

DE SOLDANIS AND THE MALTESE PRE-ENLIGHTENMENT

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Let me start by making a small comment. I do not know whether it was intentional on the part of the organisers to hold this conference in this hall named after Erin Serracino Inglott. It is well known how much Erin admired de Soldanis and I am sure he would have been an attentive member of this distinguished audience tonight.¹ But, to come to our subject, the aims of this talk are two. First, I want to show my appreciation to the department of Maltese of the University who have done me the honour of inviting me to give this talk. Secondly, having already contributed my share to the study of Vassalli,² it is imperative for me to assess the importance of de Soldanis on the Maltese cultural stage. After all, he furnished Mikiel Anton with more than one idea and justice must be done with him.

In truth, who was de Soldanis or, as he preferred to sign his name, Francesco Agius?³ What made him regret his stay in Gozo where people discussed only the price of wheat, the growing of crops, the planting of vines, the sowing of

- 1 See the interview that Erin gave to Alfred Massa in *Il-Hajja*, 5 March 1982.
- 2 Besides other work consult the essays in *Journal of Maltese Studies* 23- 24 (1993), 37-52.
- 3 For a bare skeleton of his life, see Cassar Pullicino, 1-34, in the present volume.

grain and the hunting of birds?⁴ More to the point, on which grounds did he find a place in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, a work of international prestige?⁵ For which reasons did Inquisitor Gregorio Salviati in 1759 refer to him as 'a man of great talents'?⁶ Was he simply paying back the compliment the canon had made him by dedicating a book to him the preceding year?⁷

It is undeniable that the canon, a graduate in law from the University of Padua, was the 'most erudite man of the island',⁸ a walking encyclopaedia. He had a detailed knowledge of the works of other writers and in his writings one can detect a sustained engagement with their arguments.⁹ He was a bookworm, who must have impressed his contemporaries, as he still impresses us, with his unbounded avidity for knowledge and the flood of his writings. Books were his greatest treasure since 'without them one works in the dark.'¹⁰ His library, however, was not just for his private use but he lent his books to fellow Maltese men of letters. Nor was it simply a source of books: it was also a meeting place for the learned. It is likely to have been in the library that he received his colleague Ignazio Saverio Mifsud during his visit to Gozo in October 1759.¹¹

4 De Soldanis (trans. Mgr. Guzeppi Farrugia), *Ghawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu* i (Malta, 1936), 11.

5 *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* i (Rome, 1960), entry by D. Veneruso, 398-99.

6 AIM, Corr. 96, f. 138r, Salviati - SU, 16 January 1759.

7 De Soldanis, *Discorso Apologetico contra la Dissertazione Storica e Critica in Lingua Francese Descritta dal Signor Abbate Ladvoat* (Venice, 1758).

8 Abbé Delaporte, *Le voyageur François, ou La Connoissance de l'Ancien et du Nouveau Monde* i (Paris, 1787 edition), 145.

9 For instance: Samuel Bochart, Antonio Magliabecchi, Alessio Simmaco Mazzocchi, Anton Francesco Gori, Scipione Maffei, Gio. Battista Passeri, Ludovico Antonio Muratori.

10 Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, *Fondo Paciaudi*, Cass. 65, no. 1. See appendix two.

11 NLM Libr. 13, pp. 169-70.

Foreign journals brought news about books to the attention of scholars.¹² The *Novelle Letterarie* of Florence, for instance, carried a review of de Soldanis' *Annone Cartaginese*.¹³ Moreover, print was supplemented by manuscript copying, which was certainly intended for wider circulation. Among such various works which survive one can mention the 'Notizie del Convento e Chiesa de' Conventuali Religiosi di S. Francesco della Valletta' by padre Attard,¹⁴ the 'Dissertazione sopra l'origine dell'organo' by Balì Stadl¹⁵ and the 'Dissertazione sopra la scrizione del Tempio d'Apolline' by Vittorio Gristi.¹⁶ This combination of public and semi-public initiatives may be taken as a testimony to the vigorous cultural life in the eighteenth century. It made possible the extensive circulation of ideas among men of letters and created space for intellectual debate.

A personal source of intellectual enrichment was provided by correspondence. Through the surgeon Michel'Angelo Grima,¹⁷ de Soldanis pursued a correspondence with Giovanni Lami, the first librarian of the *Biblioteca Ricciardiana* on the via Ginori, Florence.¹⁸ Lami was by no means de Soldanis' only correspondent; others were 'your true friend' abate Stefano Borgia,¹⁹ and Cardinals Domenico Passionei²⁰

- 12 Pietro Giannone, *Dell'Istoria Civile del Regno di Napoli*, 4 vols. (Naples, 1723), iv, lib. xl, c. v, p. 489.
- 13 See issue no. 17 in NLM Misc. 250.
- 14 NLM Libr. 142 vi, pp. 591-606.
- 15 NLM Libr. 155, ff. 153r-158v.
- 16 *Ibid.*, ff. 169r-178v.
- 17 G. Cassar Pullicino, 'Michel'Angelo Grima Chirurgo Maltese del Settecento', *Rivista di Storia delle Scienze Mediche e Naturale*, anno XL, no. 1 (1949), 1-39.
- 18 NLM Libr. 146 ii, f. 205v. On Lami see the fundamentally important study by E. Cochrane, 'Giovanni Lami e la storia ecclesiastica ai tempi di Benedetto XIV', *Archivio Storico Italiano*, anno CXXIII (1965), 48-73.
- 19 NLM Libr. 146 i, f. 139v.
- 20 NLM Libr. 155, f. 209r. On Passionei's close links with the Jansenists at Rome: E. Dammig, *Il Movimento Giansenista a Roma nella Seconda Metà del Secolo XVIII* (Città del Vaticano, 1945), esp. 51-63, 77-79, 278-81.

and Portocarrero.²¹ One of the most important channels of correspondence was that which de Soldanis maintained with the Theatine padre Paolo Maria Paciaudi. Fortunately, two years ago at the *Biblioteca Palatina* of Parma I came across three letters that they exchanged with each other in 1748 and 1760.²² The friar, a great admirer of Newton and the *philosophe* Condillac, archaeologist, librarian, anti-Jesuit as well as teacher and friend of Alfieri, was the prime instigator of the reforms in Parma. In his *Nuova Scuola della Lingua Punica* the canon says he had met him in Rome.²³ Here he also struck up an acquaintance with the Hospitaller Fra Giuseppe Almeida, known to all the *litterati* of Europe, and the Jesuit padre Pietro Lazzari, librarian and lecturer of ecclesiastical history at the *Collegio Romano*.²⁴

This is ample evidence that de Soldanis was not an insular Maltese but in touch with the *litterati* of his age. He moved freely among them, hopping from one Italian city to another. More than anything, it was such direct, personal contact which ensured that Maltese men of letters were accepted and able to regard themselves as fully accredited members of the European Republic of Letters, an international framework for intellectual communication.²⁵ They brought back and gave to Malta what they had learned on the continent. In fact, we

21 NLM Libr. 155, f. 217v. On Portocarrero: R. L. Dauber, *Bailiff Frá Joaquin de Portocarrero, 1681-1760* (Malta, 2003).

22 Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, *Fondo Paciaudi*, Cass. 65, nos. 1, 2, 3. See appendices two, three and four, 66-70, in the present volume. For Paciaudi's correspondence: Leonardo Farinelli ed., *Paolo Maria Paciaudi e i suoi Corrispondenti* (Parma, 1985).

23 De Soldanis, *Della Lingua Punica*, 70.

24 *Ibid.*, 5, 70.

25 M. Ultee, 'The Republic of Letters: learned correspondence 1680-1720', *The Seventeenth Century* ii (1987), 95-112. J. Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment. Scotland and Naples 1680-1760* (Cambridge, 2005), 38-41. I would like to thank the author for his generous gift of this excellent book.

misunderstand the development of Maltese society and institutions if we neglect the foreign influences that have persistently been at work in our country. This is something distinctive in Maltese history. A people that could survive so many conquests could survive and also absorb anything. Stubborn persistency and receptiveness, not insularity, are the marks of the Maltese throughout their history.

Agius was specially related to Tuscany. Here he forged several close personal and intellectual connections, being, for instance, a member of the *Accademia degli Apatisti* of Florence and the *Accademia Botanica e di Storia Naturale* of Cortona.²⁶ These relations determined partly his career. In 1726 two important discoveries shook the academic world of the Tuscan *eruditi*. In 1720 an Englishman, Thomas Coke, had acquired a manuscript of Thomas Dempster (1570-1635). This Scots scholar, while teaching at Bologna and Pisa early in the seventeenth century, had collected various artefacts and inscriptions as well as a number of passages from Roman authors. He deduced from them the existence of a highly developed civilisation in Italy before the rise of Rome. Coke donated the manuscript to his friend senator Filippo Buonarroti, who supplemented the text with a great quantity of copperplate illustrations.

The two-volume work was ready after four years. It was at that time that the bishop of Gubbio ordered the printing of a set of ancient Umbrian tables known as the *Tavole Eugubine*. These had been discovered in 1444 but had lain neglected in the archives of the commune ever since. Buonarroti added a

26 In 1758 he composed a sonnet in honour of Ludovico Coltellini, the secretary of the latter academy: Ġ. Cassar Pullicino, 'M. A. Grima u De Soldanis: Sunett bil-Malti tal-1758', in his *Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti* i, 75-81.

lengthy appendix and in the summer of 1726 published *De Etruria regali*.²⁷

This was the beginning of etruscology but, what is more important for our argument, it inspired de Soldanis and set him on his course as the promoter of the two chief characteristics of Malta's national identity, *history* and *language*. To reach both these ends the canon, in his testament dated 14 April 1768, left 500 *scudi* so that with their interest a literary academy would be set up, under the name of *Agiusiana*. Meetings were to be held at the national library, the last one of each year being appropriately dedicated to the 'Punic-Maltese' language and some aspect of Maltese history.²⁸

In Malta, historical investigation had been dead for the last hundred years, since the publication of *Della Descrizione di Malta* by commendatore Fra Gio. Francesco Abela in 1647. De Soldanis contemplated issuing a new edition of the book with historical and critical annotations.²⁹ Giuseppe Giacomo Testaferrata, another erudite of the period, would have liked to do this work, too. He had the backing of Paciaudi, who had first put the idea into his head.³⁰ He was a relative of Abela while Count Ciantar, the correspondent of Muratori and the Sicilian Antonio Mongitore,³¹ had eye

27 I am indebted to the lucid discussion by E. Cochrane, *Tradition and Enlightenment in the Tuscan Academies, 1690-1800* (Chicago, 1961), 165-66. Consult also S. Maffei, 'Degl'Istati Primitivi. Ragionamento in cui si procura d'investigare l'origine de gli Etrusci, e de' Latini', in his *Istoria Diplomatica che serve d'Introduzione all'Arte Critica in tal Materia* (Mantova, 1726), 199-260.

28 NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, ff. 255r-256v, 15 April 1768. See appendix one.

29 De Soldanis, *Lettera sopra la Fondazione, ed Esistenza della Chiesa e Convento de' RR. Padri Cappuccini del Gozo di Malta* (Malta, 1759), 27.

30 Through de Soldanis, Testaferrata sent the text of his *La Croce Ottogona* to Paciaudi to comment upon: de Soldanis to Paciaudi, 25 September 1760, Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, Cass. 65, no. 1.

31 G. Mangion, 'Giovanni Antonio Ciantar Letterato Maltese del Settecento', *Melita Historica* vii, no. 2 (1977), 157-62. See also the same author's entry in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 25 (Rome, 1981), 200-02.

de' fascetti. E siccome con questo di dar luogo le più for-
 zose e stabilite suete di questa Università di Gozo
 per le loro leggi e regolamenti.

Siu considerando come in Malta, particolarmente in que-
 sta Città di Valletta non esservi fondata un Accademia Lette-
 rana, ove possono radunarsi simili Letterati e dar leg-
 gia in pubblico del loro talento; così stabilita e fondata un
 Accademia Letteraria da nominarsi Aquidiana in que-
 sta Città di Valletta di Malta sotto l'invocazione del glorioso
 San Filippo Neri, e da conservarsi in perpetuo, sotto le
 regole e leggi che saranno prescritti dal S.^o Commisario
 & Bibliotecario di questa Biblioteca della S. Religione
 Perislanitana; quelle si che vaglio et ordine che sia
 onninamente osservato sotto pena di nullità di questa
 Fondazione. Et tutto questo viene da me scritto ed ordinato.
 Che una volta al mese, o almeno una volta ogni due
 mesi si tenghi l'Accademia, o l'erudita radunanza.
 Che in questa ogni Accademico, debba dire qualche cosa
 e lasciare in scritto quanto disse in mano del S.^o Segre-
 tario dell'Accademia.
 Che nell'ultima radunanza dell'Accademia che si fa in
 tutti gli anni si debba trattare della Lingua Punico-mal-
 tese, o di qualche cosa che spetta alla Storia di Mal-
 ta e Gozo.

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NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, f. 255r, 15 April 1768:

Che nell'ultima radunanza dell'Accademia che si fa in tutti gli anni si debba trattare della Lingua Punico-maltese, o di qualche cosa che spetta alla Storia di Malta e Gozo.

problems. For his part, Agius was staying in a desolate place like Gozo without the required material at hand. However, since he knew how much the two were jealous of each other – Ciantar even accused him of passing information on to the canon – Testaferrata refused.³²

Eventually it was Ciantar who issued the new edition.³³ But if de Soldanis failed in his intent he still devoted a significant part of his scholarly energies assembling material that was relevant to the history of his countrymen. Besides manuscripts and books he had enough coins,³⁴ medals, inscriptions, pottery, fossils and statues to make a museum of these antiquities.³⁵ He wanted nothing to be lost that could throw the least ray of light on the history of the Maltese islands. He wrote on the adventure of the Christian captives who succeeded to bring their ship, the 'She Wolf', back to Malta³⁶ and on the conspiracy of the Turkish slaves in 1749.³⁷ His sense of historical memory was so acute that he compiled a diary for the year 1733³⁸ and an ecclesiastical one for the next year.³⁹ His *Itinerario Italico*, which he left to his friend Mgr Gio. Antonio Beretta of Milan, describes his

32 Testaferrata to Paciaudi, 10 January 1761, Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, Fondo Paciaudi, Cass. 92.

33 G. A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata, Ovvero Descrizione di Malta Isola del Mare Siciliano ed Adriatico, con le sue antichità ed altre notizie, divisa in quattro libri, del commendatore fra Giovanfrancesco Abela, vicecancelliere della Sagra ed Eminentissima Religione Gerosolimitana, corretta, accresciuta e continovata dal conte Giovannantonio Ciantar*, 2 volumes (Malta, 1772, 1780).

34 De Soldanis, *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu* i, 85.

35 De Soldanis, *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu* ii (Malta, 1953), 14.

36 NLM Libr. 142 iv, pp. 233-39: 'Relazione della valorosa impresa effettuata dalli Cristiani Schiavi su la Galera Lupa Capitana di Rodi, e della di la felice venuta a Malta, li 2 Febraro 1748 col rapporto delle più notabili circostanze'. Consult also NLM Libr. 142 vi, pp. 643-46.

37 Michele Acciard, *Mustafa Bassà di Rodi schiavo in Malta, o sia la di lui Congiura all'Occupazione di Malta* (Naples, 1751).

38 NLM Libr. 142 vi, pp. 281-321.

39 NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 288-305.

voyage to Italy in the years 1757-58.⁴⁰ Everything interested him, even the statutes of the *Sodalità della Buona Morte* at Sannat⁴¹ or the memorial which the parish priest and people of Qormi presented to Grand Master Pinto so that their village would be promoted to the status of *città*.⁴²

Even so, he was particularly interested in Gozo since Abela had largely ignored it.⁴³ To make amends for this omission, 'moved by his love for his country', he started writing *Il Gozo antico-moderno*. In this comprehensive work the canon describes the Gozitan place names, the setting up of the collegiate church and the other parishes, as well as the arrival of the religious orders in Gozo. He dwells on the rulers of the islands, from the time of the 'giants' to that of the Knights Hospitallers. But he had the foresight to write not only on political events but on every phase of human life and activity: funeral customs, the fertile land with its fruit and vegetables, hunting, coral, clay, the Gozitan fungus – a remedy against dysentery,⁴⁴ the alabaster found at Żebbuġ in 1738. Above all, the *Gozo antico-moderno* is a eulogy of those Gozitans who enhanced the name of their island but who lay forgotten in the limbo of the past. The aim of de Soldanis was

To immortalise their talent
And embalm honour with the ink.⁴⁵

40 NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, f. 253v, 5 November 1769.

41 NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 113-17.

42 NLM Libr. 142 iv, pp. 399-412.

43 Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta*, 118-23.

44 R. Ellul-Micallef, 'Tarthuth (*Fungus Melitensis*), for a time, Malta's Quasi-Singular Contribution to Materia Medica', in M. Camilleri and T. Vella eds., *Celebratio Amicitiae: essays in honour of Giovanni Bonello* (Malta, 2006), 167-90.

45 'Che nella fama immortalar l'ingegno / E coll'inchiostro imbalsamar l'onore' – De Soldanis, *Lettera sopra la Fondazione, ed Esistenza della Chiesa e Convento de' RR. Padri Cappuccini*, 26.

All the same, if de Soldanis dedicated his life collecting everything that concerned the history of Malta he gave first importance to the Maltese language, an authentic document of Maltese identity. This means that several years before Herder he identified language as the best, original and sacred inheritance of the people.⁴⁶

From where did this tongue originate and how was it formed? Fortunately, de Soldanis' linguistic itinerary can be precisely followed. In his *Gozo antico-moderno* he refers to the several theories about the origin of Maltese. But, possibly comforted by, among others, Abela's⁴⁷ and Magri's⁴⁸ convergent opinion, the canon held it was derived from Arabic, 'not purified Arabic but adulterated and mixed with the languages I have mentioned.'⁴⁹ So he wrote in 1746 but later he shifted his argument and took the view that Maltese is derived from Carthaginian. In support of this theory he published in 1757 *Annone Cartaginese*, confirming that the Maltese could understand the words of Hanno in Plautus.⁵⁰

46 G. Brincat, *Malta. Una Storia Linguistica* (Genoa, 2003), 235-37.

47 Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta*, 257-59.

48 D. Magri, *Breve racconto del viaggio in Monte Libano* (Viterbo, 1664), 16. See also G. Mangion, 'La letteratura barocca a Malta', *Journal of the Faculty of Arts* iv, no. 4 (1971), 272-75.

49 De Soldanis, *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu* i, 67.

50 De Soldanis, *Annone Cartaginese cioè vera spiegazione della I scena dell'atto V della commedia di M. A. Plauto in Poenulo fatta colla lingua moderna Maltese o sia l'antica Cartaginese* (Rome, 1757), 5. Note also what Quintinus wrote in 1536: 'although their language is such that it cannot be well expressed in Latin letters, and much less can it be pronounced by any other people except by the inhabitants, still the Maltese understand most of the Punic words which a Carthaginian character of the name of Hanno uses in the play of Plautus' – Jean Quintin d'Autun (ed. and trans. H. Vella), *The Earliest Description of Malta* (Malta, 1980), 19. On this thesis see the biography of the canon by G. A. Vassallo, *L'Arte*, anno III, no. 71 (1865), 4-7 and L. Cachia, 'L-Akbar Żball ta' de Soldanis', in *L-Ilsien Malti – Ilbieraħ u Llum* (Malta, 1994), 94-97.

In his 1754 reply to a Parisian journalist of the *Journal Étranger*, who held that Maltese is derived from Arabic, Agius takes endless pains to inform his readers how he came to embrace this thesis of the Punic origin of Maltese. At first, he says, it had seemed a daunting project. In former centuries this nation of formidable people (the Phoenicians) had terrified all Europe but 'today we hardly know its name, much less its character.' Its language was altogether unknown, and, like Vassalli, he was surprised how it survived. It only had the good fortune of being inherited from father to son, from son to nephew, from nephew to grandnephew. 'Nobody ever thought of it. Only God kept it alive.'⁵¹

The journalist based his arguments on two points: the Arabs stayed in Malta for a long time and the Maltese understood Arabic. On the one hand, the canon does not deny that the Saracens' occupation lasted for more than two centuries but did not the Arabs occupy other parts of Europe as well? And if they did not plant their language in these places, why did they have to do so in Malta? The example of our island should surprise nobody. In the kingdom of Tunisia 'there are today some villages in which their Arab inhabitants speak only Spanish.' And in his *Verona Illustrata* Marquis Maffei cited a people in northern Italy who preserved their own German tongue.⁵²

De Soldanis reinforces the point by a subsequent observation. Does not an Italian understand Spanish and perhaps even a little French and Provençal as well? This is so only because the four tongues are derived from Latin. So can it be said for Maltese. The people of the island understand Arabic for the simple reason that

51 NLM Libr. 143 i, 'Lel Karrai', f. 2r.

52 S. Maffei, *Verona Illustrata* i (Verona, 1732), 521-22.

both languages have the same source, Hebrew or Punic.⁵³ Besides, not all Maltese sounds can be expressed with the Arabic alphabet. This must be, de Soldanis affirms, a 'sufficient reason to convince us that our language cannot recognise Arabic as its mother tongue.'⁵⁴

It would have been most unfortunate if this ancient and prestigious language were lost. Elsewhere the canon comments on how much profit Maltese could be to Etruscan, both being derived from Punic.⁵⁵ But he was interested primarily in his own tongue and in lesson XIV of the *Nuova Scuola dell'antica lingua punica*, or the revised grammar of 1750, his enthusiasm knows no bounds and bursts forth into extravagant praises of the Maltese language. It is neither a primitive nor a rough tongue but elegant, expressive and concise: 'Can the other languages ever express what Maltese says succinctly in one word?'⁵⁶ It was for this reason, partly, that he collected the proverbs⁵⁷ and the dialogues or conversations.⁵⁸ But what I like best about de Soldanis is that he insists, like Herder in *The Songs of the People*, that song has the 'divine spark of genius'. He boasts that the musicality

53 De Soldanis, *Risposta del Canonico Giopietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis al giornalista di Parigi che può servire d'avviso a chi legge il Giornale Straniero del mese di Luglio 1754, pubblicato dal medesimo giornalista in lingua Francese nella sopradetta città*, s. d.

54 De Soldanis, *Della Lingua Punica*, 45-46.

55 De Soldanis, *Risposta del Canonico Giopietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis al giornalista di Parigi*, unnumbered. Agius made the same comment in the *Journal Historique* when he claimed that both languages 'derive from the same source, that is Punic, which was brought into Italy, as in Malta, by the same people': *Suite de la Clef, ou Journal Historique sur les Matieres du temps* (September 1756), 198-99.

56 R. Clark, *Herder: His Life and Thought* (Los Angeles, California, 1955), 258-60.

57 'Apoftegmi e Proverbi Maltese raccolti e spiegati in lingua Italiana': NLM Libr. 142 i, pp. 1-99. These 387 proverbs were published by G. Curmi in *Malta Letteraria* (May-December 1928).

58 NLM Libr. 144, ff. 192r-199v. See the study by G. Cassar Pullicino in *Il-Malti* (September 1947), 99-125. The same study but without the dialogues was again published in *Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti* i, 60-74.

of Maltese is such that the extemporaneous versification of the countrymen and women surpass by far the efforts of several poets.⁵⁹

However, in preserving the pure forms of the words of the people, de Soldanis had another seminal aim: to describe, so many years before Vassalli,⁶⁰ the dialects of the island. Malta, he stated, was a small island, only sixty miles in circumference. Nevertheless, country people were distinguished from each other by the way they pronounced the syllables. And a Maltese well instructed in these nuances could differentiate between an inhabitant from Birkirkara and another say from Żejtun.⁶¹ This picture of the way the people spoke in the eighteenth century is one of de Soldanis' great merits.

He castigated severely, of course, those men and women in the harbour area who unnecessarily bastardised their language with the result that they spoke neither good Maltese nor good Italian.⁶² This does not mean though that Maltese does not borrow foreign words; even the most cultivated languages do so. Is it not true, he asks, that French has many Italian words and that Latin borrows from Greek, Italian from Latin, and Spanish from Italian and Arabic? Maltese is derived from Carthaginian but 'I can't swear that every word is Punic', de Soldanis states in his introduction to the *Damma*. Anyway, these foreign words put on a Punic dress: 'Punic grafted the words of those people who came to stay here or to take their place.'

Having sung its praises, de Soldanis passes on to describe how this language was to be kept alive. First of all he composed an alphabet, a grammar⁶³ and a Maltese-

59 NLM Libr. 144, f. 85v.

60 M. A. Vassalli, *Ktjġb yl Kljġm Málti* (Rome, 1796), xviii-xix.

61 NLM Libr. 144, f. 82v. Thanks to Olvin Vella for this reference.

62 *Ibid.*, f. 109r.

63 De Soldanis, *Della Lingua Punica*.

Latin-Italian dictionary or *Damma*.⁶⁴ The latter, which unfortunately is still in manuscript form, has several uses. Primarily, it gives the exact meaning of words. For instance, if it had been published in 1720 there would not have arisen the problem over the form of baptism. How were the Latin words *in nomine patris* to be translated, *in* or *with the name of the Father*?⁶⁵ This was a fundamental theological problem since if the form is wrong the sacrament is invalid. In Maltese, de Soldanis assures his readers, these two terms have the same meaning.⁶⁶

Besides, he meditated, time is both envious and voracious and those words that are not registered are forgotten. This could be seen, for instance, from some words published by Abela and the Magri brothers,⁶⁷ which were lost in less than a century. De Soldanis' dictionary, therefore, is superior to Vassalli's in this respect. Mikiel Anton, who, on his own testimony, consulted the canon's manuscript, was a purist and left out several non-semitic words. By contrast, the canon registered all the words the people spoke.

All the same, for Maltese to make any progress at all it was necessary, before all else, that it be standardised. Whoever wrote for his own use could invent the rules and employ the method he liked, but those who wanted their work to be read had to see that it was understood. He brought the example of those preachers who wrote their sermons in an alphabet understood only by them. When they died their writings were valueless and were torn up or thrown away.

64 NLM Libr. 143 i-iv.

65 For a similar case that arose in 1779 see AIM, Corr. 96, ff. 292v-294r, Zondadari – SU, 19 June 1779. Consult also F. Ciappara, *Society and the Inquisition in Early Modern Malta* (Malta, 2001), 124.

66 NLM Libr. 144, ff. 107r-108v.

67 Domenico and Carlo Magri, *Hierolexicon sive Sacrum Dictionarium* (Rome, 1677). For such words see G. Bonello, 'The Earliest Maltese Encyclopedia, 1644', in *Histories of Malta i: Deceptions and Perceptions* (Malta, 2000), 66-77.

Instead, de Soldanis engineered a solution to a difficult problem and formulated a Latin alphabet composed of twenty-six letters. He thus ignored the advice of his friend Giovanni Cachia who counselled him to use Arabic letters for Arabic sounds.⁶⁸ Even so, he received the approval of such an eminent academic as abate Giuseppe Aloisio Assemani, professor of Syriac at 'La Sapienza' at Rome.⁶⁹

This alphabet was to be used not only in the teaching of Maltese but also in learning Latin and Italian. At that time, the teaching of these two foreign languages was a torment to students and teachers alike. And it was so superficial that 'let them write a letter and for sure they will drown in a span of water.' It was a waste of time for these young men in their prime of life. A fertile ground must be irrigated and de Soldanis provided the canals for the water to pass through. His was a simple idea: first, the students were to learn Maltese and then, by means of this Latin alphabet, Italian and Latin as well.

Once the teachers understand well my method, the reading and writing of Maltese in the Latin alphabet ... and teach it to their students, this will be of great comfort to them, as it is not much difficult. And who cannot see this? ... Can the teachers wish anything better to their disciples and the students from their masters?⁷⁰

After all this, what can we conclude about de Soldanis, a well-known figure in the literary European world of the eighteenth century? In other words, can we put him in the temple of the enlightened?⁷¹ Can we identify him with the

68 See the letter Cachia wrote to de Soldanis dated 27 September 1744. He was no expert but advised the canon that some letters of his alphabet '*fanno brutta figura*': NLM Libr. 155, f. 131v.

69 De Soldanis, *Della Lingua Punica*, 18-19. Also Ġ. Cassar Pullicino, 'Dun Ġwann Cachia: Studjuż Malti tas-Seklu Tmintax', in *Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti* i, 35-46.

70 NLM Libr. 144, f. 110rv.

71 On the Enlightenment in Malta see F. Ciappara, *Enlightenment and Reform in Malta, 1740-1798* (Malta, 2006).

meaning of Kant that at the time of the Enlightenment man reached his manhood because he started using his own mind and did not let anyone think for him?⁷²

We must admit that the canon was a rabid patriot. He dedicated his life so that the Maltese preserve their tongue, history and traditions.⁷³ Malta and Gozo retained such a hold over his loyalty that, however far away he may be, however long his absence, he always felt himself to be a stranger and a foreigner until he returned to his native land. A letter to his friend Dr Michelangelo Grima expresses such deep affection. He congratulated him for preserving his love for his island home while abroad and, citing Montesquieu, told him that 'at our coming into the world we contract an immense debt to our country, which we can never discharge.'⁷⁴

But despite his genuine enthusiasm it is possible to identify various lacunae that obscure his greatness. Let us take, for instance, the part he played as a practical philosopher. Like Vassalli he was interested in education, one of the main themes of the age of the Enlightenment. He expressed his hope to Bishop Rull that his grammar would be of great help to those boys destined for the 'ecclesiastical army'.⁷⁵ But what about the other children? He knew that 'in most countries parents send their girls to school. In Rome and other places kings who have the well-being and happiness of the people at heart pay teachers for this purpose.' This was not the case in Malta where girls roamed the streets demanding alms and losing their innocence instead. De Soldanis proposed the setting up of

72 I. Kant, 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?', in Kant (ed. H. Reiss), *Political Writings* (Cambridge, 1991), 54-60.

73 See the essay by Ġ. Cassar Pullicino in *Il-Bennejja tal-Folklore Malti* (Malta, 1964), 8-14.

74 NLM Libr. 142 vi, p. 1.

75 NLM Libr. 155, f. 16r.

a *conservatorio* for ten girls in a house at the *castello* of Rabat. They were to be under the supervision of a *maestra* to teach them 'feminine virtues'. He also suggested how the project was to be financed. Divine providence was to have pride of place. Do perhaps the capuchins, he asks, ever lack what to eat and dress? The *università* or commune of Gozo was to contribute its part too, but de Soldanis makes another suggestion later copied by Vassalli. Pious foundations, like the *legato* Navarra, were to serve this purpose, as they served to redeem Gozitan slaves.⁷⁶

Compared to Mikiel Anton's these projects appear weak and feeble. The brilliant plan of Vassalli, a national primary education, would have transformed the Maltese – 'masters of their own language, proficient in arithmetic, skilled in diverse trades and especially conscious of their duties of men and citizens.'⁷⁷

If we are looking for something brave in de Soldanis we do not find it either in the *Accademia Agiusiana*. There are two reasons for this. First, on 5 November 1769 the canon made a codicil by which he annulled the foundation of the previous year.⁷⁸ Secondly, even if it were set up we should not think that, like learned societies in Germany,⁷⁹ it was intended to foster intellectual innovation or encourage discussion of new ideas. It would have been, in the words of Muratori, simply a form of *perditempo* (waste of time) and *fuggilozio* (how to escape laziness). Like the members of the *Accademia dei Ferrvidi*, set up by I. S. Mifsud in 1743, its members would have read insipid pieces to each other, devoid of any

76 NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 360-62.

77 M. A. Vassalli, *Ktjġb yl Kljġm Málti*, xxxix-xlii. See also F. Ciappara, 'L-Ilsien Malti u l-Edukazzjoni fid-*Discorso Preliminare*', in J. P. Borg ed., *L-Edukazzjoni għall-Illuminizzmu f'Vassalli* (Malta, 2004), 25-36.

78 NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, unnumbered, 5 November 1769.

79 On these academies, see R. J. W. Evans, 'Learned Societies in Germany in the Seventeenth Century', *European Studies Review* vii (1977), 129-51.

literary value.⁸⁰ In other words, it would have been a haven for a select band of elite who buried themselves from the world to discuss irrelevant trivia, frivolous stuffy pedantry and useless nonsense, not an institution dedicated to the 'greatest utility of society'.

De Soldanis falls short of true greatness even in his literary and academic works. He deserves of course our praises for printing the first grammar of Maltese even though this work has been dismissed simply as 'historical and sentimental'.⁸¹ Nevertheless, he devoted every ounce of his extraordinary energy to collect the sources of Maltese history; and we must give him credit for arousing, like his colleagues, the Capuchin padre Pelagio, I. S. Mifsud and Count Ciantar, the enthusiasm of his countrymen for their past. He accumulated all that was prestigious in the inheritance of the nation and put it at the service of the people.

Making known whatever can throw light on antiquity has always been the laudable custom of the learned men of the past as it is of the *litterati* of the present enlightened century. Hiding anything that can be useful to scholars is a crime.⁸²

But this mass of data was simply of interest only to antiquaries or, as Carl'Antonio Barbaro referred to them, while describing the archaeological sites found at Marsa in 1768, *i curiosi di cose antiche*.⁸³ The next step was to realise that the knowledge of the past should not be transmitted passively:

80 For a record of the papers or *lezioni* prepared by its members: NLM Libr. 1, pp. 203-315. For an assessment of its importance: V. Laurenza, 'Società Culturali in Malta durante il Settecento e l'Ottocento', *La Brigata*, anno 1, no. IV (1932), 85-91.

81 E. F. Sutcliffe, *A Grammar of the Maltese Language with Chrestomathy and Vocabulary* (Oxford, 1936), pp. v-vi.

82 NLM Libr. 142 ii, f. 2r.

83 C. A. Barbaro, *Degli Avanzi d'Alcuni Antichissimi Edifizi, Scoperti in Malta l'Anno 1768. Dissertazione Storico-Critica* (Malta, 1794), 2.

chronological lists of governors, bishops and inquisitors, place names, description of objects like the statue of Hercules⁸⁴ or the assembly of inscriptions in Latin.⁸⁵ The paper on which such data was put down was good only to wrap pepper in, as happened to the *Biblioteca Maltese* of Mifsud.⁸⁶

Historical research is not the good food of curious men but the implements with which to better the material and spiritual life of the people. In the words of Leibniz, the essence of history is *utilitas* and Giovanni Lami warned his colleague Lorenzo Mehus that the historian should also be a philosopher and not simply a reproducer of facts.⁸⁷ This means that data must be interpreted⁸⁸ and, like the English ambassador in Naples, William Hamilton, the historian should try to put his information in a context.⁸⁹ According to Herder, history must give us characters of people and individuals. This is the point, too, that that fine historian Marc Bloch made in his posthumous book, *The Historian's Craft*:

it is men that history seeks to grasp. Failing that, it will be at best but an exercise in erudition. The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies.⁹⁰

84 NLM Libr. 142 ii, ff. 1r-10v.

85 NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 244-65.

86 G. Pisani, *Lettera di un Maltese ad un Cavaliere Gerosolomitano Professo* (Vercelli, 1783), 34.

87 M. Rosa, 'Per la Storia dell'Erudizione Toscana del '700: Profilo di Lorenzo Mehus', *Annali della Scuola Speciale per Archivisti e Bibliotecari dell'Università di Roma*, anno II, no. 1 (1962), 56. Consult also Cochrane, 'Gio. Lami e la storia ecclesiastica', 60-62.

88 E. Cochrane, 'Muratori: The Vocation of a Historian', *The Catholic Historical Review* li, no. 2 (1965), 153-72.

89 A. Schnapp, 'Antiquarian Studies in Naples at the End of the Eighteenth Century. From Comparative Archaeology to Comparative Religion', in G. Imbruglia ed., *Naples in the Eighteenth Century: The Birth and Death of a Nation State* (Cambridge, 2000), 154-66.

90 M. Bloch (trans. Peter Putnam, preface Peter Burke), *The Historian's Craft* (Manchester, 1992), 22.

De Soldanis was capable of writing good history. In the second chapter of *Mustafà Bassà di Rodi* he questioned the established political order, meaning that as change had occurred in the past it might again occur in the future. When the Hospitallers came to Malta in 1530 the inhabitants lost their local government, the *consiglio popolare*, but he emphasized that his compatriots subjected themselves to the Order only voluntarily. After they had expelled their feudal lord Gonzalvo Monroy, King Alfonso of Spain in 1428 had given them the right to govern themselves and take up arms if they were given to some other nation, *manu forti*.⁹¹ The Maltese protested vehemently and surrendered to the wish of Charles V only when they realised that their country was to be the bastion of the Cross against the Crescent and that this was an occasion to join the European nobility against the barbarian.⁹²

De Soldanis did not, of course, explicitly argue for a right of resistance, but his comments on a past episode of disobedience implied that there were circumstances in which it was legitimate. His claim that the people had anciently ruled themselves provided a powerful justification for their aspirations. Inquisitor Passionei at once realised his threat to the government. He informed the cardinal secretary of state that the canon had tried to introduce 'a type of republican government against the sovereign and despotic authority of the grand master.'⁹³

The canon's courage appears stronger when one realizes the circumstances of the book's publication. When he presented the manuscript to the censor appointed by the *Sagra Congregazione dell'Indice* the reviser, the Dominican

91 A. Mifsud, 'Le Franchigie Costituzionali Alfonsiane e l'Invasione dei Mori del 1429', *Archivum Melitense* iii (1918-1919), 318.

92 M. Acciard, *Mustafà Bassà di Rodi*, 31-34.

93 ASV, SS 118, f. 155r, Passionei - SS, 29 May 1751.

Fra Tommaso Maria de Luca, claimed that the work was written so badly that he could not understand parts of it. But besides these grave stylistic defects he condemned 'the out-of-place assertions against the grand master and the Order.' He corrected and cancelled parts of them and gave his approval for publication of the book only on condition that the author first presented it to the Order's ambassador in Rome. De Soldanis defied him. The book was published in Naples as originally written but under the name of Michele Acciard.⁹⁴

Pinto accused him of 'several unfounded and prejudicial statements against the government and the Religion'⁹⁵ and ordered the copies of the book to be collected.⁹⁶ He also reported the author, whom he called 'insolent and vile', to Pope Benedict XIV. The canon was summoned to Rome where he was interrogated by Cinotti, one of the ablest criminal judges of the pope. He was reprimanded⁹⁷ and ordered to apologise to the grand master on his return to Malta.⁹⁸

De Soldanis, who had shown the colours of a true patriot in the service of a 'noble and generous nation', the defender of the nation's liberties, submitted and preferred to give up history altogether rather than expose himself to the persecution of the government. This historian *manqué* was rehabilitated so that he was appointed the first librarian of the national library set up by Bailiff de Tensin in 1763.⁹⁹ After all, he was not receiving his salary to reconstruct the

94 AOM 1574, pp. iii-iv (between pp. 182-83), Pinto to Solaro, 14 June 1751.

95 AIM, Corr. 100, f. 108v, Passionei – SS, 29 March 1751.

96 AIM, Corr. 52, f. 220r, SS – Passionei, 27 April 1751.

97 AIM, Corr. 53, f. 58r, SS – Passionei, 23 August 1752. For the fable, perpetrated by his brother, that de Soldanis was declared innocent by Benedict XIV: NLM Libr. 1146 i, p. 821. Cp. Cassar Pullicino, 23, in the present volume.

98 AIM, Corr. 100, f. 117r, Passionei – SS, 1 July 1752.

99 C. Testa, *The Life and Times of Grand Master Pinto, 1741-1773* (Malta, 1989), 201.

past with its memories of liberty and insurrections and throw the existing order into question.

History in the hands of de Soldanis must serve ulterior ends than historical development. Let us take his linguistic studies, in which he expended his best strength and which distinguished him more than anything else as the child of his age. 'If there has been a century', so he triumphantly wrote to Giovanni Lami, 'which can glorify itself on having brought to life again languages thought by the republic of letters to be dead, and of which one knew only their name, the present century is the one which has surpassed all others.'

He mentions the Etruscan and the Celtic languages as an example. These languages had either not yet been born at all or else were very young when the Punic language ruled supreme in Africa, Asia and in most of Europe. Now this eloquent language was debarred from every corner of the world and was spoken only in Malta and Gozo.¹⁰⁰

It must not be imagined that in his thesis de Soldanis was an isolated dreamer, an obscure and a solitary academic whose conclusions were comprehensible to no more than a handful of sympathetic writers. He had the backing of such a celebrated expert in oriental languages as Johannes Henrich Maius.¹⁰¹ His work was so well-known that it was instrumental for General Charles Vallancey to prove that the Irish language was a 'Punic-Celtic compound'. *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language*, published in Dublin in 1772, reproduced 141 'Punic-Maltese' words, culled from *Della Lingua Punica* and supposedly corresponding to Irish meanings.¹⁰²

100 NLM Libr. 155, f. 98rv.

101 J. H. Maius, *Specimen Linguae Punicae in hodierna Melitensium Superestitis* (Jessae, 1718).

102 C. Vallancey, *An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language, being a Collation of the Irish with the Punic Language* (Dublin, 1772), 32-43.

This linguistic theory of the Punic origin of Maltese has been successfully refuted by Wilhelm Gesenius. In his *Versuch über die Maltesische Sprache* which he published in 1810 at Leipzig he established the Arabic origin of Maltese. He accused de Soldanis of incompetence in the comparative criticism of languages and proved that the canon's knowledge of Hebrew rested on some vague and often quite erroneous recollection of early instruction. And still less value must be attached to his comparison of Maltese with the ancient Etrurian and 'Egyptian'.¹⁰³

For which reason did the canon change his previous scientifically correct theory for one philologically mistaken? We have already speculated on the linguistic reasons for this change. But could there have been some other explanation that fitted in with his deeply religious convictions? Plausibly, the dissertation that the canon wrote against abbé Ladvocat in 1758 could give us some clue. This librarian of the Sorbonne had contended that the language of Malta changed with every coloniser. At the time of the Romans, therefore, it must have been Latin. It is hard to exaggerate the effects of these arguments and de Soldanis engaged closely with this line of thinking. If Ladvocat's hypothesis were true, an obvious difficulty arose because in that case St Luke would not have referred to the inhabitants as 'barbarians'.¹⁰⁴ In turn this means that St Paul would not have been shipwrecked at Malta but, perhaps, at Meleda

103 W. Gesenius, *Versuch über die Maltesische Sprache* (Leipzig, 1810), p. vi. See also *The Biographical Dictionary of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge* vol. I, part II (London, 1842), 456. Thanks to Mario Cassar for these references. For the contribution of German scholars to the study of Maltese: R. Kontzi, 'Il-kontribut ta' studjużi Germaniżi fl-istudju tal-ilsien Malti mill-bidu tas-seklu sbatax sal-bidu tas-seklu għoxrin', *Journal of Maltese Studies* 25-26 (1994-95), 26-30.

104 *Acts of the Apostles* 28: 1-11.

(Mljet) in Dalmatia¹⁰⁵ and the most momentous period in the annals of the islands would have been destroyed by a stroke of the pen.¹⁰⁶ According to de Soldanis this reasoning must have had a serious flaw and exposed the weakness of his adversary's thinking. It was his firm belief that the Maltese never abandoned the island but cohabited with every new master that conquered it. Nor did they ever ignore their original language, of which they were so jealous.

This last assertion was bold but unhistorical. In other words, de Soldanis was not guided by a genuine search for truth but was rather inclined towards writing apologetic history. Listen to the moving exhortation to his compatriots:

You Gozitans heeded his [St Paul's] voice without delay. You understood his message at once, for which I congratulate you. And as, since that day, you have chosen him as your father and protector, may you also, one day, join him in heaven after living here on earth the message he has preached.¹⁰⁷

But de Soldanis was not only convinced that history displayed the guiding hand of divine providence in human affairs. He still tied it to the role of providing moral examples for the promotion of virtue and the perfection of the soul.¹⁰⁸ That is, he upheld the traditional humanist ideal of history as a lesson in virtue. After describing the life of prayer and fasting that Fra Antonio di San Carlo led at the sanctuary of Our Lady at Qala he exclaims: 'You see, dear reader, what

105 For this thesis see especially I. Giorgi, *Divis Paulus apostulus in mari, quod nunc Venetus sinus dicitur naufragus, et Melitae Dalmatanensis insulae post naufragium hospes...* (Venice, 1730).

106 De Soldanis, *Discorso Apologetico*, 62-83.

107 *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu* ii, 3.

108 For this comment: G. Spini, 'I trattatisti dell'arte storica nella Controriforma italiana', in his *Contributi alla storia del Concilio di Trento e della Controriforma* (Florence, 1948), 109-36.

great love this man had for God.¹⁰⁹ Another case refers to Girgor Bonnici of Nadur. When this saintly man opened a beehive he found inside the model of an eagle and a ship made of honey and wax. These were 'a gift from God to his servant who always walked in the way of the Lord.'¹¹⁰

History, therefore, was to be at the service of religion, an exercise in oratory.¹¹¹ Descartes and his followers were the cause of this *malaise* common all over Europe, that the *ars historica* passed into the hands of the rhetoricians. They succeeded to expel history from the reign of science because they said it is impossible to establish historical truth. Fortunately, this dangerous abyss had been overcome by the eighteenth century and history re-established its supremacy over pyrrhonism.¹¹² The inductive method started being applied to historical research and, as in physics, experiment and evidence became supreme.¹¹³

The Gozitan canon, however, failed to evaluate the sources with a critical eye and the conservatism of his historical writing is evident also at the level of method. He did quote Jean Mabillon¹¹⁴ but there is no indication that he was aware of the Frenchman's concern with the critical use of evidence. No wonder that he could lose himself so easily in the intricacies of fanciful speculation. I admit that he questioned S. Agata's stay in Malta and S. Corrado's at Mosta.¹¹⁵ But these were exceptions and, like the first historians of their country, de

109 *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu* ii, 100.

110 *Ibid.*, 154.

111 E. Cochrane, *Historians and Historiography in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago, 1981). See also G. Spini, 'Historiography: The Art of History in the Italian Counter Reformation', in E. Cochrane ed., *The Late Italian Renaissance, 1525-1630* (London, 1970), 91-133.

112 R. N. Stromberg, 'History in the Eighteenth Century', *Journal of the History of Ideas* xii, no. 2 (1951), 295-304.

113 S. Bertelli, 'La Crisi dello Scetticismo e il Rapporto Erudizione-Scienza agl'Inizi del Secolo XVIII', *Società* xi (1955), 435-56.

114 *Discorso Apologetico*, 83.

115 NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 39-40.

Soldanis, faced by an obscure past and a paucity of written material, did not scruple to dream up national *mythistoires*. He based his work on the fabulous opinions of other writers' or upon popular tradition and wrote a collection of apocryphal stories. Does not the man from Għarb, Bernard Zammit, whose strength matched his height, provide sufficient evidence that the 'giants' really inhabited Gozo?¹¹⁶ Is not the church dedicated to St Paul at Marsalforn ample proof of the saint's visit to the island?¹¹⁷ On which historical bases can one say that when in the fourth century the vandals expelled the Christians from North Africa S. Rossiniano came to Gozo and set up the first Augustinian convent? Perhaps on what 'an old and reliable Augustinian related to me'?¹¹⁸ This is the same mistake that padre Pelagio made. Who were, for instance, the forty Maltese martyrs at the time of Emperor Licinio?¹¹⁹ Or on what historical evidence can we say that the 'Arabs carried the Maltese Christians together with their saintly bishop to Palermo to be there killed'?¹²⁰ Such writing reflects, Momigliano comments, the 'ferocious and controversial character that ecclesiastical history assumed since the Reformation.'¹²¹

To conclude, de Soldanis and his colleagues – though he was a bigger man than they were – represent the earlier phase of the Maltese Enlightenment. This pre- or early Enlightenment was a late product of baroque culture whose agents did not have a political programme. If they did succeed to formulate an idea of national conscience, their horizon did not reach beyond their immediate environment

116 *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tieghu* i, 54.

117 *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tieghu* ii, 1-8.

118 *Ibid.*, 78-79.

119 ACM, Misc. 56, ff. 33r-41v.

120 *Ibid.*, f. 38r.

121 A. Momigliano, 'Pagan and Christian Historiography in the Fourth Century A.D.', in A. Momigliano ed., *The Conflict between Paganism and Christianity in the Fourth Century* (Oxford, 1963), 92.

and in no way can we call them the men of the future. After all, as has been well underlined, 'it was perfectly possible to participate in the Republic of Letters as a correspondent, antiquary, historian and bibliophile and remain contentedly ignorant of Enlightenment thinking.'¹²² Their conservatism is symbolised by the humiliating retreat of de Soldanis before the arrogance of the Order. The dreamers of a new Malta would never publish their works, as the canon did, under another's name. Nor would they do like Don Vittorio Gristi.¹²³ This priest and chancellor of the inquisition 'was known for his hatred of the Order'¹²⁴ but kept his grumbles to himself. He had to content himself with leaving the text about the rights of the Maltese in his drawer, taking it out every so often plausibly to polish his arguments. It was only, he unashamedly informs us, an academic exercise which he wrote not for publication but to while away the time.¹²⁵

This was a literary as distinct from a political Enlightenment. This dramatic change was represented by the attempt of the Order's ambassador in Rome, Bailiff Solaro, so that *De l'Esprit des Lois* would not be put on the Index of Prohibited Books.¹²⁶ In this period Malta presented those political and cultural conditions that justify the use of the historical term 'enlightened absolutism'. The two grand masters Pinto and Rohan were both 'philosopher kings', assisted by able functionaries and led by the new spirit of utility in the service of the public good. Their programme included a change in the economy, education,

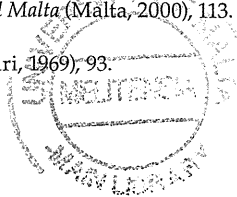
122 Robertson, *The Case for the Enlightenment*, 41.

123 W. Zammit, 'Gristi's literary activity within the Maltese eighteenth-century context', in W. Zammit ed., *Il Naufragio di San Paolo in Malta ossia la Conversione di San Publio e dell'Isola. Opera Morale, 1748* (Malta, 2004), 17-82.

124 F. Ciappara, *The Roman Inquisition in Enlightened Malta* (Malta, 2000), 113.

125 PA (Birgu), Lanzon v, p. 539.

126 M. Rosa, *Riformatori e Ribelli nel '700 Italiano* (Bari, 1969), 93.



judicial process, public administration and the relations between State and Church.¹²⁷

As a prominent member of the clergy¹²⁸ and the chancellor of the tribunal of the inquisition in Gozo,¹²⁹ de Soldanis was a stranger in this milieu. Temperamentally and intellectually he was not the man to propose such reforms. He wrote a sonnet in honour of the Augustinian Don Bartolomeo Attardi, the antagonist of Muratori.¹³⁰ And if he quoted Montesquieu¹³¹ and Voltaire,¹³² this did not mean that he shared their political ideas; Cardinals Roberto Bellarmino¹³³ and Cesare Baronio¹³⁴ were more to his tastes.

I hope I have persuaded you that the intellectual priorities of this hard-working man, full of curiosity, were conservative. It is my contention that he would have felt more at ease in the dead silence of the antiquities he had in his museum than in the deafening din of the French Revolution and among such fierce personages of the Maltese Enlightenment like Fabrizio Grech, Mikiel Anton Vassalli and Nicolò Muscat.¹³⁵ This was no longer the time for historical erudition; it was the time for action.

127 Among other works on the enlightenment: H. M. Scott ed., *Enlightened Absolutism: Reform and Reformers in Later Eighteenth-Century Europe* (London, 1990).

128 For his unsuccessful attempts to become the archpriest of Gozo and the provost of St Helen's: NLM Libr. 13, pp. 151-53 and NLM Libr. 146 i, ff. 25r-26v – letter of F. S. Scerri to Agius, 29 April 1755.

129 AIM, Corr. 96, ff. 137v-138r, Salviati – SU, 16 January 1759.

130 The sonnet is an appendix to Bartolomeo Attardi, *La Risposta senza Maschera al Signor Antonio Ludovico Muratori* (Palermo, 1742), unnumbered.

131 NLM Libr. 142 vi, p. 1.

132 *Discorso Apologetico*, 70.

133 *Ibid.*, 24, 73.

134 *Ibid.*, 69.

135 For these chief figures of the Maltese enlightenment: Ciappara, *Enlightenment and Reform*.

APPENDIX ONE

... Più considerando come in Malta, particolarmente in questa Città Valletta non esservi fondata un'Accademia Letteraria, ove possono radunarsi Uomini Letterati, e dar saggio in pubblico del loro talento, così stabilisco e fondo un'Accademia Letteraria da nominarsi Agiusiana in questa Città Valletta di Malta sotto l'invocazione del glorioso San Filippo Neri, e da conservarsi in perpetuo, sotto le regole e leggi che saranno prescritti dal Sr. Commissario e Bibliotecario di questa Biblioteca della S. Religione Gerosolimitana, quello si che voglio et ordino che sia onninamente osservato sotto pena di nullità di questa Fondazione tutto quanto viene da me ora scritto ed ordinato.

Che una volta al mese, o almeno una volta ogni due mesi si tenghi l'Accademia, o l'erudita radunanza.

Che in questa ogni Accademico debba dire qualche cosa e lasciare in scritto quanto disse in mano del Sr. Segretario dell'Accademia.

Che nell'ultima radunanza dell'Accademia che si fa in tutti gli anni si debba trattare della Lingua Punico-maltese, o di qualche cosa che spetta alla Storia di Malta e Gozo.

Che da cinque in cinque anni si dià in premio una moneta d'oro del valore di scudi cinquanta all'Accademico che meglio avrà trattata la materia. Il giudizio dovrà farsi colla pluralità de' voti delli Ssri. Associati Accademici per voti segreti nel Bussolo, e non per acclamazione o a voce viva, altrimenti la fondazione non avrà luogo e si rende nulla.

Più voglio et ordino ch'il Sr. Segretario dell'Accademia Agiusiana registri in un libro apparte quanto si tratta e si delibera in tutte l'Accademie dalli Sigri. Accademici, e che tenghi apparte li scritti che gli saranno consegnati dalli Ssi. Accademici.

Più voglio et ordino che la radunanza di quest'Accademia si faccia nella Sala della Biblioteca della Religione Gerosolimitana.

Più voglio et ordino che la ricezzione delli Ssi. Accademici sia fatta nella radunanza dell'Accademia dalli ascritti Accademici, e che siano reggistrati in un libro apparte.

Per mantenimento e Fondazione di quest'Accademia Agiusiana assegno il mio capitale di scudi cinquecento, a me dovuti oggi dal Sr. Canco. mio Coadr. D. Giuseppe Calleja, Sigra. Modesta Fiteni Abela, e Felice Cassar do. el Pellic, tutti abitanti nell'Isola del Gozo, com'appare in Atti del Sr. Notaro Giuseppe Marchesi li 16. novembre 1762. In Atti del Sr. Not. Salvatore Cordina li 7. Maggio 1763. In Atti del Sr. Notaro Giuseppe Vella li 12 settembre 1763. et altri se vi sono. E detta somma di scudi 500 di capitale data in forma di Bolla a 5 scudi p.% allì sopranominati, e che i loro interusuri, che principiaranno a favore di questa fondazione dell'Accademia dal primo giorno dell'approvazione e decreto di S. A. Serenisa. del Gran Maestro e nostro Principe.

Voglio ch'il danaro degl'interusuri del mio capitale di 500 scudi sia amministrato dal Bibliotecario pro tempore existente, e che se il capitale delli 500 scudi venghi o tutto o in parte restituito, che lo riceva il do. Bibliotecario, e lo impieghi di nuovo a Persone ben stanti col consenso ed approvazione del Sr. Commissario di questa Biblioteca pro tempore existente.

Più voglio et ordino che se questa Biblioteca venisse a mancare e sarà disfatta, e non collocata altrove, come si vede oggi stabilita, che questa fondazione dell'Accademia Agiusiana venghi ad essere nulla, come se mai fosse fatta e fondata, che vadi a favore d. Capitale delli miei Ssri. Eredi infrascritti.

Più voglio ed onninamente comando, che doppo che questo mio solenne Testamento sarà aperto, fra due mesi

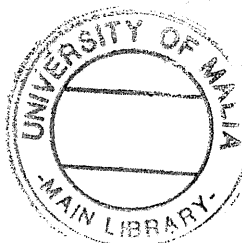
inclusive questa mia Fondazione debba essere approvata, confermata, e corroborata del Sermo. Principe di Malta e Gozo, e Gran Maestro di quest'ordine Gerosolimitano con un magistrale decreto in tutto e per tutto senz'alcuna eccezione di quanto sopra venne da me descritto, e se fra due mesi inclusive non viene ottenuto do. rescritto dell'approvazione di questa Fondazione, e se dopo ottenuto, non si osserva quanto venne da me ordinato appuntino, allora voglio che detta fondazione ipsofacto sia nulla, e come mai fosse fata, ed il capitale mio delli 500 scudi vadi a favore delli miei SS. Eredi infrascritti, e non altrimenti.

[..]

Ed in conferma di questo solenne Testamento dalla mia propria mano scritto ed ora sottoscritto ed ultimato nella Biblioteca di questa Città Valletta di Malta oggi li 14 di Aprile 1768.

Io Canonico Francesco Agius Protonotario Aplco.

NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, ff. 255r-256v, 15 April 1768.



APPENDIX TWO

1/234
 Anno 1722 e 1723 (1720)

BIBLIOTECA
 DI PARMA.

Padre, riprendendo di suo proprio pugno scritto a me sopra un
 indetto mio, al primo pensiero considerava del mio libro e del
 Racconto, sono stato deluso, aperto che fu. Mi avvegna mio fratello
 come V. R. via di partenza, e che più non possa poterfi al fine,
 pazienza, crederei qui godola, e godola ancora, et attenda tempo a
 sempre ancora il padrone, volendomi far l'onore, in tal caso a
 viva voce la ringraziano della notizia creduta sopra le figure le-
 tuali: detto ancora sempre attendendo l'altre sulle medaglie Mal-
 tes, e mi di credere che mi farà la grazia e l'onore sparranza-
 to: di mandarmi a Malta o da fuori, e nel caso Hattuari
 la medaglia univa, se così le parerà meglio, le figure in disegno.
 Ha avuto et ha fatto ragione di molti della mancanza de libri,
 senza le quali uno cammina al bujo, più volte mi ritorna nel
 capo con dispiacere. Vorrei benedire l'opere seguenti per tutto
 quanto fanno nelle medaglie di Malta, ma dove sono. V. R. forse
 le conoscerà, e fuori di Malta le avrà in mano, quando mai vorrebbe
 farli il favore di trasmetterli loro copia, certamente che tanto te-
 nuto alla sua grazia et a sua giustizia al suo merito di suo. Cede

Claverius lib. 2. Hist. antiq. cap. 16.

Fronovius in Praefat. ad vol. VI. Graec. ant.

Phil. Lavata in Sicilia numismatica, & in suo bonumest. Havercampus.

Ch. Higley Inglese ho avuto spessa memoria di V. R. ed egli
che addosso è un portante di sicca non altro che la sua lingua.
Personalmente per il suo genio anticipato: piacere non avo egli: non
nò per goderlo un altro giorno tenendolo il fratello per il giro
di Sicilia, il quale deve essere di solito nella propria diceria
Vedere scapolarà.

Se non sarò mai tale in con; non ha che fatto nel sapere, mon
te e colui e il l'animo ogni cosa eseguirà, e l'ho visto giacere
l'ima di me qua

Di V. R.

Ma 7. Maggio 1748.

Alto di V. R. del vero
Francesco Aguirre

110

Alto Padre e Sr. Colmo
Mro Paciaudi Teatino Lib. di. p. d.

Melita

APPENDIX THREE

Dono P. e L. e. O. e. O.

BIBLIOTECA
DI PARMA.

Ho già letto e riletto con mille piaceri l'enditij. ^{giusto} ~~del~~ P. O. e. O.,
sempre più vado osservando la sua profonda erud. ⁱⁿ ~~in~~ ^{questo} ~~questo~~ ^{studio} ~~studio~~
antico monetario. In poco che rimorò in Malta comprese il suo
antico rito ereligione, e in que' simboli sviluppò le difficoltà, che
non a me solo, ma ad altri ancora senza studio e ajuto de' libri,
sarebbon molto da pensare, fatica invero segnandella sua penna.
Se V. P. O. e. O. non m'avesse nella prima, speranzata la seconda
dell'altra Medaglia di Donna volata e 3. figure, m' avrei preso
seco la libertà di dirle, non essere conveniente lasciare sepolta
questa lettera; ma giacché fu avventurato per la prima, giovarò
sperare emere per la seconda, allora prendero la libertà d'aprire
li miei sentimenti e risoluçioni

M' ha posto in curiosità non piccola la citazione ch' ella fa
in essa piffata del *codice fortaneo intit.º Melite monumenta di-*
versorum auctorum, non avendo avuto sin al giorno l'oggi sua
notizia, se il comunicarmi il padrone nonde pregiudicà il sapere
L'auri à sommo favore, pensa forse potrà ritrovarsi qualche cosa
di buono per me.

Landando ad S. M. I. Inglese nostro amico sopra la scrip-
tura greca, che leggeji nel Firdino abela di P. P. Teouiti, m' assicu-
rà

re esserfi sia ad oggi malamente spiegata intanto, il non a-
verla ritrovata allora tra le mie carte, il non esserfi ritornato al Gozo
come pensava, mi tolse la bella consolazione di vedere il genuino
significato, gl'ela mando, affinché la sua erudizione potesse
supplire alla privazione del primo, senza ambedue versarfi
nel Greco. eccola

In il 11^{to} Av. Tudes, che qui ritrovai, il primo a raggiuglier-
mi della sua dimora in Malta; ed all' Ill^{mo} Mons^o Inquisitore,
nuova buona è stata per me d'impensata, poiché due giorni
avanti m'avea del contrario assicurato il S^o Marescaor Ingegn^o
Mi conservi intanto la sua buona grazia, e la supplico d'armene
di essa proua coll'onore de' suoi frequenti comandi; mentre
inalterabilmente mi protesto

Di V. P. D^{no}

Il mio amato S^o Governad^o
(Cass. de' S^off. veneta mille)
riverenza

Gozo 27. Maggio 1748.

V^{ro} ed O^{bbli.} sel
Francesco Agius

~~to~~
All' Ill^{mo} Sig. Abbe' Sand' Colmi
N. P. Paolo M. Paciaudi Pre' Teale
del. P.

Roma.
S. Silvestr.

APPENDIX FOUR

Mons. Sig. Padre mio Padre

3
235

BIBLIOTECA
DI PARMA



Leas' il mio amabiliss. P. Abb. Bevelta, si non saprei se V. S. Ill. fosse più in Roma. Lo ringrazio efficacemente della bontà avuta di pararmi di tanti intratti le di lei buone nuove, e me ne congratulo assai più che goda di ottima salute, ed 'Dio appri della Repubblica lettenna gl'ela conservi.

Io pur vado aspettando la spiegazione di quella scissione, ed ella mandi in Parigi al P. Abb. Bartholemy a nome mio, e dopo di averla ricevuta, poi in presenza mia rigorosamente, invidiamente ricenata, perchè non fu ritornata. Fatto credere che gli avri' dieffe una copia, ma se l'avri' ricevuta, come credo, me ne farò sommo favore di passarvene una copia, che tanto desidero per una mia opera che presto presto mandarò in luce. Perchè non si dimentichi di ciò, ricevessi unitamente colla presente una Dissertazione sulla font. Ottagon, fatta del giovane Maresca Abbate Tepparati, benchè an in fis materia peregrina, però credere che le gradirò, perchè tratt' di materia che tiene nella di lei pensa, o almeno almeno il buon mio animo. Finalmente S. I. M. resp. coprand

Di N. S. Illmo Gio: 25. 7mo Vni ed obbl. Le Due
1760. Francesco Agui