

A MALTESE CASALE: 1436 (1)

by

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During the fifteenth century a class of notables or oligarchs, most of whom were more or less recently established in Malta, came to dominate the island's affairs; they secured control of local government through the *universitas*, and of lucrative royal appointments such as the *secrezia* or financial office and the Castellanship of Birgu castle. Despite the promises made by King A'fonso V after the uprising against Gonsalvo de Monroy in 1426, the king continued to sell or pawn the highest posts in the island to Spaniards or Sicilians who were willing to advance cash (2). By 1436 the tensions caused by such corrupt forms of government could be felt at a local level. The *casale* of Raħal Allun or Hellul in the east of the island between Tarxien and Zabbar was uninhabited; the *secreto*, or his deputy the *credenziero*, had granted it at an annual *census* to certain influential figures from Birgu castle; and the men of the neighbouring *casale* of Targel, presumably Raħal Tarxien (3), were suffering in consequence. Their actual complaint was that their own animals were being *presa addamagiu*, that is seized and held in reprisal while pasturing on Raħal Allun. This was not an area of marginal cultivation, and behind the protest of 1436 there may possibly have lain another factor, a process of enclosure by the oligarchs which would have forced men away from certain *casali*, thus producing desertions which would, in that case, have been as much the result as a cause of this enclosing movement; but that remains a hypothesis (4).

The political background is also obscure; the document subsequently

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1. This document, first noticed by Henri Bresc who most kindly helped with its publication, is presented by way of example; while it is evidently dangerous to read too much into a single isolated text, its publication may encourage students of medieval Malta to exploit the wealth of material at Palermo.
 2. See H. Bresc, "The *Secrezia* and the Royal Patrimony at Malta: 1240-1450," in *Medieval Maltese Studies*, ed. A. Luttrell (London, in press).
 3. On *raħal*, *casale* etc., see G. Wettinger, "The Lost Villages and Hamlets of Malta," *ibid.* Wettinger shows that in 1419/20 Hal Hellul was a *casale* which, jointly with Saflieni, provided 12 militiamen; it was documented as a *raħal* and it disappeared before 1530, becoming a *contrata*. It was certainly next to Tarxien, which still exists and must have been the *Targel* of 1436. That Tarxien was then three times described as *lu dictu casalj de reichel* might be explained as an error by a Sicilian scribe.
 4. As already suspected by Wettinger, *ibid.*: "The rapacity of the nobles and other large landowners may well have been responsible for certain village desertions, but there is no proof of this in the documents available." Hal Ellul lay at the western end of the fief of Buleben, and is one of the *casali* mentioned by Wettinger in this connection.

issued by the viceroy gave no reasons and mentioned no names. Simone de Mazzara had been appointed *secreto* on 12 November 1436, following the death of the Castilian Guttierrez de Nava who had been both the *secreto* of Malta and the Castellan of Birgu castle (5). Clearly there was a chance to act against those whom Guttierrez de Nava had favoured. In the face of the oligarchs, the men of Targel, acting as the *uniuersitati* of the *casale*, petitioned the viceroy in Sici'y with the suggestion that they, as an *universitati*, be allowed to lease Raħal Allun at the same *census*. At Catania on 21 December 1436 the viceroy quashed the original concession and instructed the *secreto* and *credenziero* to grant Raħal Allun in perpetual emphyteusis to the men of Targel. In so doing he recognized, at least implicitly, the juridical existence of some sort of local corporation, however loose and informal, which was separate from the *universitas* of the city at Mdina; that was the *uniuersitas hominum targel* (6).

pro uniuersitate hominum targel de Insole meliueti (7)

Alfonsus etc Vicereges etc Secreto Ciuitatis et Insole meliueti et vel cridenzerio dicte secretie consiliario et fidelibus regijs salutem Nouamenti per parti dila uniuersitati dilj homini di lu casalj de targel di la dicta Insola nj fu expostu humilimenti ki hactenus non est t[rop]pu ip[su] (8) alcunj habitaturj dila dicta Insola et dilu castelli si Inpetraru dilu secretu passatu oy da cui exercia lu dictu officiu et da vuj dictu credinzerj unu casalj dishabitu chamatu Ragal allun cum lj soy spacij et tenuti vichinj alu dictu casalj de reichel per certu annualj Inchensu comu apparj per lu quaternu di'a secretia prefata per farindi paxiriagl j oy cludirilj dila qualj cosa per la troppu vichinitati et pratica dilj homini et habitaturj dilu dictu casalj de reichel et di loru animalj kj dilj dictu spacij non si possu spisarj oy viuirj di senza si sentinu multu lesi maxime ki loru bestiami andandu apaxirj siria sempre presa addamagi Et Ipsi per euitarj quisti Inconuenienti si proponinu haurij ad tantu Inchensu quantu foru dati achillj altrj dilu caste'lu dila Insola et farindi comitati dilu dictu casalj loru Et per tantu nj fu supplicatu kj reuocata la prima

5. Bresc, note 124 *et passim*.

6. Little is known at present about the status and organization of the Maltese *casale*. This seems to be the only example so far published of a *casale* having a *universitas*, though it is known that, in 1462 for example, representatives of the *casali* were summoned to meetings of the *universitas* at Mdina: A. Mifsud, "La Cattedrale e l'Università, ossia, il Comune e la Chiesa in Malta," *La Diocesi: Bollettino ufficiale ecclesiastico di Malta*, ii (1917/8), 42. The meaning of the passage *farindi comitati dilu dictu casalj* in the 1436 text is not clear.

7. Palermo, Archivio di Stato, Cancelleria Reg., 71, f. 415v (*olim* 365v).

8. Illegible; perhaps *troppu tempu* or *tempu ipsu*, and presumably meaning "not long ago."

concessionj prenominata nj plachissi regia pro parte conchedirj per quillu midesmj Inchensu alj habitanti dilu dictu casalj de reichel lu dictu casalj dishabitatu cum lj soy spacij prementionati Nuj vero considerandu li cosi prenotati hauimu maturamenti prouistu et cossi vi comandamu si sic est ut predicatur kj Reuocandu et anu'landu la' prima concessionj Indi fachiti noua concessionj ad perpetuam emphiteosim sub eodem jure census annuj alj dicti supplicanti laqualj cosa exequiti vuj secretu et credenzerj oy vuj credenzerj In absencia dilu dictu secretu fachendondi farj de his omnibus oportunu Instrumentu et Rescriptu ad rey eternam memoriam et fachendondi specifica mencionj In lj librij dila dicta secretia datum Cathanie sub signo unius propter absentiam alterius xxj^o decembris xv Indictionis anno dominj m^occcc^oxxxvj^o babbista de plathamone

stefanus secretarius mandato
domini viceregis

AN AMENDMENT

Owing to the fact that in the article on the Secrezia previous to the coming of the Knights of St. John (M.H. Vol. VI. No. 2, pp. 107-132) a number of dates were misprinted or mixed up, I am publishing a correction based on R.M.L. Univ. 206 which is a faithful transcription of Notary Barberi's original report by Notary Leonardo Biasini. This was done in 1644. Libr. Ms. 1226 is another transcription made ca. 1698. It is entitled 'De Juribus et Feudis Meliveti'. Libr. Ms. 1-41, Part II and Libr. Ms. 870 also give similar data.

The amendments are the following:

In p.109, the date 23rd January 1420, should read 1421. In p.114, the date 28th February 1397, should read 1398. (Univ. 7, f.155). In p.117 the date 1349 should read 1439 while in p.119 "his brother Angaro" should be replaced by "his son". In p.122 21st November 1456 should read 15th November 1456. (Univ. 206, f.183); 6th March 1516 should read 1517 (Univ. 206, f.161v); 1347 should read 12th November 1372 (Univ. 206, f.102). In p.123 the date 28th January 1315 should read 31st January 1316 (Univ. 206, f.137); 15th February 1397 should read 1398 (Univ. 206, f.143); 18th January 1453 should read July 1453 (Univ. 206, f.137v) and 1479, refering to Tabaria should be 1513. In p.124 the date 1360 should read 1361. (Univ. 206, f.272), while in p.125 the date 24th Februar 1397 should be 1398.

In p.126 the date 16th February 1397 should read 1348 Univ. 206, f.27vv) while the four dates given as 1347 should read thus: 1372, 13th Nov. 1372 (Univ. 206, f.110), 12th Nov. 1372 (Univ. 206, f.114) and 12th Nov. 1372 (Univ. 206, f.118). In p.127 the dates 1347 should read 12th September 1372 (Univ. 206, f.122) and 13th Nov. 1372 while the grant that was made to Spiteri was made on 7th April 1439 (Univ. 206, f.301 fol.) In p.128 the date 8th May 1328 should read 1318 (Univ. 206, f.205) while 14th Jan 1480 should be 1481 (Univ. 206, f.204v). In p.129, Nava should read Bava, while 4th Jan 1350 should be 1351 (Univ. 206, f.223); while 14th February 1397 should read 1398 (Univ. 206, f.223v). The date 12th March 1431 should read 1432. In p.130 the dates 16th February 1397 should read 1398 (Univ. 206, f.291 & 31v. fol.) while the dates 13th Nov. 1347 should read 1372 (univ. 206, f.106). In p.131 the dates 1347 should read 1372. (Univ. 206, f.98 & 134).

C. Galea Scannura