

The Names of the Town and Villages of Gozo (Malta)¹

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Abstract: *The Maltese islands have been dominated by various rulers who left an imprint on the life, customs, and language of the inhabitants. This is evident also in the toponymy of the archipelago. The names of places, towns, and villages of the larger island, Malta, provide interesting samples of these admixtures. The names of the town and villages of Gozo are no exception. The legal name of the capital, Victoria, reflects the very recent history of the islands; Malta under British rule. However, its older one, Rabat, and most of the names of the villages and smaller inhabited areas, corroborate the dominating Semitic element in the Maltese language, and the mixed history of the islands and their people. This paper gives a hypothetical etymology, together with a descriptive linguistic picture, of each of the names, and discusses the relationship each has within the prismatic context of the Maltese language, but especially toponymy.*

Keywords: *Maltese village, toponymy, Victoria, Rabat, hagio toponomy.*

The Maltese islands

The Maltese archipelago² is situated about 96 kilometres (60 miles) south of Sicily and 295 kilometres (180 miles) north of the African coast. It consists of two large islands, Malta and Ghawdex (also called Gozo),³ and a number of smaller uninhabited islands.⁴ The language used by most of the *c.* 412,970⁵ inhabitants is Maltese.

¹ This paper was read at the 'Twenty-Second International Congress of Onomastic Sciences', held in Pisa (Italy), between 28 August and 4 September 2005.

² The extreme points of these islands fall within the following position: North – 36° 57' Latitude, South – 35° 48' Latitude, East – 14° 35' Longitude, West – 14° 11' Longitude. Cf. Neville Ransley and Anton Azzopardi, *A Geography of the Maltese Islands*, 4th and enlarged edition, Malta, 1988, p. 1.

³ Malta is the largest island with a maximum length of 27.3 kms (17 miles), a maximum width of 14.5 kms (9 miles), and a surface area of *c.* 246 sq. kms² (95 miles²), and Gozo, the second largest island, situated about 9 kms (5 miles) northwest of Malta, with a maximum length of 14 kms (8.75 miles), a maximum width of 7 kms (4.3 miles), and a surface area of *c.* 67 kms² (26 miles²).

⁴ These are: **Kemmuna** (Comino), **Kemmunnett** (Cominotto), **Il-Gżira** (< Arabic جزيرة , 'island', popularly known as **Manoel Island**), **Filfla**, **Selmunnett**, and **Il-Ġebbla tal-Ġeneral** (literally 'the general's stone/rock', popularly known as **Fungus Rock**).

⁵ Unless indicated otherwise, this and other figures for inhabitants in the villages in Gozo were taken from the *Demographic Review 2009*, (National Statistics Office), Malta, 2010, p. 15.

Historical background

The fate of the inhabitants always depended on the powers which ruled over the islands from time to time, in the last three millennia. These were the Phoenicians (c.800–c.600 BC), the Carthaginians (c.600–218 BC), the Romans (218 BC–c.AD 350), the Byzantines (c.350–870), the Arabs (870–1091), the Normans, the Swabians, the Angevins, the Aragonese, (1091–1530), the Order of the Knights of St John (1530–1798), the French (1798–1800), and the British (1800–1964).

The Maltese language

Nothing is known about the language which was used by the people who built the megalithic temples in the period 4,000–1,500 BC. It is presumed that the parlance used on Maltese soil during the time of the Phoenicians was Phoenician. This might have undergone some changes during the centuries of Carthaginian colonization, and surely began to be infiltrated by Latin lexical stock when Malta was taken over by the Romans in 218 BC. However, in AD 60 the inhabitants must have still used a dominantly Semitic vernacular, as observed by Luke in *Acts of the Apostles* 28, 1–2, where he stated that the island where St Paul and those shipwrecked with him landed, was Malta, and the inhabitants were *βάρβαροι*,⁶ that is they spoke neither Greek nor Latin. Hence, it is understood that they have continued to speak Punic.

It is presumed that the language our forefathers used until the Arab invasion in 870 was Late Punic, or Greek;⁷ more probably Late Punic. This could, or would, have been transformed by the Arabs and the people who came with them and ruled over the islands for more than two centuries, and were allowed to stay on until the expulsion of those who did not embrace Christendom between 1222 and 1249.⁸

⁶ *Acts of the Apostles* 28, 1–2. Cf. ‘et cum evasissemus tunc cognovimus quia Militene insula vocatur barbari vero praestabant non modicam humanitatem nobis: accensa enim pyra, reficiebant nos omnes, propter imbrem qui imminebat, et frigus [...]’, *Biblia Sacra Juxta Vulgatam Clementinam*, [Desclee], Tournai, Belgium, 1947, pp. 160–1. Cf. “‘natives”, lit. *βάρβαροι*; but this only meant that they did not speak Greek, and the term could easily be used by anyone who had such entire facility in Greek as St Luke. The word is probably onomatopoeic in origin, meaning those whose speech was mere “bar-bar” to the Greeks. The more educated among the Maltese, however, would doubtless speak Greek, or Latin, or both.’ Luttey Cuthbert and Joseph Keating, (eds), *The Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures – The New Testament*, Vol. II, 1936, p. 312, n. 2. Today, the biblical *βάρβαροι* is interpreted to refer to ‘people who spoke neither Latin nor Greek’.

⁷ Alexander Borg states that even Greek could have been used. Cf. ‘[...] it is more likely that after approximately 370 years under Hellenic rule, the inhabitants of the Maltese islands shifted to Greek.’ Alexander Borg, ‘Language’ in *Malta – Culture and Identity*, Henry Frenco and Oliver Friggieri (eds.), Malta, 1994, p. 34.

⁸ Cf. Joseph M. Brincat, *Malta 870-1054 – Al-Himyari’s Account and its Linguistic Implications*, Malta, 1995, p. 26.

Since the rediscovery⁹ of Al Himyari's historical account, which speaks of an Islamic violent attack on the Maltese islands in *c.*870, it has been inferred that the islands 'remained an uninhabited ruin'¹⁰ for almost 180 years.¹¹ However, the latest study on a poem written by a twelfth century poet in Greek strongly implies that a Christian community with its own bishop – hence even the language – survived in Gozo, thus confirming tradition that the islands were not totally depopulated during the Arab rule over the islands.¹²

In *c.*1049, a community of about 5,000 people¹³ from Sicily, and who spoke Sicilian Arabic, reached our islands. Their Sicilian Arabic must have brought about the 'basic source of the Maltese language'¹⁴ still used today. This was eventually supplemented by Romance vocabulary and morphology especially between 1091 and 1798, and later still by English since the administration and many English families settled on the islands and English began to be taught from the very first years at school. Later on English was adopted as an official language, side by side by Maltese.

Maltese is a mixed language. Its constituent linguistic elements¹⁵ are Semitic, Romance, and English. It is a living language which enjoys the status of Malta's national and first official language; English is Malta's second official language. Because of its predominantly Semitic grammar, Maltese is classified as a Semitic language.¹⁶ It is the only Semitic language written with a Latin alphabet and is also the only Semitic Language which has been adopted as a working language in the European Union.

⁹ The text on Malta by Al-Himyari was published in a geographical dictionary by Ihsân 'Abbâs, in Beirut, in 1975. Prof. Joseph M. Brincat of the University of Malta rediscovered the text and eventually published several studies which throw new light on the darkest age in Malta's history. Cf. among these, Joseph M. Brincat, *Malta 870-1054 – Al-Himyari's Account*, Malta, 1991, and Brincat 1995.

¹⁰ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

¹¹ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

¹² Cf. Joseph Busuttill, Stanley Fiorini, and Horatio Caesar Roger Vella, *Tristia ex Melitogauda – Lament in Greek Verse of a XIIth-century Exile on Gozo*, Malta, 2010. A Byzantine poet, while on exile on Gozo – referred to as Melitogaudos – wrote a long lament in verse. He addressed himself to the Vizier of the realm, George of Antioch, pleading with him to intercede on his behalf with the king to return him to his homeland, Sicily. In the poem he speaks of King Roger's exploits, among which, his attack on Gozo in 1127. The poem is a detailed description which sheds important new light, especially on Christianity in the Maltese Islands, on a period of Maltese history – Arab rule over these islands before and after Count Roger's invasion in 1091 – about which very little is known.

¹³ Cf. Brincat 1995, p. 20.

¹⁴ Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 27.

¹⁵ Cf. N. Tagliaferro, 'Sugli Elementi Costitutivi del Linguaggio Maltese', *Archivium Melitense*, Vol. I, No. 1, Malta, 1910, pp. 8–14.

¹⁶ For the phonetic sounds represented by the Maltese graphemes, see Appendix, on p. 98, *infra*.

The names

The capital city of Gozo is **Victoria**, or, as it is more popularly known **Ir-Rabat**. The names of the larger villages are **In-Nadur**, **Ix-Xaghra**, **Ix-Xewkija**, **Ghajnsielem**, **Iż-Żebbuġ**, **Ta' Sannat**, **Il-Qala**, **Ta' Kerċem**, **L-Gharb**, and **Il-Munxar**. The smaller ones are **Il-Fontana**, **San Lawrenz**, and **L-Ghasri**. The minor localities include **Marsalforn**, **L-Imġarr**, **Ix-Xlendi**, and **Santa Luċija**. None of the Gozitan names include the *Hal* prefix – an abbreviation for *raħal* ‘village’ – extant in some village names in Malta.¹⁷

The article *l-* and the possessive *ta'*

Like the place-names ‘The Hague’ and ‘The Netherlands’, many of the toponyms of the Maltese islands take the definite article. Gozo’s **Rabat**, and most village names are in fact preceded by the definite article, which in Maltese is ‘*l-*’ < Arabic ل. As may be observed, it is written ‘*l-*’ by itself, in front of **Imġarr**, **Gharb**, and **Ghasri**, where the initial ‘gh’ digraph in the latter two represents a zero phoneme and the words are pronounced /a:rb/ and /a:sri/, hence both begin with a long vowel. ‘*L-*’ is, in fact, written by itself in front of words which begin with any of the vowels – which in Maltese are six – or with silent ‘gh’ or ‘h’. In front of the other names, it is written ‘*il-*’ as in the case of **Il-Qala** and **Il-Fontana**, or is assimilated with the initial letter of the word/name, when this is one of the nine ‘sun’ letters ‘*c*’, ‘*d*’, ‘*n*’, ‘*r*’, ‘*s*’, ‘*t*’, ‘*x*’, ‘*z*’, and ‘*z*’, hence **In-Nadur**, **Ir-Rabat**, **Ix-Xaghra**, **Ix-Xewkija**, **Ix-Xlendi**, and **Iż-Żebbuġ**; the initial ‘*i*’ in **Imġarr**, and that preceding the article is a euphonic vowel. **Marsalforn**, **San Lawrenz**, and **Santa Luċija** do not take the article, while **Kerċem** and **Sannat** are preceded by the possessive ‘*ta*’’, and they too do not take the article. In English none of the articles or ‘*ta*’’ are used in front of the relative names. This is a linguistic factor which influenced the authorities who have adopted each of the proper names by themselves in official street names, in most of the Local Councils’ greeting signs, and very often in official correspondence, too.

The names of the capital city - **Rabat** and **Victoria** (population c.7006 in March 2009)

Victoria is the official name of the capital city of Gozo. However, Gozitans never refer to it by this name; for them it has always been **Ir-Rabat**.

Godfrey Wettinger says that **Rabat**,¹⁸ in Arabic is both written and pronounced

¹⁷ Cp. **Had-Dingli**, **Hal Balzan**, **Hal Far**, **Hal Gharghur**, **Hal Kirkopp**, **Hal Qormi**, **Haż-Żabbar**, **Haż-Żebbuġ**, and **H’Attard** (short for Hal Attard).

¹⁸ Cf. Joe Zammit Ciantar, ‘Victoria jew Rabat?’, *Sagħtar*, 94, March, Malta, 1983.

ربط.¹⁹ However Joseph Aquilina makes a distinction, and derives the word < Arabic ريبض , ‘wall of a town’.²⁰ G.B. Caracausi also represents the Arabic word with ‘rabaq’.²¹

In Gozo, it must have been descriptive of the inhabited area below and around the hill on which lies **II-Kastell** *alias* **Iċ-Ċittadella**, *alias* **II-Belt** as referred to by some senior citizens. These render the meaning of ‘castle’, ‘citadel’, and ‘town’ respectively, and stand for the old fortified city of the island, within the high bastions of which lie the Gozo Cathedral, the Gozo Bishop’s Palace, the Gozo Law Courts, and the old Gozo prison. Today very few people still dwell within this ‘town’, and some of the few buildings extant from the distant past house the Folk Museum, the old *Sentinella*, and the Museum of Archaeology. After the Mediterranean was freed from marauding seafarers, the people have moved down to **Ir-Rabat**, ‘the suburbs’.

The name occurs in Malta, too. The inhabitants distinguish between the two by referring to ‘**Ir-Rabat ta’ Malta**’ and ‘**Ir-Rabat ta’ Għawdex** (Gozo)’. The name refers to the same geographical area, outside the fortification walls of the old city of **Mdina**, *alias* **Città Vecchia**, *alias* the **Melita** of antiquity. Hence, it renders the meaning of ‘suburbs’, as well. **Rabat** refers to some places in other countries, too; it is also found associated with places in several small towns in Sicily,²² Spain, Morocco, and Saudi Arabia. In each case the name once served as a common noun, always standing for ‘suburbs’, and is remnant of the Arab dominance over these places. In Malta the Arabs ruled for 221 years (870–1091), and those who converted to Christianity were allowed to stay on even when the last Muslims were expelled in 1249.

The earliest reference to **Rabat** in Gozo, may be traced in Italian ‘*rabbato*’ registered in a notarial deed dating to 16.xi.1449.²³

The adoption of the very artificial name **Victoria** took place on 10 June 1887, when Malta was under British rule, as a commemoration of the Silver Jubilee celebrations of Victoria as queen of England and of Malta. Today both **Victoria** and **Rabat** feature side by side, sometimes with the former given prominence over the latter for easy use by the foreigners, on commercial, printed maps of Gozo.

¹⁹ Godfrey Wettinger, *Place-Names of the Maltese Islands ca. 1300–1800*, Malta, 2000, p. 453. The author gives a lengthy explanation on the linguistic interpretation of the name **Rabat** and includes other authors’ lexicographic citations which corroborate the same meaning. Cf. *Ibid.*, pp. 452–3.

²⁰ Cf. Joseph Aquilina, *English-Maltese Dictionary*, Vol. I, Malta, 1987, Vol. II, Malta, 1990, *sub* ‘RABAT²’.

²¹ Cf. Girolamo Caracausi, *Dizionario Onomastico della Sicilia*, Palermo, 1993, *sub* ‘Ràbato’.

²² Cf. ‘Rabato [...], *Rabatun* presso Agrigento [...] (1305), *Rabato* sobborgo di Caccamo, [...] *Rabato di S. Nicolò*, presso Sciacca, [...] *Ràbato*, a Mineo [...]’. *Ibid.*

²³ Wettinger, 2000, p. 452.

The names which do not take the article

Ghajnsielem (population c.2660)

Ghajnsielem is a hydronym. Although it is written as one word, the name is composed of ‘*ghajn*’ (‘spring’) and ‘*sielem*’ which could render an adjectival form derived from Semitic ‘*sliem*’ ‘peace’. However, the latter word assumes the semblance of an Arabic proper name ‘Salim’, too. In this case the composite name renders the meaning of ‘the spring of Salim / Selem’ which is a very popular Arabic name.²⁴ In this case the toponymy is patronymic.

Reference to the village in the form of ‘*el migiar sive hain selem, contrata*’ was made in a notarial deed dated 17.ii.1587.²⁵

The word ‘*ghajn*’ derives from Arabic عين ‘spring’. It features in hundreds of composite names attributed to springs found all over both of Malta and Gozo,²⁶ which once provided water, and were dearly owned, appreciated, and sparingly used. Most of these do not produce water any more. Expanding housing estates and official control of rainwater have disturbed the natural flow, but the names got stuck to the sites, and some of them have even acquired a greater recognition. The area called **Ghajn Abdul** (‘Abdul’s spring’, in Gozo), and **Wied-il-Ghajn** (‘the valley of the spring’) and **Ghajntuffieha** (‘Uffieha’s spring?’) (both in Malta), are such examples. The last name stands for a very popular sandy beach on the north-west, while the former co-exists with another name, **Marsaskala**, for a once-popular natural harbour in the south-east of Malta.

‘Salim’s spring’ still delivers, but **Ghajnsielem** has today earned the credit of a name of a village which incorporates the very important **Il-Port**, *alias* **Ix-Xatt**, *alias* **L-Imgarr** harbour, and is inhabited by some 2,500 people, including many fishermen.²⁷

The name does not take the article because its morphological set-up denotes the use of the construct state, in which case the second composite word immediately designates ownership or possession, hence ‘Salim’s spring’ which, in English syntax, does not require the use of the definite article neither.

Marsalforn

This name pertains to a very popular summer seaside resort in the north of Gozo. A

²⁴ Ibid., p. 190.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ For lists of place-names found in notarial deeds which date to the years 1300–1800, and include the lexeme ‘*ghajn*’, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 181–93. For similar names encountered on the coast of Gozo, cf. Joe Zammit Ciantar, *The Placenames of the Coast of Gozo (Malta)*, Malta, 2000, pp. 78–9.

²⁷ Cf. also Joseph Bezzina, *Ghajnsielem – The Gateway to Gozo*, Malta, 2002.

very small community lives there all the year round. In the past, the name has been registered in various forms such as ‘*marsa alfurni, contrata*’ (13.viii. 1486), ‘*marsalfurni, cala*’ (9.iii.1487), and ‘*marsa Ifurni, pecia de terra*’ (29.ii.1520).²⁸

The bay must have served as a harbour since antiquity. Because it faces the north, sea-faring craft coming from Sicily (from where Gozo may be seen in fine weather) or mainland Italy, must have found **Marsalforn** as their first safe landing place. The name itself infers the use as an anchoring harbour, at least from the times of the Arabs, but most probably from Romans times as well.

The toponym is a composite word, made up of Semitic ‘*marsa*’ + definite article ‘*il*’ + Romance word ‘*forn*’ which derives from Latin *furnus* ‘oven’.²⁹ This does not mean that the harbour did not have a name for itself before the advent of the Arabs. The word ‘*marsa*’ must have been bestowed upon, or at least side-by-side with, a name by which the harbour was known in pre-Arabic times; ‘*forn*’ could have been the case.

In fact ‘*marsa*’, from Arabic مرسى, ‘anchorage’,³⁰ features as the first component of **Marsaskala** (*marsa* + Italian *scala* ‘landing place’), **Marsaxlokk** (*marsa* + Italian *scirocco* ‘south-east’), and **Marsamxett** (*marsa* + *mxett* ‘wintering place’) – three large harbours – and in the name indicating the sea and the town **Il-Marsa**, on the inner side of the Grand Harbour. The four names, like that in Gozo, are associated with harbours good for anchorage and wintering of boats and large sea craft.

The word ‘*forn*’ is today immediately translated by ‘oven’, and the popular association of the ‘anchorage where there is a cave like an oven’ has been expressed in a Portulan of 1490.³¹ However, unless the Gozitan ‘*marsa*’ was associated with some kind of large oven which could supply boats and ships with the bread required for their men on long voyages, ‘*forn*’ could be another of those words which experienced a change in either its form or semantic value, of a remote past, perhaps from the days of Roman rule over the islands. As a matter of fact, it has been conjectured that the Arabicized word *liforn* could be a corruption of Latin

²⁸ Cf. Wettinger 2000, p. 364.

²⁹ Cp. ‘*forn*’ in ‘**Molin del Forn**’ from Arabic ‘فرن’, *furn*, vocable d’origen llatí incorporat molt prest al vocabulary de la llengua àrab.’ Antoni Mut Calafell and Guillem Rosselló Bordoy, *La “Remembrança ...” de Nunyo Sanç – Una relació de les seves propietats a la ruralia de Mallorca*, Palma de Mallorca, 1993, p. 66. G.B. Pellegrini inserts various Italian place-names which derive from, or include the Latin lexeme *furnus*; cf. *Forno*, *Fornoli*, *Fórnoli*, *Fornale*, *Fornase*, *Fornello*, *Poggio al Forno*, *Bocca de For*, and *For*. Cf. Giovanni Battista Pellegrini, *Toponomastica Italiana*, Milan, 1994, p. 220.

³⁰ Hasan S. Karmi, *Al-Manar – An English-Arabic Dictionary*, Beirut, 1971, *sub* ‘anchorage’.

³¹ Cf. Wettinger 2000, p. 364.

Liburna or Greek *Λιβύρνον* meaning ‘an Illyrian type of ship’, thence **Marsalforn** could mean ‘the vessels’ harbour’.³²

Very recently I have come across with Portuguese ‘*furna*’ which stands for ‘cave; cavern; den; grotto’.³³ I have also encountered the names **Estrada Furna** and **Porto de Furna** for a street and a small harbour, both located near the town of Vigo, on the north-western coast of Spain, just north of the border with Portugal.

Then, **Marsalforn** must have gained its name from that of the prominent deep sea cave, still called **Il-Forna**, and infers ‘the harbour near the cave’. It must be noted that ‘*forna*’, has been interpreted to be ‘a word used by Gozitan fishermen to refer to “a cave hollowed out by the sea”’.³⁴

The name may be compared with that of **Kalafrana** – made up of ‘*kala*’ < ‘*qala*’ (‘a port, harbour’) + ‘*frana*’ (which at face value could be a derivative of ‘*forn*’, too) in Malta,³⁵ and **California** (in the USA) made up of *cala* (‘inlet’) + *fornia*.

The names preceded by the article

Il-Fontana (population c.852)

Il-Fontana is another hydronym. Both Gozitan place-name **Fontana** (< Maltese ‘funtana’) and English ‘fountain’ derive from Italian *fontana* ‘fountain’ or, perhaps better, ‘spring’. In Gozo it refers to a spring which delivers an abundant amount of water all the year round, but today it refers to the place, dwelt in by a sizeable community, that might be considered as an extension to Victoria’s. This place is also called **It-Triq ta’ l-Għajn** (‘the street of the fountain’), and this is the name more popularly used by most of Gozitans.

The word ‘*triq*’ in the latter name surmises ‘street’, while ‘*ghajn*’ renders precisely the equivalent of ‘spring’. The long composite name associated itself to the small inhabited area because, up to several years ago, the only houses stood along the first half kilometre or so of the road which leads from **Rabat** to **Xlendi**, and at the bottom end of which a large natural spring delivered precious fresh water. Unfortunately, buildings and cattle-rearing on the rocky grounds through which rainwater permeates, and under which the spring runs, have polluted the water and today it is undrinkable though it is used for washing clothes – even by

³² Joseph Busuttill, ‘Onomastique – Marsa’, *Orbis*, Tom XXI, 2, Nuneaton, 1972, pp. 520–2.

³³ Cf. ‘**furna**: cave, cavern, den, grotto’, *Dicionário Português / Portuguese Dictionary*, in <http://pt.thefreedictionary.com/furna>, sub ‘**furna**’; (Site accessed on 30.ix.2010).

³⁴ Cf. <http://www.selltimeshare.co.uk/wiki.asp?k=Marsalforn> (Site accessed on 28.x.2009).

³⁵ Cf. Dunstan G. Bellanti, *Why Malta? Why Ghawdex?*, (2nd edition), Malta, 1943, p. 78.

³⁷ Wettinger 2000, p. 185.

some women who still go there to wash their laundry by hand – and is hence known as **L-Ghajn tal-Hasselin** ('the spring of the washerwomen').

Under the Order of St John, however, the quantity of water available was controlled, and **Il-Fontana** became definitely an extremely popular landmark. The little rainfall in the Maltese islands, and the lack of similar significant springs in Rabat, necessarily made the place known and frequented. The name has been rendered as '*fons magnus*' (2.i.1373),³⁷ '*Gran Fontana*' (9.vi.1567),³⁸ '*gayn ilkibire*' (30.x.1501), '*hain kibire*' (14.ix.1522), '*Jll hain chibire*' (2.vi.1578), and '*Aayn il Kibira*' (1647),³⁹ and today **L-Ghajn il-Kbira**, all meaning 'the great spring'.

This is the only case in Maltese where the lexical term '*fontana*' associated with 'a spring' has survived; otherwise, the word, in the form of '*funtana*' and its plural form '*funtani*', is today used to denote man-built embellishing 'fountains',⁴⁰ among which the most popular distinguishing landmark 'Il-Funtana ta' Putirjal' at Valletta's main bus terminal.

L-Gharb (population c.1172)

Gharb is the name of the village on the remote north-western headland of Gozo. The name is today used only in association with a particular village, but in the distant past it simply denoted 'west', the place of sunset. The vocable derives from Arabic غرب, related to that used by the Phoenicians for whom the 'west' embraced the Mediterranean Sea and the continent today called 'Europe' – a name which most probably derives from Phoenician; compare Classical Biblical Hebrew ברע for 'evening'.

The word is today pronounced /a:rb/; the initial '*gh*' – standing for Arabic غ – represents a silent phoneme. However, this was once pronounced /*ghain*/.⁴¹ It forms part of the Arabic speech sounds, but is lacking in Latin, Sicilian, and Italian, the languages used at one time or another by the various administrations of the islands since the Normans took over in 1091. Hence the difficulty to represent the sound with any of the Roman letters, and the eventual rendering of the initial '*gh*' very often by 'g' in '*garbi*' – 'a district so called' – registered in a notarial deed which dates back to 6.ix.1487.⁴² The name appears written '*garb*' and '*charb*' in deeds of

³⁸ Cf. Joseph Bezzina, *Fontana – It-Triq tal-Ghajn – The Village of Valleys and Springs*, Malta, 2001, p. 9.

³⁹ Wettinger 2000, p. 185.

⁴⁰ Cf. Charles Galea Scannura *et al.*, *Funtani fil-Belt / Fountains in Valletta*, Malta, 1988.

⁴¹ 'غ ghain is the sound made in gargling, or like the French "r" grasséyé with a little more of the 'g' in it.' J.A. Haywood and H.M. Nahmed, *A new Arabic grammar of the written language* (reprint of the second edition), Great Britain, 1984, p. 7.

⁴² Wettinger 2000, p. 213.

10.xii.1517 and 31.vii.1618 respectively.⁴³ It starts to be written down ‘*Garbo*’ in ecclesiastical documents from the middle of the sixteenth century onwards.⁴⁴

L-Ghasri (population c.407)

The name **Ghasri** is of Semitic origin and stands for a very small village situated close to **Żebbuġ** and **Gharb**. The name was recorded as ‘*Jl hasri, contrata*’ by a notary in a deed dated 4.iii.1587.⁴⁵

Linguistically **Ghasri** has been analysed as being ‘a masculine adjective’ derived from Semitic noun ‘*ghasar*’ (‘*vespers*’), from Arabic عصر, by extension interpreted as meaning ‘squeezed between two points, between the light (of day) and darkness (after sunset)’,⁴⁶ or ‘*vespers*’ land’.⁴⁷

The word has been attributed a meaning associated with the Semitic verb ‘*ghasar*’ from Arabic عصر which means ‘to press, to squeeze’, too. Hence it had been related to ‘grape *or* olive-oil presses’.⁴⁸ As a matter of fact, the late Prof. Joseph Aquilina placed the toponym among the different explanations for Maltese verb ‘*ghasar*’ ‘to press’. He inserted the name immediately after GHASRI (a masculine adjective) and gave the meaning ‘Backward (topon[omy] Occurring in place-names [...] *L-Ghasri*, a village in Gozo, and *Wied il-Ghasri*, a valley in Gozo.’⁴⁹ **Ghasri** village, in fact, lies retreated in a stretch of low land beneath **Żebbuġ** on its north-west, and hidden among higher land all round.

It has also been hypothesized that **Ghasri** could be a personal name or nickname, hence meaning ‘The Ghasri’.⁵⁰

Notwithstanding these rational linguistic interpretations, the word may be a remnant of a totally different etymology. Time and changes in the phonetics of the Maltese language might have helped forge ‘*ghasri*’ and made it look as one of the toponyms too easy to explain through available lexicography. The original form and meaning could have been quite different.

L-Imgarr

This name stands for the small harbour which provides shelter for yachts, but mostly fishing boats owned by fishermen largely coming from **Ghajnsielem** – of

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Cf. Joseph Bezzina, *Gozo – A historical glimpse*, Gaulitana No. 5, Malta, 1988, p. 19.

⁴⁵ Wettinger 2000, p. 217.

⁴⁶ Cf. Bezzina 1988, p. 21.

⁴⁷ Cf. Wettinger 2000, p. 217.

⁴⁸ Cf. Bezzina 1988, p. 21.

⁴⁹ Cf. Aquilina 1987–1990, *sub* ‘GHASAR²’.

⁵⁰ Cf. Wettinger 2000, p. 217.

which it makes part – and today the large ferryboats owned by the Gozo Channel Co. Only a very small community lives at **Mġarr**.

This place seems to have served as a very important harbour since antiquity. Because of its position, sheltered from all the winds which blow from the northern arch of the wind-rose, comprising the westerly through the north-easterly, sheltered by Comino and Malta from the south-easterly through the south, facing Malta on the south-east, it has always served as a landing place for the Gozo-Malta-Gozo boat and ferry connections. Gozo's nature's and man-made products always left for Malta from here. And provisions from Malta, always reached the inhabitants through this harbour; hence its name **Imġarr**, which word may be assessed as being a mimated noun, derived from Semitic verb 'ġarr', < Arabic جر 'he carried', hence, rendering the hypothetical meaning of 'the carrying place'.⁵¹

The name was recorded as 'Miciaro' in a fifteenth-century Portulan,⁵² 'ilmijar', on 21.x.1505⁵³ and 'el migiar' in 1587.⁵⁴

However, 'imġarr' has been interpreted as implying 'watercourses', i.e. plural form of 'miġra' (in which case the spelling should be rendered as 'imġar' with one 'r') 'watercourse',⁵⁵ too; in this case, **L-Imġarr** would be another hydronym. Yet, since the name, used by the Gozitans stands side-by-side with variants **Il-Port** ('the harbour'), and **Ix-Xatt** ('the coast'), and the place has been an active harbouring and landing place helping to ferry man and his supplies between the two larger islands from time immemorial, I tend to accept the former derivation, and the morphology of *Miciaro* (in the Portulan) corroborates this hypothesis. I believe there must have been other watercourses in both Gozo and Malta, which would have otherwise left similar names in other parts of both islands. Yet these are non-existent.

By itself, **Imġarr** (usually written **Mġarr**; the initial 'i' is a euphonic vowel) features only once in Gozo and once in Malta where it was once associated with a small inlet on the north-west coast, and is today the name of a relatively small village which lies on a high plateau, a little distance away from the same inlet.

The word features as a composite part of a name associated with another inlet in Gozo: **Mġarr ix-Xini** (where 'xini' could stand for 'galley'), a short distant away by sea, east of **L-Imġarr**. This could have been a landing place too. But, again, the name has been translated as 'watercourses pertaining to Xeni (a personal name)'.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Wettinger includes this meaning as a 'normal rendering'. However, he upholds the 'watercourses' meaning. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 376 and 377.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 376.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 276.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 377.

Il-Munxar (population *c.* 1,089)

This is the name of a small village which has developed on the southern side of a valley which begins from the village of **Ta' Sannat**, and runs on into **Il-Wied tax-Xlendi**, a deep valley which leads to **Xlendi Bay**, on the western coast of Gozo.

The name, which is a mimated form of the verb '*naxar*'⁵⁷ derived from Arabic نشر where it means 'to saw', seems to have formed part of the Maltese language to describe 'saw', or 'saw-like objects' but by time fell out of use; '*serrieq*' from Arabic سراقه has replaced its popular usage. It has been compared to Arabic 'المنشار / per serram serram'.⁵⁸

The lexeme '*munxar*' features in other Maltese place-names too; compare **Il-Munxar**, name associated with a pointed promontory on the left-hand side of the bay of **San Tumas**, in Malta, which was registered as '*ta monxar, clausura in contrata sancti thome*' on 30.v.1544.⁵⁹ Compare also the toponyms '*talmunxar*' (near Gudja), and '*Jl monxur, clausura in contrata tel apsi*' (near Ghar Lapsi), both in Malta, written down in deeds dating back to 31.i.1519, and 3.viii.1541 respectively, and **Habel Munxar**, **Habel Munxar il-Ġewwenija**, and **Xaghret il-Munxar**, with no identified location.⁶⁰

The name of the village in Gozo features in '*tal munxar, duae clausurae in contrata cortin xilendi*' (on 29.x.1562), '*il monxar*' (on 2.vii.1584), and '*tal monxar*' (on 24.iv.1588).⁶¹

From comparison between the geo-morphological features next to **Il-Munxar** in Gozo, and of **Il-Munxar** in Malta, it may easily transpire that the land so called was compared with the characteristics of a saw, and hence the call-name. The name in Gozo must have originated from that once possibly referring to the conspicuous long and high pointed saw-like promontory which stands in between two valleys – one starting from **Victoria**, the other from **Ta' Sannat** village, and passes just beneath **Il-Munxar** – that eventually join in a deep ravine: the latter half of **Il-Wied tax-Xlendi**.

In-Nadur (population *c.* 4,206)

The word '*nadur*' definitely derives from Arabic نظر – which means 'to watch'. Hence the word renders the meaning of 'look-out point, place suitable for militia

⁵⁷ Cp. **Naxxar**, the name of a large town in Malta. This name may be assessed as that of a tradesman: 'a man who saws', with which cp. **Żabbar** (the name of another large town in Malta) 'a man who prunes (trees)'.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 405.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

guard duty'.⁶² In fact, it features in several place-names in both Malta and Gozo.⁶³ In Malta, it is found associated with a very important prehistoric archaeological site referred to by **Borg in-Nadur** ('the watch tower').⁶⁴ The word also features in Italian toponymy.⁶⁵

Reference to **In-Nadur** in Gozo features at least as early as 21 March 1533,⁶⁶ and was written '*nadur, contrata*' in a notarial deed dated 21.iii.1534.⁶⁷

The village is situated on the plateau of a large hill, overlooking sandy beaches separated by rocky promontories which characterize the northern coast of the island. From an old watch-tower, which still stands on the headland of this plateau, the militia men used to watch out against possible enemy landings at **Ir-Ramla l-Hamra** ('the red sandy beach'), or **Dahlet Qorrot** ('Qorrot's inlet'), or **Ir-Ramla ta' San Blas** ('St Blaise's sandy beach').

Il-Qala (population 2,258 in March 2010)

This is the name of a secluded village situated on the eastern part of Gozo and standing on a plateau overlooking coves and creeks both on the north-east and on the south-east. Among the latter, one finds picturesque **Hondoq ir-Rummien**, **Iż-Żewwieqa**, and a very out-of-the-way fascinating inlet called **Il-Bughaż** from Arabic جعاز meaning 'a cove', today frequented by owners of private sea-craft in search of quiet and inaccessible bathing places.

The word by itself, preceded by the definite article only, **Qala** refers to the village in Gozo. However, it features as part of other place-names too; compare **Il-Qala tad-Dwejra**, and **Il-Qala tax-Xlendi**, in Gozo, and **Il-Qala ta' l-Għażzenin** (St Paul's Bay), **Il-Qala ta' l-Ghożlien** (Marfa), **Il-Qala ta' l-Imġarr** (near Mġarr), **Il-Qala ta' Wied il-Buni**, and **Il-Qala ta' Wied Xaqqa** (near Benghisa) in Malta.⁶⁸ It seems that in these cases '*qala*' refers to an inlet or a creek as the names in Gozo infer. Strange enough, the name **Il-Qala ta' l-Imġarr** recorded by G.F. Abela in 1647⁶⁹ does not refer to **L-Imġarr** in Gozo. Still, in the past, '*qala*' could have referred to **L-Imġarr** (in Gozo) as well.

⁶² Cf. *ibid.*, p. 409.

⁶³ For names of several localities which include '*nadur*' as part thereof, cf. *ibid.*, pp. 409–10.

⁶⁴ The word is also associated with the name referring to megalithic prehistoric Mnajdra Temples. The word 'mnajdra' is the mimated diminutive form of '*nadur*' too.

⁶⁵ Cf. **Nadure**. Caracausi derives the word from Arabic 'nāzūr' 'alta torre sulle muraglia, da dove si fa la guardia', 'fanale, faro'. Caracausi 1993, *sub* 'Nadure', p. 1094.

⁶⁶ Bezzina 1988, p. 29.

⁶⁷ Wettinger 2000, p. 409.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

⁶⁹ Cf. *Cala tal Mugiarr*, in Gian Francesco Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta, isola del mare siciliano, con le sue antichità ed altre notizie*, Malta, 1647, p. 24.

Joe Bezzina assertively states that the name ‘*chaleta*’, ‘a small *qala*’, which features in a fifteenth-century Portulan ‘written in Venetian, preserved in the Vatican Library’ definitely refers to **Hondoq ir-Rummien** (‘the valley of the pomegranates’), and that it must have been this *cala* which eventually gave its name to the village which developed on the plateau above.⁷⁰

Otherwise, it could have been the other creek (lately transformed into a small busy harbour), today known as **L-Imġarr**, and once possibly commonly referred to as ‘*cala*’ as well, which might have given the name to the inhabited area today simply called **Il-Qala**.

The word could be mixed up with Arabic قلعة meaning ‘fort’. However, it may probably be a residue of late Latin *cala* ‘inlet’,⁷¹ ‘*seno di mare*’, ‘*porto*’⁷² as it definitely stands for in Maltese toponyms associated with names on the shoreline.⁷³

Ix-Xaghra (population c.4,946 in March 2010)

The word ‘*xaghra*’ has been related to Spanish *xara* ‘bramble’ from Arabic شعراء,⁷⁴ and Arabic ثعري and الثعرا.⁷⁵ In Maltese it is a common noun, and refers to ‘a large open plain’, very often ‘uncultivable, sterile land’.⁷⁶ It is met with in many toponyms associated with different places in both islands, in either of the forms ‘*xaghra*’, ‘*xaghri*’ (plural form), ‘*xghajra*’ (diminutive form) (with which compare **Ix-Xghajra tal-Furjana** and **Ix-Xghajra ta’ Haż-Żabbar** – both in Malta), and ‘*xaghret*’. In Gozo I have collected eight place-names which include ‘*xaghra*’ and seven with the adjectival form ‘*xaghri*’.⁷⁷ Napoleon Tagliaferro gives 55 names with ‘*xaghra*’, 6 with ‘*xaghri*’, 1 with ‘*xaghriet*’, and 1 with ‘*xaghar*’,⁷⁸ in both islands. On the other hand, Wettinger lists at least 61 place-names which include

⁷⁰ Cf. Joseph Bezzina, *Qala – The Village with Valleys and Views*, Malta, 2003, p. 7.

⁷¹ Wettinger 2000, p. 431.

⁷² Cf. Caracausi 1993, *sub* ‘Cala’, p. 233.

⁷³ Caracausi cites **Cala** and various other composite names which include this word as the first element. The author, however, states that in some of the toponyms cited, unless they refer to localities on the coast, the word could be a residue of Arabic ‘*qal’ah*’. *Ibid.*, *sub* ‘Cala’, p. 233. Then he cites [qal’ah] under the letter ‘Q’, and explains ‘voce araba per “fortezza, cittadella”.’ *Ibid.*, *sub* [qal’ah], p. 1300.

⁷⁴ Cf. Aquilina 1987–90, *sub* ‘XAGHRA’.

⁷⁵ Wettinger 2000, p. 602.

⁷⁶ With which cp. Sicilian *sciara* ‘campo di arena’, ‘terra incolta ove crescono piante selvatiche’ which derives from Arabic ‘*šar’ah*’ variant of Arabic ‘*šar’rā*’. Caracausi 1993, *sub* ‘Sciara’, p. 1490.

⁷⁷ Cf. Joe Zammit Ciantar, ‘A Linguistic Study of Gozitan Toponymy’, unpublished thesis presented to the Faculty of Arts of the University of Malta, for MA in Maltese, in 1978, index, p. 183.

⁷⁸ Cf. Aquilina 1987–90, *sub* ‘XAGHRA’.

‘*xaghra*’, 16 with ‘*xaghret*’, and 4 with ‘*xaghri*’, which he traced in notarial deeds written between 1300 and 1800.⁷⁹

Identified as it is alone with the definite article, **Ix-Xaghra** refers to one of the large villages of Gozo, situated on a plateau extending on top of the hill that stands between **Marsalforn** and **In-Nadur**, on the northern part of Gozo. In the past, the village was known by other names such as **Tal-Qaċċa**, **Casal Caccia**, and **Xaghret I-Ghazzenin**. However, **Xaghra** was registered as ‘*thax ahara*’ on 17.ii.1518,⁸⁰ and as ‘*ta xahura, contrata*’ on 21.iii.1561.⁸¹

This place has been inhabited since prehistoric times. Conspicuous remains of a Neolithic community are extant in the temples of Ġgantija – the oldest free-standing structures in the world, dating back to c.3600 BC – and in the burial place known as Brocktorff’s Circle, dating back to c.3000 BC.

Ix-Xewkija (population c.3,105)

This is a phyto toponym. The name, attributed to a large extensive village midway between **Ghajnsiela** and **Victoria**, is situated on the side of a deep ravine-like valley which from **Ta’ Sannat** leads to **Mġarr ix-Xini**, hence called **Wied Imġarr ix-Xini**. This valley divides **Ix-Xewkija** from the heights which extend to **Ta’ Ċenċ Cliffs** on the south of Gozo.⁸²

The earliest recorded form ‘*xeukie*’, for **Xewkija** in Gozo, we know of goes back to 9.iii.1487.⁸³ The same name must have been associated with several other sites in Malta. Reference to these is made in the following forms: ‘*xeukie*’ (9.iii.1487), ‘*xeukje*’ (Tal-Hasewi – 9.iv.1506), ‘*xeukje sive ilhaseli*’ (11.iv.1506), ‘*xeukie*’ (Hal Ġwann – 1.viii.1508), ‘*Ta xeuchie*’ (Hal Kaprat – 1536), ‘*xeukie*’ (Hal Tartarni – 28.vi.1536), ‘*Jxeuchie*’ (Hal Ġer – 9.iii.1541), ‘*te xeuchie*’ (Hal Djar Binsinjur – 28.vii.1542), ‘*ta xeuchie*’ (Djar Binsinjur – 5.xii.1548), ‘*xeukie*’ (23.xi.1573), and ‘*xeuquie*’ (12.xi.1588).⁸⁴

The word’s morphology is assessed as being an adjectival form of ‘*xewk*’ ‘thistle’, hence possibly describing ‘a place full of thistle plants’. The name has been explained as referring to ‘thorny land’.⁸⁵ Joe Bezzina conjectures that ‘[...] thistles grow locally in both waste and cultivated land. They must have been especially abundant at *Xewkija*, which got its name from them.’⁸⁶ The fact that

⁷⁹ Cf. Wettinger 2000, pp. 602–10.

⁸⁰ Cf. Joseph Bezzina, *Xaghra – The Village of the Goddess and the Madonna*, Malta 2001, p. 9.

⁸¹ Wettinger 2000, p. 602.

⁸² Cf. also Bezzina, *Xaghra ...*, Malta 2001.

⁸³ Wettinger 2000, p. 616.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Bezzina 1988, p. 39. Cf. Also Joseph Bezzina, *Xewkija – The first Village of Gozo*, Malta, 2004.

there are several place-names which had this adjectival form associated with them may corroborate this explanation.

One very particular characteristic of the inhabitants of this village is that they do not pronounce the ‘q’ /ʔ/ glottal stop of modern Maltese. Instead, they still utter the ف /qāf/ of Classical Arabic. This may be a deposit remnant of Arab rule. Although, after the Norman conquest, the Arabs who did not convert to Christianity were expelled in 1249, those who stayed over, were perhaps in a great number in Xewkija. Whatever the case, this phenomenon still lingers on, and people brought up in this village grow up pronouncing the ف phoneme as part of their Maltese phonetic sounds.

Ix-Xlendi

If **Marsalforn** could in some way be associated with a pre-Arabic Illyrian vessel, *liburna*, like ‘xwejni’ (‘little galley’, in **Ix-Xwejni**) and ‘xini’ (‘galley’ in **Mgarr ix-Xini**) (both in Gozo), ‘*xlendi*’ has always been related to a Byzantine ship: *Xelandion*, in Arabic known as الشاندى ⁸⁷ *xalandi*.⁸⁸ The name has been recorded as ‘*lu xilendi*’ on 5.iii.1526.⁸⁹ Alexander Borg states that the place-name **Xlendi** could be a residue of the Byzantine period; it is traceable to Greek χελαυδιου meaning ‘*bateaux legers* of the Byzantine navy’.⁹⁰

The name identifies a small romantic fishing village with a beautiful long and narrow bay lodged between high breath-taking cliffs which stretch up to **Munxar** – of which it makes part – on one side and to **Ta’ Kerċem** on the other. It faces west-southwest. Its beauty has been spoilt by high blocks of flats which accommodate the great number of visitors who spend summer there. Notwithstanding this, **Xlendi** provides the tranquillity and serenity of the past. The bay, dotted with fishermen’s colourful boats, sheltered between the grey high rocks on both sides, still enchants the visitor, especially at sunset, but even throughout the winter months from October to April.

Iż-Żebbuġ (population c.1,818)

This is the name of a village situated on top of two hills joined by a ridge, towering above **Marsalforn** and its bays on one side, and above the small village of **Ghasri** on the other.

With regards to early occurrence of the village name, a piece of land, enclosed with a wall, called ‘*zebugi*’, in the limits of ‘*ayin il cosaf*’ (not necessarily in

⁸⁷ Wettinger 2000, p. 621.

⁸⁸ Cf. Bezzina 1988, p. 41.

⁸⁹ Wettinger 2000, p. 621.

⁹⁰ Borg 1994, pp. 33–4.

Gozo), features in a document which dates back to 1399, while another ‘*zebugi*’ definitely in Gozo, is written in a notarial deed of 12.x.1435.⁹¹

In Maltese, ‘*żebbuġ*’ has the form of a collective plural of ‘*żebbuġa*’ ‘an olive’ (*Teucrium fruticans*) from Arabic زبوج , and expresses either ‘olives’ or ‘[wild] olive-trees’. The word features in the name of a large town in Malta: **Haz-Żebbuġ**, where ‘*ħaz*’ represents ‘*ħal*’, an abbreviated form of ‘*raħal*’ (‘village’), hence ‘The village of olives/[wild] olive-trees’.

The names preceded by the possessive *ta*’

Ta’ Sannat (population *c.*2,100 in October 2010)

This is the name of a village situated on the side of a sloping large extent of rocky land that stretches from the plateau between **Ir-Rabat** and this village, to **Ta’ Ċenċ Cliffs** on the south.

This is a name about which I have written at length. In my study,⁹² I have conjectured the possibility that the word ‘*sannat*’ could be an adjectival form derived from ‘*sined*’ (‘a stretch of barren and hilly land’ on the side of a hill), possibly from Arabic سنت or سند , plural ‘*isinda*’. I do not believe it could be rendered as Ta’ San Nat, in which case ‘Nat’ could be an abbreviated name of a saint, such as *Fortunat* or *Coronat*.⁹³ However, Aquilina states that ‘A more plausible origin of this village-name is that *sannat* preceded by *Ta*’ [...] derives from a Sic[ilian] or It[alian] surname indicating the original owner of the area [...]’.⁹⁴ This is supported by Wettinger who cites the name registered as ‘*di sannatu, territorio dila dicta terra dilu Gozu*’ on 13.i.1468, and explains ‘*sannat*’ as ‘A personal name or surname;’ corroborating his argument with similar names quoted by Cusa and Rholfs.⁹⁵

Ta’ Kerċem (population *c.*1,883 – in October 2010)

The village with this name is situated on the side of a large slope that stretches from **Victoria** to the relatively small **Santa Luċija** and **L-Gholja ta’ Ghar Ilma** (‘the hill of the water cave’), far behind the village.

The particle ‘*ta*’’, as has been observed, denotes possession. It must have stuck to an area which once pertained to someone carrying the name or nickname of

⁹¹ Wettinger 2000, p. 628.

⁹² Cf. Joe Zammit Ciantar, ‘The Toponym *Sannat*’, *Onoma*, XXVI, 1–3, Leuven, 1982, and Joe Zammit Ciantar, ‘The Origin of *Sannat*’, *The Sunday Times* [of Malta], 24.vii.1988.

⁹³ Cf. Aquilina 1987–1990, *sub* ‘SANNÂT’.

⁹⁴ Cf. *ibid.*

⁹⁵ Wettinger 2000, p. 506.

‘kerċem’, as has been suggested by Gozitan historian Gian Pietro Francesco Agius De Soldanis in 1750. The name has been compared to a personal name in Western Palestine by Aquilina in ‘*ajjn Abu Kerzem*’ (‘the spring of Abu Kerzem’).⁹⁶ On the other hand, Wettinger asserts that the name infers ‘Kirchim’ in the meaning: ‘Belonging to Kerċem, undoubtedly a surname or personal nickname; cf. Antonius Kirchim Melitensis habitator terriae Heracliae, Sicily, 12.iii.1539.’⁹⁷

The villages with names of saints

The last two names are hagio toponyms; they denote names of villages – **San Lawrenz** and **Santa Luċija** – obtained from the names of St Laurence and St Lucy respectively.

San Lawrenz (population c.593)

San Lawrenz is a relatively small village, situated in the shade of **Ta’ Dbiegi** hill, on the high land above the bay of **Dwejra**, and in the vicinity of **Gharb**.

The village gained the name from that of St Lawrence to whom an old church dedicated to him stood on the spot where the modern one was eventually built, and around which the village developed. The church features in the apostolic visit to Malta, made by Mgr Pietro Dusina in 1575: ‘*Ecclesia sub vocabulo Sancti Laurentij sita in loco dicto Garbo [...]*’⁹⁸ and was ‘well kept’.⁹⁹ Reference to the name, written as ‘*ta dueyre sive sancti Laurentii, contrata in territoriis Insulae Gaudisii*’, is also made in a notarial deed of 20.xii.1584.¹⁰⁰

Santa Luċija

Santa Luċija is a hamlet on the periphery, and forms part, of **Ta’ Kerċem** village.

In Malta, a new pre-planned town which has developed and expanded over the last 60 years, was named **Santa Luċija** after a chapel dedicated to the Sicilian saint which stands near the town.

The name, which might be indicative of the rural community in Gozo, features in a notarial deed as ‘*S. lucie ta cabese, contrata*’ dating to 22.viii.1570.¹⁰¹ A small church dedicated to the saint, which seems to have undergone little changes in the past, was visited by Mgr Dusina in 1575. He recorded it as ‘*Ecclesia sub vocabulo*

⁹⁶ Cf. Aquilina 1987–1990, *sub* ‘KERĊEM’.

⁹⁷ Wettinger 2000, p. 342.

⁹⁸ Cf. George Aquilina and Stanley Fiorini (eds.), *Documentary Sources of Maltese history – Part IV – Documents at the Vatican – No. 1 Archivio Segreto Vaticano Congregazione Vescovi e Regolari – Malta: Visita Apostolica no. 51 Mgr Petrus Dusina*, 2001, p. 193.

⁹⁹ Bezzina 1988, p. 33.

¹⁰⁰ Wettinger 2000, p. 496.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

Sanctae Luciae sita in dicta contrata de Cabeze [...]'.¹⁰² It still provides spiritual services for the community.

Conclusion

As may have been observed, besides their intrinsic linguistic forms, the names distinguishing the town and villages of Gozo form part of the prismatic toponymy of the Maltese islands.

The words '*forn*' in **Marsalforn** and '*qala*' in **Il-Qala** may lead us to the times when Malta was under the Latin influence of the Romans, while **Xlendi** may suggest a trace of the Byzantines in Malta.

But most of the names – including **L-Ghajn il-Kbira**, **It-Triq Ta' L-Ghajn**, **Ghajnsielem**, **Gharb**, **Munxar**, **Nadur**, **Rabat**, **Xaghra**, **Xewkija**, and **Żebbuġ** – seem to have been assigned during the Arab period, a phase which definitely left what eventually became the basis of today's Maltese language. This is conformant with the origin of most of the Maltese toponyms. Many of these – such as **Gharb**, **Munxar**, **Nadur**, **Rabat**, **Xaghra**, and **Xewkija** – have descriptive characteristics associated with the place they distinguish.

Although **Ghasri** and **Sannat** may sound like personal names or nicknames, they too have a Semitic shade. However, they are also representative of toponyms which, although they suggest an immediate meaning, may be remnants of words lost in time and memory. Meanwhile, **Ghajnsielem**, **Kerċem**, and **Sannat** might be considered as indicative of possession; they are reminiscent of patronymic toponyms – in other words toponyms which indicate that the original places so called once pertained to someone called Selim, Kirċem, and Sannat(u) respectively.

Fontana is the only Romance name indicative of the period when Italian was used by the administration of the islands especially in the days of the Order of St John.

On the other hand, **San Lawrenz** and **Santa Luċija**, Romance names rendered with Maltese phonetic characters, are village names which evolved from those of saints venerated in small chapels – with which the islands' countryside abounds – hence hagio toponyms,¹⁰³ proof of the Christian faith the inhabitants embraced in the early years of Christianity, strengthened with the coming of the Normans in 1091, and they still cherish today.

Acknowledgements

Mr Mario Cassar, MA; Mr Louis J. Scerri, MA;
Fr. Charles Buttigieg, S.Th.L. (Biblical Theology); and the Local Councils of Gozo.

¹⁰² Cf. Aquilina and Fiorini 2001, p. 189.

¹⁰³ Cp. with similar hagio toponyms for towns: **San Ġwann**, **Santa Luċija**, **Santa Venera**, **San Pawl il-Baħar**, and **Santa Venera**, and for bays **Il-Bajja ta' San Ġorġ** and **Il-Bajja ta' San Tumas** (all in Malta), and **San Blas** (St Blaise in Gozo).

Appendix

The Maltese alphabet consists of 30 letters; 6 vowels and 24 consonants.

Grapheme	IPA phoneme	Name of letter	English phoneme
A, a	/a/	a	car
B, b	/b/	be	bar
C, ċ	/tʃ/	ċe	church
D, d	/d/	de	do
E, e	/e/	e	elm
F, f	/f/	fe	far
G, ġ	/dʒ/	ġe	germ
G, g	/g/	ge	guard
GH, Gh, gh ¹⁰⁴	//gh//	ghajn	-
H, h	//h//	akka	-
H, ħ	/h/	ħe	hotel
I, i	/i/	i	him
IE, Ie, ie ¹⁰⁵	/iə/	ie	year
J, j	/y/	je	pay
K, k	/k/	ke	kin
L, l	/l/	le	lard
M, m	/m/	me	mark
N, n	/n/	ne	no
O, o	/o/	o	doll
P, p	/p/	pe	part
Q, q	/ʔ/ ¹⁰⁶	qe	-
R, r	/r/	re	roll
S, s	/s/	se	sit
T, t	/t/	te	top
U, u	/u/	u	bull
V, v	/v/	ve	vest
W, w	/w/	we	wow
X, x	/ʃ/ or /ʒ/ ¹⁰⁷	xe	shut <i>and</i> vision
Z, z	/z/	ze	cosy
Z, z	/tʒ/ or /dʒ/ ¹⁰⁸	ze	pizza <i>and</i> gazette

¹⁰⁴ The digraph **Gh** must be considered as one letter, and its corresponding lower case is **gh**. Its place in the alphabet is between the **G** and the **H**. Cf. *Tagħrif Fuq il-Kiġba Maltija*, Malta, 1924, pp. xxii-iii, and p. 3. In Arabic dictionaries, in Edmund J. Sutcliffe, *A Grammar of the Maltese Language*, Malta, 1936, p. 1, and in Joseph Aquilina, *English-Maltese Dictionary*, Vol. II, Malta, 1990, this letter is placed after the letter 'n'.

¹⁰⁵ The digraph **Ie, ie** should be considered as one letter, representing one vocalic sound, hence one letter as in the case of the 'gh'.

¹⁰⁶ The 'q' is pronounced as a glottal stop.

¹⁰⁷ The phoneme /ʃ/ has a sound equal to that of 'x' in Maltese words like **xemx** 'sun', **xifer** 'edge', and **xafra** 'blade', while the /ʒ/ represents that of the same 'x' in Maltese loanwords like **televixin** 'television' and **bex** 'biege'.

¹⁰⁸ The phoneme /tʒ/ has a sound equal to that of the 'z' and 'zz' in Maltese words like **ziju** 'uncle', **pizza** 'pizza' and **pastizz** 'a pie'. On the other hand the phoneme /dʒ/ corresponds to the sound of 'z' or 'zz' in Maltese words like **magazin** 'a magazine', and **gazzetta** 'newspaper', and verb **organizza** 'he organized'.