

TARXIEN IN THE XVIII CENTURY: A STATISTICAL PORTRAIT

Karm Sant and Mario Vassallo

Despite its relevance for a thorough understanding of the socio-cultural processes that eventually led to the creation of the Maltese nation-state, the gradual development of the various settlements on the island is still unmapped. The first 'national' census of the population was taken in 1842, and as such, comparative social and demographic statistics are still unavailable for Malta. (1) A wealth of primary sources is however dispersed in numerous ecclesiastical and civil archives, ready for analysis. This paper is an attempt to start the construction of the mosaic that will eventually emerge, and limits itself to Tarxien, for the period 1699—1769.

Tarxien today has a total population of 6,776 (3,360 males and 3,416 females) and geographically is often confused as an extension of Paola, which now has a population of nearly twelve thousand. During the period under consideration the situation was the exact opposite. Tarxien had been founded as a parish on 29 May 1592, when it was separated from *Bir Miftuh*, whilst Paola, popularly known from its very foundation as *Rahal il-Gdid* or *Casal Nuovo*, was founded by Grand Master Antoine De Paul in 1662 and was erected a parish on 26 October 1909. Tarxien was then already an established community, and the development of Paola, because of the unhygienic swamps and marshes at the Marsa, was bound to be sluggish. The Paola community in fact began to grow substantially only after the draining of these marshes and the construction of the New Port, *Porto Nuovo*, around the middle of the 19th century. *Table 1* shows that the population of Tarxien and Paola, taken together or independently was by and large a relatively stable one. As evident from *Table 2*

Table 2: % Rate of increase in Maltese Population

1842	—	1911	14.52
1851	7.86	1921	0.33
1861	8.55	1931	13.83
1871	5.76	1948	26.64
1881	5.65	1957	4.26
1891	10.18	1967	-1.19
1901	11.94		

the mean % increase of the Maltese population since censuses were taken (1842) substantially supersede those registered a century or so earlier for Tarxien and Paola as given in *Table 1*.

Table 3 gives a break-down of the population during the period under study. This table is to be analysed jointly with *Table 4*. Some people did manage to survive and live long, but the very high death rate clearly reflected the poor medical resources then prevalent. Depopulation was not rampant simply because of the very high natality rates typical of the era. In turn, *Tables 5, 6, and 7* are to be taken together. Clearly the death rate for males who had to face the difficult working conditions of the time resulted in a disproportionate number of widows to widowers, even if the figures as they stand might in fact be hiding a possible high incidence of serial marriages, data on which is at present unavailable. There would certainly have been more pressure on males to remarry especially if left with young children than would have been possible for a widow who finds herself in a similar situation. The relative size of the widow/widower population, especially at a time when social services were still unknown, is however still very striking. *Table 6* gives an indication of family size in Tarxien. It must however be remembered that the figures refer to surviving members — a significant factor at a time when neo-natal mortality was rampant.

Table 7 provides data on marriages. There existed a tendency for early marriage to be avoided, even if this applied then, as of now, primarily to males.

Table 8 and 9 can be used as simple indicators of religious life in Tarxien. At the time the Church was in practice the only indigenous institution which required a differential level of education and which conferred a differential status to individuals within its ranks. Even so the percentage of clergymen, in minor or major orders, was not exorbitantly high. Supersingly even the number of female members of *Third Orders* was found to be low. Further reasearch might unearth some interesting reasons why this should have been so in a closed society in which the Church alone conferred status and authority.

Table 9 is indicative of the religious homegeneity of Tarxien at the time. The most significant figures are those for the annual reception of Holy Communion which was obligatory for persons over the age of reason. Religious ritual and social bondage were so closely interchangeable that all such persons (see *Table 1*) received communion, and as such satisfied fully, at least externally, the church's requirements for continued membership. Figures for *Confession* need be far less reliable because of the nature of the sacrament. *Baptism, Marriage, and Confirmation* on the other hand present themselves as the occasion for both social and religious solemnization of the more important stages in the individual's life cycle — occasions which necessarily had to be legitimated by religious ritual if the individual did not want to risk social, and not merely religious, sanctions.

Table 1: Population Growth in Tarxien & Pawla, 1699—1769

Year	Number of Persons in:-			Mean Growth in Tarxien & Pawla
	Tarxien & Pawla	Tarxien	Population in Pawla	
1699	696	615	81	
1705	799	720	79	2.47
1710	949	693	56	3.75
1715	891	837	54	-6.11
1719	875	809	66	-0.30
1725	871	825	46	-0.09
1730	926	882	44	1.26
1733	793	750	43	1.80
1741	909	851	58	3.60
1745	885	851	34	-0.53
1750	915	862	53	0.68
1755	891	857	33	-0.52
1760	939			1.08
1765	834			-2.80
1769	796	781	15	

Unless otherwise stated information is gathered from the *Liber Status Animarum* 1699—1770 (Tarxien) preserved in the Tarxien Parish Archives. Totals here include also Paola.

Table 3: Sex and Ages Structure of the population of Tarxien & Pawla, 1699—1769

Year	Persons aged			Males aged			Females aged			Maximum Age
	0-13 yrs	14-64 yrs	65 + 70 yrs	0-13 yrs	14-64 yrs	70 yrs	0-13 yrs	14-64 yrs	65 + 70 yrs	
1699	212	470	20	109	228	10	103	242	10	85
1705	259	524	16	112	248	8	147	276	8	85
1750	263	473	13	117	227	9	146	246	4	76
1719	267	601	23	128	257	7	139	344	16	80
1745	295	563	17	150	274	8	145	289	9	86
1730	231	633	15	135	277	7	96	356	8	90
1710	302	607	17	165	293	7	137	314	5	82
1725	238	536	19	107	241	14	131	285	10	90
1715	307	562	40	181	253	22	126	309	18	91
1755	273	579	33	129	254	17	144	325	16	86
1765	260	628	27	132	298	13	128	330	14	88
1733	222	651	18	128	296	7	94	355	11	85
1741	218	702	19	124	282	7	94	420	12	85
1760	222	587	25	119	280	11	103	307	14	89
1769	190	582	24	99	264	11	91	318	13	96

Table 4: Vital events in Tarxien & Paola, 1699—1769

Year	Births ¹		Deaths ²		Infant Deaths		Marriages	
	no.	rate per 1,000 pop.	no.	rate per 1,000 pop.	no.	rate per 1,000 pop.	no.	rate per 1,000 pop.
1699	43	61.78	14	20.11	9	12.93	9	12.93
1705	41	51.31	26	32.54	14	17.52	7	8.76
1710	31	32.67	16	16.86	7	7.38		
1715	29	32.55	22	24.69	13	14.59		
1719	33	37.71	37	42.29	31	35.43		
1725	43	49.37	27	31.00	22	25.26		
1730	41	44.28						
1733	32	40.35	37	44.66	25	31.53		
1741	36	39.60	37	40.70	25	27.50		
1745	36	40.68	25	28.25	20	22.60		
1750	40	43.72	23	25.14	10	10.93		
1755	39	43.77	26	29.18	14	15.71		
1760	34	36.21	19	20.23	5	5.32		
1765	26	31.18	24	28.78	10	11.90		
1769	32	40.20	24	30.15	5	6.28		

1. *Liber Baptizatorum* for this period. It is presumed here that all or nearly all newly-born were baptized a short time after their birth.

2. *Liber Defunctorum*. Only those who died and were buried in the Parish are recorded.

Table 5: *Widower/widowhood in Tarxien & Paola, 1699—1769*

Year	No. of Widowers	No. of Widows
1699	7	7
1705	5	31
1710	7	33
1715	10	37
1719	5	40
1725	9	39
1730	8	47
1733	15	42
1741	8	52
1745	8	57
1750	7	50
1755	7	48
1760	8	52
1765	6	42
1769	5	46

Table 6: *Households in Tarxien & Paola, 1699—1769*

Year	Number of Households			Average no. of persons per household
	total	with 1—5 persons	with 6 or more persons	
1699	189	155	34	3.7
1705	202	151	51	4.9
1710	203	164	39	3.7
1715	235	193	42	3.8
1719	240	190	50	3.6
1725	251	214	37	3.4
1730	250	214	36	3.7
1733	234	181	53	3.4
1741	226	175	51	4.0
1745	238	199	39	3.7
1750	238	202	36	3.8
1755	264	234	30	3.3
1760	259	224	35	3.6
1765	242	214	26	3.4
1769	218	198	20	3.6

1. Household means one person or a group of persons living together in the same dwelling.

Table 7: Families classified by the ages of the Spouses, Tarxien & Paola, 1699—1769

Year	Number of families	Number of husbands aged		Number of wives aged		No of Couples with a difference in age of:		Number of wives older than husband by:	
		under 20	21 or more	under 20	21 or more	5 or less	6 or more	5 years or less	6 years or more
1699	60	1	59	0	60	37	23	21	6
1705	151	1	150	3	148	96	55		
1710	141	3	138	5	136	91	50		
1715	153	0	153	1	152	101	52		
1719	173	1	172	5	168	104	69		
1725	182	4	178	5	177	112	70		
1730	180	1	179	2	178	101	79		
1733	151	0	151	0	151	92	59		
1741	152	0	152	1	151	102	50		
1745	158	0	158	4	154	101	57		
1750	160	2	158	6	154	112	48		
1755	124	0	124	8	116	72	52		
1760	170	1	169	2	168	110	60		
1765	173	0	173	7	166	109	64		
1769	163	1	162	6	157	105	58		

1. Family means a married couple, with or without children, living together.
2. In case of widows this is indicated directly; in case of widowers, it is drawn from the fact that their children are still with them. This does not exclude the possibility of men living by themselves or with others; in these cases one cannot tell whether they be widowers or bachelors.

Table 8: Ecclesiastics in Tarxien & Paola, 1699—1769

Year	Major Orders	Minor Orders	Married Clerics	Number	Total % of Population	Female Tertiaries
1699	10	3	1	13	1.4	
1705	12	6	1	18	1.5	
1710						
1715	8	1	0	9	.9	
1719	12	5	1	17	1.4	13
1725	10	6	2	16	1.1	
1730	11	7	2	18	1.2	8
1733						
1741	14	4	3	18	1.5	15
1745	16	2	2	18	1.8	7
1750	17	5	2	22	1.8	14
1755	14	4		18	1.5	9
1760	14	8	2	22	1.5	7
1765	18	2	0	20	2.1	6
1769	18	0	0	18	2.2	7

1. This includes also married clerics.
2. This proportion is based on number of persons in Major Orders. In 1699 there were one priest for 69 persons i.e. 1.4%
3. Orders mentioned: Carmelites, Capucins and Dominicans.

Table 9: Administration of the sacraments in Tarxien & Paola, 1699—1769

Number of persons receiving the sacrament of:-					
Year	baptism ¹	communion ²	confession	marriage ³	confirmation
1699	43	538	—	9	95
1705	41	524	58	7	182
1710	31	503	27	7	122
1715	29	576	38	9	141
1719	33	618	—	7	114
1725	43	64	5	12	162
1730	41	670	—	7	92
1733	32	—	—	7	102
1741	36	—	—	5	195
1745	36	598	96	10	
1750	40	623	103	9	
1755	39	621	60	7	
1760	34	562	48	5	
1765	26	541	67	10	
1769	32	529	31	5	

1. *Liber Baptizatorum.*

2. *Liber Status Animarum:* confessions start earlier than Communion.

3. *Liber Matrimoniorum.*