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The Gozo Observer

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Front Cover Picture: San Dimitri Chapel.
Courtesy of Peter Mohr.

Editorial:

Accessible and Safe Open Public Areas

The occupation of public space by private interests has mushroomed in Malta and Gozo. This undesirable development is to a large extent the result of the so-called business-friendly governance, exacerbated by lack of enforcement of existing laws and regulations, including those covered by the Policy and Standards for Outdoor Catering Areas on Public Open Space. The Marsalforn and Xlendi seafronts in Gozo are cases in point. This is creating the impression that there is a tacit and undeclared stratagem of putting business interests before those of the common citizen – business friendliness gone too far.

The recent St George's Square debacle, where business persons excessively occupied public space by tables and chairs, was given prominence in the press and in news reports of local TV stations. As a result, we learned that enforcement relating to open spaces is not as simple as many of us would have thought, given that it involves a number of agencies including the Police, the Malta Tourism Authority, the Lands Authority and Planning Authority.

The abuse in St George's Square was so rampant that all entry into the square was to a large extent blocked. As a result of protests by NGOs and other Gozitan societies calling for action, as well the strong denunciation by Archpriest of St George's Basilica, the mentioned government agencies intervened and enforced the limits set by law. But could this be a temporary cessation of abuse?

At the time of writing this editorial, we cannot be sure that the business persons involved in the St George's square abuse will continue adhering to the rules, as, after a while, in many such instances, the situation goes back to square

one, due to lack of continuous monitoring by the agencies involved. Undoubtedly, having multiple agencies to enforce the rules is not the ideal arrangement for ongoing enforcement. This is even more so as the agencies fall under different ministries with different agendas in this regard.

Another public space problem in Malta and Gozo, relates to uneven and cluttered pavements leading to fear of walking, injury, and possibly death. Here again, business operations are often to blame for this. Many restaurants occupy pavements and sometimes even part of the street, albeit sometimes legally, making it very difficult for pedestrians to walk through. Many catering establishments also hinder movements of passers-by as a result of the comings and goings of waiters from the shop to the outside tables. Groups of people reading the menu posted outside the shop, and clients waiting outside the shop to be seated, add additional pavement obstruction.

All these annoying developments call for two major changes in the rules and regulations relating to outdoor catering areas on public open space. Firstly, the business friendliness approach adopted by the current government, should not be excessive, especially when this leads to discomfort for the common citizen, and this may require a revision of the Policy and Standards for Outdoor Catering Areas on Public Open Space. Secondly, the enforcement exercise should be coordinated more effectively. This may require the setting of some sort of standing committee, representing the agencies involved, with the remit of taking action to control abuse, quickly and on an ongoing basis.

Lino Briguglio



The excessive occupation of public space at St George's Square by private business caused considerable commotion. Source: 'Times of Malta', 11th and 15th June 2024.

Medically-related Sculptures in Gozo

CHARLES SAVONA-VENTURA

Introduction

Before and during the pre-Modern age, art held great influence over society as a prominent medium of communication especially relating to religious or political messages. Places of worship and other religious-managed institutions, such as the various hospices known as *Xenodochium* or *Nosokomion*,¹ frequently commissioned sculptors to carve images suggesting a religious theme into the exteriors and interiors of these institutions. These images generally depicted a religious contemplative diorama or specific saintly individuals directing the viewer to emulate their actions. Other sculptures depict symbolic or realistic body image representations that may have served to communicate a specific message to the contemporary viewer. In Western culture, the head was considered the chief symbolic part of the body signifying intellect, but was further regarded as the seat of the soul. The face was not only considered central to identity, but also an expression of emotion and character. The symbolic or realistic facial image, sometimes illustrating medical features, was therefore a commonly sculptured image. Two such head sculpture images are to be found in the Il-Ħaġar Museum at Victoria-Rabat in Gozo.

Provenance

The two limestone head sculptures have an uncertain provenance. The first sculpture [labelled Code 9017] is said to have been discovered during early twentieth century excavation works adjacent to the Basilica of Saint George in Victoria-Rabat, Gozo; the second [labelled Code 9018] has no information as to provenance but presumably originated from Victoria-Rabat, Gozo having found its way in the collection of the Basilica of Saint George.² Both head sculptures are damaged

but overall do not appear to have the refinement expected from sculptures produced during the Classical Age. Stylistically, the sculptures more closely emulate those produced during the Late Medieval Period. However, without a recorded archaeological context, determining a possible age must be left to conjecture.

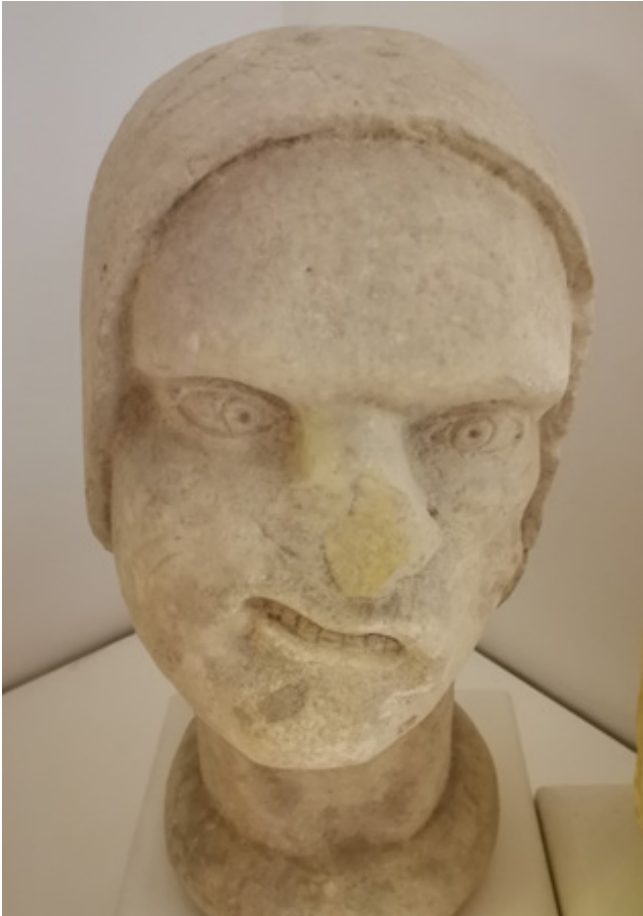
The reported discovery of Sculpture 9017 in the vicinity of the Basilica of Saint George suggests a possible relationship to that establishment. The foundation stone of the present church was laid on 7 August 1672. The church's construction was completed by 1678 but was only consecrated by Bishop Paul Alphéran de Bussan on 21 September 1755. The church, however, had an earlier establishment being definitely extant in 1450. Other religious establishments in the locality in existence during the sixteenth century, include the churches dedicated to Santa Maria d'Ħtria, to St Catherine, and to Our Lady del Soccorso (Borg, 2008: 339). The two skull sculptures may well have embellished one of the earlier Late Medieval establishments.

Description

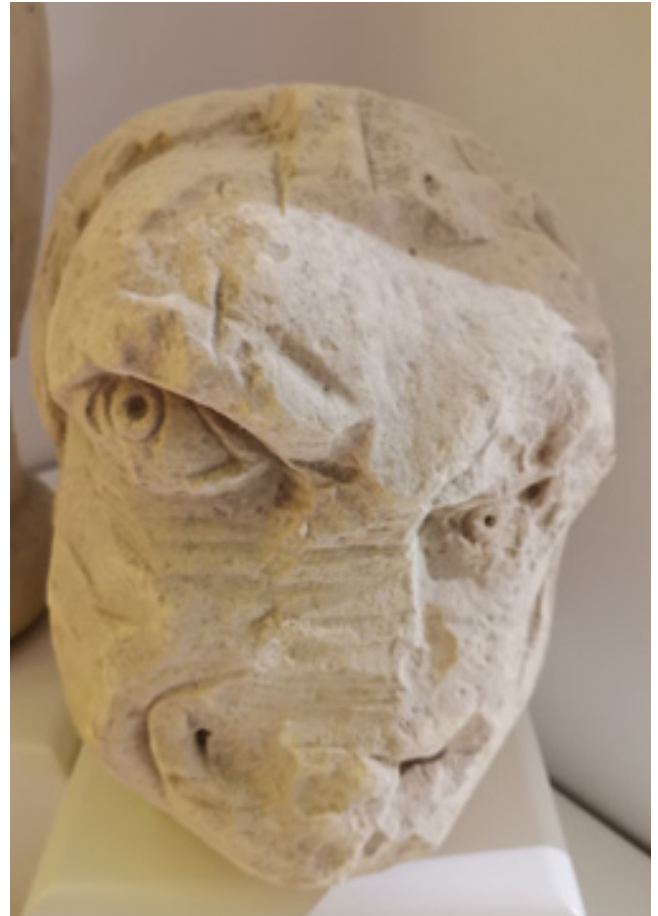
Both sculptures are characterised by definite medical features. Sculpture 9017 is the better preserved of the two showing damage only to the right side of the nose. It consists of a head sculpture on a stone stand suggesting that it was originally targeted to be placed on a flat surface such as in a niche or on a column. The individual is shown wearing a hood-like hat. The interesting feature is the face depiction which clearly shows an individual suffering from a right-sided facial palsy. Other possible visible medically-related features include an apparent widening of the nose and absence of any apparent eyebrow depiction or frontal hair.

1 'The Greek word *Xenodochium* translated into Latin is a refuge for travellers and poor people. *Nosokomion* is the hospice which cares for the sick people taken into it from the squares and alleys. *An account of the location of the places* (~1130). See Wilkinson et al. (1988). Other specific institutions included *leprosaria* where advanced cases of leprosy were cared for.

2 Museum labels.



Limestone bust held by Il-Ħaġar Museum at Victoria-Rabat in Gozo. **Sculpture 9017** – note facial asymmetry, widened nose, absent eyebrows and frontal hair.



Limestone bust held by Il-Ħaġar Museum at Victoria-Rabat in Gozo. **Sculpture 9018** – note facial asymmetry, widened nose, tuberosity growth on eyebrow, right eye enlargement.

Sculpture 9018 is unfortunately rather damaged but clearly depicts a distorted facial image showing unequal sized eyes that are set at different levels in the face [facial nerve palsy]. The right eyebrow is marked by a tuberosity, the left eyebrow is unfortunately damaged and missing. The nose and centre of the mouth are also significantly damaged. Like the other example, this sculpture is shown wearing a hood-like hat and there is no evidence of frontal hair.

Discussion

The facial features shown by the two skull sculptures are suggestive of a facial nerve pathology with possible associated alopecia, nasal bridge collapse, tuberosity facial growths, and ophthalmic pathology. One would assume the depicted medical condition to be a chronic one that invoked a sense of dread and projected a specific message to the viewers. The most likely diagnosis that fits this disease pattern is late-stage leprosy.

Leprosy or Hansen's disease is a chronic infectious contagious disease produced by *Mycobacterium leprae*. The clinical manifestation of leprosy is related to the degree of the immunological response the infected individual has against the bacterium. Those with a reduced response would develop lepromatous leprosy, while those with a high immune reaction would develop tuberculoid leprosy. Besides the tuberculous growths, the infection is characterised by distinct sensory loss and peripheral nerve involvement, which in the head would include facial palsy that would alter facial symmetry and prevent closure of the eyelids leading to ocular infection and eventual blindness. The infection also contributes towards atrophy of nasal spine causing collapse of the nose. These deformities have been clearly depicted in nineteenth century medical illustrations.³

Medieval European institutions are known to have incorporated artistic representation of leprosy in their artistic repertoire. Many of these, like the two

³ See Danielssen and Boeck (1847).



19th century facial depictions of cases with late-stage leprosy showing right facial palsy [both drawings], ocular damage, collapsed nasal septum, and tuberculoid protuberance over the eyebrow [second drawing].

examples held by the Il-Ħaġar Museum, suggest that the mason was personally familiar with leprosy in its advanced stage. The perception of the leper as being punished by God for sins committed had by the Late Medieval period been tempered by the image of Job of the Old Testament who patiently suffered his leprosy lesions without losing his faith in his God. The incorporation of the leper image within religious institutions would serve to communicate the message that sin was punishable or that suffering was a test of faith from God. Of course, institutions set up with the specific role of caring for lepers, such as the leprosaria established by the Order of Saint Lazarus, would consider the leper's visage an appropriate iconography to reflect the suffering of the inmates.

The first documented case of leprosy termed *erga corpore morbo lepre* is said to have affected a Gozitan woman Garita Xeiba who in 1492 bequeathed land in the district of Għajn Xejba to support the benefice related to the church dedicated to Sant'Antonio Abate.⁴ In contrast to the general belief that lepers were considered "the living dead" and stripped of all legal rights, the 1492 document suggests that lepers in the Maltese Islands during the 15th century retained their legal and inheritance

rights (Busuttil and Fiorini, 2006: doc. 57: 80-81). While the first documented case in Gozo dates only to the late 15th century, the absence of documentation cannot exclude the possibility of an earlier presence of the disease. Based on linguistics, the disease in Malta probably has very ancient origins. The Maltese vernacular term for leprosy is *Ġdiem* [leper = *mġidde*]; a word that originates from the Arabic *جذام* = *jozam* [leper = *مجنوم* = *majzoon*]. Mid-sixteenth century (1542) medical practitioners in Malta are known to have been conversant with the works of the Islamic physicians Rhazes (*865 †925), Avicenna (*980 †1037), and Avenzoar (*1094 †1162) (Cassar, 1974), who all contributed towards understanding the clinical features of leprosy.

There is furthermore no documentation of a functioning leprosarium in Malta or Gozo during the Late Medieval period, though it has been suggested that the Medieval *hospitalis Sancti Franciscj*, situated outside the Medieval walls of Mdina in Malta, had been initially established as a leprosarium (Gulia, 1874). No documentary proof has however been found to substantiate this assertion. The hospital is known to have been definitely in existence by 1372 (Fiorini, 1989: 198)

⁴ Ta' Għajn Xejba is situated in the parish territory of Xagħra where the church dedicated to Sant'Antonio Abate is located.

and probably by 1299.⁵ The hospital was managed by members of the Franciscan Order who included the care of lepers in their vocation. By 1494, the hospital documentation makes no mention of lepers but refers only to “*poveri abitanti*” (Savona-Ventura, 2007). However, leprosy had become less of a problem in Europe after the Black Death – plague epidemics of the 14th century and the lack of specific mention in the 15th century documentation does not preclude the use of the hospital facilities for lepers in earlier centuries.

In Gozo, the earliest documented established hospice targeting poor women – *Hospitalis Sancti Spiritus* later *Hospitalis Sancti Juliani* – was that established by Francesco Bonnici in 1454. This was situated in the locality of the storage room under the sacristy of the Collegiate Church (Bonnici, 1999: 133-134). By 1575, the edifice was being used to house prisoners but not needy inmates, and the Apostolic Delegate Mgr Duzina gave specific instructions so that the building reverts to the original use intended by the founder (Aquilina and Fiorini, 2001: 139). It seems unlikely that the sculptured heads, that were apparently found in the vicinity of the Basilica of St George, originated from the *Hospitalis Sancti Juliani* edifice located within the Cittadella.

Whatever the provenance of these two sculptures, the accurate depiction of facial pathological features generally associated with leprosy would have served to elicit strong emotive religious feelings in the minds of the viewers. They certainly serve to illustrate the general dread experienced among the population during the Medieval Period when faced with chronic destructive medical conditions, especially those conditions that are adversely identified by the holy scriptures. The two statutes augment the medical history heritage of the Maltese Islands – unfortunately the lack of provenance limits their historical value.

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⁵ On the 20th July – 7th August 1299, Pope Boniface VIII appointed Cardinal Bishop Gerardus of Sabina as an Apostolic Legate to the Kingdom of Sicily [including Malta] who was authorised to grant up to a hundred days of indulgence to the faithful who assist in the building of churches and the running of hospitals. *Reg. Vat. F f.ccxlviii-ccliii verso, ep.xxiii*. Transcribed in: Aquilina, G.A., Fiorini, S., editors. *Documentary Sources of Maltese history. Part IV Documents at the Vatican. No. 2 Archivio Segreto Vaticano: Cancellaria Apostolica and Camera Apostolica and related sources at the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana 416-1479*. University Press, Malta, 2005, doc.41, ep. XXIII, 63-64.

Trachoma in Gozo (1920-50)

MARIO SALIBA

Trachoma is a bacterial infection of the eyes which was very common in the past. In the first decades of the twentieth century no specific anti-bacterial treatment was available and many children especially suffered from complications in eye sight including loss of vision from this disease.

In a report dated 23rd May 1923, Dr Adriano Cremona who was the Medical Officer of Health (MOH) for Gozo, noted that trachoma was a disease that had always existed in Gozo. He observed that there was always a great number of cases he had attended during his first years of private practice in Gozo namely in 1896 -1897. Owing to deficient and improper cleanliness and the ignorance of the people at that time as to the infectiousness of the disease, cases rapidly increased in number especially in Xaghra, Nadur, Qala, and Xewkija. On the 10th of April 1920, due to the increased prevalence of trachoma cases in Gozo, the Chief Government Medical Officer (CGMO) wrote to the MOH for Gozo to approach His Grace the Bishop of Gozo to request the parish priests to impress on their parishioners the importance of timely and proper treatment of eye disease in order that it would not cause permanent physical disability and disfigurement.

Due to the seriousness of the situation the CGMO came to Gozo and, accompanied by the MOH for Gozo, inspected the children frequenting the government elementary schools. In some districts the number of trachomatous children was exceedingly small, namely in Sannat, Xewkija, and Żebbuġ, but in the other localities it was comparatively large. They detected no cases in Għarb. The CGMO advised the MOH for Gozo that children should not be allowed to frequent school if the disease had not been modified as to no longer contagious. On the other hand, it was equally important that they should be treated and cured. He noted that treatment was comparatively long and required unremitting attention of the medical attendant and perseverance on the part of the patient.

The CGMO also recommended that where the number of cases was large as in Xaghra, Nadur and Qala, the children could continue their schooling to ensure regular and uninterrupted medical treatment. The school headmaster was advised to arrange for students to be taught in separate classrooms, even at the risk of slowing down their educational progress. He also recommended that to economise on the teaching staff, such classrooms would be made to receive children from more than one village when distance was not a bar to concentration.

The MOH wrote back on the 12th of April 1920 and informed the CGMO that as soon as he approached His Grace the Bishop of Gozo, the latter was very glad to know he was in a position to give some help in this matter. The bishop addressed consequently a note to the Secretary of the Parish Priests Body in which he insisted that parish priests should make all their efforts to enlighten and help their respective parishioners to stamp out from their village the disease in question, commonly known as trachoma.

The Health Department started to check to prevent the spreading of this disease and to have all the cases properly located. As from the 22nd of May 1908 the MOH inspected the government elementary schools and the Casa Industriale of Xaghra (Crafts School) for granular conjunctivitis as the disease was styled in those days. The MOH sent the first report with his views to Dr J. Caruana Scicluna who was the CGMO at that time. Attention was frequently called to enforce treatment, prevent the spreading of trachoma by a) giving instructions to inspect all government schools to detect trachomatous children, b) by instructing District Medical Officers (DMO)s to attend one day a week for the treatment of eye diseases in their respective dispensaries, c) by sending monthly the Professor of Ophthalmology to attend special cases of eye diseases, d) by instructing DMOs to inspect periodically all government schools and to report monthly on the incidence of eye diseases, and e) by causing the separation of trachomatous

children from the normal cases in their respective school classes.

But this was all very well as regards children attending government schools; however, they had no means to review children excluded from schools and all other cases where medical treatment was not sought. These children were a source of infection to all the members of the family and therefore the MOH suggested that special steps be taken to enforce treatment to all children. The Sanitary Inspectors were informed by means of a circular to perform house-to-house inspections and when they detected cases, these had to be reported to the respective DMOs. When such patients failed to attend upon the DMO for the necessary treatment, legal steps would be taken to enforce compulsory treatment. This measure was thought to have this disease totally stamped out from the island.

In May 1923 the government sent a commission to Gozo, composed of Professor Vassallo and Dr Preziosi, with a view to see all the government schools in Gozo and to report on the present condition of trachoma in this island. The Director of Elementary Schools joined the two gentlemen doctors and the MOH accompanied the commission in their several inspections. Overall, the result was very satisfactory as very few active cases were found and the great majority of cases found were of a non-secreting form and a good number had shown signs of recovery. This showed that all efforts of the department towards checking trachoma were proving effective. In 1922, 652 cases of trachoma were reported as against 199 cases reported the year before. Trachoma was only made a notifiable disease in September 1922, hence the difference. The district nurses were involved and had an important part in the control of this disease. They attended trachomatous children in the government schools and private people in respective government dispensaries (bereġ) as well.

A marked improvement had already been noticed everywhere due to the health measures that had been ongoing for only a few months. Such improvement was more noticed in Qala, Nadur, Xewkija and Sannat. But as most of the cases existed in Xagħra, some time was required before a marked improvement would be noticed in that place. According to the MOH a regular twelve-

month period of treatment was needed to notice improvements and hopefully stamp out the disease from the island. This was a wrong assumption as no effective treatment was yet found for this disease as its cause was still unknown.

Till 1924 the disease was still very common among school children so much so that visits were supposed to be performed regularly to elementary schools by Health Inspectors and District Medical Officers (DMOs). In fact, the CGMO wrote to the MOH Gozo that monthly reports of inspections of school children were not being sent regularly to his office. He ordered the MOH to see that such reports were collected by him and then passed to his office. In this respect the CGMO referred specifically to the infant schools in Victoria and Nadur run by the Franciscan Sisters and insisted that these schools should be visited by the DMOs of Victoria and Nadur respectively and a monthly report sent.

In 1928 the disease was still prevalent and a number of cases had to be admitted to the Victoria Hospital, Others were treated as out-patients and a larger number at home. These latter patients, the majority of the school children, were looked after by the district nurses and school teachers who attended special courses on Saturdays at the Victoria Hospital about the application of the treatment of trachoma to these children at home. It was therefore felt that there should be some sort of co-ordination of the duties between the DMOs and the district nurses when the patients were discharged from hospital, by the hospital physician.

By 1933 all cases of trachoma in children attending government elementary schools were to be treated by the district nurses so that the treatment of trachoma would thus be exclusively carried out by the Public Health Department. The treatment continued without interruption twice weekly during the summer holidays from 16th July to the 20th September.

But in 1937 the MOH Gozo wrote to the CGMO informing him that the attendance of children for treatment during the summer holidays had become very meagre and was doubtful whether this practice should be followed any longer or abolished altogether. The number of school children attending treatment had been dwindling from year to year

and in 1936 the attendances with the exception of Xaghra, had been very disappointing. In other words, the results left much to be desired and did not justify the expense incurred thereon by the government. Just to quote only one example: in 1936 only the small sum of £1 5/- was distributed as prizes amongst the children who attended for treatment during the summer holidays in the various schools of Gozo, while £23 was paid to the assistant teachers as remuneration for attending during treatments. This suggestion was not accepted by the CGMO and he was convinced that with a bit more effort and the small sum of money given as an incentive to the families of children who attended for 14 treatments or more, the numbers would increase. In fact, 5/- were paid to the family of each of the children who put in 14 or more treatments during the summer holidays and the total amount of money distributed was £10 5/-. This meant that 41 children in all attended for 14 treatments or more. It is to be noted that trachoma treatment was not compulsory while on the other hand if trachomatous children didn't complete the course of treatment they could not be excluded from school owing to the "Compulsory Attendance Bill".

In 1937 the disease was still prevalent and it was reported in a departmental correspondence that at St Joseph Institute in Ghajnsielem there were four boys who were suffering from trachoma. Steps were taken so that these boys were excluded from attending the Elementary School in Ghajnsielem until it was safe for them to do so. In the meantime measures were taken so that they didn't spread the infection to other boys at the institute. They were given separate beddings, linen, handkerchiefs, towels and soap and their clothes and linen were to be washed separately from that of the others.

Even during the WW2 years, treatment during the summer holidays was continued as usual and from the 1st of June till the 15th September, 109 children attended for treatment and 37 of these attended at least 24 times or more. In the districts of Victoria and Xaghra the attendances were satisfactory but in the districts of Nadur and Xewkija the results were not as encouraging. This was partly due to the war conditions and partly to neglect of parents who failed to send their children for treatment. It was noted that by the beginning of WW2, due to the vigorous measures that had been instituted, the

prevalence of trachoma in Gozo was much less than it used to be and the number of fresh cases had been greatly reduced.

The treatment of children with trachoma persisted during the war years even though the schools were closed. The district nurses used to go to the houses of children to treat them on a regular basis usually twice a week. The families were given the sum of 5/- every summer if the children were given at least 14 sessions of treatment and in 1941 the number of children treated at their homes was 135 and 64 of them benefitted financially. The results were especially satisfactory in Xaghra, while not so satisfactory in other villages.

The main reason for this lack of cooperation was that during the war, the parents' financial circumstances were dire. Many of them had to work very hard all day to earn a livelihood and couldn't give the necessary attention to their children. The district nurses were doing their best to go to the homes of these children. In fact, the progress made in the treatment and care of trachoma in Gozo was being steadily maintained and the number of sufferers from this disease was dwindling from year to year which showed the vigorous measures being taken in this direction by the Medical and Health Department.

From the 1st of April 1945 the provisions contained in Sections 9 and 10 of the report by the "Committee appointed to report on the prevalence of trachoma and to make recommendations to bring a reduction of this disease" dated 12th of July 1928, were to be strictly enforced. DMOs were still obliged to visit the homes of persons notified to be suffering from trachoma with a view to give advice on the measures to be adopted to prevent the infection passing to other members of the household and, in the case of wage-earners, to fellow workers. The district nurses were to accompany the DMO in order that they would know what instructions had been given. They would then carry on with the visiting of the home to ascertain whether the necessary precautionary measures were being adopted. District nurses would keep a special trachoma register in which a serial number was given to each case and in which they were to enter all relevant particulars whenever they revisited the case. One needs to say that in March 1945, 72 cases of trachoma were registered, of which, 21 were new cases.

Despite all these measures the treatment of trachoma was still inadequate, and the disease was not under control. After the war, in 1948, Dr Vincent Tabone, a Gozitan and an ophthalmologist trained in the United Kingdom, came up with a new way of how to treat this eye disease. He used his knowledge and experience which he had acquired abroad when he was entrusted with the task of studying the prevalence of the disease in Gozo. He started to treat trachoma in Gozo by introducing a full anti-trachoma campaign (Tabone, 1951; 1:1449). This campaign lasted till 1951. As part-time assistant he had with him Dr Paul Portelli from Nadur. The latter started employment on the 3rd of December 1949 and was paid 12/- per day. Dr Vincent Tabone, or as he was known in Gozo as Ċensu Tabone or simply Ċensinu, had returned from the UK after he had obtained his Edinburgh Fellowship as Ophthalmic surgeon. He introduced a new method of treatment based on the Sorsby model on the lines of Professor Sorsby which consisted of sulpha drugs in the form of sulphanomide tablets by mouth for about ten days, sodium sulphacetamide eye drops and sulphacetamide 6% ointment. During this campaign, Dr Tabone saw 4,058 Gozitan school children, of these, he found 721 to be suffering from trachoma. Besides the school children Dr Tabone examined thousands of adult persons and in this way, he was able to almost eradicate this eye disease from Gozo. After two years of the campaign only two cases were found, one in Xagħra and one in Għajnsielem. The highest number of cases were school children. Lack of hygiene, including many flies, was the main cause for the spread of the infection.

Later, Dr Tabone started using a new eye ointment called aureomycin which was even better, and which became a household name in almost all families in Gozo. With his treatments, observations and studies in Gozo, Dr Tabone came to several novel observations and conclusions about this disease and mainly that it was an eye infection caused by a group of organisms called *chlamydiae* which are a type of bacterial disease which responds to the application of the proper antibiotics. His work in Gozo made him a pioneer practitioner in this field and his publication in the BMJ gave his findings greater value and credence. The publishing of the findings of Dr Tabone was a breakthrough as nobody had so far claimed what was the causative agent. As a result, Dr Tabone was recognised by the World



Dr Vincent Tabone.

Health Organisation in Geneva and in 1952 he was engaged by WHO as a consultant in eye disease and to organise Trachoma Control in Taiwan, Indonesia, and Iraq. Since the work of Ċensu Tabone in Gozo, this disease has become under control and most of the cases which sought help were cured without any complications thanks to his sterling work and ingenuity. Ċensu Tabone later made a career in politics with the Nationalist Party when he served as Minister of Labour, Employment and Welfare (1966–1971) and Minister for Foreign Affairs (1987–1989) and later on (1989 – 1994) he served as the fourth President of Malta.

Note: The main source of this article is an administrative register found at the Public Health Office in Gozo, not catalogued.

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

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

LUCA CURMI

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 paupers, 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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A Gozitan Documented in 12th Century Norman Sicily

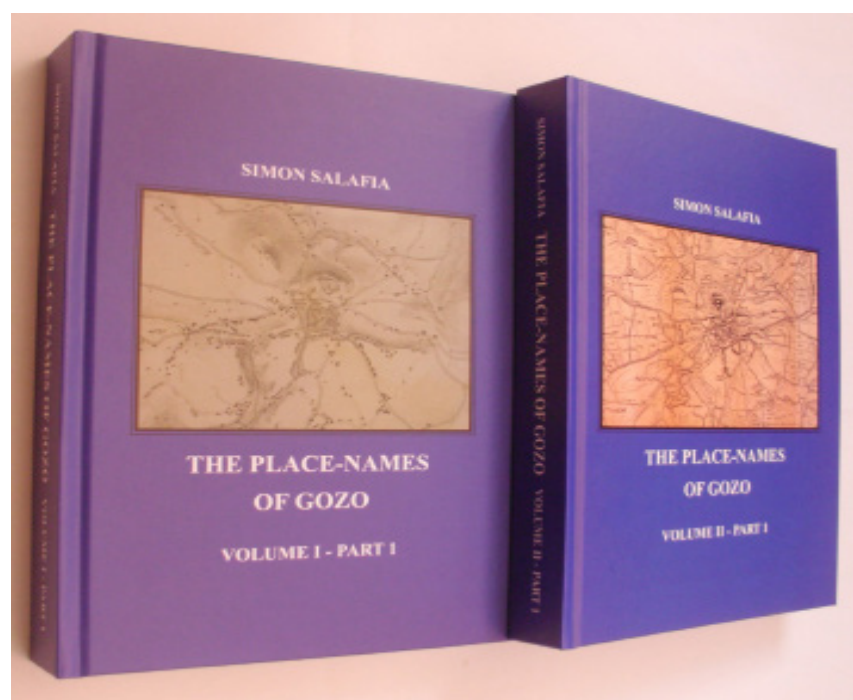
SIMON SALAFIA

Introduction

When I published the large corpus of Gozitan toponyms (which were collected from over 65 different sources) (Salafia, 2020: 562-567), I decided not to include the meaning of each place-name. The main reason for this is that I realised that this corpus of more than 9,400 catalogue entries contained toponymic terms which are not encountered in Wettinger's seminal publication (Wettinger, 2000) about place-names. After the publication of the second volume (which is a detailed analysis of Wettinger's Gozitan toponyms), I was more than convinced that I took the right decision, since to decipher the etymology of Gozitan (and also Maltese) place-names, one needs to possess a very good understanding and knowledge of Arabic and/or Muslim names. In the second volume (Salafia, 2022: 189-262), there is a glossary of toponymic terms, in which there is a detailed explanation of more than eight hundred terms. This is basically a *Dictionary of Gozitan Toponymic Terms*. From this

'dictionary' more than 130 toponymic terms can be deciphered as Arabic or Muslim first names.

Hence I decided to familiarise myself better with the nomenclature and structure of Muslim names to be in a better position to understand and decipher certain Maltese and Gozitan place-names. Moreover, to acquaint myself better with toponymic terms, in general, I turned my attention to Muslim Spain or Al-Andalus. Since Al-Andalus existed during more than seven centuries (from 711 to 1492) over a territory which at times occupied more than 80 percent of the Iberian Peninsula, the probability to encounter a local toponymic term was higher in Muslim Spain. Thus, to date, from various sources, I succeeded to collect more than 600 Semitic descriptive toponymic terms present in Al-Andalus, and a corpus of more than 500 different anthroponyms, mainly Arabic and Berber names also present as toponyms in Muslim Spain. The next step was to focus on nearby Muslim Sicily where the Arabs ruled for less than three centuries. Before describing the source, it is also very important



The Place-Names of Gozo (Volume I & II) authored by S.Salafia.

to understand the local scenario in the distant 13th century.

Historical and Linguistic Background: The 13th Century

The 13th century may be considered as an important transitional period in Malta's medieval history from different aspects. First of all, at the beginning of this century, Maltese society (in general) was predominantly Muslim, although after a mere hundred years our society had been more or less Christianised. The number of Jews, both as a percentage and also in absolute terms, did not change drastically during these hundred years. Two important events took place at that time: the deportation of the rebel population of Celano (in the province of L'Aquila, in the Abruzzo region, Italy) to Malta, and the expulsion of the Maltese Muslims who did not convert to Christianity and their exile to Lucera (in the province of Foggia, in the Apulia region, Italy). A recent analytical and mathematical study by Fiorini (2022) states that the estimated number of exiled Muslim Maltese families was 103. Giliberto Abbate's report of circa 1241 gives us a snapshot of the population of Malta and Gozo in the mid-13th century, when the Muslim presence was still strong in Malta, but not as strong in Gozo. This report has been given different interpretations by various scholars of our Medieval history. However, the basic fact remains that the situation in Gozo was surely different from that prevailing on the main island of Malta.

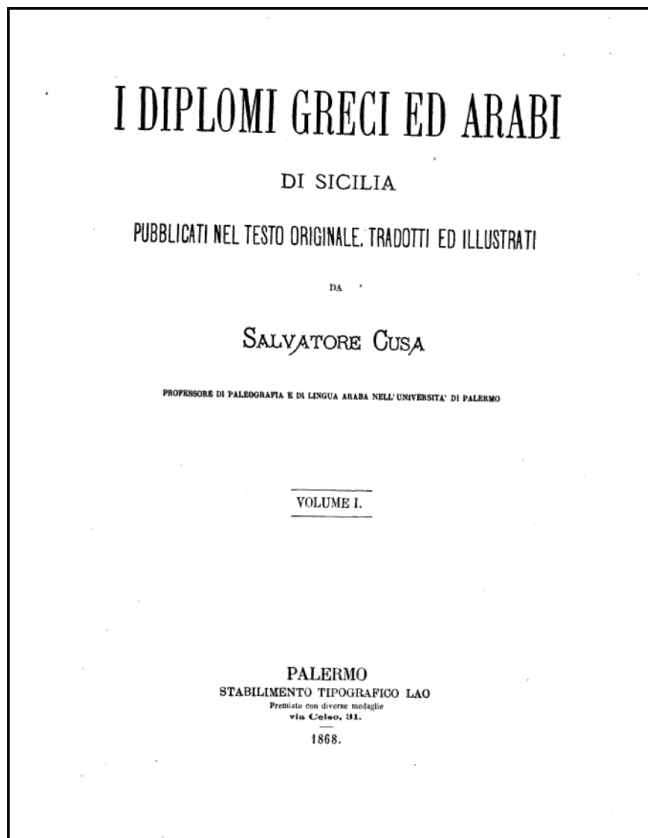
The second aspect is the linguistic shift from a language which was almost completely dialectal Arabic in all aspects (grammar, syntax, morphology, phonetics and lexemes) to a situation in which many lexemes of Romance origins (mainly Sicilian) started filtering slowly, but constantly, in the vernacular spoken language. The Semitic morphology was still dominant and hence these Sicilian 'loan words' adapted themselves quickly in this new scenario: the broken plural, the Semitic diminutive, verbal forms and verbal nouns. A remarkable example is the Romance noun *serp* (in Maltese) which spawned its broken plural (*sriep*), its Semitic diminutive (*srejjep*), its verbal noun (*tisrip*), two verbal forms (*serrep* and *isserrep*), and the past participle (*mserrep*). However, although one can state that by the year 1300, no Muslim families were

still living in Malta, as all of them had converted to Christianity, all the basic lexemes associated with religion were and are still essentially Arabic: nouns like *Alla*, *quddiesa*, *qaddis*, *tqarbin*, *magħmudija*, *qrar*, *żwieg*, *tieg*, *tberik* and verbs like *għammed*, *qaddes*, *qarben*, *qarar*, *zewweg* and *bierak*.

The third aspect is the complete shift in the **personal names** given to newly-born babies in the Maltese Islands. Since that society was predominantly Muslim in the beginning of the 13th century, one can safely state that these first names had a Muslim or Arabic import. More specifically, they could have been Quranic names. These first names can only be traced through toponymy: the earlier the date of the source documenting an Arabic first name as a toponym, the greater is the probability that it was the name of a Maltese Muslim person. The situation changed drastically by the end of the 13th century. If one were to imagine all the babies born in the Maltese islands in the year 1300, one could easily state that the first names given were Romance Christian names. One may also add that these first names were related to Christian saints, in order to flag the new status of a Christian family. What happened to the previous Muslim names? In my opinion, these first names can be traced in the earliest-documented Maltese Arabic surnames. Thus, Wettinger's Militia List (Wettinger, 1969: 80-106) of 1419 is a seminal source since it provides the earliest good sample of Maltese given names and also surnames. However, as might be expected only masculine first names are included in this list. Hence, feminine first names (both Arabic and Romance) can only be tracked through toponymic evidence.

The Source and the Author

The source analysed is the publication authored by Salvatore Cusa: *I Diplomi Greci ed Arabi di Sicilia, pubblicati nel testo originale, tradotti ed illustrati da Salvatore Cusa*. The work was published in two volumes: the first volume was completed in 1868, whilst the second one appeared in 1882. These two volumes were again reprinted as one volume in Vienna in 1982. To my knowledge, Wettinger was the first among local scholars to be aware of this source. In fact, in his publication of 2006, *Kliem Malti Qadim*, he states: *Studjużi Maltin ta' qabli ma ntebhux b'din il-minjiera ta' tagħrif fuq il-Għarbi*



Title Page of 'I Diplomi Greci ed Arabi di Sicilia' authored by S.Cusa.

bikri ta' Sqallija, u għalhekk fuq il-Malti bikri, billi l-biblijoteki tagħna, dejjem neqsin mill-flus, baqghu ma kisbux kopja.

Salvatore Cusa was a Sicilian Arabist, born in Palermo on 20th September 1822, where he also died on 30th November 1893. He was professor of paleography and in charge of Arabic Studies at the University of Palermo. His greatest contribution to academia was the two-volume publication cited above, where he transcribed all the texts from the original documents written in three languages (mainly in Greek and in Arabic, but some are in Latin). According to linguists, although the edition is not perfect, it constitutes a distinguished monument of erudition, which has not yet been rivalled.

The source consists of a corpus of 202 documents (specifically called *Diplomi*) mainly related to the Church Administration in Norman Sicily. These documents were written from various parts of Sicily such as Palermo, Monreale, Messina, Cefalù, Patti, Lipari, Catania, and Girgenti. Most of these documents date back to the 12th century. In fact, there are 161 out of 202 documents (almost 80%)

covering this period of time (1100–1199). Moreover, there are 13 documents (more than 6%) from the late 11th century (1079–1099) and 24 documents (almost 12%) from the 13th century (1200–1299).

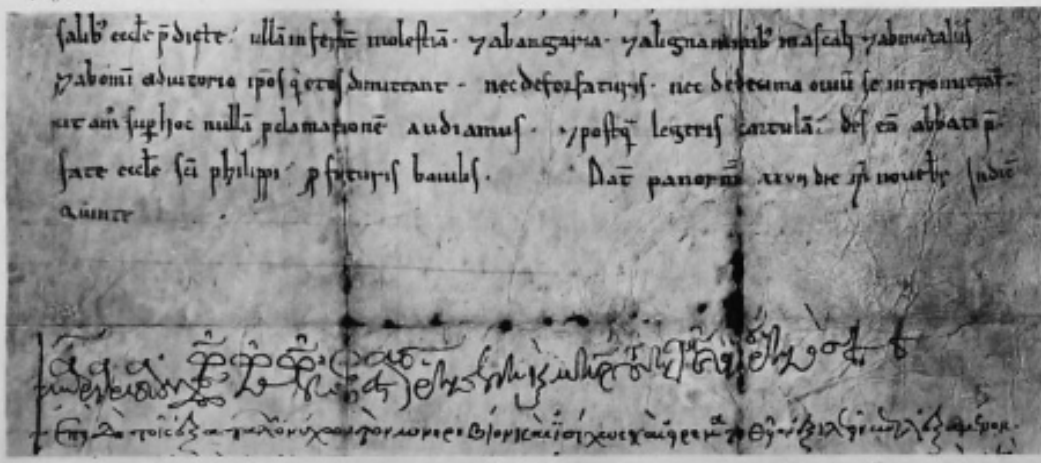
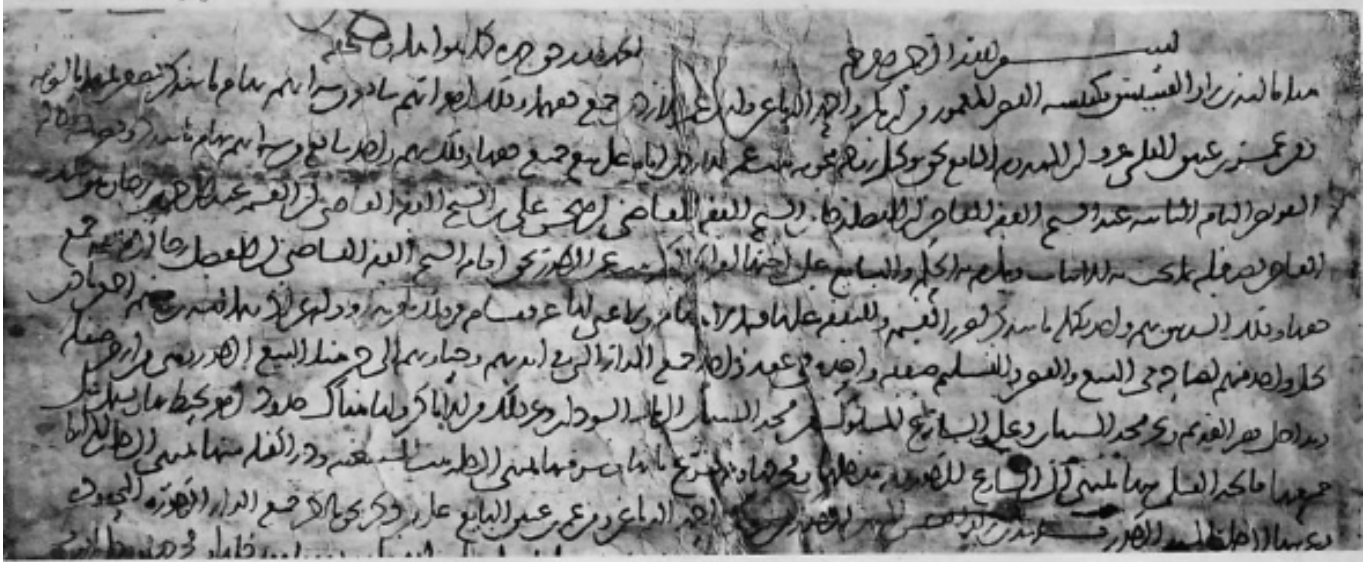
A Pleasant Surprise: A Gozitan Living in Sicily in 1183

As explained in the introduction, my main intention was to familiarise myself with Arabic personal names, and hence I started writing all the personal names (in Arabic) from the index of this publication. I was convinced that this corpus of personal names living in neighbouring Sicily, and dating back mainly to the 12th century, would be essential to decipher more local place-names which contain some anthroponymic components. In total, there are 885 personal names written in Arabic.

One may ask here: Was Wettinger aware of these personal names written in Arabic? The answer is yes since in his publication of 2006, *Kliem Malti Qadim*, he states: *fid-dokumenti li dan (i.e. Salvatore Cusa) ippubblika ssib li għandek, ngħidu aħna, l-ismijiet tal-irġiel fl-artijiet mogħtija lill-Knisja miktubin kemm bl-Għarbi kif ukoll bil-Grieg.*

Hence, Wettinger was aware of these personal names, but opted to concentrate on the toponyms present in this source. Moreover, he analysed the longest document or diploma (65 pages) which has its first part written in Latin followed by the translation in Arabic. Hence, a total of 374 toponyms were listed from this document and published in his *Kliem Malti Qadim* (pages 18 to 37). However, from the index of place-names (covering all these 202 documents) there is a total of 597 place-names which were also written or copied by myself in Arabic to familiarise myself also with more and more toponyms.

The pleasant surprise was that from this corpus of 885 first names, there were four particular names referring to Maltese, or *il-Malti* (in Arabic: مالطي). The cherry on the cake was that there was also one Gozitan included. This male is documented as Nighma l-Għawdisi, where the letter 'gh' of Għawdisi is underlined to indicate that it is the harsh 'gh' (غ). This sound is still present in Gozo especially in the dialect of Għarb and San Lawrenz.



Some of the original Diplomi.

One should note also that Gozitan in Arabic was still pronounced as *Ghawdisi* (with an ‘s’, not with an ‘x’). This corroborates the fact that the earliest documents written by local notaries used the term *gaudisi* or *gaudisii* when referring to the adjective Gozitan. The earliest references with this term (*gaudisii*) dates back to 1372 and refers to the Saqqajja Benefice, an area known as il-Lunzjata nowadays. The original text is *Saccaya, beneficium in Insola Gaudisii*. The piece of land *tal-Gruwa* also dates back to 1372 and is attested as *la grua, pecia terrae in insula Gaudisii*. These attestations are from Wettinger (2000). The Sicilian document (written in Arabic and Greek) dates back to 1183 and it is one of the *Diplomi della Chiesa di Monreale*. But what about the name itself of this Gozitan person living in Sicily?

The name *Nighma* (in Arabic: نعمة) is attested in Standard Dictionaries of Muslim Names both as

a male and female name. It means ‘blessing’, ‘boon’, ‘favour’, ‘grace’ or ‘bounty’. There is also the masculine theophoric name *Nighmet Alla* (in Arabic: نعمة الله), which means the ‘Blessing of God’ or ‘Allah’s Blessing’. In the Maltese language, the same three roots coin the noun ‘*naghma*’ with the meaning of ‘ostrich’. From what I could easily deduce from the Arabic text and from Salvatore Cusa’s summary of the whole document, this Gozitan person hailed from the small village or hamlet of *Manzil Nağita*, or *Menzil Niceta* as transcribed by Cusa. In this hamlet, there are four persons mentioned, two are described as *coloni* (in Italian) and the other two as *borghesi* (in Italian). *Nighma l-Ghawdisi* is listed as one of the two *coloni*. It is interesting to note that the document where the Gozitan person is mentioned lists a total of 729 personal names, out of which 160 are *borghesi* and the remaining 569 are *coloni*.

Toponymic Evidence

Another intriguing question is whether there is any toponymic evidence of this personal name is local toponymy, especially in Gozo. The answer is that there may be plausible evidence, as explained below:

Ta' Nighma	>	Ta' Nagħma (nagħma is a Maltese noun)
Ta' Nagħma	>	Ta' Lagħma (L and N are interchangeable liquid vowels)
Ta' Lagħma	>	Tal-Għama (għama is a Maltese noun, better understood)

Hence, more documentation is surely required to decide whether the correct meaning of any toponyms with the term **Għama**, refers to a blind person (in Maltese, *għama*) or to the personal name *Nighma*. To date, it can be stated that both meanings are plausible.

In Salafia (2020), there are the following nine catalogue entries as per the following table:

Toponym	Description	Locality	Page
Aghma, tal-	a piece of land	Għajnsielem	001
Art tal-Għama, l-	a piece of land	Għajnsielem	007
Għama, tal-	a piece of land	Għajnsielem	145
Għama, tal-	cultivated land	Għajnsielem	145
Għama, tal-	cultivated land	Nadur, in-	145
Għama, tal-	cultivated land	Xewkija, ix-	145
Għama, tal-	a piece of land	Xewkija, ix-	145
Għama ta' Isfel, tal-	a piece of land	Għajnsielem	145
Għama tan-Nofs, tal-	a piece of land	Għajnsielem	145

Conclusion

The core conclusion is that the Cusa's texts of the *Diploma* where this Gozitan is mentioned should be translated from both languages (Greek and Arabic) to English to be able to have a sound understanding of their significance. The same applies to the other texts where the other four Maltese individuals are mentioned. To my knowledge, this task which I

prefer to call a feat, has not been accomplished yet. Only scholars who are experts both in Classical Arabic and in Ancient Greek might be able to handle it, since to complicate things further, all the Arabic texts are written without the short vowels.

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Gozo: The Identity of an Island Region

ALFRED GRECH

Introduction

It has been said that all island societies have developed particular features to make them 'unique' (Patton, 1996: 190). The island region of Gozo is no exception. It is an example of an island identity, which is the result of its unique geography, history and culture based on special characteristics of an island separated by sea from the mainland. Gozo has unique landscape and seascape. It has a particular environment, culture and traditions and possible ways of communication. Insularity does not however necessarily mean isolation. Although insularity is not the same as isolation, one could say that the insularity of an island very often generates a certain amount of isolation from the mainland. Despite the fact of this insularity, Gozo was able to sustain a dynamic interaction with mainland Malta.

Insularity has obviously influenced very much and determined the outlook and life-style of the Gozitans as compared to the Maltese. Although in recent years connectivity between the two islands has

improved a lot, the difference in outlook approach and temperament is still very evident.

One could say that the Gozitans are more inward looking than the Maltese but this is mainly due to historical reasons that will be mentioned later on, and due to this general attitude, Gozitans generally tend to fend for themselves and have to try harder than their Maltese counterparts. An overarching Catholic religion has had the same influence in Gozo as in Malta as regards the upbringing and formation of the average Gozitan character, but has been more pronounced in Gozo than in Malta.

Geographical Significance

Gozo's geographical location plays a pivotal role in shaping its identity. Situated just five kilometres north of Malta, the island has been a crossroads for civilisations throughout history. Its strategic position was more pronounced in the past than it is today. For example archaeological evidence suggests that Gozo was very important from the



point of view of navigation in the Mediterranean Sea. The area around Ras il-Wardija was inhabited in the Neolithic and Bronze Age, and the sanctuary, first constructed during the Punic period in the 3rd century BC, must have served as a beacon for mariners sailing between the Maltese Islands and North Africa, as well as a temple sanctuary to provide protection for ships harbouring in Xlendi (Gambin, 2002/3: 20). Evidence of the trade that passed through Gozo in the Punic period are the remains of a Phoenician vessel still laden with cargo, deep beneath the sea, to the west of Gozo. The vessel belongs to the Archaic period and has been lying largely intact at a depth of more than 100 metres after sinking approximately 2,700 years ago (Oldfather, 1952: 129).

Diodorus Siculus writing in the first century A.D. had this to say about Gozo's navigational importance. "After this island [Malta] there is a second, which bears the name of Gaulos, lying out in the open sea and adorned with well-situated harbours, a Phoenician colony. The number of wrecks identified in the area confirm that Xlendi was in use throughout a long spell in antiquity. Although not all scientifically investigated, various projects carried out on the site confirm the presence of more than one shipwreck from different periods (Gambin, 2002/3).

Over Development in Gozo

Gozo's natural beauty has in the past captivated the hearts of both locals and visitors, further bolstering its identity as a tranquil and picturesque haven. However that may no longer be the case today. It is very evident that Gozo has suffered the impact of modern external influences especially after Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004. The idea of a single market where all barriers are removed as regards trade, travel, and transfer of capital and human resources has had its impact on an otherwise rural, quiet and tranquil community. In addition, Gozo has become the victim of excessive tourism.

What was once a separate world with its own traditions, ecosystems, culture and landscape has now become more like another piece of Malta's urban environment. The same social problems that

are evident in Malta have become a characteristic of Gozo, namely population pressures, influx of foreign immigrants/settlers with their contrasting cultural, religious and linguistic backgrounds which sometimes (if not most of the time) translate into social complications.

Up to a few years ago there was no question as to who the people, that formed the Gozitan society were. Except for a few settlers, (amounting to a few hundred), mostly British, the Gozitan population consisted mainly of local born and bred Gozitans, most of whom lived off the fruit of the land and operated the local sphere of industries. They generally maintained their traditional socio-cultural characteristics which were passed from generation to generation. This might no longer be the case. Due to the economic model embraced by the present administration, the immigration doors have been opened to let a flood of foreigners.

Another factor that is endangering the identity of Gozo is overdevelopment especially since the modification in planning policies and attitudes adopted by the Planning Authority in the last decade or two. Gozo has unique characteristics as far as landscape is concerned. With its stretches of green areas: valleys, hills, cliffs and promontories all in a very short circumscribed space, the island is very different from Malta. Although lip service has been paid towards a different planning regime for Gozo, nothing has been done towards this objective. Instead we are seeing an intensive attempt, by construction magnates, to overdevelop this small island to the extent that many green stretches are disappearing.

Population Shifts

Of major significance is the population shift in Gozo. From the year 1995 till the year 2021 the Gozitan population has increased by more than 10,000.¹ Almost one fifth of the population are not Maltese citizens. Although the Roman Catholic religion remains the dominant religion, it is by no means the only religion of the island. Eighty-four percent declare themselves to be Roman Catholic. The rest come within a spectrum of Orthodox, other Christians, Islam, other religions or no religion.²

1 29,026 in 1995, 39,287 in 2021. 2021 census

2 City Population: Gozo and Comino: https://www.citypopulation.de/en/malta/admin/026__gozo_comino/ [accessed March 2024].

Historical and Cultural Legacy

Over the centuries, Gozo has experienced major historical episodes, with each era contributing to its rich tapestry of traditions. From ancient temples, such as Ġgantija, considered the world's oldest freestanding structure, to the medieval citadel and churches, the island is a living museum of human history. During the Roman period Gozo enjoyed its own municipal status and its own administrative autonomy. In fact, it minted coins and had its own government. This autonomy probably extended to commercial selfsufficiency and this explains why shipping and sea navigation called on Gozo directly. During the medieval period, although Gozo passed through the same fortunes and foreign domination as Malta, some historical events may be pointed out.

For instance, in 1425 the Gozitan population revolted against the feudal overlord Don Gonsalvo Monroy. The island had been neglected, unprotected and ravaged by continuous pirate raids. The feudal overlord made no attempt to find a solution to the extreme scarcity of food and other essential commodities. It was the Gozitan population which first took up arms against their overlord. The subsequent year, the revolt spread over to Malta. Monroy could not quell the rebellion which ended with grant of the *Magna Carta Libertatis* to the Maltese and Gozitans on the 20th June 1428. This Charter of Liberties contains a very unique and significant article, namely that the Maltese and the Gozitans were given the right to revolt if ever they lose their status as part of the Royal Domain and their freedom.

The Siege of Gozo of 1551 is a big scar, not only on the history of the island, but also on Maltese history in general, even though this episode is usually left out or purposely understated in most history books published by Maltese historians. It was the time when all or most of the Gozitan population was taken into slavery by the Ottoman invaders. To the Order of St John, Gozo and its population were expendable. Even before the incident happened it was evident that the defences of the island were inadequate and neglected.

This historical episode, more than any other, must have imparted something to the character of the Gozitans who are known to carry not only an

insular mentality and introverted outlook, but also to distrust anybody who is not “one of their own” and more inclined to rely on their own resources. Obviously history has taught them so.

Another important chapter in the history of Gozo (something that is never narrated in general Maltese history books) is that for twenty two months Gozo was an independent nation from Malta. As soon as news of the Maltese insurrection against the French reached Gozo on the 2nd September 1798, the Gozitans took up arms against the French and with the help of the British were able to oust the French from the Island in October 28 1798, less than two months from the inception of the uprising. The French remained in Malta, albeit blockaded in Valletta, till 1800, and Gozo was run as an autonomous region by Archpriest Saver Cassar as Superintendent of Gozo. Cassar sent his representative lawyer, Francesco Pace, as a resident ambassador to the Sicilian court. And there are official documents that refer to Gozo as “la nazione del Gozzo”.

The Road Towards Autonomy

As has been stated, throughout its history Gozo always sought, and for some particular periods had, some form of autonomy. Starting from recorded history, in some particular periods, Gozo enjoyed a certain amount of autonomy from Malta. For example, during the Roman period, Gozo had its own *Municipium* autonomous from Malta with a republican government and minted its own coins. Little is known during the time when Gozo, together with Malta passed under the domination of the Byzantines (the Eastern Roman Empire) as well as during the Arab domination. A study by Joseph Busuttil, Stanley Fiorini and Horatio Vella (Busuttil, et al, 2010) points towards a hypothesis that during the Arab domination, Gozo remained mainly Christian while the Islamic religion was enforced in Malta.

After 1127, Malta and Gozo shared their destiny with Sicily, passing successively under the dominion of the Swabians, 1194, the Angevins, 1266, and the Aragonese, 1282. However around 1397, Gozo had its own Universitas (*Universitas Gaudisii*) which was a representative body defending the local interests and maintaining its own privileges and

freedoms. The situation remained more or less the same under the Knights of Malta when apart from the *Universitas Gaudisii*, Gozo also had its own Governor as representative of the Grand Master. During the short period of the French rule, Gozo, like Malta, was divided into cantons, but after the rebellion of 1798 Gozo enjoyed a brief period of independence.

The British installed a Commissioner for Gozo replacing Saver Cassar as Superintendent of Gozo after the French had capitulated, but in 1814 Sir Thomas Maitland, Governor of Malta, abolished the *Universitas Gaudisii* and downgraded the Gozo law Courts.³ From a court presided by a Judge the Gozo Courts were presided by a magistrate. The difference signified that the Gozitan Courts were downgraded to inferior courts as far as competence and jurisdiction were concerned.

However on the 14th April 1961 a Civic Council was established which gave Gozo a local government with limited powers, mostly in the area of public health and public works, including those of imposing rates and administering government revenue raised on the island. It consisted of an elected assembly of representatives consisting of a delegate from every village (14 in all) meeting at regular intervals. It was presided over by a President and having a Secretary/Treasurer who took care of the day to day administration, besides taking the minutes of every meeting and preparing the annual financial budget and administrative reports. This experiment in local government was short lived because it was abolished by a government in 1973, after a referendum. The Gozo Civic Council is today deemed by experts in public administration to have been the best experiment in devolution of power, autonomy and local government.

With Malta's accession to the European Union in 2004, a Declaration was annexed to the Treaty of Accession (Declaration 36) which seeks to address the social and economic disparities between Malta and Gozo. The Declaration states: "The Commission would be asked to propose appropriate measures, as required, in the framework of the Community regional policy

or other relevant Community policies, to ensure the continuation of the reduction of disparities between Gozo and Malta as well as the further integration of Gozo into the internal market on fair conditions. In particular, in the event that Malta, as a whole, would no longer be eligible to certain measures of the regional policy, the report would assess whether the specific economic situation of Gozo justifies a continued eligibility of Gozo to those measures, and under which conditions, during the reference period."

Although this is only a unilateral Declaration made by the Maltese Government, and apparently it only binds the Maltese Government and not the European Commission, there are those who maintain that such a Declaration imparts some sort of regionality to the island of Gozo.

Act No. XVI of 2009 amending the Local Councils Act (Chapter 363 of the Laws of Malta) added another Schedule to the existing Schedules to the Act, containing a list of five regions of Malta and Gozo with the local councils that they comprise. It is stated that the Gozo Region comprises the Local Councils that have been set up in Gozo by that Act, and in that manner one could refer to The Gozo Region as representing the Gozitan electorate. However neither the present Gozo Region nor the other Regions of Malta are entrusted with the normal legislative and administrative powers normally associated with a Regional Council. They can be considered as Regions only in name and regalia. For example the President of the Gozo Region is elected from the members of the Local Councils. The actual administrative powers reside with the local councils of every town and village not with the Region. And if one were to look at the powers of the Regional Committee, these mostly consist of keeping the street lights in a good state, or organising cultural event and similar ephemeral competences.

Most Gozitans are aware that it would be in the best interest of the island of Gozo if it had, as in the past, its own representative assembly with powers to legislate and administer Gozitan affairs in all sectors of public life, except of course in foreign policy and matters that need to be integrated in the

³ Then as now, Gozo has its own law courts independent from Malta.



The Circolo Gozitano logo.

national interest. Then and only then could one really speak of Gozo as a Region.

Circolo Gozitano: Preserving Gozitan Identity

A cornerstone in the preservation of Gozo's identity is the Circolo Gozitano, founded in 1913. This esteemed social and cultural organisation has been instrumental in promoting Gozitan values and traditions. The Circolo organises various events, such as art exhibitions, literary gatherings, and folklore performances, fostering a sense of community and solidarity among Gozitans. It has in recent years instituted the conferment of the Ġieħ Ġhawdex Award on distinctive personalities who have helped and promoted Gozo and the Gozitan identity.

Beginning in 2005, the bicentenary of Saver Cassar's demise, the Circolo Gozitano commemorates Jum Ġhawdex together with the Gozo Region and the Gozo Ministry. Jum Ġhawdex is celebrated on the 28th October which is the date of the capitulation of the French in 1798 starting a period in which Gozo was independent.

The next step in affirming the identity of Gozo as an island region is the adoption of the Gozo flag. The Circolo Gozitano has been promoting the establishment of a regional flag for Gozo in line with accepted practices worldwide where regions do not only have their own coat of arms (which in the case of Gozo already exists) but also their regional colours. The colours of the Gozo flag are inspired by



The Gozo flag.

the motto of Gozo: *Fertilis et ad undis caput effero* (A promising land with flowing water); therefore the blue and the green with a white buffer in the middle. So far the idea has not caught on.

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What Makes Destination Gozo Different

JOE MUSCAT

The distinctiveness of a tourism destination depends highly on its unique qualities and particularities that belong to that specific destination. Way back twenty-five years ago, the Gozo Tourism Association, still in its fledgling years, started to promote the island with the catchphrase ‘Gozo – a distinct destination’. This Gozo tag-line is based on the natural tangible fact that the island is really and truly different from mainland Malta and other neighbouring islands. Initially, albeit entrenched in the tourism master plan of that time, this tag-line was not easily accepted or deemed credible. Each time the distinctiveness of the sister island was evoked on discussion tables, it was very often mocked. Nowadays, this catchphrase is no longer disputed or debated, but, rather, it is the main feature and highlight of all the promotional and advertising initiatives undertaken to promote tourism on the island.

The Malta Tourism Strategy 2021-2030 (2021) rightly states that the island should continue

building on the distinctiveness of Gozo, focusing more exclusively on its unique selling propositions and embracing the principles of climate friendly tourism. Even the Gozo Regional Development Authority, in its recently published strategy (2023), highlighted Gozo’s distinctive characteristics and earmarked the importance of their preservation, enhancement and promotion as key factors for a long-term strategy.

The distinctiveness of Gozo is based on its rustic character and natural beauty of the island. This uniqueness originates mostly from Gozo’s topography, with gentle hills contrasting with breathtaking sheer cliffs, donning variegated seasonal hues.

Unlike other islands of similar size, Gozo has fortunately preserved its quaint villages scattered around the island. These unique communities are still (except for a few cases) separated and detached from one another, some of which perched



Gozo has preserved its quaint villages.



Carnival is another distinct touristic event in Gozo.

on lofty hills, while others nestled in the lowlands, all dominated by their respective church dome or belfry. They have retained their respective diverse articulation of the Gozitan dialect up to this day! Simply an island of villages.

Other peculiarities of Gozo are friendliness of its people, its rhythm of life, often quiet yet fully alive. The island's history is evidenced by many built structures, including its megalithic temple at Xagħra, the fortified Ċittadella at Victoria, the various watch towers, and the quaint chapels in various locations. Although Malta's and Gozo's histories are intertwined, in many instances, some historical developments in Gozo differed from those of Malta.

The distinctiveness of Gozo is also evident in the touristic accommodation offer of the Island. The bed stock mix in Gozo, which is mostly inclined towards the non-collective sector, includes the commonly known farmhouses, which are so prevalent and typical of Gozo. This conversion of old, often derelict buildings in the rural areas of Gozo, into comfortable tourist accommodation, is an undisputed attraction of Gozo as a tourist destination.

Another distinctive Gozo touristic offer is the intertwining of cultural, religious and folkloristic events that can only be experienced on the island. It is a well-known fact that the lyric opera performances staged annually by the two Victoria theatres during the month of October offer a distinct tourist experience. The opera in Gozo can be described as a labour of love, because of the large amount of voluntary work that goes into each production. The engagement of topnotch international artists, who perform alongside the local talent in this field, makes Gozo's opera truly singular.

The Carnival period is another distinct touristic event in Gozo that has established itself as a major crowd puller to the island especially within the domestic market and which is gradually gaining grounds even with the foreign visitors. This fun time of the year has made a name for itself in Gozo. Such a spontaneous carnival with dark undertones, satire, traditional costumes and masked revellers is a sought-after eclectic event.

Christmastime is yet a period where one may enjoy a particular and unique experience at this festive time of the year. This month-long string of cultural and religious events culminating in the nativity village



Gozo is a popular destination for diving.

at Bethlehem in Ġhajnsielem has really and truly authenticated Gozo as the Christmas Island. Gozo is now being branded as the place to savour and relish the Christmas festive spirit.

Gozo is a well-known destination for diving. Notwithstanding its geographical size, the island is endowed with a number of dive sites situated especially on the north and northwest coast of Gozo. The distinctiveness of Gozo as a diving destination emerges from its popularity with the foreign diving enthusiasts. In fact, year on year, around 20% of the foreign tourists to the island come to visit purposely to practice diving.

There are other attractions that are strengthening Gozo's position as a distinct tourism destination, because they showcase Gozo's true and genuine identity. The island's gastronomy, its local agricultural produce, and the Holy Week pageantry. These also contribute towards authentic and unique experiences.

Tourism is a major economic sector in Gozo, and it is therefore necessary to improve the touristic product, requiring the protection of its distinctiveness, which is, at time, threatened by over development. Destination Gozo has an excellent touristic potential

by pursuing and upholding the objective of keeping it as a distinct destination. This is the winning formula for Gozo. In this regard, synergising efforts of all the stakeholders in the sector is a fundamental requisite.

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The Impact of COVID-19 on Supply Chain Decision-Making of Gozitan SMEs¹

JAN LUCA GATT

Introduction

The objective of this article is to assess the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on the supply-chain of SMEs in Gozo. This study also attempts to gather information about the adaptability of these organisations to the changing conditions and their prospects post-COVID-19.

The outbreak of COVID-19 has had major effects on businesses and economies across the globe (International Monetary Fund, 2020). It has spread at an alarming rate and millions of people were infected. To end the spread of the virus, several countries imposed a nationwide lockdown, which considerably slowed down economic activity. The adverse effects of the pandemic have not only been on global health but also on the global economic system (Francis, 2020). While governments and their health-care systems were effectively treating patients and stopping the spread of the virus, businesses had to deal with the impact that the pandemic had on their performance, with a major problem being supply-chain (Francis, 2020).

Supply chain issues existed before the COVID-19 pandemic (Alicke, et al., 2020) however, COVID-19 increased their intensity and unpredictability. Managers had to regularly assess what was happening in the external world and take decisions with little time for preparation, in order to minimise the harm of their organisation's supply chain (Manuj and Sahin, 2011).

As a result of the supply chain disruptions, businesses were faced with higher costs due to the shortage in the availability of raw materials as well as delays in receiving their goods (Cai and Luo, 2020; Remko, 2020, Cai and Luo, 2020; Paul, et al., 2021). This resulted in, among other

things, businesses not having enough inventory, and therefore unable to fulfil the demand for their products.

Inherent Features of the Gozitan Economy

Islands, especially remote ones, due to their limited resources endowments, tend to be heavily dependent on the importation of industrial supplies, and therefore supply-chain disruptions are likely to have a major impact on these territories. Malta is a small island but it cannot be considered remote, being connected to the rest of the world through air and sea transportation. However, Gozo faces an additional layer of connectivity difficulty, that of double insularity. All industrial supplies are downloaded in Malta which are transported to Gozo by sea.

The impacts of COVID-19 on Malta's and Gozo's SMEs were severe and occurred on both the supply and demand sides. On the supply side, these were mostly due to disruptions in transportation and in supply networks. However, there were additional problems associated with workers absenting themselves from work due to illness or to take care of their children when schools were closed. Restrictions on people's movements and sanitation requirements also negatively affected business in the Maltese Islands. On the demand side, a sharp and unanticipated decline in demand and revenue occurred mostly in retail outlets due to restrictions of mobility and loss of income of consumers in the domestic market.

Method

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with 24 top-level managers operating in SMEs in Gozo in order to obtain information for the

¹ This is a summary of a dissertation submitted by the present author in partial fulfilment of the requirements of Masters of Science in Strategic Management and Digital Marketing at the Faculty of Economics, Management and Accountancy University of Malta

purpose of this article. Two sectors were selected for analysis, namely (a) 10 manufacturing firms and (b) 14 importers. The majority of those operating in the importing sector, i.e. 10 participants were retailers, while 4 wholesalers.

The businesses selected from the manufacturing sector included producers of garage doors, furniture, building bricks, apertures, window blinds and food. Those selected from the importers included importers of bathroom tiles, furniture, marble slabs, lighting equipment, construction materials, solar panels, household appliances, glass panes, food and beverages.

A series of questions and an interview guide were prepared for the interviews in line with the objective of this article (see Appendix 1). The interview guide was divided into the following three sections:

(1) a general introduction about the businesses and their operation before the pandemic; (2) their effect of the pandemic on their operation; (3) recovery from COVID-19 and post-pandemic performance.

Considerable information was derived from the responses and only a summary of these responses is reported in this article.

The Results with Brief Discussion

The operations of the SME respondents before the pandemic

During the interviews, all respondents stated that before the pandemic, Gozo was disadvantaged in matters relating to the supply chain due to the double insularity problem, but supply-chain matters were predictable and by and large routine. However, the onset of the pandemic led to uncertainty and this negatively affected their business.

The effect of the Pandemic on the supply chains of SMEs in Gozo

80% of manufacturers and 86% of importers stated that COVID-19 disrupted the whole process of the supply chain. From their response it emerged that none of the participants was prepared for the pandemic, and not one of them had a contingency plan in place.

The negative effects mentioned by the respondents were mainly delay in delivery of orders and increase in freight costs. The delivery delays from abroad led delays in supplying the final product. Some 50% of manufacturers and 29% of importers were faced with cash-flow problems because clients were taking longer to pay, whereas the business operators were given less time to pay their suppliers.

The majority (70%) of manufacturers and half of the importers stated that they had to plan way ahead when placing orders to ensure that they always had enough material in stock and for this reason it was essential for them to increase their engagement with suppliers.

Problems other than those relating directly to the supply chain

All the manufacturers and 43% of importers indicated that during the pandemic, many foreign workers returned to their country of origin, and a number of local workers resigned. About a third of the respondents in the retail sector indicated that customers were adding additional challenges to businesses because they were hoarding goods and buying in bulk. Businesses had to plan way ahead when placing orders for stocking, given the delays involved. To combat the challenges that the pandemic brought with it, 43% of the importers stated that they opted to stop importing certain materials.

Most manufacturers (70%) stated that to combat the rising prices of raw materials, businesses had to shorten the validity of quotes to their clients. Another problem mentioned by almost all manufacturers was that since businesses were experiencing delays in orders leading to lack of certain raw materials, they opted to work on multiple projects simultaneously, so as to keep operating when certain inputs were lacking.

About half of the manufacturers and about a third of importers stated that they had to take decisions under stress and pressure, often with negative results. This finding complements the argument put forward by Starcke and Brand (2012) who found that humans do not always make well-informed strategic judgments under stress.

Problem encountered	Manufacturers (%)	Importers/wholesaler/retailers (%)	Total (%)
Double Insularity	100	100	100
Distruptions in the supply chain	80	86	83
Did not have a contingecy plan	100	100	100
Delay in deliveries	70	71	70.5
Increase in freight costs	70	71	70.5
Cash flow	50	29	39.5
Plan way ahead when placing orders	70	50	60
Lack of employees	100	43	71.5
Customers hoarding goods	0	29	14.5
Stopped importing certain materials	0	43	21.5
Shorten the validity of quotes	70	0	35
Worked on multiple projects simulataneously	90	0	45

Table 1.

About a fifth of all respondents stated that communication technology played a very important role during the pandemic, and when possible, they switched to telework practices to be able to continue with their operations during the pandemic.

Table 1, summarises the various problems associated with the pandemic, with corresponding percentages of respondents who indicated that they faced such problems.

Unfortunately, from the data collected, one cannot assess whether a business within the same niche was impacted more positively or negatively than its competitors. If one looks at the two manufacturers of upward garage doors interviewed for this study, for example, one mentioned that the business didn't face any major disruptions during the pandemic, while the other business mentioned that the business was impacted severely by the pandemic. Again, if one looks at the importers of tiles and bathrooms interviewed for this study, some mentioned that the pandemic had no repercussions on their business, while others stated that they experienced major challenges.

Post-COVID-19 World

Regarding their future, some participants (30% of manufacturers and 21% of importers) explained that they do not have an optimistic view of the post-pandemic situation, due to a highly uncertain environment.

All respondents stated that when businesses started to recover from the pandemic, they were immediately faced with the Ukraine war, sometimes even with negative repercussions, as the war prolonged the problems that businesses faced during the pandemic.

About 25% of all respondents expressed the pessimistic view that as a result of the frequency of crises leading to uncertainty and economic interruptions, the world in general could face a recession, and inevitably the economy of Gozo would be affected.

Almost all respondents stated that a major problem, which existed before the pandemic, and is likely to persist in the future, is labour shortage in the private sector of Gozo, given that many workers are opting to work in the public sector, for a more secure form of employment.

Conclusion

This article has argued that the outbreak of COVID-19 has had major adverse effects on supply chain relating to business in Gozo. No business operator in Gozo was prepared for the COVID-19 pandemic or had any contingency plan in place, and although most business tried to adapt to the situation, the overall impact remained negative.

Various problems relating to supply-chain disruptions were mentioned by the respondents.

But the most important ones related to delays in orders, rising costs, increases in freight costs as well as delays with installations. Some participants also indicated that they were faced with cash-flow problems.

One positive outcome of the pandemic is that, in all probability, the crisis will lead to advancements in digital technology. The pandemic has shown that supply-chain issues are of major importance even for small business, requiring frequent adjustments to changes in the external environment. Digital supply networks were essential for surviving the outbreak all over the world, and in some cases also in Gozo.

Such technology will be even more essential in a post-COVID-19 world to increase the supply network's intelligence and responsiveness (Cai and Luo, 2020). Business operators worldwide are already utilising cloud and big data technology in their supply networks, with the aim of enabling them to manage their operation under uncertainties, to quickly resume operations after a crisis, and to anticipate customer demand in such circumstances.

A lesson that would be useful for SMEs in Gozo is that it will be beneficial for them to strategise their operation by investing in appropriate technology, so as to improve their connectiveness with the rest of the world. In the case of Gozo, where business is highly fragmented into small units, joining forces in adopting such technology would improve the feasibility of such a strategy.

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Appendix 1:

The Questionnaire

Section 1: General introduction about the business

1. Describe the nature of your business?
2. What is your position within the company?
3. How many employees do you employ?

Section 2: Operation before the pandemic

4. How would you describe your supply chain operation before pandemic?
5. What were your challenges in supply chain operation during the pandemic?
6. Was your business prepared for a major disruption as COVID-19?

Section 3: Operation during the pandemic

7. Which areas of your business were most impacted?
8. Were the challenges during COVID different than before the pandemic or did you face the same challenges?
9. Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed the way you operate your supply chain?
10. Did you take decisions differently during the pandemic?
11. What were the effective decisions taken in specific situations related to the COVID-19 with regards to lock downs, suppliers closing down, delay in orders?
12. Do you import your raw materials yourself?
13. Were your decisions effective and on time? Would you make the same decisions?
14. Is your company engaging with suppliers to address supply issues both during the pandemic and now that the pandemic is over?
15. Did your company have a contingency plan in place that could be deployed during COVID-19?
16. Do you think that operating a business in Gozo effected the supply chain differently than operating a business in Malta during COVID?
17. And during the March – May 2020 period, when the government introduced restrictive measures to cross between the two islands, were you effected by that?

Section 4: Recovery from COVID-19 and the future

18. Did the Ukraine war worsen the effect on your supply chain and on your decision making?
19. What are the challenges you faced in recovering from COVID-19?
20. What changes are needed to strengthen your supply chain against future disruptions?
21. How are you envisaging your future?

Remembering Gozitan Poet Ġorġ Pisani (1909–1999)

25 Years After his Death

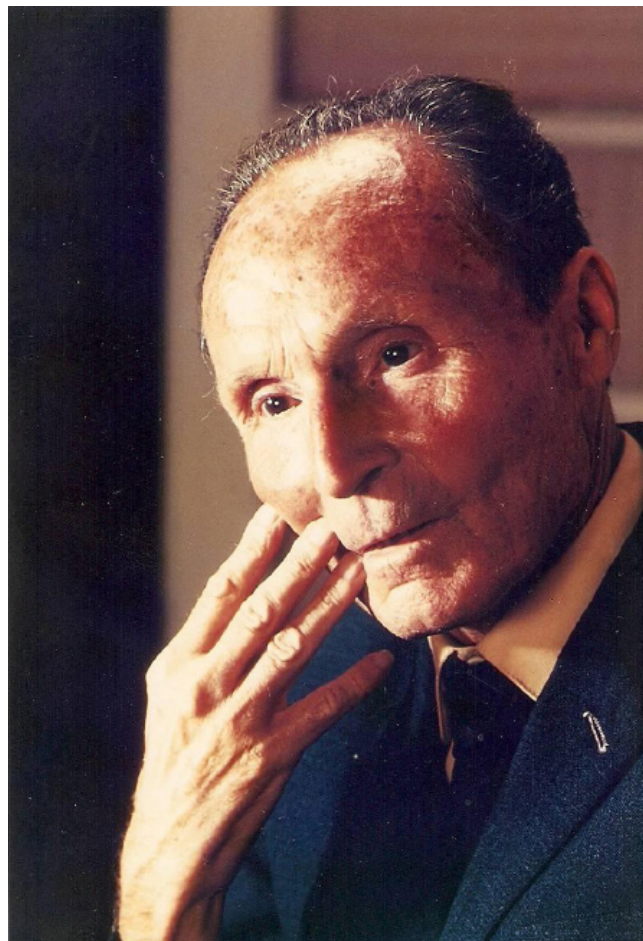
CHARLES BEZZINA

On 24 February 1999 at about 7:20 pm, Ġorġ Pisani passed away at the Gozo General Hospital. He was 89 years old. I cherish his memories with esteem not only because he was a close friend of mine, and perhaps his closest friend during the last twenty years of his life, but also because he was a renowned poet, a patriot and an educator, who loved Gozo to his utmost.

I well recall going back to my early teens, when I started sending him a birthday card every 6th of May. It was but a normal card always with designs of colourful flowers, yet in it I wanted to convey my noble thoughts and admiration. I remember at the primary school reading from the text books ‘Ġabra ta’ Ward’ his beautiful poems. Once, he told me that when Emanuel Benjamin Vella, was compiling the said books, he asked several poets of that time to compose some poems for children. Pisani was the main contributor, without forgetting that years before poet Anastasju Cuschieri had written nice poems for children.

It was 1979. At that time I was searching for a job. I had just completed attending and studying the tourist guide course. I passed the exam with high marks, and while guiding tourists, I well recall my acquaintance of Ġorġ Pisani – not on the textbooks, but personally. He himself was a tourist guide, and we used to travel together every morning to Mġarr harbour in the black taxi of Carmelo Agius ‘il-Brejbx’ to welcome the tourists coming over to Gozo. I was always with him when at Mġarr, we regularly walked up to the Lourdes Church and prayed together for 15 minutes or so, and afterwards we gossiped and talked, until the arrival of the scheduled ferry.

At that time I had started writing poetry and was extremely fond of it. He not only gave me his help,



Ġorġ Pisani in the last years of his life.

his support, his comments and suggestions, but above all influenced me to love poetry more and to plough deep by much reading. While I always adhered to his remarks, I got to know much better this great intelligent man. We usually dined together at Calypso Hotel in Marsalforn, but once while having a cup of coffee together at Saint Patrick’s hotel at Xlendi, he asked me if I was going to stick my career as a tourist guide. I didn’t answer him. I was at that time at the age of 18, undecided. Then he said to me, ‘Charles find something else for tourism is like a bird in one of your hands, that can easily escape and you finish up with an empty hand’. I

thought for days about this in the following days, and today I know that he gave me fatherly advice in a most prudent way, for afterwards in 1981 I joined the Bank of Valletta and worked there for 39 years.

In publishing my first poetry books at the beginning and middle of the 1980s, he would not accept them freely from me as a humble donation. "No", he used to repeat. "Tell me how much and I will buy it, for if we writers first don't help each other, who would do so?" For every book I published and forwarded to him later on, he always paid me. He would not accept it for free.

When my father died in 1996, I went to his house as usual, and told him my plans to amalgamate, enlarge and republish my father's invaluable wartime books. I never forgot the courage he gave me, and I left his house with great hope to do so. It was in the mid 90s, when I commenced this work. I frequently visited him to interview him about the wheat contribution during the daring war years, when Malta was at the edge of surrender. Together with Kelinu Vella Haber, l-Għaqda tal-Bdiewa, and not forgetting the Bishop of Gozo, Mgr Michael Gonzi, Pisani was instrumental for the enormous wheat collection from Gozo, at a time when hunger on our islands was rife. This saved Malta.

Ġorġ Pisani was born in Victoria, Gozo, on 6 May 1909. He had a normal childhood and grew up loving literature. Once he told me, he had showed his first lines to the Gozitan novelist, Mgr Luigi Vella, who was surprised with the ability of this young man. Later on he joined the Capuchins Order in Gozo, as Fra Alipju, where he studied philosophy, classical literature and Latin, and from where he started to publish his first poems on their periodical 'L-Immakulata'. He gained the admiration of several writers and poets at that time, most notably among them, the national poet Dun Karm Psaila. Besides the beautiful poem, 'Lil Palma Xiha', I never forgot his beautiful lyrical poem, 'Il-Qanpiena tal-Kunvent tal-Kappuccini', that he published so many years ago in the same periodical, and never republished.

Leaving the Capuchins, he went over to Malta. He became acquainted with the most notable poets and writers of that time, notably Ġużè Chetcuti, Rużar Briffa, Karmenu Vassallo, Ġużè Bonnici and others. He succeeded in establishing himself as a major poet



The monument to Ġorġ Pisani in Victoria Gozo.

and was instrumental in the Għaqda Kittieba tal-Malti. He was also responsible in 1939 for setting up in Malta, 'L-Għaqda għat-Tixrid tal-Ilsien Malti' together with Anton Buttigieg and some others. As a consequence, in October 1940, Kelinu Vella Haber set up in Gozo, 'Ix-Xirka tal-Ilsien Malti' with the aim of promoting the beauty and the love of our language.

Ġorġ Pisani was sent to Gozo by higher authorities as an Assistant Protection Officer at the beginning of June 1942, with the aim to boost the local moral during those grim wartime years. He succeeded in opening a number of information bureaux and in public meetings persuading the Gozo farmers to sell their tons of wheat to the Agricultural Department. When in 1943 the Allies won North Africa from under the Nazis rule, he organised in Victoria, Xagħra and Nadur, propaganda festivities in decorated roads and squares.

In my childhood I recall his efforts for the promotion of the Industrial Exhibition which is held annually on 15 August at Villa Rundle, and also showing

Lis- sun Charles Bezzina

b' teorija ta' thaja.

Kemm huma shiek il- f'juri
li b'ghatli f'eghluq snini,
donnhom ghadhom qed jifther
mas- sebt filgħodu kmieni.

Għalkemm m' humier t'leif klejjag
bil- għagal impittarin
tak silhom ghadhom jaslu
friski minn xi qardin.

Wassluli dawn il- f'juri
kliem helu ta' tiffkura;
qaluli bl- ilsen tagħhom
kemm qalbek hija kbira.

Għalhekk, Charles, ngħidlek grazzi,
grazzi sincier, għerrieni;
jien ngħozz ix- xewqat tajba
li b'ghatli f'eghluq snini.

Gorġ Pisani

6 ta' Mejju, 1988

A poem by Gorġ Pisani to Charles Bezzina

regularly informative films at it-Tokk Square to educate the Gozitans, who at that time were mostly illiterate. I regularly heard his voice booming from the Rediffusion, that at the time was the most important means of broadcasting, always emphasising on the rich history and folklore of our islands. Pisani is author of several poetry books, dramas, essays, short stories, two novels and the interesting Gozo legends in two books. He was also a contributor of the 'Review' and to newspapers, but most important was his collection of, 'Tajjeb li Tkun Taf'. Pisani was awarded 'Gieħ ir-Repubblika' by the Maltese State for his achievements and his prolific writings that surely will never die. He was also bestowed with other honours during his lifetime.

Passing by the bronze statue of Gorġ Pisani, which stands proudly in Main Gate Street, Victoria, in front of his house, I always recall his enthusiasm and his wholehearted love for Gozo. Gorġ Pisani has passed on, but his writings and poems will never die. They will live on so that future generations will never forget that once on our little island, lived a gigantic literary figure, who donated so much for the love of Gozo.

Charles Bezzina, born in 1961, is a poet and a writer, who has published 20 books. He twice won the Book National Prize for poetry. He is also a researcher about Wartime Gozo and has published several books about this subject.

Book Review:

Tajr tal-Karti. Antologija ta' Poeziji

Alfred Grech

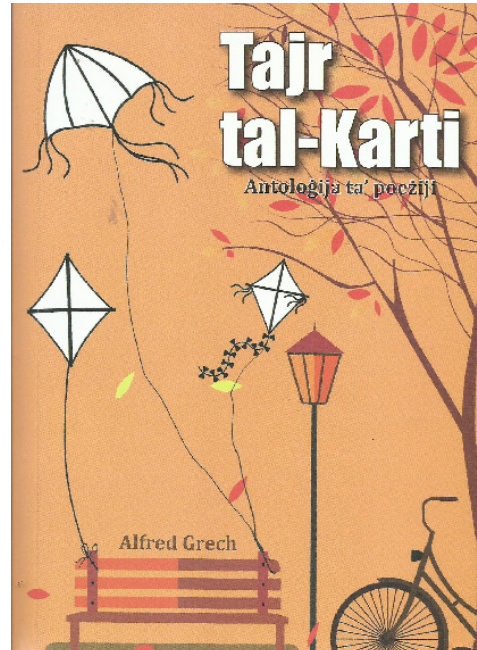
A & M Printing, 2022, 226 p.

REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

During the last decade or so, Gozitan lawyer and poet Alfred Grech has published a number of anthologies of poetry which have gradually established him as one of the island's main contemporary poets, and one of the most prolific.

Tajr tal-Karti which can be loosely translated either as 'Paper Kites' or even 'Birds of Paper' – depending on whether one decides to focus on the kites on the front cover or the hovering bird on the back cover – is the fifth anthology of poems that Alfred Grech is giving us. As he writes in the book's introduction, these poems can easily be considered as a diary that reflects the different moods and feelings of the poet on an almost daily basis. The poems feature different themes and are written in different styles. The poet feels at ease both when he used the so-called 'vers mahlul' (free verse) free of both rhyme and verse, as well as when he used the traditional quartette. Most of the poems have an autobiographical slant; even though the reader may understand nothing, he or she is still able to appreciate the way Grech transforms feelings into words or short phrases. Above all, a sense of constant search is felt throughout the entire anthology. Grech seems to be constantly addressed 'the other'; this other could be a lover from days gone past or a one who disappointed him. On the other hand, it can also be perceived as the yin that is in contrast with the yang that represents him.

Various poems in the anthology address this 'other' which constantly receives his reprimands, his words of anguish, his wish to converse or his adamant will to be heard and appreciated. In 'Meta leĥnek lanqas jasal', (When your voice cannot be heard) he experiences the sour distance that divides him from his interlocutor. The feeling of solitude due to this indifference is reflected in 'U int hallejtni hawn' (And you left me here). Solitude and loneliness, the search for the broken pieces and a drive to make himself whole again are themes that characterise this continuous urge of his to find harmony or at least,



inner peace. He becomes angry as he observes an unjust and unauthentic world (F'did-dinja/In this world), and he emerges as the poet whose spirit knows no bounds. Grech sees the world as an illusory place where everything passes (Xejn mhu għal dejjem/ Nothing is eternal) and uses words as 'buzżieqa' (balloon) and 'efimeru' (ephemeral) to make his argument in favour of a fleeting and unsatisfactory existence. In what may at first seem as a contradictory statement, his spirit, which earlier on perceived itself as boundless, rejoices in the recognition of a horizon and a land shore: without them, uncertainty may prevail (Imnalla hemm int/ Thanks to you).

What I like about Alfred Grech's poetry is that when the need arises, he does not think twice to become self-critical; words come easy to him and he uses them to his greatest advantage to incarnate through them his deepest feelings without going back to revise them or seek any sense of perfection. Tajr tal-Karti speaks to every reader in a distinct manner and can be appreciated by one and all.

Book Review:

The Roman Municipia of Malta and Gozo. The Epigraphic Evidence.

George Azzopardi

Oxford – Archaeopress, 2023, 155 p. Includes Bibliography and General Index.

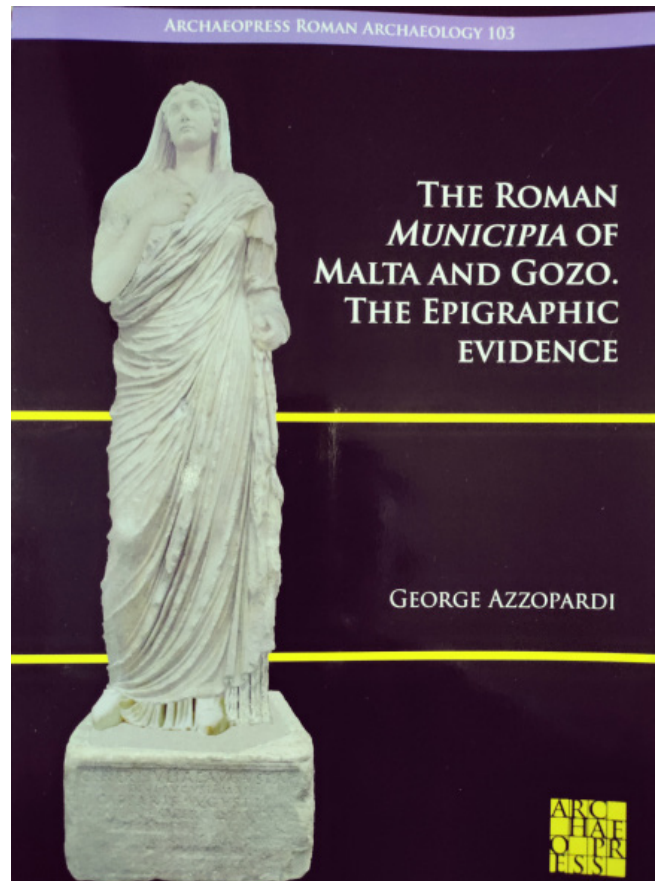
REVIEWED BY JOSEPH CALLEJA

How did the Maltese and Gozitans fare under Roman occupation? How were they treated by the new masters? And what did they do to appease them? What changes did the new political situation bring about in their lives? How did they respond and/or adapt? Was their religious identity in any way affected? How did they manoeuvre their loyalties to their own benefits? And how did they manage their own domestic affairs within the new political set-up?

Though based essentially on epigraphic evidence, this monograph seeks to address the above and other questions through an exercise in which epigraphy and the archaeological record supplement each other. For this reason, this study is not monodirectional and, in its quest for answers, often verges also on the margins because its ultimate aim is to gain as wide a picture as can be possibly attained. It is, in fact, towards this aim that the epigraphic evidence under review is studied also within its political, social, cultural, and often also its religious contexts.

The results shed new light on the governing bodies of the Maltese Islands in Roman times and the models they followed, those who administered them, the latter's role and status, and also their relationship with and their significance for the rest of the population.

This book consists of ten thematic chapters which do not follow strictly any chronological sequence. Each theme draws its starting point from a surviving or a documented inscription or set of inscriptions. For its content, the first chapter relies heavily – though not exclusively – on the author's unpublished MA dissertation. On the other hand, some of the remaining chapters originated as published papers (by the same author) but are, here, being revised and re-edited. The rest are completely new and have never been published before.



The book is available direct from Archaeopress or from their website www.archaeopress.com.

From our Readers:¹

The Lost Leaders

JOSEPH PSAILA

Dedicated to Victoria Hotspurs who have recently abandoned the game of football in Gozo in order to participate exclusively in competitions held in Malta:

Just for a trophy of nickel they left us
just for a medal to stick on their shirt;
seeking promotion in fancies of grandeur,
they dared to consider the home turf, mere dirt.

They took the decision to leave without farewell,
abhor all their rivals who made where they lie
as champions or losers in history, but now
oblige generations to simply comply.

In years what will happen when dreams come not true,
when present incumbents have spirits that fade;
when they cross to perform for a busload of fans,
will there be other dreamers to come to their aid?

A trophy of nickel may come and may not,
but parting of ways was regretfully wrong
for what was their game they're leaving it lame;
will they expect on return, a welcome with song?

¹ As from this edition, the Gozo Observer will carry brief comments from readers, which could be in the form of a poem or verse. The text should fit in one page.

Errata Corrige

With reference to the review for the book, 'Bilanċ: Għal Hajja Aħjar', in *The Gozo Observer* Issue 47, page 40, the reviewer should have read Mario Saliba.

Recent Activities at the University of Malta – Gozo Campus

JOSEPH CALLEJA

Courses at the Gozo Campus

During academic year 2023/24, the following University of Malta courses continued to be held at the campus:

- Bachelor of Commerce in Business and Enterprise Management and Economics (Yr 2)
- Bachelor of Commerce (Yr 3)
- Bachelor of Psychology (Hons) (Yr 4)
- Master in Counselling (Yr 3)

These courses are being offered on a part-time basis with lectures mainly held on Friday evenings and Saturday mornings.

Similar to the previous academic year, the Centre for Liberal Arts and Sciences, at the University of Malta, continued with the offering of a number of micro-credentials at the campus. The following micro-credentials were offered:

- LAS1082 The Art of Maltese Bobbin Lace I
- LAS1085 Appreciating Antiques: An Introduction to Art and Antiques Collecting in Malta and Gozo
- LAS1010 Beekeeping and the Art of Honey Making
- LAS2050 The Art of Maltese Bobbin Lace II
- LAS2074 Maltese Bobbin Lace: An Advanced Approach.

Lectures are held in the evenings during weekdays and on Saturday mornings, and are normally spread over 14 weeks. Each micro-credential is of 4 ECTS which involves between 20 to 28 contact hours.

The University of the Third Age continued with its programme during the second semester with the offering of more courses to the elderly. The courses offered are:

- L-istatistika reġjonali u l-importanza tagħha fuq temi ambjentali u soċjo-ekonomiċi
- On the Future of Humanity
- Discovering the Middle Ages



The students who followed the Art and Antique Collecting course, accompanied by their lecturer Mr Mario Cassar and campus manager Mr Joseph Calleja, on a site visit at Palazzo Falson in Mdina.



Dr Consiglia Azzopardi surrounded by students during one of the lectures on Maltese Bobbin Lace.

Gozo Lace Day

The University Gozo Campus in collaboration with the International Organisation of Needle and Bobbin Lace (OIDFA) (Malta) and Koperattiva Għawdxija tal-Bizzilla u Artigjanat, organised the annual event “Gozo Lace Day”. The event was held on Sunday 14th April 2024 at the University Gozo Campus and consisted of a number of exhibitions and demonstrations of Gozo lace and talks on matters related to lace-making. This year’s event marked the 100th anniversary from the death of Dun Giuseppe Diacono, an important promoter of Maltese lace in Gozo. Present for the event were Professor Philip Von Brockdorff, Rector’s Delegate for Gozo and Dr Consiglia Azzopardi.

In his introductory speech Professor Von Brockdorff welcomed those present and gave a brief description of the courses being offered at the campus including those in lace-making. The courses relating to lace-making are being offered by the Centre for Liberal Arts and Sciences of the University of Malta and it is planned that such courses continue to be offered in the future.

Dr Consiglia Azzopardi delivered an interesting lecture on the life of Giuseppe Diacono and his legacy of lace works and designs. Her presentation also included an interview with the last surviving lace maker who had been a student in Diacono’s school. Dr Azzopardi thanked the staff at the Gozo Campus for their assistance in the offering of courses and the organisation of similar events. The talk was concluded by local musician Spiru Sillato who entertained the audience with some Maltese folk music or *ghana*.

Numerous lace makers and friends attended the event which also included exhibitions of contemporary lace masterpieces and textile crafts. There were a number of stands mounted by OIDFA (Malta), the Koperattiva Għawdxija tal-Bizzilla u Artigjanat and by the Centre for Liberal Arts and Sciences students.

Island Tourism is Not Just Tourism on Islands

Islands come with their own particular challenges, and the marketing and management of their vital tourism industry requires sober reflection,



Dr Consiglia Azzopardi showing one of the exhibits to the Rector's Delegate for Gozo, Prof Philip Von Brockdorff, during Lace Day.



Prof Von Brockdorff delivering his speech to the audience during the Lace Day.



Professor Godfrey Baldacchino delivering his lecture during the seminar.



The students who participated in the seminar accompanied by Professor Godfrey Baldacchino and Dr Karl Agius.

accompanied by reliable and up-to-date statistics and appropriate governance mechanisms.

These are some of the main conclusions of a day seminar held at the Gozo Campus of the University of Malta on Saturday April 27th 2024, as the highlight of the study unit on Island Tourism, offered by the Department of Tourism Management and coordinated by Dr Karl Agius, and with the assistance of Prof. Godfrey Baldacchino during the seminar.

The students were offered insightful presentations by Joe Muscat (Gozo Tourism Association), Daniel Borg (Gozo Business Chamber), Daniela Borg (Gozo Branch of the National Statistics Office) and Ronald Sultana (Ministry for Gozo and Planning). The activity also included a critical textual analysis of the popular song *Inti Djamant* (by The Tramps, a Gozitan band) as well as a challenge

that involved drawing the Maltese Islands in their right proportions on a sheet of paper.

Book Launch

On 19 January, cultural anthropologist and art historian Veronica Veen launched her tenth book on Maltese culture, entitled *Malta's Temple Culture summarized in the Twin Ladies of the Xagħra Stone Circle*. The book is not only a tribute to this finest piece of prehistoric art ever found on Gozo, but also puts it firmly in its context of the declining late Tarxien phase around 2500BC, plagued by a host of imminent environmental, health-related and ideological problems. All this contributed to its multi-layered symbolic meaning, subtly expressed in a pictorial language that reflects the centralising tendencies radiating from Tarxien Temples in the South of Malta, but retains a distinctive Gozitan character as well. The event was held at the Gozo Campus.



Dr Veronica Veen and her husband Dr Adrian van der Blom during the book launch.

Exams

All Gozitan students who are following courses at the Msida campus were once again given the opportunity to sit for their end-of-semester exams in Gozo. Around 517 exams were organised in Gozo during February, while during the June session, around 544 exams were held. Of these, 166 consisted of WISEflow exams on campus.

Joseph Calleja is Manager at the University of Malta – Gozo Campus.



The Gozo Observer is published twice a year by the University of Malta - Gozo Campus. It contains articles relating to all aspects of life in Gozo, including culture, education, business, arts and literature. Those wishing to submit articles for inclusion in the Gozo Observer should contact the Editor of the magazine (contact details below).

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