

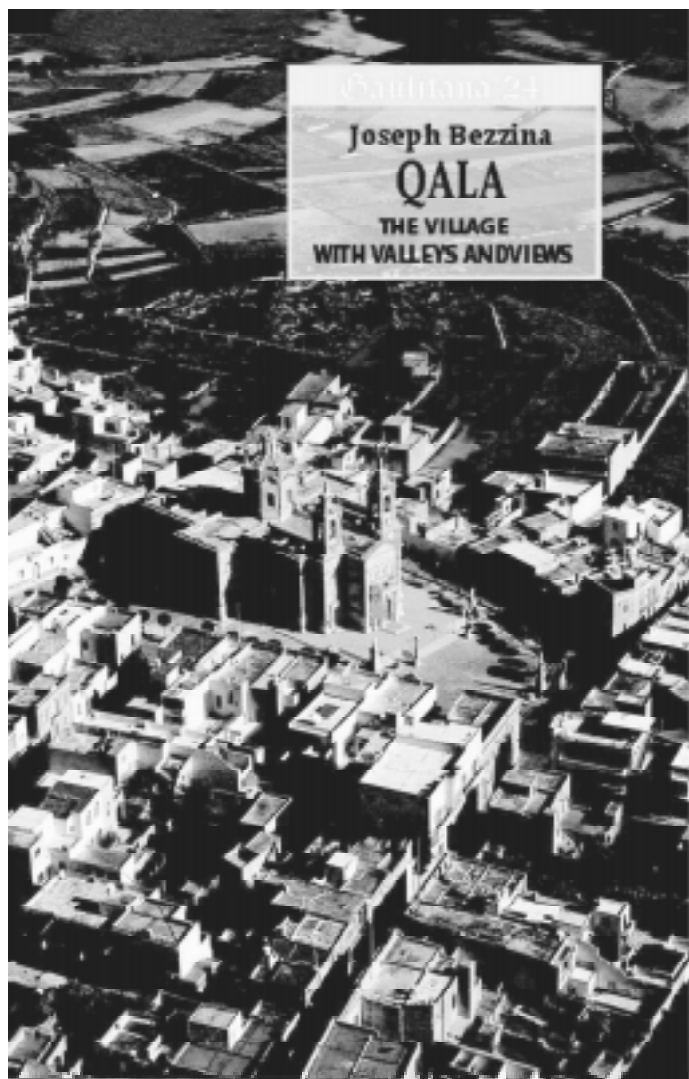
# Book Review: Qala and its Sights

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Joseph Bezzina, *Qala: the Village with Valleys and Views*, Qala: Qala Council – Gaulitana, 2003 68 pp., illus. ISBN 99909-57-21-5

The 24<sup>th</sup> in the *Gaulitana* series written and edited by Rev. Dr Joseph Bezzina, this little book is also the fourth in a sub-series of short works about Gozo's towns and villages.

It is well illustrated and includes a useful map of Qala, a small village that has grown considerably during the last couple of decades, though oddly enough it lacks a map of Gozo showing Qala's geographical position. While it is not one of the best written numbers of this series and is structured rather loosely, it contains much useful information for both residents and casual visitors.



Qala is an attractive village even if its notable sights are very few. It has one relic, a menhir, of the island's prehistory, that scholars often regard as the sole remaining sign of a megalithic structure built in the Temple period which produced Gozo's most remarkable monument, the Ġgantija temples at Xaghra, though the cart ruts at is-Sidra may also be prehistoric.

The area now occupied by the village has not been inhabited for a long time and the earliest settlement was probably created in late medieval times. As late as 1667, the village's population was just 65 living in 14 households, most of them farmers or farm-workers.

According to the 1995 census Qala's population that year was 1,492 out of a total Gozitan population of just over 29,000. The name itself, Qala, refers not to the village but to the inlet in the coast below, Hondoq ir-Rummien, the word being a late Latin noun (*cala*) meaning inlet or creek.

So little material is available about the history of this quiet village, that much of Bezzina's historical information is about the history of Gozo in general and not about Qala. Even during the 1939-45 war Qala was spared much suffering. Of the 11 *Qalin* who were killed most of them died while serving in the Merchant Navy.

Qala has not given Gozo a great number of distinguished personalities, but there is no biographical information about the few it has produced, such as Dr Anton Buttigieg, author, lawyer and politician, who ended his career as President of the Republic of Malta, while another Anton Buttigieg made himself well known as an educator and writer on local topics and was also active at one time in local politics. Yet another Buttigieg, Mikiel Frangisk, became Gozo's first bishop in 1864.

The best sections of the book are the ones describing churches and areas like Hondoq ir-Rummien or Ras il-Qala with its 18<sup>th</sup> century St Anthony Battery. Bezzina tells the simple tale of Kurraw (originally Corrado?) who at some time in the Middle Ages is said to have fled from his hermitage in Wied il-Ghasel, Mosta, to Comino, sailing miraculously on his cloak as it floated on the waves, and ended his days in a cave below the Sanctuary of the Immaculate Conception that overlooks the channel between Gozo and Comino. The tale of Kurraw and of the miracles he wrought is probably fictitious, but the visitor is still shown Kurraw's cave that can be entered through an aperture in the floor of the Sanctuary.

The Sanctuary owes its first shape to the 16<sup>th</sup> century, but its façade and parvis were built in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main points of interest are the graffiti made by people as a sign of gratitude to the Virgin for help received, and the altar-piece attributed to the 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian artist Federico Barocci di Urbino, showing the Immaculate Conception. Though

it lies on the village's outskirts, this church is much frequented and not just by the people of Qala.

The parish church dedicated to St Joseph is much more recent. The foundation stone was laid in 1882 and the building began to be used as a parish church in 1889, but the bell-towers were built in the early years of the new century. The architect was an amateur, the parish pries of the time, Dun Guzepp Debono, and much of the actual building was carried out by village people for the love of it.

A section of the book is devoted to the village's institutions, clubs and associations, and to its feast and other folkloristic attractions. Bezzina very sensibly gives telephone and fax numbers for readers seeking up-to-date information on the various activities and associations.

There are several attractive illustrations. It is a pity, however, that the definition of the picture showing a bird's eye view of Qala is poor.

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*Ms Lynn Chircop performing one of her songs during "An Evening with Four Eurovision Singers" held at the University Gozo Centre on 22nd August 2003.*

- 22nd August 2003 – ‘An Evening with Four Eurovision Singers’ was organised at the Centre with the participation of Ms Lynn Chircop, Ms Ira Losco, Ms Miriam Christine and Ms Claudette Pace. The event was compered by Mr Charles Saliba and was attended by a large audience.

- 14th November 2003 – Presentation of Certificates to students who successfully completed the Certificate Course in Education for Learning Support Facilitators.

**Publications**

- The 9th edition of “The Gozo Observer” was published in February.