
QUINTINUS' *INSULAE MELITAE* *DESCRIPTIO* (1536) AND LATER WRITERS

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THE influence of Quintinus' *Insulae Melitae descriptio* (Lyons, 1536) on writings about Malta has been immense, as has recently been shown.¹ Johannes Quintinus Haeduus, a priest and a Knight of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta, wrote what is known to be the first long printed description of Malta during his stay there from 1530 to 1536. Only a few years after its publication, Quintinus' description started to leave its mark on scholars and other writers writing about Malta, even down to the present century. Because of the rarity of copies of the book, quite a few writers of the nineteenth century appear not to have known of him, while earlier writers were obliged to follow others in quoting Quintinus or referring to him. Modern facilities, however, have made Quintinus' book more accessible to scholars, while research in the manuscripts of the Order has provided further information about Malta.

First published at Lyons in 1536, it was then re-edited in Paris in 1540 with J. Fontanus' *De bello Rhodio libri tres*; at Basel in 1541 with the *Opus historiarum nostro seculo convenientissimum*; at Nuremberg in 1566 with Conti's *Commentarij de acerrimo, ac omnium difficillimo Turcarum bello, in insulam Melitam gesto, anno M.D.LXV.*; at Frankfurt-on-Main in 1600 with the *Italiae illustratae, seu rerum, urbiumque Italicarum scriptores varii notae melioris*; and posthumously at Leyden, 1723–25, with Graevius' *Thesaurus antiquitatum et historiarum Italiae, Neapolis, Siciliae, Sardiniae, Corsicae aliarumque adjacentium terrarum insularumque*. During Quintinus' lifetime his work was translated twice into Italian, and that incompletely, first by J. Fontano, *Della guerra di Rhodi libri III* (Venice, 1545) and then by F. Sansovino, *Dell'origine de' Cavalieri* (Venice, 1566). Sansovino's

1. Cf. my two theses on Quintinus, *The 1536 edition of Quintinus' Insulae Melitae descriptio* (Malta, 1976) and *A commentary on Quintinus' Insulae Melitae descriptio* (Malta, 1977) presented for my B.A. (Hons.) and M.A. degrees respectively at the University of Malta, and my book, *The earliest description of Malta (Lyons 1536)* (Malta, 1980). All references to Quintinus are taken from this edition.

version was anonymously re-edited, with a few additions and deductions, in two books [by A. de Ulloa], one *La historia dell'impresa di Tripoli di Barberia, fatta per ordine del sereniss. Re Catolico l'anno M.D.LX. con le cose auenute a Christiani nell'isola dell Zerbe* (Venice, 1566), and the other *La historia dell'impresa di Tripoli di Barbaria, della presa del Pegnon di Velez della Gomera in Africa, et del successo della potentissima armata Turchesca, uenuta sopra l'isola di Malta l'anno 1565* [Venice, 1569], and in another book entitled *Trattato delle ceremonie, che s'vsano nel creare i Cavalieri di S. Giovanni Girosolimitano* (Rome, 1566). Sansovino's translation was re-edited in Venice, 1570.²

The influence which the *Insulae Melitae descriptio* had on writers of the first few centuries after Quintinus is evident not only from these re-editions and translations, but also, as has been said earlier on, on writers who used Quintinus in their own works. Such writers have either borrowed phrases and sentences from him, or quoted him, or referred to him, or shown some dependence upon or reminiscence or echoes of him, as shall be presently illustrated.

Writers borrowing phrases and sentences from Quintinus have done it generally through the medium of Latin itself, or sometimes through Italian. Earliest writers borrowing from Quintinus include V. Castellanus (1566), while latest ones include G. A. Ciantar (1738).³ Giacomo Bosio, writing in Italian, borrows from Quintinus far more frequently than other writers.⁴ Some others who borrow from him quite frequently are the following: A. Cirni Corso, H. Pantaleone, Th. Porcacchi, an anonymous writer (2), C. S. Curio, and Th. Fazellus.⁵ Passages in Quintinus which are borrowed by a

2. For copies of the above-mentioned editions and translations of Quintinus, cf. my edition, 13, notes 66–7. I myself have discovered that the three anonymous Italian books each contain a description of Malta identical with Sansovino's translation. These can be consulted at the Public Library in Valletta, Malta, where they are preserved in a show-case.

3. V. Castellanus, *De bello Melitensi historia* (Pesaro, 1566), 4, 4v., 5, *passim*; J. A. Ciantar, *De B. Paolo Apostolo in Melitam Siculo-Adriatici Maris insulam naufragio ejecto dissertationes apologeticae in inspectiones anticriticas R. P. D. Ignatii Georgii de Melitensi Apostoli naufragio* (Venice, 1738), 24, 25, 31, 32, *passim*.

4. G. Bosio, *Historia della Sacra Religione et Illustrissima Militia di S. Giovanni Gierosolimitano* (Venice, 1695), 3. 90ff., *passim*.

5. A. Cirni Corso, *Commentarii* (Rome, 1567), 36ff., *passim*; H. Pantaleone, *Militaris Ordinis Iohannitarum, Rhodiorum, aut Melitensium Equitum, rerum memorabilium terra marique, a sexcentis fere annis pro Republica Christiana, in Asia, Africa, et Europa contra Barbaros, Saracenos, Arabes et Turcas fortiter gestarum, ad praesertim usque 1581 annum, historia nova, libris duodecim comprehensa, omnibus Christianis lectu dissima* (Basel, 1581), 211, 212, *passim*; Th. Porcacchi, *L'isole più famose del mondo* (Padova, 1620), 58,

large number of later writers show their importance when compared to others which are either not borrowed from at all, or borrowed by only one or two writers. I shall give two instances in which such passages have been followed almost *verbatim* by many writers; for both instances I shall quote both Quintinus and the other writers for comparison.

Quintinus mentions Mdina, which he says is eight miles off from the suburb of Vittoriosa, situated in the middle of the island, larger than the other villages and well looked after. *Octo a uico millibus in mediterraneo ciuitas est, maioris cuiusdam reliquiae: non / inamoena quidem illa, et culta satis pro loci gentisque genio* (p. 30). Cf. Curio, *quae in insulae fere medio (nisi quod ad meridiem magis accedit) sita*; I. A. Viperanus, *oppidum est in ipsis insulae mediterraneis*; anonymous (2), 'Evvì ancora una Città del nome dell'Isola lontana dal Castello miglia otto, non punto spiacevole, e secondo il genio del luogo coltivata'; P. Dusina, 'V'è la Città Vecchia dentro a terra'; Pantaleone, *nobilissima ciuitas in loco medio aedificata, quam Melitam vocant*; Porcacchi, 'Otto miglia lontano di qui (Castel Sant'Angelo) fra terra è la città, chiamata Malta'; Bosio, 'La Città vecchia, è circa otto miglia da' sopradetti Borghi lontana, sopra un rileuato colle fra terra, quasi in mezzo dell'Isola situata, di maggior vista, che d'essenza; con le reliquie d'edificij molto più nobili; diletteuole all'occhio, et assai ciuile per la qualità delle genti, e del Luogo; si come sono quasi generalmente tutte le case de'Maltesi.'⁶

In the other passage, Quintinus says that as a sign of St Paul's protection over the island, no serpents, whether they are born there or brought from elsewhere, are poisonous. *Praeterea (ut haec insula non solum ab eo diligì, sed etiam pene incolì et custodiri uideatur) Melitae nullum maleficum serpentis genus neque nascitur neque nocet aliunde inuectum* (pp. 44–6). Cf. Cirni Corso, 'E stimano alcuni, che per suo rispetto non cui nasca niuno animale, o serpente nociuo, e uelenoso: aggiungendo, che se ui è portato da altra parte, perde subito la forza'; Curio, *Illud insuper quod aiunt, uidelicet in ea insula malefici generis animal nullum gigni, neque allatum nocere*; anonymous (2), 'Non nasce in questo luogo niuno animale o serpe

59, *passim*; anonymous writer (2), 'Descrittione dell'isola di Malta con l'assedio di Solimano' (Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris), Fonds Italien MS. 254, folios 311ff., *passim*, C. S. Curio, *De bello Melitensi historia nova* (Basel, 1567), 30ff., *passim*; Th. Fazellus, *Rerum Sicularum scriptores ex recentioribus praecipui, in unum corpus nunc primum congesti diligentique recognitione plurimis in locis emendati* (Frankfurt-on-Main, 1579), 8, 9, *passim*.

6. Curio, 32; I. A. Viperanus, *De bello Melitensi historia* (Perugia, 1567), 1; anonymous (2), folios 313, 313v.; P. Dusina, 'Dell'isola di Malta', *Discorso di Malta* (Malta Library) MS. 433, folio 20; Pantaleone, 211; Porcacchi, 59; Bosio, 3. 94B.

velenoso e portatovi d'altrove subito perde il veleno'; Dusina, 'et niun Serpente, o scorpione in quest'Isola è velenoso anzi se vi sono portati da' forestieri, mentre, che sono qui non usano il veleno, che 'sendo trasportati altrove pare che subito lo ripiglieno et usino'; Pantaleone, *Ab eo tempore quo D. Paulus viperam excussit in ea insula nullum maleficum animal gignitur, neque aliunde allatum nocet*; Porcacchi, 'che per suo rispetto non nasca, ne viua in quest'Isola alcun nociuo animale'; Bosio, 'nella quale non vi nasce Serpente, nè animale alcuno velenoso, e nociuo. E dicesi, ch'essendone portato quiui alcuno di fuori, subito perde la malignità, et il veleno'.⁷

It is evident from these passages that while Quintinus was the main source and inspiration for later writers, their wording was very often influenced by that of writers who first borrowed from Quintinus. In the case of Italian borrowings from Quintinus, it is probable, and at times certain, that such writers were following Sansovino's translation of Quintinus. It is enough to quote the second passage of Quintinus from Sansovino for comparison with Cirni Corso, anonymous (2), Porcacchi, and Bosio (cf. *supra*): 'Et si crede che per suo rispetto non vi nasca animal nessuno o serpente nocivo, e velenoso, e se vi è portato di qualche altra parte perde la forza'.⁸ With the Latin borrowings, writers still followed others more often than Quintinus, either because Quintinus' text was not available to them, or because they found the borrowings of other writers from Quintinus ready-made for them to copy. Thus R. Pirro sometimes copies from Fazellus, while Pantaleone also copies from Curio. Cf. the following examples: Quintinus, p. 18; *Romanorum enim esse incepit quum et Sicilia; semper eodem post iure iisdemque praetoribus usa*; Fazellus and Pirro, *Quo ijsdem etiam, quibus Sicilia iure ac praetoribus semper vsa*; Quintinus, p. 28: *Reliqua fere sui parte rupibus immensae altitudinis ac profundo mari septa*; Curio and Pantaleone, *reliqua pleraque mari saeuo et rupibus altissimus septa*.⁹

Less frequently writers convey the gist of Quintinus' words in their own words and in this way they echo Quintinus. Such reminiscence can be found especially in Viperanus, Fazellus, and Castellanus who also borrow from Quintinus, as has been shown above.¹⁰ Others like Ph. Cluverius, B.

7. Cirni Corso, 36v.; Curio, 32; anonymous (2), folio 314v.; Dusina, folio 21; Pantaleone, 212; Porcacchi, 59; Bosio, 3.95D.

8. Sansovino, 151.

9. Fazellus, 8, and R. Pirro, *Sicilia sacra disquisitionibus, et notitiis illustrata* (Palermo, 1733), 901; Curio, 36, and Pantaleone, 211.

10. Viperanus, 1, 1v., *passim*; Fazellus, 8, 9, *passim*; Castellanus, 4v., 5, *passim*.

Niderstedt, G. F. Abela, M. A. Axiaq, anonymous (1), and O. Bres are dependent on Quintinus in a more general way. Writing on the island of Malta they, as well as others, have taken up the various subjects which Quintinus had treated and developed them in their own way.¹¹ Such subjects include the geographical position of the island, its traditions, and its agricultural aspects. Quintinus' book in fact became the model for other descriptions of Malta till the nineteenth century, when it appears to have become even rarer to find.

More frequently still Quintinus is quoted in Latin, Italian, English, and Maltese. Mention may be made of Abela, Niderstedt, Bres, D. I. Georgius, M. F. B. Attardi, Cluverius, Ciantar, I. Gagneius, G. Gesenius, A. P. Vella, G. P. F. Agius de Soldanis (1), V. Borg, and A. T. Luttrell.¹² These

11. Ph. Cluverius, *Sicilia antiqua* (Leyden, 1623), 526ff., *passim*; B. Niderstedt, *Malta vetus et nova* (Helmstedt, 1660), 4ff., *passim*; G. F. Abela, *Della descrizione di Malta isola nel mare siciliano con le sue antichità, ed altre notizie, libri 4* (Malta, 1647), 18ff., *passim*; M. A. Axiaq (Haxac), 'Relatione della nuoua e grandissima deuotione introdotta nella S. Grotta di S. Paolo nell'isola di Malta', *Notitie di Malta* (Archives of the Cathedral Museum MS, Malta), folios 7ff., *passim*; anonymous (1) 'Descrittione compendiosa della nobilissima isola di Malta', *Notitie di Malta* (A.C.M. MS), folios 70ff., *passim*; O. Bres, *Malta antica illustrata co'monumenti, e coll'istoria* (Rome, 1816), 61ff., *passim*. It is evident from these writers that the most popular passages in Quintinus upon which they have been dependent are those that treat of the episode of Battus and Dido (18: *Battus . . . Didone*), Phalaris and Malta (20: *Agrigentino . . . coniunctio*), the temple of Juno (22: *Iunonis . . . defensa*), the site of St. Paul's shipwreck (44: *Visitur . . . illisit*), and the chapel at the same site (44: *Ibi . . . extracta*).
12. Abela, 29ff., *passim*; Niderstedt, 16ff., *passim*; Bres, 61ff., *passim*; D. I. Georgius, *D. Paulus Apostolus in mari, quod nunc Venetus Sinus dicitur, naufragus et Melitae Dalmatensis insulae post naufragium hospes sive de genuino significato duorum locorum in Actibus Apostolicis. Cap. XXVII.27 – XXVIII.1 inspectiones anticriticae* (Venice, 1730), proemium Xff., *passim*; M.F.B. Attardi, *Bilancia della verità risposta al libro intitolato Paulus Apostolus in mari, quod nunc Venetus Sinus dicitur, naufragus, del P.D. Ignazio Giorgio Benedittino della congregazione Ragusina* (Palermo, 1738), 11ff., *passim*; Cluverius, 534, 539, 540, *passim*; Ciantar, 8, 14, 24, 27, 259 *passim*; I. Gagneius, *Clarissima et facillima in quattuor Sacra Iesu Christi Evangelia, necnon in Actus Apostolicos scholia* (Paris, 1552), 284, *passim*; G. Gesenius, *Scripturae linguaeque Phoeniciae monumenta quotquot supersunt edita et inedita ad autographorum optimorum que exemplorum fidem edidit additisque de scriptura et lingua Phoenicium commentariis* (Leipzig, 1837), 92, *passim*; A. P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta* (Malta, 1974), 178–181, *passim*; G. P. F. Agius de Soldanis, *Annone cartaginese* (Rome, 1757), 21, 22, *passim*; V. Borg, 'Tradizioni e documenti storici', *Missione archeologica italiana a Malta 1963* (Rome, 1964), 43, 49, *passim*; A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches to Medieval Malta', *Medieval Malta: studies on Malta before the Knights* (London, 1975), 54, 55, *passim*. From these writers it appears that the passages in Quintinus that have been quoted most are those which treat of the temple of Hercules (22: *Herculani . . . stupendae*), the temple of Juno (22: *Iunonis . . . defensa*), and the cotton shrub (32–4: *Speciem . . . expetitum*).

writers cover a period from the sixteenth century to contemporary times, which shows that whether for citing an authority or for criticism they had Quintinus as their source of information. These and other writers also refer to Quintinus without quoting him, as, for example, E. R. Leopardi (1), Luttrell, Agius de Soldanis (2), and Georgius.¹³

Sometimes the same passage is quoted, referred to, borrowed, and echoed by various later writers. For example in the case of Quintinus' references to the Maltese thistles and their use for the baker's oven, his words are quoted in Latin by C. L. Dessoulavy and Ġ. Cassar-Pullicino, referred to by Leopardi (1), echoed by A. Kircherius, and borrowed by Cirni-Corso, anonymous (2), Bosio, and Georgius.¹⁴ Similarly when he mentions Gozo with reference to its geographical position, fertility, and jurisdiction under Malta, his words are quoted in Latin by Abela and Niderstedt, referred to by Agius de Soldanis (2), echoed by Dusina, Fazellus, Cluverius, and Pirro, and borrowed by Viperanus and anonymous (2).¹⁵ Such passages and others reveal the importance of their subject matter readily followed by later writers in various ways.

Quintinus' description of Malta, being the first one and giving an all-round picture of the island, served as an essential source of information for others who in the following centuries also wrote about Malta. Its various detailed points also served as a starting point of reference for writers who

13. E. R. Leopardi *Malta's heritage* (Malta, 1969), 23 – 25, 57 – 59, *passim*; Luttrell, 11ff., *passim*; Agius de Soldanis, 'Il Gozo antico-moderno e sacro-profano, isola mediterranea adiacente a Malta africana (Malta Library) MS. 145, 1, 27, 38 – 40, 48; Georgius, proemium Xff., *passim*. The passages in Quintinus that have been referred to most frequently treat of the temple of Hercules (22: *Herculani . . . stupendae*), the quality of water (38: *Salsae . . . scrobibus*) and Quintinus' own incredulity at the Maltese tradition about St Paul's shipwreck (42: *Nec enim . . . conantur*). Leopardi in his book sometimes mistakes Quintinus' description with the report of the 1524 commission to Malta. He is also the author of 'The first printed description of Malta, Lyons 1536', *Scientia* 15 (1949), 52 – 63, which describes the form of Quintinus' book.
14. Quintinus, 38: *Carduis quibusdam incolae pro lignis utuntur, qui cum siccato boum editu, clibanis et furnis praebent usum*: cf. C. L. Dessoulavy, 'Visitors to Malta from the 15th to the 18th century', *The Sundial*, 3 (1940), 98; Ġ. Cassar-Pullicino, 'Antichi cibi maltesi', *Melita historica* 3 (1961), 31; Leopardi, *Malta's Heritage*, 24, 58; A. Kircherius, *Mundus subterraneus* (Amsterdam, 1678), 2.119; Cirni Corso, 35, anonymous (2), folios 314, 314v.; Bosio, 3.95B; Georgius, 123.
15. Quintinus, 46: *Est insulae Gaulos breuissimo transitu a Melita, latitudine intercurrentis freti quinque millia non amplius passuum, parua quidem, ambitu duntaxat XXX. millia passuum; sed quae fertilitate non credit Melitae, cuius Praesulem cognoscit*: cf. Abela, 118; Niderstedt, 35, 36; Agius de Soldanis, 'Il Gozo', folio 1; Dusina, folio 22; Fazellus, 9; Cluverius, 549E; Pirro, 928; Viperanus, 1v.; anonymous (2), folios 312, 313.

were concerned only about some particular parts of it. Quintinus' influence on them is seen not only in their treatment of the same subject-matter, but also, at times, in their style of language. It is evidently clear, however, that because of the rarity of his book, later writers were constrained to read Quintinus from the works of others.



A reproduction of Quintinus' map of the Maltese Islands, the earliest printed map of Malta.