

The Xaghra (Gozo) Windmill: Marcello Xicluna – The First Miller

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Introduction

The windmill located in Xaghra, Gozo, is popularly known as Ta' Kola after Nikola Grech, who was one of the last millers who owned it. Grech passed away in 1941 and, while enough is known about him, very little information has been available so far on the first miller who managed this windmill. He was Marcello Xicluna, who took over the lease of the windmill when its construction was completed on 1st February 1787 (Vella, 2010).

This windmill in fact had replaced a previous one, which had been built in 1725 by a Foundation established by Grandmaster Manuel de Vilhena. It functioned until 1786 when it had to be demolished because its structure had deteriorated considerably. The construction of the new windmill was likewise financed by the Vilhena Foundation and Marcello Xicluna took up the lease at a cost of 400 scudi per annum. He was also bound by a number of other conditions, known as *carnaggi*, since he was required to present to the officers of the Foundation seven roses on the 1st May of each year, as well as two cockerels to the Treasurer of the Foundation, every Christmas and Easter (Vella, 2010).

Marcello was born in Xewkija, Gozo, on the 30th October 1734 to Carlo Xicluna and Grazia neè Xuereb. He was baptised at Xewkija Parish Church and named Giobatta Marcello, although he is always referred to by his second name Marcello.¹ So when Marcello took over the lease of the new Xaghra windmill in 1787, he was already 53 years old, which would seem to indicate that he had previously already exercised his trade as a miller. It is not improbable therefore that he had previously held the lease of the old Xaghra windmill, although so far no record of this is available. In this respect, it is however pertinent to point out that records



Ta' Kola Windmill, Xaghra.
[Photo courtesy of www.visitgozo.com (accessed: 13/02/2016)]

exist which show that members of the same Xicluna family had been involved in the running of windmills in Gozo since the early decades of the eighteenth century. The windmill in Xewkija, where Marcello was born, is known to have been on lease to Gio Maria Xicluna in 1738 and this lease was eventually transferred to Gio Maria's son, Michele, in 1742 (Vella, 2010).

A Numerous Family

Marcello married Angela Bonello in Xaghra, Gozo, on the 5th July 1759 when he was 25 years old and together they produced 15 children, nine males and six females. Their first child, Carlo Liberato, was born within the first year of their marriage on 23rd May 1760, while their last one, Margarita

¹ Guljana Masini 1554-1930 - (National Archives Gozo - NAG). The Giuliana Masini, consisting of 88 manuscript volumes of various sizes, registers all the births, marriages and deaths that took place in Gozo between 1554 and 1930. It also registers the births of Gozitans in Malta and, sometimes, even abroad.



The Miller's Tools at the Ta' Kola Windmill Museum, Xaghra. [Photo courtesy of heritagemalta.org (accessed: 13/02/2016)]

Grazia Teresa, was born on the 7th November 1788, twenty nine years after their marriage. It is possible that one or more of their children died in their infancy since two of the children, one born in 1769 and the other in 1774 were both given the name of Damiano, a name which was inherited in the Xicluna family from one generation to another for many generations.

Liberato's Misfortune

Indeed, infant mortality was prevalent at the time and continued to be prevalent for many decades into the following century, especially during the first decades of British colonial rule when it became more pronounced due to the extreme poverty prevailing in the country, with the resultant low levels of public health. One of Marcello's children, Liberato Bernardo, who was born on the 13th April 1781 and who later married Maria Bajada, was very badly affected by this unhappy situation. In the summer of 1822, Liberato and Maria lost two infant children in the space of a few weeks. On the

27th June they lost a son, Marcello, aged one year three months while on the 19th August they lost a daughter, Angela, aged two years six months. The children had been named after their paternal grandparents who, by that time, had both passed away. Misfortune hit the couple years later when, on the 15th September 1836, they lost another son, Salvo, when he was only six days old (Ġuljana Masini, NAG).

When he took up the lease of the new windmill in 1787, Marcello had already fathered 14 of his 15 children. So only the last one of his children, Margarita, was presumably born in the new windmill.

Marcello died in Xaghra, Gozo, on the 1st May 1815, a year after an outbreak of the bubonic plague, which had claimed the lives of a large number of residents of that village. He was then 81 years old. His wife, Angela, died five years after him on the 26th March 1820 (Ġuljana Masini, NAG).

New Pastures in Malta

Some of Marcello's male children eventually followed in their father's footsteps. In fact, a number of them migrated to Malta to seek opportunities in the trade which they had learnt from their father. One of them, born on the 2nd October 1774 and christened Damiano Paolo Bernardo Rosario, migrated to Malta during the first decade of the 19th century where he took on lease the windmill located in the village of Qrendi and where he married a girl from the village, Maria Vella, on the 28th September 1807. Various entries in the Naxxar Parish Archives indicate that by the late 1830's, Damiano and his family had moved to Naxxar where one of his sons, Matteo, married Anna Bonavia on the 28th July 1840. Anna was the daughter of Onorato Bonavia, another miller, who had leased one of the five windmills then in existence at Naxxar (il-Mithna tal-Għaqba) and who transferred the lease to his son-in-law upon his marriage to his daughter.



A photograph of Onorato Xicluna - the great grandson of Marcello Xicluna.



Tal-Għaqba windmill, Naxxar.

The Last of the Xicluna Family of Millers in Malta

Matteo was not the last one in this line of the Xicluna family to be engaged in the milling trade. One of his sons, Onorato, who was evidently named after his maternal grandfather and who was born on the 5th September 1844, took over the lease of the windmill located at Mellieħa (il-Mithna hdejn is-Salib tal-Pellegrini) sometime in the 1870s until his premature death abroad around the year 1895. Onorato was the great grandson of Marcello Xicluna and he represented the last of at least four generations of millers in this line of the Xicluna family.

References

Vella, C. (2011). *L-Imtiehen tat-Thin tal-Qamħ fil-Gzejjer Maltin*. Malta: Book Distributors Ltd.

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