

# A Description of Gozo at the Turn of the Eighteenth Century

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*This is the third and concluding section of the article which continues on those published by the same author in the two previous editions of The Gozo Observer.*

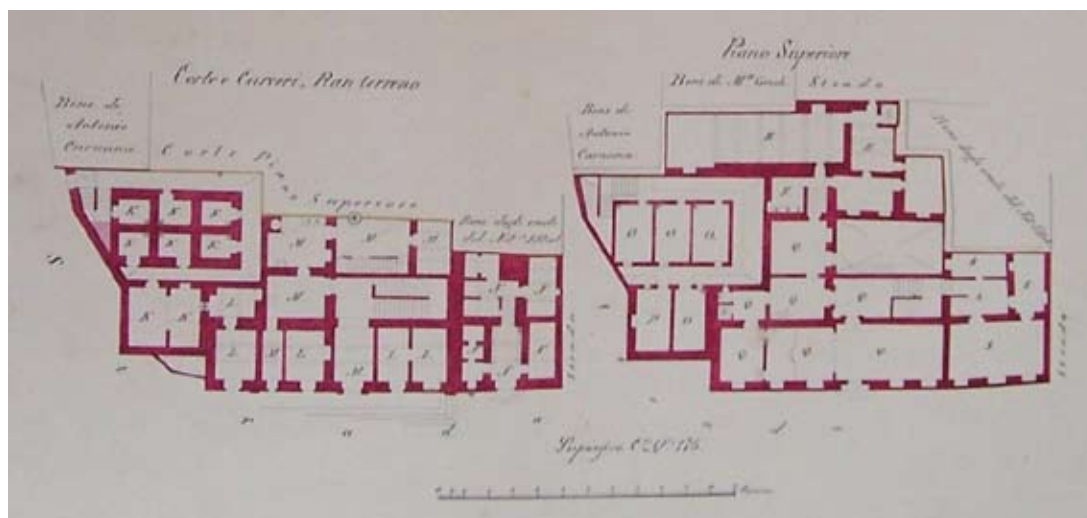
*This section proceeds with Caxaro's description of Gozo (1704).*

## Gozo's Governance

Renovated in 1667,<sup>1</sup> the Governatorial Tribunal inside the Castello is chaired by the Governor, a judge for civil and criminal cases, a fiscal officer and a notary. A night captain and other supporting personnel are also attached. Its archive preserves all civil and criminal cases and related registers and documents from 1551 onwards. Earlier records were reduced to ashes by the Turks. Petty litigations where an ounce<sup>2</sup> or less is at stake are chaired by an idiot judge.<sup>3</sup> The Governatorial Tribunal complex incorporates also three detention units, namely one in the Governor's house, another affixed to and accessed through the sentinels quarters<sup>4</sup>, and a third abutting onto the archive.

The Jurors' Court at Rabat is presided by four jurors, a treasurer and a notary. They hold their sittings in the notary's banca<sup>5</sup> where all registers, acts, case files and related documents from 1551 onwards are kept. As in the case of the governatorial archives previous records were lost during the 1551 assault. The Juror's Court employs four inspectors to regulate the open public spaces, shops, taverns and butchers on the island and certify the weights, scales and measures in circulation. They are to report any contraventions detected and advise the Court on the penalty to be imposed, which is not to exceed 15 tari. Said inspectors are obliged also to disseminate all edicts issued by same Court.

All litigations related to the government-owned property leased to third parties are evaluated and decided by the same Judge of the Governor's Court with the assistance of a notary. Furthermore, in 1660, the illustrious Cotoner<sup>6</sup> strengthened the Gozo Courts with the appointment of a dedicated official to coordinate the summoning of the respective parties.



The ground and first floors of Courts of Justice and Old Prison compound as at 1861. The former Governor's Palace stands on the right hand section. The façade of the complex was heavily modified during the subsequent years.

<sup>1</sup> The Gozo Courts of Law were successively remodelled during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> An ounce is equivalent to 2½ scudi.

<sup>3</sup> Derived from the Italian word *idiozie* meaning petit issues.

<sup>4</sup> These detention facilities remained in use until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and were eventually inaugurated as a cultural attraction on 4 October 1996.

<sup>5</sup> The Banca Giuratale moved out of the Castello to its present location in 1661. The rear part of the present building was completed in 1733, while the semi-circular façade was added in 1875 (Bezzina 2005, pp 50 – 4).

<sup>6</sup> Grand Master Raphael Cotoner reigned between 1660 and 1663.

## University of Gozo

As from 1643, the University became the net beneficiary of all revenues from the renting out of public estates on Gozo. These yield around 860 scudi per annum, whereas a tax on wine and bread consumption returns some 280 and 75 scudi a year respectively. The latter was introduced in 1648 to finance the honoraria of the musketeers' regiment officers. Further variable annual proceeds are harvested in form of administrative charges on the storage and resale of foodstuffs. For instance during the six-year period 1683 to 1687 it amounted to 76, 74.4, 60.8, 186 and 169 scudi respectively, while in 1690 it totalled 91 scudi.

The University generates also some 166 scudi in interest on the capital employed for the annual provision of the same foodstuffs. It receives also 24 scudi and 5 tari in connection with the annual dowry to a poor girl drawn up by chance and who would eventually be expected to get married on the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady which falls on 8 September. This dowry is derived from the incomes of various properties donated by the people of Gozo for the purpose over the years.



The coat-of-arms of the University of Gozo along the façade of the Courts of Justice and Prison compound.

The incomes, rights and annual emoluments collected by the university are employed to pay the salaries and for the recurrent expenses required for the maintenance of the governor's residence, towers, coastal guard stations, artillery mounts and wheels, arms, gun powder, timber, and related military equipment, and for the upkeep of the island's infrastructure, namely:

- Governor's Honoraria – 18 scudi
- To the four Jurors – 20 scudi
- To the Judge of the Governor's Court – 23 scudi
- To the Treasurer of the University – 25 scudi
- To the Doctor – 140 scudi
- To the Surgeon – 50 scudi (plus a supplement of 20 scudi)
- To the Pharmacist – 55 scudi
- To the Notary of the University for issuing mandates, compiling the Militia lists and to register all purchases – 20 scudi
- To same Master Notary for the manufacture of registers – 15 scudi
- To same Master Notary for paper – 4 scudi
- To the Armourer – 33 scudi
- To the school master – 30 scudi
- To the Preaching Priest for the usual donations – 33 scudi
- To the two ... – 24 scudi
- To the castelian of Dwejra tower (including an allowance of 2 scudi for oil consumption) – 22 scudi
- To his assistant – 25 scudi
- To the castelian of Xlendi tower (including an allowance of 2 scudi for oil consumption) – 22 scudi
- To his assistant – 25 scudi
- To the castelian of Mgarr ix-Xini tower (including an allowance of 2 scudi for oil consumption) – 38 scudi
- To his assistant – 25 scudi
- To the castelian of Daħlet Qorrot Tower (including an allowance of 2 scudi for oil consumption) – 38 scudi
- To his assistant – 25 scudi
- To the castelian of Marsalforn tower for signalling fires – 4 scudi
- To the castelian of the Castello – 4 scudi
- To same for signalling fires – 4 scudi
- To same for mortar cartridges – 4.2.8 scudi
- To the drummer of the Castello – 20 scudi
- To the cavalry's trumpeter – 20 scudi

For the bonfire in honour of St John the Baptist – 4 scudi  
 To the musketeers' regiment – 50 scudi  
 Dowry to a poor girl – 24.5 scudi  
 For the Palios<sup>7</sup> of the August 15<sup>th</sup> horse race<sup>8</sup> – 33 scudi  
 For the visit of the Seneschals – 100 scudi  
 Petty cash – 100 scudi  
 For 360 measures of oil to light up the lamp of Our Lady of Soledad's niche (calculated at the rate of 6 grani per measure) – 9 scudi  
 For 300 measures of oil for the soldiers' base and lookout post inside the Castello – 7.6 scudi  
 Total – 1098.1.8 scudi

In addition to the above listed recurrent expenses, the University repaired as necessary the towers, coast guard stations and roads.

### Mass-Provision of Food Supplies

The University of Gozo secured a number of loans against an annual interest rate of 4% to finance the mass procurement of wheat and barley. The creditors are:

Zomellina Foundation	1914 scudi
Gattinara Foundation	5000 scudi
Marrados Foundation	2000 scudi

St Paul's Grotto	1018.10 scudi
St Ursula's Monastery	3800 scudi
Commenda of Modica	650 scudi
Total	14383 scudi

The Jurors of Gozo employ these funds and their University's liquid capital of 3900 scudi for the annual procurement of some 3000 salms<sup>9</sup> of wheat and barley. Local farmers are encouraged to enrol into a scheme whereby they receive payment in advance for the supply of good quality and resalable cereals by the feast of St John the Baptist. Any untaken funds are eventually redirected for the acquisition of supplementary provisions. Those farmers who fail to deliver their pre-agreed quota in time will incur a penalty of 4% to make good for the resultant lost opportunity and ensuing potential damages.

Administration of the University's annual purchase and resale of food provisions, taking into consideration load interests, storekeepers' fees and related expenses to safeguard the assets employed.

Under normal circumstances, ground rent is payable in two instalments, the *meta* or first half on the feast of St John the Baptist and the remaining balance or *contrometa* on St Martin's. The first instalment is



An early 20<sup>th</sup> century photo of a family sifting its freshly threshed grain. The process had not changed much from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century, when the Island's annual yield was already unable to meet the annual requirements of the Gozitans.

<sup>7</sup> Small flags awarded to winners.

<sup>8</sup> Government still votes a sum every year for the organisation of such horse races in Gozo (Financial Estimates).

<sup>9</sup> A salma (Maltese modd) is equivalent to 290.9 litres.



The exponential population increase during the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> century necessitated the construction of additional food storage facilities at St Martin's Quarter Street. This 1770s vaulted store currently houses Heritage Malta's Gozo Area Office.

lower than that of mainland Malta. Calculated at eight- and six-*grani* per *tumolo*<sup>10</sup> for wheat-sown and barley-sown fields respectively, the University's income pays for the capital loan interest of 4%.

Transport to the University's stores is charged five *grani* per *salma*, while the storekeeper receives two *tari* for each *salma* sold. The Master Notary's honoraria totals three scudi, one each for wheat, barley and *meschiato*<sup>11</sup>. The respective overheads are added up to the provisions purchase price to establish the true cost per *salma*, while the eventual selling price incorporates also a slight margin of profit in favour of the University.

The *contrometa* is imposed also on merchants and land owners who store provisions for eventual retail, thus supplementing the University's central supply and ensuring that the people of Gozo are well stocked throughout winter. If need be, additional food stuffs are imported from mainland Malta and beyond.

For the benefit of the reader, hereunder are the summarised workings for purchase and resale of wheat and barley during 1702:

484.8 *salme* of wheat at 8.2.12 scudi per *salma*  
– 3940.8.4.2 scudi

4% interest on financing capital – 157.7.10.5 scudi  
Storekeepers fee of 2 *tari* per *salma* – 80.9 scudi  
Transport at 5 *grani* per *salma* – 10.4.2.3 scudi  
Master Notary's honoraria – 1 scudo  
Total Cost – 4190.0.17.4 scudi

Resale of said wheat at 8.8 scudi per *salma*  
– 4199.1.1.4 scudi  
Less total costs incurred – 4190.0.17.4 scudi  
Profit – 9.0.4 scudi

332.13 *salme* of barley at 4.3.4 scudi per *salma*  
– 2359.2.8 scudi  
4% interest on financing capital – 94.4.6.2 scudi  
Storekeepers fee of 2 *tari* per *salma* – 92.1.17.3 scudi  
Transport at 5 *grani* per *salma* – 11.6.5 scudi  
Master Notary's honoraria – 1 scudo  
Total Cost – 2558.2.16.5 scudi

Resale of said barley at 4.8 scudi per *salma*  
– 2580.4.10 scudi  
Less total costs incurred – 2558.2.16.5 scudi  
Profit – 22.1.13.1 scudi

Profits vary from year to year, depending also on the *meta* and *contrometa* combination. Between 1683 and 1690 profits surpassed the highlighted 1702 outcome, whereas on several other years inferior results were registered. Prior to the securing of the aforementioned loans, the people of Gozo could not afford such a scheme and many suffered hunger during winter.

Grain had to be imported from Malta or Sicily at a much higher cost. Loan interests were in the tune of 16.8%, while the purchase costs were inflated by both shipping expenses and by the allowance of 6 *tari* per *diem* awarded to the Juror who travelled overseas to negotiate the deal and who would at times be constrained to lengthen his stay abroad because of unfavourable weather conditions.

Having evaluated all options available the Governor and Jurors held a popular council meeting at the Governor's residence to come up with a practical

<sup>10</sup> A *tumolo* (Maltese *tomna*) is equivalent to 1124 m<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> A mixture of wheat and barley.

solution. The greater part of those present seconded their leaders' proposal to explore the possibility of stocking the island's own produce. A trial was set out for the following season and, on experiencing the resounding success, a subsequent popular council meeting approved its introduction on a perennial basis. The required loan capital was secured from Malta, while the interest payable went through a gradual decrease until reaching the present percentage as confirmed by the University's registers. A rate of 8.4% was originally charged but was subsequently lowered to 6%. In 1683 the respective lenders were persuaded by the University to reduce the interest payable toll to 5.6% and a further discount of 0.6% was granted the next year. The interest payable was set at 4% as from 1697.

**Magisterial Tenements and Fertile Territories Adorning the Island's Countryside**

- Tat-Taflija tenement
- Ta' Bordin Tenement
- Ta' Ghajn Nahrin tenement with fresh water spring
- Tal-Ghasafar tenement
- Tal-Lews tenement

- St George's tenement and Porta Reale fields
- Ghajn Mghel el tenement
- Ghajn il-Kbira and Is-Saqwi tenement abounding all year round in vegetables and fruits<sup>12</sup>
- Tal-Mgarr territory with fresh water spring<sup>13</sup>
- Ta' Hamet tenement
- Ghajn Abdun tenement with fresh water spring<sup>14</sup>
- Ghajn Qasab tenement with fresh water spring
- Tal-Hamrija tenement
- Ta' Majmuna tenement, known also as Ġnien Is-Sultan because of the beautiful vineyards that used to be cultivated there.

Gozo is inhabited by some 830 families each with its own residence. The Island's population totals 5934, namely:

Castello and district plus Rabat	2991
Xewkija	630
Gharb	517
Sannat	370
Nadur	494
St Anthony at Caccia	565
Żebbuġ	367

Around 1000 men fit for fighting are enrolled in militia to defend the island as and when required.



An early 17<sup>th</sup> century depiction of the Militia Corps. Detail of Altar Painting, Church of the Nativity of Our Lady (Ta' Savina), Victoria. Photo: Daniel Cilia.

<sup>12</sup> This was by far the most important agricultural tenement in Gozo. In the late 14<sup>th</sup> century, it accounted for 25% of the total annual income from state-owned fountains and Gardens (Bresc 1975).  
<sup>13</sup> The Mgarr or Wied Biljun spring was equally exploited by seafarers to replenish their water supplies.  
<sup>14</sup> During the 1930's, when its water was still being channelled to the Castello reservoirs, Ghajn Abdun or Abdul yielded an average of 1300 gallons per day in summer and 6000 gallons per day in winter (Gatt 1934).

## The Militia and Its Management

The island's militia is structured in three corps, being the cavalry, infantry and the musketeers. The cavalry comprises some 60 horsemen,<sup>15</sup> each with his own stallion or mare and armed with carbines, pistols and pikes. Divided in three squads, it is headed at all times by the Lieutenant Governor with the assistance of a standard-bearer, two flag bearers, two mounted archers and a trumpeter. The cavalry officials receive the following annual emoluments for their services: the standard-bearer obtains eleven scudi, being the equivalent of the rent income from a piece of land, the flag bearers cash six scudi each from the University's storekeepers being the rent of said stores, the mounted archers get twelve scudi each from the University coffers, while the trumpeter is entitled to twenty scudi from the same University.

Next in line is the infantry, which embraces the aforementioned 392 armed seacoast guards. Together with the sergeant and nine soldiers of the Castello, eighty supporting musketeers and four corporals, the island's infantry falls under the direct command of the University's Head Juror who acts also as their leading standard-bearer.

Established in 1648, the 460-strong regiment of musketeers is subdivided in four units under the

command of a standard-bearer, four sergeants, four corporals, a flag bearer and four drummers. All musketeers, including the eighty seconded with the infantry, are to double up as seacoast guards whenever required. In such eventuality, they are expected to work eight shifts each. The annual salaries of the regiment's officers are paid by the University through a purposely introduced tax on bread. The standard-bearer receives eighteen scudi, each of the four sergeants gets five scudi, the corporals and drummers are paid one scudo each, whereas the flag bearer is entitled to four scudi.

The Castello and respective towers are supplied all year round with arms and ammunition by the Order. Following the devastating assault of 1551 the Order forked out thousands of scudi to refortify and reconfigure the Old City into the present Castello and has ever since maintained its walls and bastions.

In 1666, a friable stretch of the north-facing wall and underlying bedrock had to be rebuilt all the way up from the foundations at a notable expense of several hundred scudi. Some years later, a squadron of forty Turkish vessels was feared to be heading towards the Maltese Islands and the then Governor of Gozo and Prior of Messina Fra Ottavo Tancredi accommodated the Castle's tunnels<sup>16</sup> and had it supplied with artillery mounts, 260 muskets,



A 2005 view of the north-facing ancient wall of the Gran Castello. Note the then fresh collapse of part of the towering cliff face.

<sup>15</sup> Though undersized, the cavalry played a crucial role in the defence of Gozo. In 1645, for instance, they managed to fend off an Ottoman assault (Agius De Soldanis, Vol. I, Ch. 6., Sec.2).

<sup>16</sup> Caxaro seems to be referring to the series of underground tunnels dug in 1645 at the base of Castello's fortifications to have the ramparts blown up should the enemy stand a good chance to overpower the defending force (Vella 2007).

100 spontoons, 100 barrels to store fresh water, a large quantity of gunpowder and related military equipment.

Between 1693 and 1696 the Castello's walls, bastions, ravelin and ditch received another costly renovation. Following the scare of a major Ottoman incursion in 1701 each of the two cavaliers was equipped with a new gunpowder magazine<sup>17</sup> whereas the projecting battery at the back of the old gunpowder magazine had its walls reinstated. Besides, the Castello's cisterns were replenished with fresh water from the Gran Fontana, while the armament compliment was reinforced with fourteen artillery pieces (twelve iron and two bronze) and accompanying mountings, 23 quintals of gunpowder, a large quantity of wooden planks and scantlings, wicker baskets, pick axes, shovels, ploughs, lead pellets, cannon balls, caskets for water storage, fuel (wood and carbon), and related supplies. The operation cost the Order nothing less than 700 scudi, including a staggering 100 scudi for the transportation of fresh water.

Gozo's coastal defence network necessitates the construction of two small towers, similar to the ones at Dwejra and Xlendi, at Qala<sup>18</sup> and at Wied il-Ghasri<sup>19</sup> respectively.

May Our Lord bestow his infinite benevolence and protect the most serene and eminent Fra Don Raimondo de Perellos et Roccaful,<sup>20</sup> Grand Master of the Order of St John and Prince of these islands of Malta and Gozo.

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<sup>17</sup> That on St Martin's Cavallier could have been housed within one of the two corner turrets featured in the 1745 pen drawing of the Castello by the Capuchin Friar L. Bartolo.

<sup>18</sup> A coastal battery was eventually built at Ras il-Qala in 1723.

<sup>19</sup> No form of fortification was ever constructed at Wied il-Ghasri. Instead, during the mid 1760s a clockmaker from Malta decided to exploit the area for salt extraction. To his misfortune, though, the project turned out to be disastrous (Houel Vol. IV pp 81-2).

<sup>20</sup> Grand Master Raimondo de Perellos and Roccaful reigned between 1697 and 1720.

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