

# A FOCUS ON GOZO



Edited by  
**Joseph Farrugia**  
and  
**Lino Briguglio**

**Published by the University of Malta Gozo Centre  
in collaboration with the Ministry for Gozo  
and the Foundation for International Studies**

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**Front Cover: A Windmill at Qala, Gozo. Photo: Ted Attard**

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**Editorial Note:**

The letters *ċ* (as in [ch]urch), *ġ* (as in [j]let), *ħ* (as in [h]orse) and *ż* (as in [z]ip) in Maltese words, are rendered in a Maltese font.

Arabic terms have been transcribed as follows: *jim* is rendered by *dj* and *ha* is rendered by *h*. The Arabic *ʿayn* is rendered by *ʿ*.

## **PREFACE**

**The Hon. Anton Tabone**  
*Minister for Gozo*

**T**his is the third volume published by the University of Malta Gozo Centre, since its establishment in 1993. The first two books dealt respectively with Tourism and with Culture in Gozo. The Gozo Centre has now established itself as an important institution in Gozitan life, and its activities and publications are making an important contribution to Gozitan cultural development.

This book contains a selection of papers originally presented in the form of lectures during the course entitled *A Focus on Gozo*, which the Gozo Centre organised in 1994-95. The course, coordinated by Rev. Dr. Joseph Farrugia, was very well attended, and the themes of the talks raised considerable interest among the Gozitan public. The organisers and my Ministry thought it would be good idea if these talks were published in one volume since this permitted the authors to elaborate on the themes of their talks, given that the 45 minute lectures presented a time constraint which restricted the amount of material that could be presented. Moreover, the publication of the lectures in a book adds to the durability of the contributions, since, unlike a lecture which is confined to a specific period of time, a printed paper can be consulted and studied over and over again. In addition, the inclusion of reference sources in the written version of the papers, render them very useful to students and researchers in matters related to Gozo.

A glance at the contents page of the book indicates that the volume covers a wide variety of themes, ranging from the physical to the cultural and the religious. Although a large proportion of the material is related to the history of Gozo, the book cannot be considered exclusively as a contribution to historical literature. Rather, as the editors suggest in their introduction, it is a search for the character and soul of the island.



## *Preface*

Producing a book of this nature requires considerable time and effort. Rev. Dr Joseph Farrugia and Professor Lino Briguglio have done a very good editorial job, considering the diverse nature of the papers and the different academic backgrounds of the contributors. I would like to thank them most heartily for their painstaking work. I would like to thank all the authors of the papers, since, obviously, without their contribution the book could not have been published.

I would also like to thank the Rector of the University of Malta, Rev. Prof. Peter Serracino Inglott, and the members of the Board of the Gozo Centre, for their important contribution to education and culture in Gozo.

My ministry has found it possible, and very rewarding, to collaborate with the Centre, not only in the production of this and the previous two books published by the Centre, but also in the various academic and social activities which the Centre organises from time to time. The fruit of such collaboration, which has now have developed into a strategic alliance, are there for all to see.

## INTRODUCTION

**Joseph Farrugia and Lino Briguglio**

**I**t is arguable whether one may speak of a specifically “Gozitan” culture but there is no doubt that Gozo possesses a soul, a character which is distinctly perceptible and intrinsically its own.

It is a character rooted in its physical features, its geographical location and insularity, and abides in the island’s geology, natural territorial features and vegetation.

It is a cultural character which has drawn from the almost constant presence of man on the island for almost 7000 years. It therefore has had a varied ethnic input which started as far back as the dawn of Mediterranean civilization, and which it now exudes. Gozo’s central position in the Mediterranean placed it at the crossroads of many civilizations and this determined the wide cross-fertilization of its culture.

It is a character moulded by history, bearing memories of plenty and want, peace and violence, freedom, colonization and slavery. The Gozitans have experienced events of great historical moment, events which marked the passage of historical eras and which often saw the local population helplessly entangled in developments which swamped them and anonymously decided their fate and daily fortunes.

Gozo’s character is also a religious one, serenely acknowledging the innate human desire to reach beyond the confines of physical life and establish some kind of contact with perceived divinity and continued life after death.

There is also a contemporary aspect in Gozo's character, in the sense that the island does not wallow in its past, but expresses itself in the more prosaic terms of the present and applies its resolute will to survive and achieve its well-being, in spite of the severe constraints it faces due to its very small size.

## *Introduction*

Such is Gozo's small size that one can mistakenly assume that the personality and character of the island are of little significance, and need not be studied and understood. The contents of this volume show otherwise. The title *A Focus on Gozo*, was chosen precisely because the editors felt that it is very worthwhile zooming in on a number of areas related to the island's physical and cultural development to understand the multifaceted impacts that have shaped the island's character, as we know it today.

Various themes are treated in this book. Dr George Zammit Maempel and Mr Edwin Lanfranco focus their attention on natural and environmental aspects.

Professor Anthony Bonanno explores the island's prehistoric archeology and introduces us to its earliest history.

Rev. Dr Joseph Farrugia explores the religious dimension of Gozo's personality and traces its evolution down the island's history.

Professor Stanley Fiorini, Dr Eugene Montanaro, Dr Albert Camilleri, Rev. Dr Joseph Bezzina and Mr Franco Masini respectively tackle interesting aspects of Medieval, Hospitaller and British Gozo.

Dr Victor Mallia Milanes and Mr Pawlu Mizzi introduce us to some hitherto unexplored problems connected with Gozitan historiography, and issue an important warning as to the interpretation of history.

Professor Joseph Vella, Dr Mario Tabone and Mr Joseph Attard Tabone enrich this publication with their respective focus on some important features of Gozitan culture.

It is hoped that this book will constitute another valid contribution to the literature on Gozo.

We would like to thank the authors of the papers included in this volume, and all those involved in the production of this book, notably Mrs Maryrose Vella, for her secretarial assistance.

## THE GEOLOGY OF GOZO

**George Zammit Maempel**

**I**n the distant past, all knowledge that did not relate to God was considered mundane and was dumped under the heading **Geology** (*Geos*: earth; *logia*: study of) — in contradistinction to Theology (*Theos*: God). It was not before the second half of the 16th century that Geology was used in its modern, restricted sense, in a manuscript attributed to Juanelo Turrientes (Lopez de Azcona, 1987: 48). In the printed form, the term ‘Geology’ appeared a century later when M. P. Escholt published his *Geologia Norvegica* in 1657.

Geology, as we know it today is a science related to the study of rocks and to the natural processes/forces acting upon them. Broadly speaking the geology of Gozo is not much different from that of Malta, but there are a few sedimentary structures as well as some geomorphological and tectonic features which are more evident on one island than on the other.

Gozo is the second largest and the most northern island of the Maltese archipelago, which lies on a Northwest-Southeast axis, with a slight Northeast tilt. As a result of this gentle tilt to the north-east, we can see, to south-west of Gozo, Ta’ Ċenc cliffs, made of rocks from the lowermost Formation on the Maltese Islands, towering to a height of about 140 meters above sea level, whilst on the north, at Marsalforn, the overlying Globigerina Limestone is brought down to sea level. Further westwards on the same coastline, Wied il-Ghasri, excavated in the lowermost geological Formation (Lower Coralline Limestone), is invaded by the sea to form a miniature Fjord.

### **Origin of Rocks**

Like Maltese rocks, Gozitan rocks are of marine sedimentary origin, having been deposited on the bottom of a warm sea, at various depths and

distances from a continental mainland, during the Oligo-Miocene epoch of the Tertiary Period of Geological Time, during an age range of about 30 - 7 million years before present.

With time these marine deposits solidified and became rocks. Then, following severe tectonic disturbances (i.e. great pressures) resulting from the impact of the African and Eurasian Plates, they were raised to the surface as the tips of a submarine ridge that was formed in what is now the central Mediterranean. The ridge extends between Sicily and Tunisia, and divides the central Mediterranean into two unequal hydrographical basins.

The rock types/Formations numbered, in the order of their deposition, i.e. starting from the oldest, are: (1) Lower Coralline Limestone; (2) Globigerina Limestone; (3) Clays; (4) Greensand; and (5) Upper Coralline Limestone. In some places, these marine exposures may be overlain by patches of much younger terrestrial deposits of Pleistocene age ('Ice Age' deposits).

In Gozo, these Pleistocene beds were first recorded in 1874 by Captain F. W. Feilden and Dr E. C. Maxwell. It is very probable that Maxwell lived in the region of San Lawrenz, for an inlet and a stretch of land with an overlying farmhouse in this Western part of Gozo still go by the name of Ta' Maxwell. There are only a few places in Gozo where you can see, at a glance, the entire sequence of rocks forming the Island. Il-Migra is one of them. None of these, however, gives a clear picture of the succession.

Compared to Malta, Gozo has a much more varied geology, with greater relief contrast and more extensive outcrops of clays. This latter factor has an effect on its water supply and consequently on its vegetation, rendering the Island much greener than Malta.

### **Historical Aspects**

The general geology of Gozo was first outlined in 1843 by the young Royal Navy Lieutenant and able marine surveyor, Thomas Abel Brimage Spratt (1811-1888) — later Vice-Admiral T.A.B. Spratt C.B., F.R.S.

## *The Geology of Gozo*

Spratt's scientific contribution in the field of Maltese and Gozitan geology was the subject of two recent publications by the present author (Zammit Maempel, 1986, 1989a).

Spratt's 1843 publication includes a 'Note' and a 'Report' on Maltese Fossils by Edward Forbes, Curator of the Geological Society Collections, as well as an outline map of the Maltese Islands (135 mm x 230 mm). Besides marking the location of two of Gozo's main faults, Spratt's map gives also three Lines of Section: one along the long axis of the Maltese Islands, one across Gozo (Forna - Xlendi, passing through Zebbuġ, Marsalforn Valley, Ramla Valley and Chambray) and another across Malta. In the 1854 edition of this work (a copy of the 1852 edition, the geological sections are in colour.

During recent years, the geology of Gozo has received considerable attention. Great advances have been made particularly in the field of its tectonics (study of the features resulting from deep natural pressures) — a subject that was originally tackled scientifically in some detail by Hobbs in 1914. It was Illies of the Geological Institute of Karlsruhe University, however, who made the first kinematic interpretations of Maltese and Gozitan tectonics (Illies, 1980, 1981). Reuther followed very closely in the foot steps of Illies, his former chief and master, and made further advances in the subject, recording his findings in a thesis and a number of scientific papers — some of which deal specifically or mostly with Gozo tectonic structures (Reuther 1983, 1984, 1993).

In former times, tectonic features were studied merely as local geological events. In recent years, however, these have been studied and interpreted also in the context of their relationship to other global and Mediterranean features — particularly the Pantelleria Rift System in the central Mediterranean region. The Pantelleria Rift system, located between Sicily and Tunisia and occupying an unstable area about 380 km long and 100 km wide, is responsible for the Maghlaq Fault in Malta. It is still affecting the Maltese Islands tectonically. In fact, the last two earthquakes affecting these islands were localized in this still unstable zone. It was the Maghlaq Fault (which extends also to Ras Bombarda in Gozo) that turned Filfla (a one-time high ground on the Maltese mainland) into an island 5 km away from coast.

In addition to the advances made in the field of its tectonics, Gozo has registered great progress also in the study of other geological subjects including sedimentation processes (Pedley *et al.* 1976, Bennet 1980), karstic (limestone solution) features and fossils. Solution subsidence structures, like Dwejra, were first investigated scientifically and in detail by Pedley in 1974, whilst Gozo fossils, have received, and are still receiving, considerable attention by various research workers. In recent years, the echinoids (sea urchins) of Gozo have been investigated mainly by Rose (1974) and by Challis (1980); the calcareous nannofossils by Hojjatzadeh (1978) and Kienel *et al.* (1995) and the Miocene Pteropod molluscs — a relatively new field of local research — by Rehfeld and Janssen (1995).

The great progress made in the study of the tectonic features of Gozo, necessarily followed great advances made in the related field-mapping of the outcrops and fault lines of that island. Newly acquired information was added to the already available basic surveys and this culminated in the preparation of much better and more detailed geological maps. The 1955 field work by a team from Durham University (M.R. House, K.C. Dunham, A.A. Wilson (on behalf of B.P. Exploration Ltd.) lead to the production of the B.P. Geological Map of Gozo and Malta (1957) on a scale of 1: 31, 680 (2 inches to 1 mile). This was followed, in 1964, by another one prepared by J.C. Wigglesworth as part of his PhD thesis. Wigglesworth's map, which showed also the various subdivisions of the Globigerina Limestone, was never published but has served as a basis for further geological maps of the Island. A very slight revision of it was published by Pedley in 1976 and this was reproduced by Zammit Maempel in 1977.

Further detailed field-work on the rock outcrops and on the tectonic features of Gozo have since resulted in the preparation of two other detailed Geological Maps of Gozo. The first of these (230 mm x 90 mm) was prepared in 3-D by Troschke of the Institut für Geologie und Paläontologie, Technische Universität, Berlin, as a *studienarbeit* for his Diploma in Geology. It was published in Reuther and Adam (1993: 14, Abb. 19) and was accompanied by 3-D geological map-blocks of East Gozo, South West Gozo and North West Gozo (p. 16, Abb. 21; p. 20, Abb. 26; p. 24, Abb. 30 respectively).

## *The Geology of Gozo*

The other recent geological map, dated 1933, was issued by the Oil Exploration Directorate of the Prime Minister's Office in 1994 and is the first published geological map of the Island to show the outcrops of the various Members or Divisions of the local rock Formations. It is based on surveys (1 : 25,000) prepared by H. Martyn Pedley of the School of Geography and Earth Resources, University of Hull in 1992 – with corrections made by Godwin Debono and Saviour Xerri of the Oil Division Directorate, Prime Minister's Office, Malta, in 1993.

### **Characteristic Fossils of each Rock Type**

Each of the geological Formations has its own particular or characteristic fossils – i.e. the remains, imprints or products of organisms (plants or animals) that existed in the geological past. Fossils are as old as the rocks containing them, so that specimens found in the lowermost Formation (of Upper Oligocene, Chattian Age) are about 25-30 million years old and those embedded in the youngest rocks (Upper Coralline Limestone, of Upper Miocene Age) date back to over 5.5 million years, whilst those contained within the intervening rock Formations are of an age somewhere in between. The most common and characteristic fossils of each Formation will be reviewed in chronological order of deposition of the Formations.

It should here be recorded that in the Maltese Islands, fossils are protected by Law (The Antiquities Protection Act), so that their unauthorised collection is illegal.

#### *Lower Coralline Limestone (Maltese: Qawwi ta' Taħt, Żonqor)*

The most characteristic fossils of Gozo's oldest rock Formation (Lower Coralline Limestone) are the tubes of the teredinid bivalve *Kuphus melitensis* Zammit-Maempel. In 1993, this fossil was described as a species new to science on the basis of its calcareous tubes, valves – two shells at its anterior or lower end – and pallets – the two hard internal structures at its upper or posterior end (Zammit Maempel 1993). Its cylindrical tubes were figured for the first time from the Maltese Islands in 1977 (Zammit Maempel 1977), whilst their Indo-Pacific affinity was noted in 1979 (Zammit Maempel 1979).



In 1989 a record was made of the lore attached to these stones by Maltese hardstone quarry workers who refer to these structures as *sallur* (petrified eels) dating back to the Universal Deluge, *terha* (sash) or *dud* (worms) depending on their shape (Zammit Maempel 1989b). In Gozo, tubes of *Kuphus melitensis* have been located at Ta' Ċenc, Hondoq ir-Rummien and Mgarr ix-Xini, but they will, undoubtedly, be found also elsewhere. Large accumulation of these tubes forming half metre thick bands (*Kuphus* Beds) traverse the Island of Malta, and probably also Gozo, at about 75 metres below upper limit of the Lower Coralline Limestone. The author could not locate the *Kuphus* Beds in the Mgarr ix-Xini gorge where in the 1860s, Andrew Leith Adams encountered the tubes 'in large numbers' (Adams, 1870: 271, footnote 19).

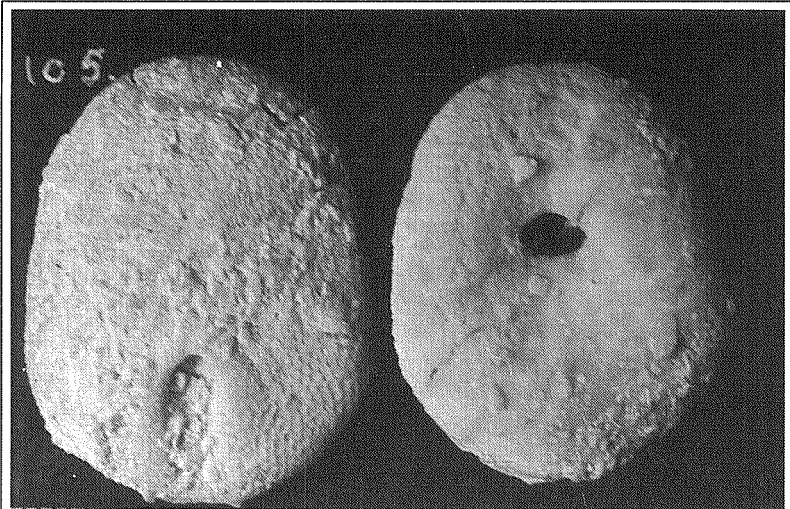
*Lower Corolline Limestone / Globigerina Transition Zone*  
(*Scutella* bed).

Between the Lowermost Formation and the overlying Lower Division of the *Globigerina* Limestone there is a transition zone that abounds in fragmented and/or complete specimens of a thin, flat sea urchin (sand dollar) called *Scutella subrotunda* Leske. Hence, this transition zone is scientifically referred to as the '*Scutella* Bed'.

In Gozo, the *Scutella* Bed seems to be more constant than in Malta — where it is, at times (e.g. at Fomm ir-Rih), replaced by a thick bed of bivalves and bryozoa. The abundance of the typical flat thin sea-urchins exposed at surface in the Dwejra area (now a Protected Natural Heritage Site) is a great tourists attraction. The *Scutella* bed transition zone — which in Gozo is characterised also by pockets of the unusual irregular echinoid *Apatopygus* (Figure 1) in its upper regions — leads into the overlying Lower Division of the *Globigerina* Limestone Formation.

*Globigerina Limestone*

The *Globigerina* Limestone Formation owes its name to the millions of tiny (microscopic), one-celled, planktonic marine creatures (called '*Globigerina*') composing it. They still thrive in modern open seas and as their shell is riddled with holes or *foramina*, they are classified with the *Foraminifera* (meaning 'bearers of *foramina* or holes').



**Figure 1. The fossil echinoid *Apatopygus*. *Scutella* bed, Wied il-Miela. This is the first time that this fossil sea urchin from Maltese Archipelago is being illustrated. Photo: George Zammit Maempel.**

A number of horizontal phosphorite levels (formerly called 'Nodule Layers' / 'Nodule Beds') characterise the Globigerina Limestone formation. Two of these levels occur on both Islands and divide the formation into three lithological Divisions, known respectively as Lower, Middle and Upper Division. The Lower Division (*Franka*) is the source of our soft honey-coloured building stone; the Middle Division (Qarghajja, Bajjad) is whiter and more clayey and has no practical use as a building stone but served once as a good source of chert (an impure form of flint) for prehistoric man's implements.

The lowermost parts of the honey-coloured Lower Division of the Globigerina Limestone are characterised by a 2 - 3 metre-thick, dense net work of branching tubes. These are generally brought out in relief through differential weathering. In former times the structures were erroneously thought to represent branching roots, but they are now known to be burrows made by sea animals (like Callianassid crabs) that existed millions of years ago. Being products of animals that existed in the geological past, they are likewise considered to be 'fossils' and are generally referred to as 'Ichno fossils'.

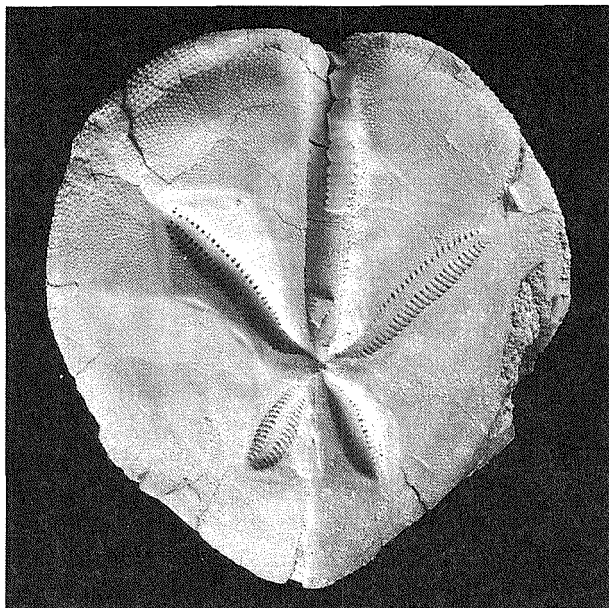
The Upper Division (*Tal-Kwiener*) — which has a certain resistance to fire — was formerly the source of slabs for lining ovens and for the manufacture of the small cooking stoves (*Kenur*/plural *Kwiener*). Gozo was the chief source of this material.

The most characteristic and most popular fossils of the Globigerina Limestone Formation are probably (1) the heart-shaped sea urchins *Schizaster eurynotus* Agassiz (Figure 2), and (2) the very peculiar sea urchin *Brissus crescenticus* Wright, whose lateral ambulacra are arranged in the shape of two crescents placed back to back, and the serrated teeth of the Giant White shark, *Carcharodon megalodon* Agassiz. Teeth of this monster shark are very common in the Globigerina, but occur also in the Clays and in the Greensand Formation. The largest one recovered locally measures 7 inches along its margins (Adams 1870:139) and — as it is generally estimated that one inch of tooth represents a 6-10 foot shark — the proud bearer of this large tooth (now at the Natural History Museum, London) must have been a monster shark with a length of between 42 and 70 feet (14 - 23 metres). The heart shaped urchins occur in large numbers in the lower parts of the Lower Globigerina Limestone Division, and are characterised by five petal-shaped furrows (*ambulacra*) the anterior three of which are much deeper and longer than the posterior pair).

#### *Clays (Maltese: Tafal)*

The Clays contain a number of fossils but these are generally very badly preserved and covered with a thick rust-like (limonitic) coating. The small beautiful members of the Cephalopod genus *Aturia* are usually an exception, for they are generally well preserved. *Aturia* is a member of the Octopus/Squid/Cuttlefish/*Nautilus* group, but, unlike the other members of its group, it is now extinct the world over. Like the Pearly *Nautilus* of the Indo-Pacific, *Aturia* is chambered and the wavy walls of its chambers can be seen very clearly on the outside of the fossil shell. The organic tube that once connected its chambers to enable the animal to regulate its buoyancy has now disappeared. What remains of it is just the opening (siphuncle) in the chambers' partition walls.

Other common and characteristic fossils found in the Clays are single



**Figure 2. Fossil heart-shaped sea urchin *Schizaster eurynotus* Agassiz. Photo: George Zammit Maempel.**

corals of the genus *Flabellum*. Their fan-like appearance, wedge-like shape and their oval 'base' — from whose margins radiate inwards a number of unequal spokes (septa)— are features which render these fossils unmistakable.

*Greensand (Maltese: Ramli / Rina).*

Orange-coloured, thick-shelled echinoids (sea urchins) called *Clypeaster* are probably the most characteristic fossils of this Formation. They vary considerably in size and shape — some resemble 'Mexican hats' but most are in the shape of rimless conical mounds. Both varieties have now disappeared from Maltese waters and survive mainly in the Indo-West Pacific region.

*Upper Coralline Limestone (Qawwi ta' Fuq)*

This relatively young Formation abounds in casts of the boring bivalve mollusc, *Lithodomus lithophagus* L. known locally as *Tamal tal-Baħar*. The species is still extant in modern rocks and in stones on shallow sea

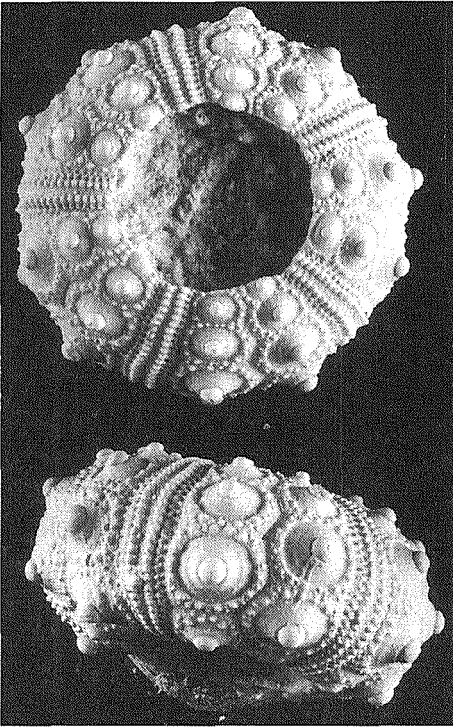
bottom and, being edible, it is much sought after by certain divers. The animal settles in the stone or rock when it is still very young, gradually enlarging its limestone chamber with the aid of acid secretions. Its only connection with the outside marine world are two joined siphons emerging from the chamber through a dissolved canal that soon takes their shape. The siphons represent a larger inlet and a smaller outlet tube, serving respectively for procuring food and for discharging waste material. The animal's home becomes its coffin, for from its chamber, it will never come out again unless somebody breaks the rock or stone enclosing it — and this is what the divers do.

One other interesting fossil of the Upper Coralline Limestone is a small very fragile sea urchin which is probably the most beautiful of all the fossils of the Maltese Islands (Figure 3). It was first recorded to science by the British (Cheltenham) surgeon-naturalist Thomas Wright in 1855, and was by him called *Cidaris melitensis*, the Maltese crown. (Wright 1855). Unlike many other members of its family, this fossil species migrated into the Mediterranean from the Atlantic Ocean and not from the Indo-Pacific.

Its closest modern Maltese representative is *Stylocidaris affinis* Philippi (Maltese: *Raddiena*), which is a great headache to local fishermen, as its long spines (2-3 times as long as its width), tend to get entangled in their deep-sea fish nets.

In the Upper Coralline Limestone of Malta, complete specimens of this fossil sea urchin are limited to a particular Member of the Formation but, owing to its great fragility, the test is hardly ever found in a perfect state of preservation. In Gozo, the present author has never encountered a complete specimen but only isolated plates. Ancient writers referred to these isolated plates as *Mammelle di San Paolo*, because of their resemblance to a human nipple with surrounding areola — *ir-ras u l-hagra*.

Another characteristic fossil of the Upper Coralline Limestone is the sea urchin *Brissus oblongus* Wright, easily recognised from the typical horizontal arrangement of its antero-lateral pair of furrows (*ambulacra*) — resembling a man with feet apart and hands outstretched. This fossil species, which was first described to science by the medical doctor-



**Figure 3.** *Cidaris melitensis* Wr. fossil sea urchin from the Upper Coralline Limestone. Photo: George Zammit Maempel.

scientist Thomas Wright in 1855, has not changed much in appearance since Upper Miocene times, several million years ago. It is still to be found buried in sandy and silty bottoms, around the Maltese Islands.

### **Marine, Sedimentary Origin of Rocks**

It will be noted that all the above-mentioned fossils recovered from the individual rock Formations of the entire geological sequence of the Maltese Islands are of marine organisms. This goes to prove that the rocks containing them must likewise be of marine origin. In addition, a careful look at the local rock Formations reveals that they are layered/bedded/stratified and that these layers/Beds/strata are generally horizontal - a sure sign of their sedimentary origin. Notwithstanding that horizontal stratification is a characteristic of all sedimentary rocks, the initial horizontal alignment is not always maintained. It could be

altered both during deposition of the sediment (giving rise to irregular deposition called 'cross bedding') or after deposition and hardening of the deposit into rocks (giving rise to dipping or bending). Disturbances occurring after rock-formation are invariably associated with nearby tectonic activity and are the effects of enormous natural pressures or stresses. One of these effects is faulting – where the continuity of the strata is interrupted as a result of a fracture + movement of the parts in relation to each other. The study of these natural forces / stresses and of the processes acting upon rocks constitutes the second part of the definition of the term 'Geology' (the first part being 'the study of the Rocks').

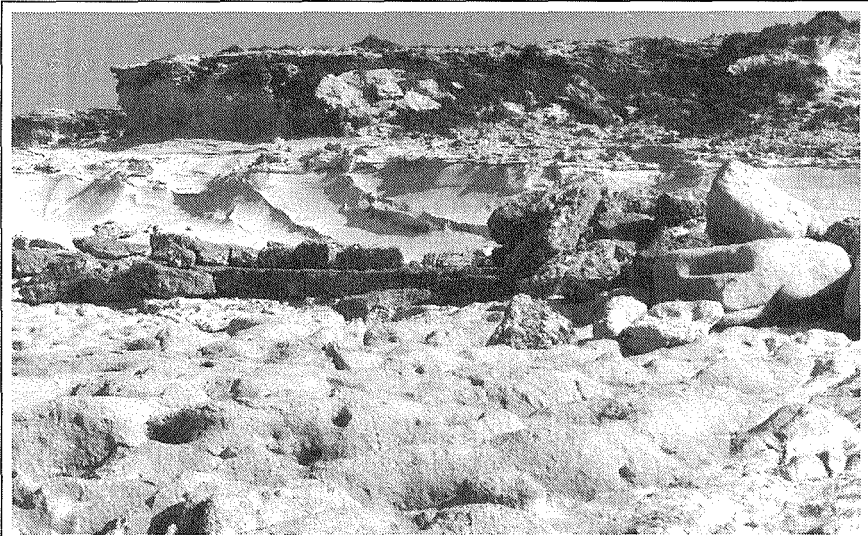
### **Natural forces/Stresses and Processes**

For the purpose of this study, consideration will be given solely to the effects of the elements and of the natural pressures/stresses upon rocks. Like the wind, natural pressures and stresses are not visible and one becomes aware of their presence only by noting their effects. At times, however, these may be difficult to interpret and a case in point is the disorderly upheaval of large blocks of rocks at ix-Xfar, east of Dahlet Qorrot, in the region of Qala in eastern Gozo (Figure 4).

Here, large blocks of the hard phosphatic bed that separates the Lower from the Middle Division of the Globigerina Limestone – P.B. 1, formerly known as Nodule Layer/Bed 1 or 'N.L.1' – have been dislodged from their base, overturned and scattered or piled up on each other in utter confusion. The blocks – each of which is about 0.5 metre thick and often several metres long – have literally 'popped out' of their original position and are, consequently, technically described as a pop-up feature.

This not-so-common geological phenomenon is the result of the still active stress pattern caused by the lateral pressure (associated with the nearby Qala fault) acting on rocks of two different consistency. The process must have occurred following the unloading (by erosion) of the overlying burden (i.e. the rocks overlying the very hard phosphatic bed) during Holocene times (Figure 6).

It will be noted that, by contrast, the overlying softer Middle Globigerina



**Figure 4. Pop-up features at Ix-Xfar, Dahlet Qorrot, Gozo. Photo: George Zammit Maempel.**

Limestone Division behind this denuded area is merely squashed and cracked. With time, the tension cracks got infilled with calcite which, being harder than the limestone, have since been brought out in relief by differential weathering and erosion.

At times, the natural forces do not crush the rocks, but merely pull them apart as if to slide them along a horizontal plane. In such cases there develop on the surface of these rocks a very characteristic pattern of cracks and parallel markings, with open tension joints set at an angle to the horizontal. Such features — which are known as 'Riedel shear structures' (after the man who first described them) — have been likened to 'cracks in the roof due to movements in the basement'. Some of these features in Gozo were first described and figured by Vossmerbaumer (1972).

Excellent examples of these geological features can be viewed on the wave-cut platform in the Lower Globigerina Limestone Division west of Marsalforn, in the region of Nagħaġ il-Baħar. Unfortunately, many of these are being obliterated by black tyre marks of cars /jeeps that are allowed to drive on the rocks by the coastline.



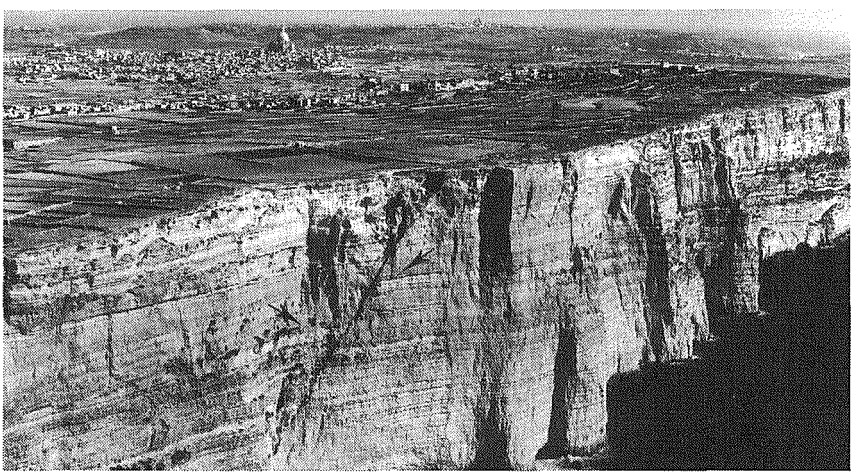
When the breakage is not just a superficial crack (as the Riedel shear structures), but a long deep fracture, the opposing parts may undergo movement in relation to each other. A fracture with movement constitute a fault. Every fault has a location, extent and orientation and if such features of each known fault are projected on to an outline map of the Maltese Islands, the result will be a Tectonic map of these islands. As the commonest form of fault in Malta is a sliding down movement that generally results in a step-like structure at surface, the local name for a 'normal fault' is *Targa* (step). The terminology is still preserved in the local toponomy — San Pawl tat-Targa and San Ġuzepp tat-Targa, both of which stand on the Great Fault of Malta. The down throw of a fault may be only a few centimetres or several metres (as at ix-Xaqqa, Malta).

When a large block of rock slides over another one, there is generation of heat with consequent melting and alteration of both rock faces — making them very hard and shiny. In addition, the pressure caused by the irregular surface of the sliding block leaves vertical scratch marks, called *Slickensides*, over the surface of its counterpart.

As no very long and impressive slickensides were encountered in Gozo, the ones seen at Ix-Xaqqa (along the Maghlaq Fault on the way down to Ghar Lapsi, Malta) are being referred to here. These give a good idea of the changes seen on the rock face as a result of the faulting. At this particular site, a 6 km block of Upper Coralline Limestone slid down over the Lower Coralline Limestone surface for a distance of about 250 m. Faulting brought the Upper Coralline Limestone down to sea level and turned Filfla (a one-time highland on the Maltese mainland) into an island about 5 km away from the Maltese coastline. The very hard shiny surface, the vertical scratch marks and the flutings on Lower Coralline Limestone surface (*Slickensides*) are here very clearly visible.

Very occasionally, the sliding movement may be horizontal. In the Mgarr ix-Xini region (a short distance below the pine trees) there are slickensides which started vertically but which at a particular point in time, shifted their course sub-horizontally. This is a sure indication of a rotation of the axis of the fault during the faulting process.

At a different site along the Mgarr ix-Xini valley, starting only two metres above soil level and continuing upwards on the rock face of the



**Figure 5. The Lower Coralline Limestone cliffs at Ta' Ċenċ. Note the characteristic sheer cliffs with caves at sea level and a fault without surface expression.**

valley wall for some more metres, there is a series of crescentic cracks. These peculiar features are an indication of the severe natural tension or stresses sustained by these rocks in connection with the nearby Qala fault.

Notwithstanding that a Fault or dislocation normally generates a 'step', the deposition of sediment after the occurrence of the fault may easily mask the evidence at the surface. Complete erosion of the former higher surface (step) by the elements may be another reason for the lack of evidence of the faulting. The fault shown in the aerial view of Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs (Figure 5) has a down-throw of about 30 metres and yet there is absolutely no evidence of this movement at surface. People can just walk over the fault line without noticing any difference in level. In this case the cause is not faulting before deposition of the overlying strata (as even the uppermost strata are mismatched), but the complete erosion of the higher surface to match exactly that of its downthrown counterpart. Compared to Malta, Gozo has markedly greater relief contrast features and this is due to the extensive erosion, solution and down-cutting of the rocks on that island by the elements. The Gozo landscape is thus characterised by hills with a flat-topped Upper Coralline Limestone

capping (*mesa*). Wherever this protective hard capping has been broken down as a result of the elements and of the unstable underlying clay formation, conical or wedge-like mounds of clay – with or without traces of the overlying hard limestone capping – are common features (eg mound *Is-Salvatur* at Marsalforn).

Besides the visible erosion just mentioned, there is also another type of erosion that is underground and invisible. As the Maltese Islands are a limestone country, and limestone is dissolved by water, it is quite common to have large solution (Karstic) cavities developing underground – even at great depths. When such structures ultimately collapse and subside, they form circular depressions like Maqluba in Malta and Dwejra in Gozo.

An aerial view of western Gozo shows that in addition to Dwejra, there are several other such like circular solution subsidence structures in the region. These were all formed millions of years ago, during Miocene times. Solution subsidence structures in the Maltese Islands were first investigated in detail by Pedley in 1974.

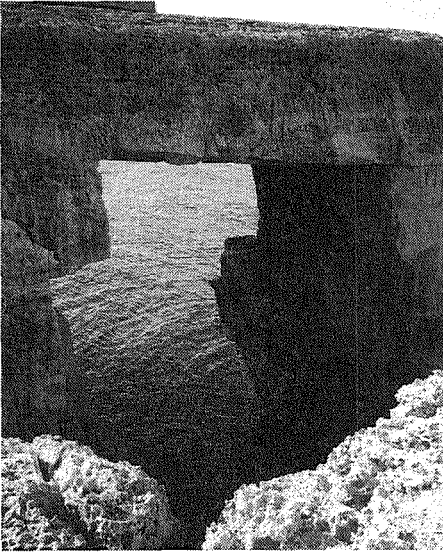
The Dwejra and Xlendi regions exhibit a series of interesting and important geological, geomorphological, tectonic and palaeontological features and have, on this account, been recently declared ‘National Heritage Protected Sites’.

## **Typical Geomorphology of Rock Formations**

The elements – wind, water and sea – all have a destructive effect on rocks and cause weathering, solution and erosion. When acted upon by the elements, each rock type or geological Formation yields characteristic surface features – depending mainly on the particular composition of that Formation. The study of the rock shapes so formed is known as ‘geomorphology’.

Reviewing Gozitan rock formations from above downwards (i.e. starting with the youngest) it will be seen that the Upper Coralline Limestone characteristically tends to form plateaus. On account of the extensive erosion that has affected Gozo, these plateaus have been split into

## The Geology of Gozo



**Figure 6. A “window” in the Lower Coralline Limestone at Wied il-Mielah, Gozo. Photo: George Zammit Maempel**

smaller units of clay hills with flat tops (*Mesas*). The underlying Greensands are very rarely exposed horizontally and their vertical exposure tends to form a thick scum at surface with underlying cavitation, thereby setting a treacherous trap for the unwary climber.

In addition, on account of the underlying unstable Clay base and of the tendency of clays to produce a  $45^\circ$  slope, the edges of the overlying Upper Coralline Limestone and Greensand get undermined and break off. Some of the detached boulders roll downwards over the underlying Formations, but others get trapped at the base of the Upper Coralline Limestone and form the characteristic *Irdum* or undercliff. When the fragmentation of the overlying protective Upper Coralline Limestone and Greensand is complete, the Clay will ultimately be reduced to a wedge or even a cone with a few fragmented boulders on top, as *Is-Salvatur* at Marsalforn. In spite of its shape, this is not a volcano, but merely the product of severe erosion. The typical  $45^\circ$  Clay slopes mentioned above, tend to develop deep Gullies as a result of the action of rain water draining down their surface. At times, they are also littered with boulders that have rolled down from the unstable margins of the overlying Upper Coralline plateau and Greensand.

Owing to the relatively small extent of the Globigerina Limestone exposures and the great relief contrast in Gozo, the typical undulating landscape produced by this Formation in Malta is not a very prominent feature of the Gozo landscape. Here, more characteristically, the Globigerina Limestone exhibits horizontal hard grounds. These are formed by the exposure of the flat upper surface of the hard Phosphatic Bed (PB1) overlying the Lower Globigerina Limestone Division. West of Marsalforn, in the region of the salt pans at Xwejni, Naghag il-Bahar and beyond, the perfectly level horizontal upper surface of the Phosphatic Bed has been used as an excellent base for an asphalted road. At il-Kappar, on the limits of Gharb, the differential weathering of the over- and under-lying soft Globigerina Limestone Divisions provides excellent mute evidence of the hardness of this Phosphatic Bed.

Another characteristic of the Gozo Globigerina Limestone is the formation of conical hills — Qolla l-Bajda and Qolla s-Safra, both in the region of Marsalforn, are typical examples. At Qolla l-Bajda the upper division of the Globigerina Limestone is further subdivided into greyish and whitish elements — a feature not seen in the Maltese landscape.

The Lower Coralline Limestone produces typical sheer-cut cliffs, with sea caves at their base (Figure 5). These are the result of the constant mechanical (battering) action of the waves assisted by their solvent action on the limestone. In addition, the cliffs are generally associated with an overlying platform formed by the receding softer Globigerina Limestone as a result of differential weathering. This feature is markedly evident at il-Miġra.

As Lower Coralline Limestone rocks are hard and well stratified, sea caves tend to have a horizontal roof. If cave formation is in a promontory or a narrow headland, the quadrangular opening or cave so formed tends to communicate with the other side to form a 'Window'. The 'window' at Dwejra and at Wied il-Mielah (Figure 6) are typical examples. 'Windows' are doomed to collapse with time, for the wider they get, the greater is the tendency for them to develop a tension crack at the middle of their lintel (the horizontal rock-bed bridging the open space), gradually leading to their collapse and the formation of an isolated column (known as *stack*) a few metres from the headland. The 'window' at Dwejra and that at Wied il-Mielah have both already developed the ominous median crack on their horizontal lintel, so that their fate is already sealed.

## Conclusion

The visitor to Gozo is, undoubtedly, aware of most of the landscape features recorded herein, but now that his attention has been drawn to their geological origin, he will look at the Gozitan countryside with a different eye — an understanding eye, one that will not only see the charm and beauty of that landscape, but that will also interpret its features geologically. By so doing, the visitor will appreciate nature all the more and will then realise — not only that landscape is merely the outward manifestation of the underlying geology— but also that the island of Gozo is basically sedimentary, has been greatly modified by faults and that it is utterly dominated by erosion and weathering.

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## **THE FLORA AND VEGETATION OF GOZO**

**Edwin Lanfranco**

**T**he Maltese Islands lie in the centre of the Mediterranean. The highest points for the two main islands are only 253 m (Ta' Zuta, Malta) and 191 m (Dbiegi, Gozo) above sea level. Therefore, as is to be expected, this archipelago is subjected to the typical climatic regime which is characteristic of low-lying coastal Mediterranean areas. Typical Mediterranean climate is characterised by the alternation of a warm dry season and a wet cool season. In the case of the Maltese Islands the dry season starts around the beginning of May and persists till about mid-September, when it gives way to the wet season. Temperatures are not extreme, rarely exceeding 40°C or descending below 3°C for more than a few days. Grass temperatures may occasionally descend to a few degrees below freezing. Most rainfall precipitates in the first half of the wet season and, in the Maltese Islands, averages between 500-600 mm annually with extremes of between 190 mm and 1030 mm. For more detailed meteorological information see Chetcuti *et al.* (1992).

Mediterranean vegetation is adapted to flourish in this particular climatic regime where the main limiting factor is water availability. Thus to survive successfully in a typical Mediterranean habitat, plants must be able to cope with long periods of drought coupled with brief episodes of torrential rains. Another factor which determines the nature of the vegetation of an area is the chemical composition of the soil. Since the Maltese Islands consist almost entirely of limestones, the soils are consequently calcareous. This means that only plants which tolerate or prefer such soils can flourish.

### **Maltese Vegetation**

The type of vegetation which is most characteristic of the Mediterranean

## *The Flora and Vegetation of Gozo*

area, and hence also of the Maltese Islands, is what can be referred to as the *sclerophyll* series. The highest expression of this type of vegetation is the evergreen wood dominated by trees such as Aleppo Pine (*Pinus halepensis*) and Evergreen Oak (*Quercus ilex*). These typically form a dense canopy and undergrowth is usually poor. Within the past few hundreds of years, this type of community has been destroyed from the Maltese Islands; only small patches of Evergreen Oak persisting to remind us of its former existence. At a lower level is the maquis which is characterised by a variety of large shrubs and small trees, examples being the Carob (*Ceratonia siliqua*), Olive (*Olea europaea*) and Lentisk (*Pistacia lentiscus*) trees accompanied by woody climbers such as Ivy (*Hedera helix*) and Sarsaparilla (*Smilax aspera*), and an undergrowth of large herbaceous plants. At a still lower level is the garrigue, typical of karstlands, which is dominated by low (less than one metre) hemispherical shrubs such as the Mediterranean Thyme (*Thymus capitatus*) and Mediterranean Heath (*Erica multiflora*) which, in the wet season, are accompanied by a large variety of herbaceous species. When no shrubs are present, a steppe community forms. The four communities which make up this sclerophyll series are actually steps in a succession and are therefore interchangeable, depending on the factors which affect the environment.

In addition to the sclerophyll series there exist other communities specialised to exist in particular environmental conditions. These include saline wetlands, freshwater wetlands, coastal sands, transitional coastal habitats and cliffs. Furthermore, due to heavy anthropic pressures, communities peculiar to disturbed habitats, which are often dominated by alien and other opportunistic species, are particularly widespread.

### **Vegetation and Flora of Gozo**

As is to be expected the flora and vegetation of Gozo is essentially similar to that of Malta. Nonetheless some rather subtle differences exist. Some species present in Malta have not been recorded from Gozo and vice versa. Some species are also more frequent in Gozo than in Malta. Literature specific to Gozitan vegetation and flora is scant but several references can be traced in works dealing with the flora of the Maltese

Islands in general such as Sommier and Caruana Gatto (1915), Borg (1927), Haslam *et al.* (1977) Lanfranco (1989) and Lanfranco (1995). Some more specific references are available in works such as Gulia (1874), Duthie (1872, 1874, 1875a, 1875b), Kramer *et al.* (1972), Lanfranco (1980), Lanfranco (1981a, 1981b), Lanfranco [G.] (1983), Lanfranco (1985), Schembri *et al.* (1987), Brullo and Pavone (1988) and Tabone (1995).

The present work is mainly intended to give an overview of some special features which characterise the Gozitan vascular flora.

### *Species Confined to Gozo*

Several species reported from the Maltese Islands have been recorded only from Gozo, or have their last outpost in Gozo. Most of these are very rare or even extinct. These are listed in Appendix A. Of the species so confined, the most significant is Maltese Everlasting, *Helichrysum melitense*, which is confined to the cliffs of western Gozo, particularly the Dwejra area and including Fungus Rock (which, for the purposes of this work, is being regarded as part of Gozo). Records also exist from Malta (at Wied Babu) from where it has possibly disappeared. This species is endemic and is related to a cluster of other *Helichrysum* taxa occurring in Sicily and associated islands (Pignatti, 1979).

Of the others the most important are the Shrubby Champion, *Silene fruticosa*, an eastern Mediterranean species, of which very small populations persist at Wied Mgarr ix-Xini and Wied ix-Xlendi, and *Pteranthus dichotomus*, a North African and Levantine species for which Malta seems to be the only European station. This was first recorded at Marsa (island of Malta) by Grech Delicata (1853) and subsequently by Gavino Gulia (Sommier and Caruana Gatto, 1915) from Chambray (Gozo). It was not seen again until recently (Tabone, in preparation) when it was rediscovered in Gozo not far from Chambray.

Mention should also be made of the Christ's Thorn, *Paliurus spinachristii*, first discovered at the bottom of Wied ix-Xlendi (Sommier and Caruana Gatto, 1915) which was seen again in the late 1970s by L.Y.Th. Westra (personal communication) in much the same place, but subsequent efforts to relocate it have, so far, been unsuccessful. Bracken Fern,

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*Helichrysum melitense*, which is confined to the cliffs of western Gozo.

*Pteridium aquilinum*, geographically a very common, sometimes noxious, species is locally confined to the Rdum il-Kbir area of Gozo where it has not been seen for several decades and may possibly be extinct, although the occasional specimen may crop up as a weed; in fact the author has met it twice at Sliema (island of Malta)!

Ramla l-Hamra, a sand dune habitat, is the least spoilt of the remaining coastal sandy communities in the Maltese islands and has recently been covered by protective regulations. This is the last refuge of a number of typical dune species which, until quite recently, also existed in dune communities in the island of Malta, particularly at Ramla tat-Torri. Thus *Pseudorlaya pumila*, *Euphorbia paralias* and *Echinophora spinosa* now seem confined to this locality while *Ononis variegata* has never been recorded from any other Maltese dune.

### Other Species

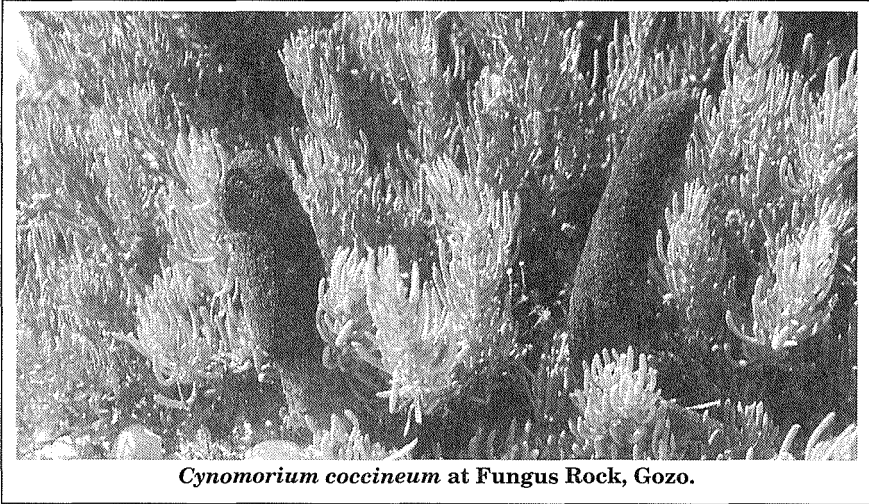
Possibly the best known plant with Gozitan connections is the so-called "Malta Fungus". Of course this is not a fungus at all, but had been mistaken for one owing to its strange shape. It is actually a parasitic vascular plant which absorbs nutrients from the roots of a number of

coastal plants. Originally it was known to exist only on General's Rock, thence also known as "Fungus Rock" and it was carefully harvested by the Knights of Malta as an item of commerce or exchange (Lanfranco [G.G.], 1961). However it was later discovered on the mainland of both Gozo and Malta as well as in various other sites in the Mediterranean region. Nevertheless, in the Maltese Islands, it remains an endangered species.

A very important site, now floristically impoverished, was provided by some parts of the Citadel which, until recently, used to be a refuge for some extremely rare species (Lanfranco, 1981a; 1981b). Restoration works have been responsible for the disappearance of a number of species from the site. Thus, Golden Chamomile, *Chamomilla aurea*, is now probably extinct from the Maltese Islands while Grey Hare's ear, *Bupleurum semicompositum*, may be extinct from Gozo and is currently known from just one site from the island of Malta. Maltese Star-Thistle *Centaurea melitensis* and Maltese Toadflax *Linaria pseudolaxiflora* have disappeared from the Citadel and, locally, both species are rapidly declining in numbers. Maltese Toadflax is actually endemic to the Maltese Islands and Linosa in the Pelagian Islands; large populations of this species which existed also at Dwejra (Gozo) seem to have disappeared. In spite of persecution, the endemic Maltese Salt-Tree, *Darniella melitensis*, a large succulent shrub, persists vigorously on the ramparts of the Citadel.

Cliff habitats are particularly important in the Maltese Islands since they harbour a large proportion of the endemic and other relict species. This is also true for the Gozitan cliffs. The endemic rupestral flora includes two monospecific genera, *Cremonophyton* and *Palaeocyamus*, both occurring also in Gozo. Good populations of Maltese Cliff-Orache, *Cremonophyton lanfrancoi* occur on the western and southern cliffs of Gozo while Maltese Rock-Centaury, *Palaeocyamus crassifolius* (Malta's "National Plant") is rarer in Gozo than in Malta. Other rupestral species of note are *Helichrysum melitense*, now confined to Gozo (see above), and the Maltese Stocks *Matthiola incana* subsp. *melitensis* which is much more widespread in Gozo than in Malta. Similarly, the Gozo Hyoseris, *Hyoseris frutescens*, was, until recently, thought to be confined to Gozo, but two small populations have now been found on the island of Malta. The large shrubby Maltese Salt-Tree, *Darniella melitensis*, is one of the

## *The Flora and Vegetation of Gozo*



*Cynomorium coccineum* at Fungus Rock, Gozo.

most frequent rupestral species in the Maltese Islands; nevertheless plants in Gozo often attain a large size, up to some four metres. Other notable, though not endemic, cliff species are the Southern Tea-Tree, *Lycium intricatum*, a very rare species, and Cliff Groundsel, *Senecio leucanthemifolius* which is more widespread on the cliffs of Gozo and Comino than on those of the island of Malta.

Few indigenous trees exist on Gozo and no records of native Evergreen Oaks, *Quercus ilex* and Aleppo Pines, *Pinus halepensis* exist, the same applies to some trees of moist habitats such as Grey-leaved Elm, *Ulmus canescens*, White Willow, *Salix alba* and Mediterranean Willow, *Salix pedicellata*, all of which are also rare or even endangered on the island of Malta. Nevertheless two small trees or large shrubs, the African Tamarisk, *Tamarix africana*, and the Chaste-Tree, *Vitex agnus-castus*, which are very rare in the island of Malta, and in Comino, are quite widespread in Gozo.

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### APPENDIX A:

#### PLANTS FOUND IN GOZO BUT NOT IN MALTA OR COMINO

#### Ferns

##### Family: *Hypolepidaceae*

*Pteridium aquilinum* (L.) Kuhn

[RDB:8; endangered, perhaps already extinct]†

#### Dicotyledons

##### Family: *Apiaceae* (= *Umbelliferae*)

\**Echinophora spinosa* L.

[RDB:25; endangered (Gozo), possibly extinct (Malta)]

\**Pseudorlaya pumila* (L.) Grande

[RDB:25; endangered (Gozo), possibly extinct (Malta)]

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† RDB = *Red Data Book* for the Maltese Islands (Schembri and Sultana [eds.], 1989). Number following RDB refers to page reference. Frequency status in increasing order of rarity: very common, common, frequent, rather frequent, uncommon, scarce, rather rare, rare, very rare, vulnerable, endangered, extinct. Clearly alien species are excluded.

\* Recorded also from the island of Malta where they are now probably extinct.



**Family: Asteraceae (=Compositae)**

\**Helichrysum melitense* (Pignatti) Brullo, Lanfranco, Pavone and Ronsisvalle  
[RDB:35; ENDEMIC, very rare (Gozo), possibly extinct (Malta)]

**Family: Brassicaceae (= Cruciferae)**

*Brassica tournefortii* Gouan

[Reported by Duthie (1875b) but records cannot be confirmed]

*Matthiola lunata* DC.

[RDB:16; possibly extinct, last seen in 1957]

**Family: Caryophyllaceae**

\**Pteranthus dichotomus* Forsskal

[RDB:13; vulnerable (Gozo), possibly extinct (Malta)]

*Silene fruticosa* L.

[RDB:13; endangered]

**Family: Euphorbiaceae**

\**Euphorbia paralias* L.

[RDB:21; endangered (Gozo), possibly extinct (Malta)]

**Family: Fabaceae (= Leguminosae)**

*Hymenocarpus circinnatus* (L.) Savi

[RDB:18; vulnerable]

*Ononis oligophylla* Tenore

[RDB:19; vulnerable]

*Ononis variegata* L.

[RDB:19; endangered]

\**Trifolium squamosum* L.

[RDB:20; very rare (Gozo), possibly extinct (Malta)]

**Family: Rhamnaceae**

*Paliurus spina-christii* Miller

[RDB:22; endangered]

**Family: Rosaceae**

*Mespilus germanica* L.

[RDB:17; possibly extinct]

## Monocotyledons

**Family: *Alliaceae***

*Allium arvense* Gussone  
[RDB:39; very rare]

**Family: *Cyperaceae***

*Eleocharis ovata* (Roth) Roemer and Schultes  
[RDB:47; very rare]

**Family: *Poaceae* (= *Graminae*)**

*Crypsis schoenoides* (L.) Lamarck [recently discovered (Tabone, 1995); endangered]  
*Echinaria capitata* (L.) Desfontaines  
[RDB:43; possibly extinct]

## APPENDIX B:

### OTHER GOZITAN SPECIES OF FLORISTIC IMPORTANCE

## Ferns

**Family: *Aspleniaceae***

*Asplenium marinum* L.  
[RDB:8; possibly extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

*Asplenium trichomanes* L.  
[RDB:8; possibly extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

*Asplenium sagittatum* (DC.) A.J. Bange  
[RDB:9; endangered, perhaps extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

## Dicotyledons

**Family: *Apiaceae* (= *Umbelliferae*)**

*Bupleurum semicompositum* L.  
[RDB:25; possibly extinct (Gozo), endangered (Malta)]

**Family: *Asteraceae* (= *Compositae*)**

*Anthemis urvilleana* (DC.) Sommier and Caruana Gatto  
[RDB:33; ENDEMIC, not threatened]

*Atactylis Cancellata* T.

[RDB:33; very rare (Gozo and Malta)]

*Centaurea melitensis* L.

[RDB:34; scarce (Gozo), rare (Malta, Comino, Selmunett)]

*Chamomilla aurea* (Loefling) Gay ex Cosson and Kralik

[RDB:34; probably extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

*Chiliadenus bocconei* Brullo

[RDB:34; ENDEMIC, not threatened]

*Chrysanthemum segetum* L.

[RDB:34; uncommon (Gozo), very rare (Malta)]

*Crepis pusilla* (Sommier) Merxmüller

[RDB:35; possibly extinct (Gozo), very rare (Malta)]

*Hyoseris frutescens* Brullo and Pavone

[RDB:35; ENDEMIC, uncommon (Gozo), vulnerable (Malta)]

*Onopordum argolicum* Boissier

[RDB:35; uncommon (Gozo, Comino), rare (Malta)]

*Palaeocyanus crassifolius* (Bertoloni) Dostal

[RDB:35; ENDEMIC, very rare (Gozo), rather rare (Malta)]

*Scorzonera laciniata* L.

[frequent (Gozo), scarce (Malta)]

*Senecio leucanthemifolius* Poiret

[RDB:36; uncommon (Gozo, Comino, Filfla), rare (Malta)]

**Family: *Boraginaceae***

*Echium sabulicola* Pomel

[endangered (Gozo), extinct (Malta)]

**Family: *Brassicaceae* (= *Cruciferae*)**

*Hymenolobus revellieri* (Jordan) Brullo subsp. *sommieri* (Pampanini) Brullo

[RDB:15; endemic to circum-Sicilian islands, possibly extinct (Gozo); endangered (Comino), absent from island of Malta]

*Matthiola incana* (L.) R.Br subsp. *melitensis* Brullo, Lanfranco, Pavone, Ronsisvalle

[RDB:16; ENDEMIC, rare (Gozo), very rare (Malta)]

**Family: *Caprifoliaceae***

*Sambucus ebulus* L.

[RDB:32; uncommon (Gozo), rare (Malta)]

*Sambucus nigra* L.

[scarce (Gozo), very rare (Malta), probably introduced and also cultivated]

**Family: *Chenopodiaceae***

*Cremonnophyton lanfrancoi* Brullo and Pavone

[RDB:12; ENDEMIC, rare (Gozo and Malta)]

*Darniella melitensis* (Bochantzev) Brullo

[RDB:12; ENDEMIC, not threatened, largest specimens occur in Gozo]

**Family: *Cistaceae***

*Cistus creticus* L.

[RDB:23; very rare (Gozo), rare (Malta)]

*Cistus monspeliensis* L.

[RDB:23; very rare (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: *Convolvulaceae***

*Convolvulus lineatus* L.

[rather frequent (Gozo); uncommon (Malta)]

*Convolvulus oleifolius* Desrousseaux

[RDB:28; restricted Mediterranean distribution, rather frequent (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: *Cynomoriaceae***

*Cynomorium coccineum* L.

[RDB:24; endangered (Gozo: General's Rock and Malta)]

**Family: *Elatinaceae***

*Elatine gussonei* (Sommier) Brullo, Lanfranco, Pavone and Ronsisvalle

[RDB:24; Pelago-Maltese endemic, rare (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: *Euphorbiaceae***

*Euphorbia characias* L.

[RDB:21; very rare (Gozo and Malta)]

*Euphorbia melitensis* Parlato

[RDB:21; ENDEMIC, not threatened, important component in Gozo garigues]

*Euphorbia peplis* L.

[RDB:22; endangered (Gozo and Malta)]

*Euphorbia terracina* L.

[RDB:22; vulnerable (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: Fabaceae (=Leguminosae)**

*Coronilla valentina* L.

[very rare (Gozo), uncommon (Malta)]

*Medicago monspeliaca* (L.) Trautvetter

[rather frequent (Gozo, Comino), uncommon (Malta)]

*Ononis mitissima* L.

[frequent (Gozo), uncommon (Malta)]

*Ononis natrix* L.

[frequent (Gozo), uncommon (Malta)]

*Spartium junceum* L.

[RDB:20; possibly extinct (Gozo), endangered (Malta), also in cultivation]

**Family: Lamiaceae (=Labiatae)**

*Stachys ocymastrum* (L.) Briquet

[RDB:30; uncommon (Gozo); rare (Malta)]

**Family: Plantaginaceae**

*Plantago albicans* L.

[RDB:32; probably extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: Scrophulariaceae**

*Linaria pseudolaxiflora* Lojacono

[RDB:31; Pelago-Maltese endemic, rare (Gozo, Comino), very rare (Malta, Selmunett, Kemunett), on the decrease]

**Family: Solanaceae**

*Lycium intricatum* Boissier

[RDB:31; rare (Gozo), very rare (Malta)]

**Family: Tamaricaceae**

*Tamarix africana* Poiret

[RDB:23; rather rare (Gozo, Comino); virtually extinct in the island of Malta where most plants appear to originate from cultivated stock.]

**Family: Urticaceae**

*Parietaria lusitanica* L.

[RDB:11; rare (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: *Verbenaceae***

*Vitex agnus-castus* L.

[RDB:29; uncommon (Gozo), rare (Malta, Comino)]

**Monocotyledons**

**Family: *Alismataceae***

*Damasonium bourgaei* Cosson

[RDB:36; vulnerable (Gozo and Malta), restricted Mediterranean distribution]

**Family: *Alliaceae***

*Allium lojaconoi* Brullo, Lanfranco and Pavone

[RDB:39; ENDEMIC, uncommon (Gozo and Malta)]

*Allium commutatum* Gussone

[RDB:39; giant form, possibly similar to that of Filfla, occurs on General's Rock]

*Allium melitense* (Sommier and Caruana Gatto) Ciferri and Giacomini

[RDB:39; ENDEMIC (?), rather frequent, possibly a variant of *Allium commutatum*]

**Family: *Aloeaceae***

*Aloe vera* (L.) Burmann fil.

[RDB:38; vulnerable, doubtfully native but Gozo populations grow in very natural settings and possibly long naturalised]

**Family: *Cyperaceae***

*Bolboschoenus maritimus* (L.) Palla

[RDB:47; scarce (Gozo), very rare (Malta)]

*Cyperus capitatus* Vandelli non Burmann

[RDB:46; vulnerable (Gozo and Malta), populations decreasing rapidly]

*Cyperus fuscus* L.

[RDB:47; endangered (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: *Dioscoreaceae***

*Tamus communis* L.

[RDB:40; scarce (Gozo), very rare (Malta)]

**Family: *Hyacinthaceae***

*Scilla sicula* Tineo

[RDB:38; endemic to Sicily, Calabria and Maltese Islands; rather rare (Gozo), scarce (Malta and Comino)]

**Family: *Iridaceae***

*Iris pseudopumila* Tineo

[RDB:41; endemic to Sicily, Puglia and Maltese Islands; vulnerable (Gozo and Malta), each population bears a distinctive character]

*Iris sicula* Todaro

[RDB:41; Siculo-Maltese endemic, vulnerable (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: *Orchidaceae***

*Anacamptis urvilleana* Sommier and Caruana Gatto

[RDB:47; ENDEMIC, rare (Gozo), scarce (Malta)]

*Neotinea maculata* (Desfontaines) Stearn

[RDB:48; probably extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

*Ophrys speculum* Link

[uncommon (Gozo), rare (Comino), very rare (Malta)]

*Ophrys sphegodes* Miller subsp. *melitensis* Salkowski

[RDB:48; ENDEMIC; uncommon (Gozo and Malta)]

*Orchis morio* L.

[RDB:49; probably extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

*Orchis italica* Poiret

[RDB:49; extinct (Gozo), endangered (Malta)]

*Orchis longicornu* Poiret.

[records for Gozo and Malta could not be confirmed]

**Family: *Poaceae* (=Graminae)**

*Aeluropus lagopoides* (L.) Trinius ex Thwaites

[RDB:42; possibly extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

*Cornucopiae cucullatum* L.

[RDB:43; probably extinct (Gozo and Malta)]

**Family: *Typhaceae***

*Typha domingensis* L.

[RDB:46; rare (Gozo), uncommon (Malta), on the increase]

## **RESEARCH ON PREHISTORIC AND ROMAN GOZO: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

**Anthony Bonanno**

**T**here is no doubt that the most important and impressive of the archaeological monuments that mark the Maltese landscape are the megalithic temples. Gozo's Ġgantija temples at Xagħra outdo all the others, even their counterparts in Malta. In spite of this, we Maltese and Gozitans have for generations grown with these constructions at our doorstep and were not always appreciative of their value. I, for one, do not remember being particularly moved by their size and sophistication on my occasional encounter with them as a child. It is normally the foreigner who 'discovers' them for us.

Nevertheless, for centuries the gigantic dimensions of the stone blocks used in these wonderful constructions struck the imagination of the uncultured local population who conjured up stories of giants (sometimes even of a single female giant) going about raising these stones according to some uncanny design (Mifsud-Chircop 1990: 166-7, with previous bibliography; Veen 1994). This is not to say that the more educated Maltese were insensitive to these unusual structures. Two Maltese writers, Gian Francesco Abela, the Chancellor of the Order of the Knights of St John (1647), and Marc Antonio Haxiaq (1610), a medical doctor of the same Order, were already writing about them in the beginning of the 17th century and attributing them to the Phoenicians, the earliest dominators of the islands in Maltese history.

### **The Ġgantija Temples**

It is strange that Jean Quintin d'Autun, the French chaplain and auditor of the Order, who wrote the first extensive description of the Maltese islands (1536), had missed the Ġgantija temples in his account of the



antiquities of the islands. In any case, he had also missed the ones at Haġar Qim and Mnajdra, and had noted only those scoring the landscape of the Grand Harbour and the Marsaxlokk harbour. It seems that he was only trying to find ancient structural remains that fitted the references given by ancient writers (Bonanno: 1982; 1993).

Gian Francesco Abela shows some inconsistency in his attribution of the temples also to a race of giants, descendents of the children of Noah, who were, according to him the first inhabitants of the Maltese islands, and whose skeletal remains turned up occasionally in Maltese soil (1647: 145-8). At first, Abela appears to limit himself to mentioning the megalithic remains at Marsaxlokk and Haġar Qim and to miss Ġgantija altogether, in spite of the close connection of the placename with the giants of his theory. But then, it is possible that the placename Ġgantija had not yet taken form by his time. In fact, after reading the placename given by Agius de Soldanis (1746: 53) it becomes clear that the “*smisurati pezzi di pietre dirizzate all’in su, alcune di due canne di lunghezza con qualche parte di muro, composto, e fabricato di grossissimi sassi situati, e posti l’un sopra l’altro senza cemento, o altra mistura, che l’unifica*” situated in the area known as El Eeyun (Abela 1647: 119) are none other than the Ġgantija temples. Abela also notes the existence of megalithic remains (*evidentissimi vestigij d’habitatione de’ Giganti*) near the church of St John at Xewkija. He even describes the sizes and height of some of the large stones (Abela 1647: 119).

His successor Gian Antonio Ciantar, in his revised edition of Abela’s *Descrittione* almost a century-and-a-half later (1772), limits himself to reproducing word for word Abela’s account, whereas his contemporary, the Gozitan Agius de Soldanis, refers more specifically to the *torri tal gianti* at *Sciahra tal hafzenin in contrada tal hjun* (1746: 53). The same scholar notes groups of stones “that could not have been raised if not by giants’ hands” at *Ta’ Goliat* and *Dahlet Korrot*. He also supports Abela’s note of the existence of megalithic remains at Xewkija, close to the parish church.

Probably the first writer to illustrate the Ġgantija temples was another Frenchman, Jean Houel, a painter and engraver in the court of Louis XVI of France on whose behalf he undertook a tour of Sicily and its minor islands, which he described and illustrated by means of engrav-



**The entrance to the south temple at Ġgantija. Photo: John Cremona.**

ings in his monumental *Voyage Pittoresque* (1787). In fact, to Ġgantija Houel dedicates a lengthy description and a full-page view (1787: pl. CCL), as well as a rough plan on another engraving (pl. CCLI). Houel seems to have been more fond of Gozo and more appreciative of its singular remains than any other writer before him, because he also describes extensively and illustrates with a full-page engraving the remains of a circular megalithic wall which was destined to become a landmark in prehistoric archaeology of the late 20th century, the Xaghra Stone Circle. He referred to it simply as “*un edifice antique de forme circulaire*” and produced a somewhat integrative plan of the structure emphasising its technique of blocks laid in a radial position alternating with others in a tangential position (1787: 78, pls. CCXLIX, CCLI). In the tradition established by Abela, Houel attributed these megalithic remains to the Phoenicians.

After Houel, the next most enlightening work on the Gozitan prehistoric archaeological heritage is that of Charles de Brochtorff who has regaled us with a series of 19 watercolours showing various views of the interior and exterior of the temples of Ġgantija soon after their clearance

operation in 1820. These scenes were being sketched while a large and deep hole was being excavated inside the Xaghra Circle, only 300 m to the west of Ġgantija. This operation was captivated by the same painter in two additional watercolours, one giving a side view of the circle from the east and the other a more panoramic and detailed view showing the excavated hole within the circle, against the topographical backdrop of Ġgantija, the In-Nuffara hill and Kemmuna in the distance. The series of watercolours is preserved in the National Library in Valletta bound together with other watercolours in a magnificent volume (Brochtorff 1849), and preceded by a handwritten introduction describing these remains as “Druidical”; Druids being a peculiar class in Celtic society – priests, judges or teachers – derived by 16th century scholars from the descriptions of the Classical age, in particular Caesar’s *Commentaries*, and Tacitus’ *Agricola and Germania*.

A return to Biblical terminology is documented with the publication in 1827 of the investigations at Ġgantija by the Frenchman Mazzara in a volume entitled *Temple ante-Diluvien dit des Géants dans l’Ile de Gozo* (Mazzara 1827). An interesting aberration is provided by a Maltese eccentric scholar, by name Giorgio Grognet de Vasset, who in 1854 published a monumental volume entitled *Compendio della Isola Atlantide...* in which he proposed his theory that the megalithic remains were the vestiges of the civilisation of the lost Atlantis of which the Maltese islands were the last surviving remnants (Grognet 1854). Grognet even reconstructed the language and the script of this lost civilisation. There are reasons to believe that he might be the author of the inscription engraved on the stone floor in the inner corridor of the south temple of the Ġgantija complex since the letters are extremely similar to those of his script.

The attribution of the megalithic temples to the Phoenicians was adhered to by virtually all the scholars who wrote on Gozitan antiquities during the rest of the 19th century, including Annetto A. Caruana in his many works (1882; 1899). Their prehistoric identity was recognized first by P. Furse (1869), later by J. H. Cooke (1893), but most emphatically and authoritatively by the German scholar A. Mayr at the turn of the century (1901).

With the discoveries of the two previously unknown, and fundamentally

important, prehistoric sites of the Hypogeum of Hal Saflieni (1902-8) and the temples of Tarxien (1915-18), the attention of field archaeology was shifted to Malta and very little activity was devoted to Gozo for almost a century. It would be enough to skim through the works of Temi Zammit, Margaret Murray, John Evans and David Trump, the most active prehistoric archaeologists on these islands since the beginning of the twentieth century to realize this. Naturally, however, all these archaeologists included the Gozitan sites in their works of a general nature, like Evans' *Malta* (1959) and his monumental *Survey* (1971), as well as Trump's *Guide* (1972). Indeed, it was Colin Renfrew, the eminent British prehistorian, who in 1973 made the claim that the Ġgantija temples were the earliest free-standing stone structures in the world (Renfrew 1973). Nevertheless, field exploration was limited to a few sporadic trenches. A noteworthy one was that made in 1969 by Francis Mallia on the floor of a roofless cave at Il-Mixta, near San Lawrenz (*Museum Annual Report 1969*: 5-6). Mallia was hoping to hit on sealed deposits at Il-Mixta like the ones from which a great amount of impressed pottery of the Ghar Dalam type had been clandestinely excavated and eventually surrendered to the Museum authorities. But he was not successful and had to abandon the exercise owing to impending dangers from a nearby quarry, the same one which had eaten away the original deposits (*Museum Annual Report 1970*: 6).

The first archaeological publication solely dedicated to Gozo's prehistoric monuments, albeit of a greatly reduced size and of a popular nature, appeared in 1986, in the series *Gaulitana* edited by Joseph Bezzina (Bonanno 1986a). This was followed by a much more extensive publication on Gozo, edited by Charles Cini (1990), with a section dedicated to archaeology (Bonanno 1990).

### **The Ġhajnsielem Huts and the Xagħra Stone Circle**

It was against this background that in September 1985, while Dr David Trump and Prof. Colin Renfrew were in Malta attending the conference on "Archaeology and Fertility Cult in the Ancient Mediterranean", the opportunity was snatched to set up a joint research project between the Universities of Cambridge and Malta and the Museums Department, with a view to undertaking excavations in Gozo. This project material-

ised in the summer of 1987 with the excavation of the remains of two domestic huts of the *Ġgantija* phase on the edge of Mgarr Road, Ghajnsielem (Malone *et al.* 1988). Simultaneously, the full scale excavation of the Xaghra Stone Circle was started, with immediate promising results. In fact, this was followed regularly by an excavation campaign each year until the project was closed in 1994 in expectation of the publication of the academic reports. Another aim of the joint research project was to undertake a systematic field walking survey of a wide strip of land stretching all along Gozo from the west to the east coast. This exercise is still being conducted.

The domestic huts at Ghajnsielem are of great interest in the light of the almost total absence of settlement sites for this period in both islands. The question often arose: "With all the concentration of imposing, monumental religious buildings, where did the temple builders live?" Traces of huts contemporary with the temples next door had been found in the sixties at Skorba (Trump 1966); but these were far too tenuous, though enough to allow us to guess that the temple builders' abodes were very ephemeral, built as they were of extremely perishable materials (Bonanno 1986). This was confirmed by the discovery at Ghajnsielem, where two huts of different sizes were found. The larger hut had walls and a central pillar built of mud-brick. The roof was probably of thatch which is not likely to leave any mark in the archaeological record after even a few decades, let alone thousands of years. Underneath another pillar, which was situated between the two huts, a cone-shaped object with a red ochre cover was found which could not be explained otherwise than as some sort of ritual object, probably connected with the foundation of the same huts (Malone *et al.* 1988).

At the Xaghra Stone Circle, by the third archaeological campaign it was confirmed beyond doubt that the circular field being excavated was indeed the one that had been illustrated by the two watercolours signed by Charles de Brocchorff in 1829 (1849), and previously by Jean Houel in his *Voyage Pittoresque* (1787). The excavators had to remove all the backfill of the huge hole that had been dug in the centre of the Circle in 1820. Underneath the soil surface they found essentially two distinct situations: 1) a small rock-cut tomb, consisting of two burial chambers reached through a common shaft, which appears to have been used repeatedly by members of an extended family in the earlier phases of

## *Prehistoric and Roman Gozo*

the Temple Period; and 2) a system of natural underground caves which were used as a collective cemetery by a large community of temple builders in the last phases of the same age. The roofs of practically all these caves collapsed towards the very end of the same age and the cemetery was abandoned, to be occupied at a later stage and for a different purpose by the Bronze Age people (Bonanno *et al.* 1990).

The finds were abundant and most rewarding, in many senses. The ceramic remains were more or less of the same types with which we are familiar from the temples themselves, with a few pleasant surprises. Stone finds included a cache of three flint knives of a size never met with before in Malta, and axe-shaped pendants of exotic materials whose provenance has been traced to Sicily, Calabria and as far afield as the Alps region (Malone *et al.* 1993). The figurative material ranges from a series of stylised anthropomorphic bone pendants and a stone anthropomorphic stele (similar to the one from the Ta' Trapna tombs), through clay and stone figures of the usual corpulent type, albeit with some important variations, to a group of stone figurines belonging to an iconography unknown before (Stoddart *et al.* 1993). All these will, no doubt, contribute with further study to a radical rethinking of the meaning of the figurative representation produced by this extraordinary culture.

Of central importance are – as to be expected from a cemetery site – the human bones which were found in their hundreds of thousands. Most were found in complete disarticulation, suggesting secondary burial. Some partial articulation, of hands and feet, was also encountered, suggesting some quite nightmarish scenery within the original underground cemetery complex.

A considerable number of completely articulated skeletons were also excavated with all the care normally required by such situations. It stands to reason that their physical context will have a lot to say as to their meaning.

The exploration and eventual excavation of the Xaghra Circle have been undertaken according to the most scientific and state-of-the-art methodology. Similarly, the post-excavation processing of the finds is being conducted with scientific rigour. We thus expect new light to be shed on

aspects, such as environmental history, palaeobotany and palaeozoology, the physical appearance and dietary regimes of our ancestors, as well as their social structures and interrelationships. The methods of geophysical surveying, excavation and research used for this collaborative project provide an excellent model for future research.

### **New Archaeological Sites**

The third component of the joint research project, the field walking survey, has already yielded concrete results. New archaeological sites are being discovered, sometimes merely from the progressive intensity of pottery sherds lying on the surface. The survey, which is still in progress, is expected to shed light also on land use in Gozo, both in antiquity and at present.

What are the prospects for prehistoric archaeology in Gozo? It is obvious that all we can say about this is by way of what is desirable to be done. We can only identify the present needs and suggest ways of providing for those needs. But it is most likely that the situation will change with the socio-economic, as well as the physical development of the island.

As far as the study of the known archaeological heritage is concerned, it is enough to mention the number of prehistoric sites in Gozo that still need to be properly documented through measured drawings, photography and (why not?) limited and very selective excavation. Borg il-Gharib, L-Imrejbiet and Ta' Marziena, to mention just a few examples, still await such study. Concurrently with that, Gozo would benefit enormously, as Malta itself would, if the study of landscape archaeology is taken up with greater intensity. A very modest exercise on these lines has been conducted by the present writer with respect to the archaeological monuments at Ta' Ċenċ. But a much more global study of the changing Gozitan landscape in prehistory was made, under the writer's supervision, by Mr Godwin Vella for his B.A. Hons dissertation. If the field walking survey referred to above were to be extended to cover the whole of Gozo, we should be able to form a much better idea not only of the archaeological resource of the island – thereby being in a much better position to protect and manage it – but also of how it changed over the millennia.

## **Management of Archaeological Heritage**

We have learnt from experience that, without proper management of resources, especially the archaeological one, we risk either losing it irredeemably without even noticing, or else over-exploiting it to its detriment. Most of us are aware of the great losses Gozo's heritage has suffered due to the inability of the central authorities to cope with the Gozitan realities. On the other hand, there appears to be a slow but positive change in mentality. For instance, plans are in hand to treat the archaeological resource within the Ta' Ċenċ property with a holistic approach, integrating it within the projected expansion of the touristic facilities, promoting and managing it in a way that befits its cultural, social and intrinsic value.

The management of the archaeological heritage needs to be backed by a thorough knowledge of the existing resources and a deep sensitivity for its treatment. Both require a fully-fledged university education in the subject besides, obviously, the political will and the financial resources to implement it. Since 1990, the University has been providing the country with a regular supply of graduates in Archaeology, some at Honours level and hailing from Gozo. In the circumstances, it would not be a bad idea if Gozo had its own resident archaeologists to mind its archaeological heritage.

## **Discovering Roman Gozo**

In view of the number of writings on Roman Gozo by the present writer in fairly recent publications (Bonanno 1990; 1992), in order to avoid undue repetition, this section of the paper is being restricted to the question of methods of research on Gozo's history and archaeological heritage of the Roman period. It should also be kept in mind that most of what has been written above on the history of prehistoric studies and archaeological activity is also valid for the Roman period in Gozo.

It stands to reason that the method of research into the historical past of Gozo differs from that of its prehistory, essentially because the sources of information available are not limited to the material evidence, the archaeological data, but include also the written records, whether of a



literary nature – such as poetry, oratory and historical accounts – or epigraphic nature. It is strongly believed that not only does such a research depend heavily on these latter sources, but it must actually start with a thorough study of them in order to extract from them the greatest amount of reliable information possible. And this is precisely what one must do in discovering Roman Gozo. A considerable amount of philological study has been done on the Greek and Latin literary references to Gozo. Quintinus himself (1536), the first writer on Maltese antiquities, showed a very thorough knowledge of the ancient literary references to both Malta and Gozo. The same and other references were taken up by various writers, both foreign and Maltese, and ranging from Abela (1647) to Ashby (1915), but never in a comprehensive way. Closer to our times, two Maltese scholars who devoted a number of important studies to these sources are Edward Coleiro (1964) and Joseph Busuttill (1968; 1975). A more historical approach is taken by the Sicilian scholar F. Rizzo in a long article published in 1977 (1976-77).

### **The Name Gozo in Classical Times**

Gozo has a name which very probably has its origin in classical times. *Gaulos*, or *Gaudos* (of which Gozo is probably a later corruption), was the Roman version of the Greek name by which the island was known as far back as the sixth century B.C. In fact, the oldest mention of Gaulos is attributed to Hecataeus, a Greek writer who lived approximately between 560 and 480 B.C. (Busuttill 1975). The same form appears in the genitive plural (*Gauliton*, “of the Gozitans”) on coins minted in Gozo in the first century B.C. (Coleiro 1965: 124).

An obvious observation, but one that needs to be made just the same, is that most of what the ancient sources tell us about Malta is applicable to Gozo. Just as today, when one refers to Malta in international quarters, one has in mind the whole Maltese archipelago, in antiquity whoever named Malta included also Gozo. It was in late antiquity that it was found necessary to mention both islands in the composite name of *Gaudomelete*. Some of the ancient writers make a specific mention of Gozo as distinct from Malta, such as Diodorus Siculus (first century B.C.) who attributes to it good harbours, and the geographer Ptolemy (second century A.D.) who even gives the coordinates of its town.

Cicero, on the other hand, who is such an important source of information on various aspects of daily life in Malta, as well as the Acts of the Apostles, have no words to spare specifically on Gozo.

### **Inscriptions**

Much more informative are the inscriptions which often define Gozo as a separate administrative entity with its own town, magistrates, priesthoods and rich patrons. A Punic inscription of the second century B.C. testifies to the survival, well within the Roman domination of Gozo, of the old Phoenician religion and of several shrines dedicated to Phoenician divinities. Only one inscription, of early imperial date, lumps the two islands together under the procuratorship of a certain Chrestion; while a contemporary inscription, dedicated to Iulia Augusta, wife of Emperor Augustus, records the existence of a female priesthood in Gozo who looked after the worship of this imperial lady in the guise of the goddess Ceres.

In the first half of the second century A.D., then, we have two inscriptions set up by the Gozitans to honour their patrons Postumus and his son Vallius which state clearly that Gozo by that time enjoyed the status of *municipium*. Postumus and Vallius both had honours conferred upon them by successive emperors, Hadrian first and Antoninus Pius after him. One inscription dedicated to Julia Domna, wife of Emperor Septimius Severus, with her title as "Mother of the Army Camps", is too fragmentary and reveals little about the goings-on in Gozo during the reign of the Severan dynasty, but another one, originally dedicated to her son Geta, implies a lot. The name of this prince was erased from the inscription, no doubt following his murder and the *damnatio memoriae* on his name and images on public monuments throughout the empire, declared by his brother Caracalla as soon as the latter succeeded his father as emperor. More imperial intrigue is suggested by two inscriptions which are recorded on Gozo, commemorating Constantius (A.D. 292-306) and Galerius (A.D. 293-311) who reigned first as co-Caesars and later as co-Emperors in the tetrarchic rule system introduced by Emperor Diocletian.

## Roman Archaeological Remains

The archaeological remains are not so abundant for Roman Gozo, mostly because most of them have been allowed to be destroyed by development, and the few that have escaped destruction still need to be properly studied. For this and for other reasons, such as the very shallow archaeological deposits normally present on both islands, archaeological excavations of ancient historical sites – including “Roman” sites – should not be less rigorous in their scientific methodology than those of prehistoric sites.

One of the first aims of Roman archaeological studies is to establish the topography of the ancient town of Gaulos: the shape and extent of its boundaries, the pattern of its streets, the position of its forum and of its public and religious buildings, the architecture of domestic housing. All this still needs to be established with more certainty than hitherto since the boundaries of the town have been only hypothetically established, as suggested by the discovery of tombs which were presumably outside them. As complete a record as possible needs to be held of all the accidental discoveries made during earth disturbing operations under the buildings and roads of the present urban texture. State agencies and departments should set an example by inviting the competent authorities to monitor closely any trenching operations performed within the town. Private developers are more likely to act responsibly if they have a good model to emulate and if they are given assurance of either timely and adequate compensation, or expeditious investigation prior to the release of development permits.

Outside the main urban centre of Roman Gaulos we know that there were some country villas, one of which – that found in Xewkija – being an example of the rustic farmstead type equipped with olive-pressing apparatus (*Museum Annual Report 1958-59*: 4), and the one excavated close to the sea-shore at Ramla Bay in 1910-11 being more likely a residential resort furnished with hot baths and rooms decorated with marble floors and painted walls (*Museum Annual Report 1910-11*: 11; Ashby 1915: 70-4). Of both these types there should be more specimens whose remains still exist buried in the soil in the Gozitan countryside. The field walking survey mentioned above is a non-destructive method that is very likely to reveal such surviving remains, as it has already



**A Roman marble *oscillum* with a tragic mask carved in low relief on one side and a griffin on the other.  
Photo: J. Farrugia**

done in a couple of cases. Even underground tombs are likely to be spotted by this method. Gozo is particularly short of such tombs, compared to the larger island. Besides the tombs found just outside the limits of the ancient town, such as the ones discovered in St Francis Square in 1892-3 (Caruana 1899: 50-1) and the funerary glass jar in Vajringa Street (Caruana 1899: 54-5), only a few tombs have been recorded for the Roman period, namely those of Wied il-Ghasri, Wied is-Simar and Tal-Qighan (*Museum Annual Report 1979:1*; Caruana 1884).

Besides the buildings and structures, the archaeologist has to turn his attention to the study of the objects retrieved from them and elsewhere. Roman sculpture from Gozo is represented mostly by the fine female draped statue from Rabat that probably represented an imperial lady, possibly the Julia Augusta recorded in the respective inscription mentioned earlier, and by a marble *oscillum* (that is, a decorative disc intended to be hung between columns) with a tragic mask carved in low relief on one side and a griffin on the other. The study of sculpture and art in general needs to be on the lookout for works that could be attributed to local production. None of the known marble pieces can be thus attributed, but sculpture in local stone, such as the satyr head in the Archaeological Museum in the Castello, and the telamon from the villa at Ramla Bay (now lost) could very well be traced to a local school of production which needs to be better defined with the discovery of more similar pieces.

Coins are also the object of an important specialisation of archaeology, and they can contribute reliable dating and other historical evidence whenever they are found in sealed contexts. Unfortunately, recording of such finds has not been up to standard in the past and the potential information that could have been provided by the context of the third century A.D. coin hoard found under the church of St George in Rabat in 1937 (*Museum Annual Report 1936-7:14*), to cite only one example, is now lost for ever.

One other area in which Gozo seems to preserve a precious heritage is marine archaeology. Off the mouth of Xlendi Bay two superimposed shipwrecks have been recorded (*Museum Annual Report 1961: 6-7*). Another one has been observed more recently in much deeper waters in the same region (Grima and Gauci 1993). Yet another shipwreck is known to lie on the opposite side of Gozo, and there are surely others awaiting to be discovered. Such heritage too needs systematic surveying, which for obvious reasons is much more costly, in terms of time, money and human resources than surveying on land.

### **The Prospects**

The problem with the archaeology of Prehistoric and Roman Gozo is that in the past evident remains that were encountered during building works even in the most frequented places were allowed to be obliterated or covered over without any proper record. This might be partly owing to a, possibly unconscious, feeling among the Gozitans against the Maltese bureaucrats who are considered almost like “foreigners” interfering in local affairs.

With the appointment of local, Gozitan archaeologists, this attitude might be overcome completely. The Gozitan people are bound to become increasingly jealous of their heritage and will want to protect it in earnest, against the unscrupulous developer, whether Gozitan or “foreigner”. We all look forward to that future, hoping that it is not a distant one.

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## **RELIGION: A PERSPECTIVE INTO GOZO'S MYSTERY**

**Joseph Farrugia**

**G**ozo is deceptively tiny for its history. Though for the most part its history is still shrouded in mystery, it is so evident and so compelling that Gozo's past is a larger than life story of an island steeped in the events, cultures and civilizations of the Mediterranean wherein it has floated since the last ice age tied, together with its elder sister and the other smaller islands, by invisible umbilical links to the southern European continent to its north and northern Africa to its south.

Having its own story to tell does not mean that Gozo may at any point in time be seen as isolated from the other island of Malta or, indeed, that of the Mediterranean. Gozo's history is substantially patterned on that of Malta and its vicissitudes are essentially woven with those of Malta. Nevertheless archeologists and historians converge with geologists, zoologists and botanists on the view that Gozo "has a personality which is quite distinct from that of Malta" (Blouet 1963: 127). Scholars of classical epigraphy, medievalists and anthropologists are not of a different mind as to the cultural identity of the island.

It is a pity that this "personality" of Gozo is still too hidden for us to be able to say that we have an adequate portrait of the island. The pity becomes greater still with the knowledge that so much will probably remain hidden, known only to those who are now forever silent. I wonder what we would learn if our hills, valleys, terraced fields and plains were to collaborate and co-author a dossier containing their accumulated knowledge of Gozo's changing fortunes over the last eight or nine millennia! I wonder what we would hear if the archeological remains that have been unearthed and those which are still buried deep beneath our feet were to give up their secrets on the origins of our culture and its evolution into contemporary civilization! I wonder what we would come

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up with if the remains of our Gozitan ancestors were to return to their former selves and tell us about themselves and their times!

Although for the most part Gozo's history is still elusive, it is not for that less real than other better known histories. One feels this history as one walks along the ancient streets of Rabat, intriguing in their twisting iters, giving up branches leading to apparently blind ends, initially unexplainable, mysterious. The more violent side to Gozo's chequered history comes through beneath the towering walls of the town's Castello, upon its wind-swept ramparts and in the midst of its haunted ruins. And nobody can miss the feeling of wonder, at once mystic and earthy, and fail to feel dwarfed by the awesomeness of the temples of Ġgantija, especially as one steps, almost nervously, into their open arms and approaches their inner sanctuaries hallowed by the intuitive beliefs and sacred rituals of our forefathers who built them and worshipped in them.

History is man-made, and to think that tiny Gozo has been inhabited for thousands of years is to wonder about the extent to which the island must be immersed in the cultural past. There is no hilltop or valley in Gozo, no slope or plain, no wild or dale, no sea ledge or shore, no nook or cranny which does not carry some sign of human presence and activity whether remote, ancient or prosaically recent. The limestone dwellings of man and animal which have evolved into hamlets and villages constitute perhaps the more recent evidence of Gozo's past. But old rock-cut and semi-built habitations, the remains of which are sparsely scattered all over the island, and especially the medieval buildings still standing (though fast disappearing) in ancient Rabat give hint of a more remote past, going back to the times of the Arabs, the Byzantines, the Romans, the Phoenicians and still earlier to the prehistoric ages of the island.

Wandering about Gozo it comes across that this island's history is indeed more, far more than what we know. It dawns that Gozo's history is more than just the chronicle we often read of assaults, sieges and conquests and such like dramatic events, however much these must feature in any mediation of the Gozo mystery and in any analysis of the island's traditional self-perception. It comes across that the history of Gozo is, more than anything else, plain man's ordinary "story": that of his probably undisputed first settlements here over 7000 years ago, that of his generally uncontested and ever more sophisticated enjoyment of the

island's natural resources, and that of the inevitable modification and adjustment of some of Gozo's landscape according to his changing material needs and successive cultures.

It is indeed on culture, after all, that historians must pause in their compositions of Gozo's history. Culture basically refers to the complex whole of meanings and values peculiar to a given group of people and emerging in that given people's attitudes and activities. It evolves into civilization at the very moment that a people's meanings and values give rise to some kind of cohesion in social organization, government, economy and especially religion. Indeed, there seems to be a majority opinion among anthropologists, archeologists and historians that religion is the first component to emerge in any cultural composition and is also one of the first constituents of civilization. Fernand Braudel goes farther and identifies religion with civilization as such. Writing about medieval Spain he points out that prior to the unity which was forged in the nineteenth century, the peoples of Spain "felt truly united only by the bonds of religious belief; in other words by civilization" (Braudel 1972: 824). It is a fact that religion invariably emerges in the history of civilizations as the earliest symptom of the latter and also their most constant one. This is especially true of the civilizations of the Mediterranean which are substantially those that followed closely on each other's heels in the islands of Malta and Gozo.

Referring more specifically to Gozo, and without hereby ignoring that the same pattern obtains for Malta, I perceive five ages or eras as forming the history of religious belief and activity here. Each one of these ages corresponds to a particular civilization, or group of civilizations, which visited and dominated this island and modified the religious beliefs and practices of its inhabitants. Each one of these civilizations or groups of civilizations, moreover, has left behind it, though not in equal measure, archeological and other evidence which serves as testimony to its presence here.

### **The Goddess of Life**

The earliest testimony of this kind is that given by the still partially standing temples of Ġgantija, by a nearby giant stone burial site known as the Stone Circle as well as by the ruins of other neolithic sites of

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worship and burial dotting the entire island. These prehistoric remains, thanks to which incidentally tiny Gozo makes a most creditable appearance on the cultural map of the world, testify to the earliest civilizations that flourished on this island. They also testify to the fact that religious belief and religious ritual emerge as primary constituents at the very dawn of our cultural history.

The religious culture of the peoples which occupied Gozo over the extensive paleolithic and neolithic ages of the island cannot be other than merely attested to and can only be tentatively articulated on the bases of the archeological finds dating mostly from the temple period. The accumulated evidence, however, points to an awareness on the part of the prehistoric people that their human life was rooted in another which was larger than their own and superior to it. Death was an instance of life rather than its negation. It was a passage to new life which some kind of overwhelming but potentially friendly power or deity guaranteed and promised. On this conviction they sought the favour of this "motherly" power wherein they saw their source of life and sought to accede to its core as to the womb where the seed of life is received, preserved, nurtured, transformed and given. Hence the feminine symbolism permeating the Ġgantija temples in their form of a flowering female, in their recessed altars, libation holes, fertility figurines, sacred carvings and especially in the adjacent grave site, expressive of the vital link perceived between the dead and the "mother goddess" of life.

Colin Renfrew states that he lacked any clue "as to how and why the temples came to be built" (Renfrew 1973: 167). While the "how" remains substantially a mystery, the "why" may in fact have its basic answer in the human spirit which has never been known to exist *in puris naturalibus* and has always manifested itself to be imbued with a transcendental dimension or existential (Rahner 1961; Rossano 1975).

The religious beliefs and customs of peoples, including those that settled on Gozo about 5000 years B.C. and inhabited the island over the subsequent prehistoric ages, are none other than expressions of this transcendental dimension. Insofar as every human artifact manifests an idea, or at least an intuition, the religious artifacts of prehistoric Gozo are sure evidence of religious beliefs and values pertaining to the people who sought to express them in material objects and customs ranging from the

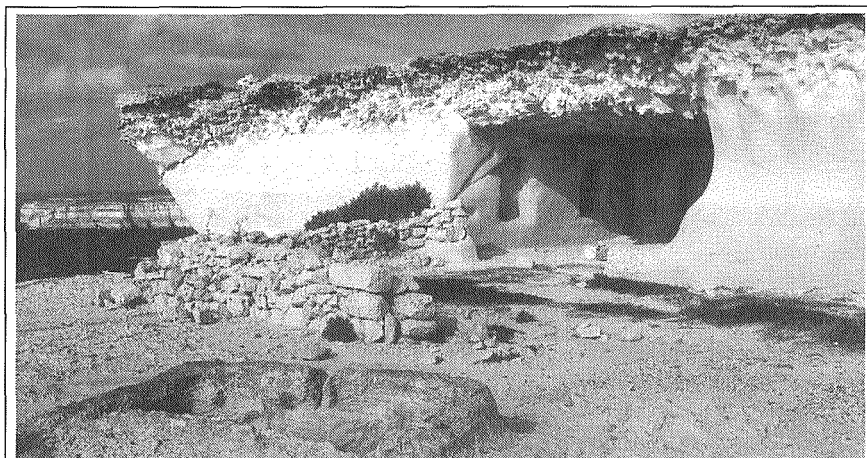
tinest clay figurine placed beside a corpse in a ritual burial to the most stupendous of the megalithic temples of Gozo.

Prehistoric Gozo possesses ample testimony to an evolved Gozitan civilization which had at its core a religious culture that expressed and socially mediated the meanings which the peoples of these ages gave to their itinerary of pregnancy, birth, sexuality, happiness, fear, pain and death. It marks the first - and the most obscure - stage of mankind's voyage down this island's history. This voyage was, as Peter Serracino Inglott aptly describes it (Serracino Inglott 1992: vii), essentially "a pilgrimage" which took the inhabitants of Gozo through various epochs, each of which had its own peculiar religious beliefs, priorities and expressions. The memorials of these first steps are here, in our midst, for all to see. They are of two kinds. The material ones are the most immediately evident, awe-inspiring and tourist-captive. The spiritual ones are the more elusive, buried now as they are in our cultural soul but constantly re-emerging in other forms and dynamic expressions.

### **Phoenician Polytheism**

The indigenous religious culture of prehistoric Gozo gradually got caught in the emergent influence of a foreign people - the Phoenicians who planted their settlement on the Maltese islands some time before 800 B.C. The Phoenicians, hailing from the Syro-Palestinian coastal strip of the eastern Mediterranean, brought over with them not only their material possessions, specialized craftsmanship and commercial acumen but also their cultural baggage, including their peculiar deities and religious customs. Their settlement here marked also the settlement on our islands by their numerous divinities and elaborate beliefs and practices.

This was not different from what at the same time was happening elsewhere on the Mediterranean shores. In fact from the moment the political turmoils amongst their maritime city-states dictated that it was in their commercial interest to take to the western sea, the Phoenicians soon became a prominent feature of the Mediterranean. As a result the Mediterranean gradually acquired a hitherto unknown unity not only as a commercial area but also as a cultural zone. The Phoenicians started the phenomenon of colonization in the Mediterranean and through them



**The Phoenician open air sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija. Photo: John Cremona.**

much flowed into its hinterlands and islands: men, industrial skills, language and writing techniques, customs and indeed religions. In their seafaring along with their goods they carried with them the deities of their native cities and wherever they set up their settlements they also established their sanctuaries there to worship their divine triads and perform their cultic rituals.

Apart from the various names of deities we know very little about the religious beliefs and customs which the Phoenicians possessed and exported with them. Sabatino Moscati concludes that these were essentially of Canaanite attribution transfused by Syro-Babylonian, Mesopotamian, Egyptian and other components (Moscati 1968: 36). Nor do we know to what extent their religious culture penetrated or rather substituted that prevalent in these islands down to the late prehistoric age. What we know for sure is the information which is to be found in the Phoenician-Punic inscriptions that have come to light in both Malta and *Gwl*, the name which the Phoenicians gave to Gozo and from which the modern name itself derives (Lipinski 1993: 1185).

The Gozitan remains which testify to the presence on this island of the Phoenicians and their religious culture are noteworthy. They range from the open air sanctuary at Ras il-Wardija, high on the western edge of the island, to the numerous tombs unearthed outside the boundaries of

ancient Rabat, especially along Il-Vajringa, containing specifically religious, ornamental and other artifacts. Of no less importance are the coins struck in Gozo showing a female head surmounted by the crescent moon, probably representing the goddess Astarte, who seems to have had a temple on the island (Lipinski 1993).

Of remarkable importance is a Punic inscription which came to light in 1855 (Caruana 1882: 39-41). This inscription discloses the deep attachment which "the people of Gozo" must have had for their divinities if, well over a century into Roman rule (Bonanno 1990:34), they were still forking out money for the upkeep and restoration of their Punic temples. A section of the text is missing but two names of Canaanite-Phoenician deities can still be deciphered: Sadambaal, a god unknown from other Phoenician or Punic inscriptions and Astarte, the famous Phoenician-Punic goddess who was generally associated with Baal, the protective god of the maritime city of Sidon, as his female companion and symbolizing the fertile earth. In Phoenician mythology Baal and Astarte headed a divine triad which also included a "divine son" whose annual resurgence to life was perceived in the seasonal cycle of vegetal life. Phoenician religious myth saw the deities manifesting themselves in the annual cycle of nature. In this there was a resemblance to neolithic religious belief. But Phoenician-Punic religion was more articulate in that it multiplied and personalized its gods and goddesses, each of whom had a name and a function related to their respective protective or destructive powers.

Religion, which permeated through all dimensions of ancient society so as it was impossible to distinguish between the religious and profane aspects of it, was undoubtedly a cultural focus in the life of Phoenician-Punic Gozo. The successive generations living on the island gradually grew into its polytheism, practised its cults and drew on its superstitions. With the arrival of the Phoenicians, and then the Carthaginians, Gozo's indigenous culture had come into contact with a new source of enrichment. It also knew for the first time the phenomenon of colonization and experienced its commanding role in the culture of the peoples it dominates. It is said that the local custom of having the protective eye of the Egyptian Osiris on the bows of the *luzzu*, the local traditional fishing boat, knows its origins in the Phoenician era. The Phoenician polytheistic experience has undoubtedly left enduring effects which are still traceable in contemporary Maltese as well as other Mediterranean

cultures. Couldn't it be, asks Braudel, that our attachment to the cult of the saints - a specifically Mediterranean characteristic of Christianity which is in contrast to that of the Protestant north - knows much to an ancient substratum of Mediterranean polytheism? (Braudel 1972: 768).

### **Roman Ruler Worship**

Next after the Phoenician-Punic civilization, in the line of civilizations which dominated Gozo and modified its culture, including its religious traditions, came that of the Romans. The Romans colonized Malta and Gozo in 218 B.C. and ruled over the islands for just over 750 years. They had taken these islands during the second Punic war and added them to their expanding Mediterranean domination.

It is impossible to speak of Roman civilization simply as a homogeneous entity especially as regards its root cultures. These differed from one region to another and evolved deeply over the classical period. After all one of the secrets of the Roman colonizing success was its capacity to tolerate and absorb provincial cultures and religions, deities and cults. But Roman civilization did, in the long run, romanize much of the indigenous culture of the Mediterranean coastlands.

The Roman archeological remains surfacing in Gozo, on which our knowledge of Roman Malta and Gozo relies so much, indicate an initial passiveness by the indigenous inhabitants of the island towards their new rulers. These, on their part, allowed their subjects to retain their cultic sites, worship their familiar deities and practice their religious customs. Indeed the Phoenician-Punic temples continued to flourish. Nonetheless the Roman colonisers brought with them their own divinities. For many years the religious beliefs of the inhabitants co-existed with those of the newcomers. We do not know to what extent the deities of the Romans eventually substituted those of the natives but we have indications which seem to tell us that they must have become fairly established. In fact we have eighteenth century testimony of several statuettes of Roman idols such as Hercules, Apollo, Flora and Romulus and Remus being reportedly discovered at Żebbuġ and Nadur and especially in the environs of Rabat.

What we know for sure, and have ample archeological proof of, concerns



the introduction on the island of Roman official ruler worship. A rather large number of Latin inscriptions carved in hard stone or marble give us a wealth of information about this semi-religious cult which was carried out by the Gozitan *municipium* in the *oppidum* of *Gaulos*, the Roman town of Gozo. These inscriptions, most of which were originally reported or found beneath or in the immediate vicinity of the basilica of St George at the very heart of ancient Rabat, make mention of gods, priestesses and high priests. They allude to the worship of the emperors which, as T. Ashby writes, was “carried out in a temple or temples within the city” (Ashby 1915: 70). This means that, apart from the Punic religious buildings pertaining to the native population, the town of Gaulos must have contained also Roman temples adorned with statues of emperors and imperial consorts deified as classical gods and goddesses with inscriptions carved in their pedestals justifying and detailing the honour due to them. Bonanno states that “such inscriptions (as those unearthed in Gozo) were normally commissioned to celebrate the erection of a monument, often a statue” to the emperor or to some important personage.

The Gozo inscriptions testify that an official cult was practised in honour of Iulia Augusta, the consort of Augustus (63 B.C. – 14 AD) the first Roman emperor under whom Jesus of Nazareth was born, Hadrianus who reigned between 117 and 138 and who had at least one priest - *flamen divini Hadriani* - in charge of his cult in Gozo, Iulia Domna, wife of Lucius Septimus Severus (193-211) and styled by the Roman Senate as *mater castrorum*, Diocletianus (284-305) and Galerius (293-305 as Caesar and 305-311 as emperor of the East). It was during the time of the last two mentioned that the great persecution of 303 A.D. was launched against the Christians whom Diocletian saw as constituting a deadly threat to the gods that guaranteed the unity of the empire.

The inscriptions, moreover, give incontrovertible evidence that the official cult to the “divine” emperors was still being carried out well into the fourth century A.D.

### **The Dawn of Christianity**

The account given by St Luke of the misadventure of the Apostle Paul on the north eastern coast of the island of Malta (Acts 28) takes us to 60 A.D.

when the Romans had already been occupying the Maltese islands for 278 years. If anything transpires from the Lucan account it is the articulate if credulous religiosity of the friendly natives who had welcomed the shipwrecked party. The attack that Paul suffered from the viper which fastened itself to his hand evoked for them the power of "divine" justice or vengeance. Paul's survival despite the attack of the viper on the other hand is perceived by them as indicative of some extraordinary power which he possessed and it induced them to hail him as god.

It is to this event that the dawn of Christianity in the Maltese islands is traditionally attributed. Indeed there is no doubt that Paul's advent in Malta probably meant the very first contact of these islands with the nascent Christian Church and with a new civilization which in a few hundred years would prevail over all the lands bordering the Mediterranean. But we have no firm evidence that Paul met with any immediate success in his missionary endeavours here and much less that he established any sort of organised Christian community. It is probable that most of the natives who had met Paul soon forgot about him and his party and carried on with their long-standing pagan religious practices and emperor worship.

This should come as no surprise. Notwithstanding the much more vigorous preaching of the Christian gospel in many places around the Mediterranean and notwithstanding the numerous conversions and the ever-increasing Christian baptisms, the pagan religions and mysteries throughout the empire continued to thrive for many years and the official cult to the Emperor continued to be carried out for several centuries into what eventually came to be counted as the Christian era.

Despite a Pauline tradition in Gozo patterned on that of Malta we can make only very dubious statements concerning a Christian presence in Gozo before the third century. The earliest undisputed evidence of Christianity in Gozo takes us back only to the late fourth century. This evidence consists of three Roman lamps, allegedly of north African provenance, two of which are adorned with Christian symbols (*Malta Archeological Report*, 1961: 5). These were found on the southern side of It-Tokk (officially known as Independence Square), in the vicinity of St George's church in the centre of Rabat. Apart from these artifacts, the

caves known as Għar Gerduf on the outskirts of the town have been traditionally identified as Christian burial places and mentioned as very early evidence of Christianity in Gozo. Mgr G. Farrugia takes this view (Farrugia 1915). Nevertheless Buhagiar (1986: 373) states that Għar Gerduf “is of doubtful date and has been quarried beyond recognition” so that no secure statements can be made on it.

There is no doubt, however, as to the Christian identity of Gozo during the Byzantine period (Id 1994: 80 ss). This classical period (535-870) marks another significant stage in the unfolding of the religious history of our people. Its heritage cannot be ignored since it saw the Maltese islands into an entirely novel religious experience, foremost in it the organization and perception of unity. The political unity of the Roman Mediterranean evolved into the religious unity peculiar to the Christian Church. This period, moreover, saw the integration of Gozo’s religious experience with a world religion based on a claim to a supernatural revelation. It tied our people to two “foreign” religious centres, Byzantium and Rome. But, perhaps its most peculiar characteristic was the introduction (or was it the re-introduction) of monotheism, namely belief in one God and the practice of one cult.

### **Islam and the Muslims**

The end of the Byzantine period in 870 A.D. marks also the beginning of the Muslim occupation of Malta and Gozo, hitherto occupied by Christians and some Jews. This happened in the course of the Islamic conquest of the eastern and southern Mediterranean. Most of the Mediterranean lands conquered by the Arabs between the seventh and the eleventh centuries are today still dominated by Islam. These are the North African lands where the Christian faith once flourished and enriched the Christian Church with some of the finest minds and glorious martyrs that it boasts of. Only Spain, Sicily and tiny Malta and Gozo have reverted to their former faith. But much cultural residue from the Arabic experience remains. The most manifest instance of such cultural residue in our case is the language that we speak.

The Maltese language, which is basically Arabic in structure and morphology, is certainly one of the most significant components of our

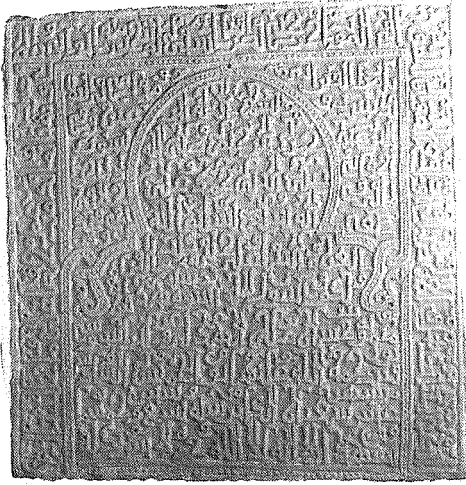
## *Religion and Gozo's Mystery*

cultural heritage and identity. Apart from its ordinary function as a means of communication, it serves also as a vessel and expression of the influences that constitute and shape our history, especially during the years of Islamic domination between 870 and 1249, that is until the practice of Islam was prohibited by the new Norman overlords and its surviving adherents were constricted to conversion or exile.

The Maltese language nevertheless retains its intrinsic link to Islamic religious culture and betrays it. With the suppression on these islands of the Islamic religious faith which provided the cultural location of its origins, the Maltese language indeed lost much of the original conceptual content of its religious vocabulary but its substitution by Christian concepts and notions did not entirely eclipse the Islamic elements. Thus today the Maltese language betrays the presence and relationship of two faiths, two different creeds, two universal and historically mutually hostile religions which respectively, but also in their mutual hostility, have shaped in no small measure the cultural identity of the Maltese and Gozitan people. Our language testifies to our Arabic and Islamic past. This paper permits only a few remarks about our Islamic past as this transpires in the Maltese language.

The Maltese language, as any other language, counts within its vocabulary words which mediate specifically religious ideas. Two such words which have religious meanings and are of Arab-Islamic derivation are *Alla* and *Insara*. The Maltese word *Alla*, meaning God, certainly derives from the Arabic *Allah*. *Allah* is a word which transmits an Islamic notion of God, that notion of God mediated by the preaching of Muhammad, the seventh century Prophet of Islam. But with the suppression of Islam in these islands, the word *Allah* - now *Alla* - was destituted of its Islamic conceptual content and infused with a notion of God which is proper to the Christian faith. Nevertheless the word itself continues to evoke the faith which it originally expressed and to remind us of our Islamic past.

The same happened in the case of the word *Insara* which derived from the Arabic term denoting "the followers of the Nazarene". Originally this Arabic term was used by the Muslims as a means of identification of the Christians but it also denigrated them by defining them merely as disciples of the "Nazarene." This derisive sense notwithstanding, the Arabic word survives in the Maltese *Insara* and remains the term by



**The Maimuna tombstone, said to have been discovered some time after 1760 in the vicinity of Xewkija and Ta' Sannat.**

which the local Christians identify themselves. In the meantime it has overcome its negative character. The point being made here is that the language which we use today as a means for expressing our Christian faith originally emerged as the vehicle of Islamic thought and of Muslim religious belief. Therefore it does stand as testimony to our past.

The Gozitans, however, may boast of other and more specifically Gozitan evidence of their island's Islamic past. This evidence consists of two Islamic tombstones discovered at Xewkija and Rabat respectively. The former (Bonanno 1990: 44; Wettinger 1990:50), said to have been discovered some time after 1760 in the vicinity of Xewkija and Ta' Sannat, speaks of Maimuna, daughter of Hassan ibn 'Ali al Hudali, known as "Is-Susi" who died c.1169. It gives testimony to Maimuna's belief that "there is no god but God alone, who has no companions". These words almost constitute a kind of indirect evidence of the presence of Christians since they are an obvious refutation of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, described by the Qur'an as Tritheism.

The other tombstone (*Daily Malta Chronicle*, 1901) was discovered at Rabat in August 1901 during excavations which were being made in the square known as *Fejn Savina* (Victoria) in connection with the rebuilding and enlargement of the little church which stands there. Engraved like that of Maimuna in Kufic Arabic, this stone inscription, which was much

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corroded, was deciphered at the British Museum and was found to consist also of a profession of belief in *Allah* “the compassionate” and “the merciful” who created the sun, the moon and the stars and who commands them, since he is “Lord of all creatures” and has “ascended his throne” and to him we are all “humbly” subject. It is a pity that the whereabouts of this tombstone are unknown.

Both inscriptions testify to a Muslim presence on the island of Gozo, a presence which eventually diminished until it was totally suppressed in the middle of the thirteenth century when the Arabs were expelled by the new Christian European rulers of these islands.

What, one asks, remains of the Islamic civilization which dominated Malta and Gozo for about 400 years? Very little as far as religious belief as such is concerned, and the little which remains arrives down to us deeply permeated by a long history of anti-Arabic, anti-North African and anti-Ottoman hostility which reached its culmination during the time of the Knights of St John who transformed Malta into a forward bastion of Christian Europe.

### **The Catholic Faith**

The fifth cultural age which deeply modified the religious history of Gozo coincides with the advent of Christianity in Malta and Gozo. Indeed this cultural age traces its origins to the distant past of Rome and Byzantium, but it could be safely said that its influence on the cultural identity we have today became effective with the re-Christianization and Latinization of Malta and Gozo under the Normans and the other Christian European powers.

So many testimonials stand to the importance of the Christian faith in our cultural identity. Indeed so much material and spiritual evidence testifies to Christianity's contribution to our peculiarly Maltese and Gozitan cultural consciousness, our value system, our customs and folklore, our social institutions and our human socialising, our vernacular and artistic heritage, our apprehension of time, family relationships, our educational objectives and priorities, and one may go on. For better or for worse our contemporary cultural personality is imbued with the Christian

faith and exudes it. Our attachment to the Christian faith, and more specifically to the Catholic religion, may today be rejected but it cannot be denied without thereby denying our roots. And denying our roots would amount to wounding our present and consequently ourselves.

The “story” of Gozo is still for the most part buried beneath several layers of rubble and soil as well as more subtle layers of indifference, prejudice and at times mediocrity. But on the other hand it is also true that the number of skilful scholars who, within their chosen fields of scholarship are exploring and unravelling the enigmas of our ancient and more recent past is also thankfully growing. The history of Gozo, however, should not be reduced to a mere chronicling of persons and events in the traditional manner. The story of Gozo is a “mystery” which finds expression in the island’s chronicle of events indeed, but also in its ecological evolution, in the cultural currents and watersheds which for better or worse modified it as well as in the different religious beliefs and cults which successively visited and established themselves on the island.

Today’s relatively pluralist Gozitan society was until recently preceded by a staunchly Catholic population which was itself preceded by men and women who believed and worshipped in the manner of the Muslims, the Jews, the Byzantines, the Romans, the Phoenicians and, way back beyond them, the neolithic and paleolithic peoples. Tiny Gozo provides a microcosm of “macro” Mediterranean religious history and moreover offers itself as a mysterious testimonial to the inherently transcendental nature of the human being. The mystery of Gozo calls upon the effort of many students and scholars: historians, anthropologists, archeologists, art critics, sociologists, and not least also scholars of religion and religious history.

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## THE 1551 SIEGE OF GOZO AND THE REPOPULATION OF THE ISLAND

Stanley Fiorini

I have already considered the depopulation of Gozo of 1551 and its aftermath – a central event in Gozitan history – in an earlier paper published in *Melita Historica* of 1986. In that work the principal primary sources utilized have been the notarial and the parochial records. I have since had the opportunity to look into another important source – the Courts records – information which both corroborates the picture that has already emerged as well as supplements it with important details. The *Acta* of the various *Curie* on these islands are not in the best of states of preservation and are very patchy for the period under consideration. Fortunately, however, the Bishops' Curial records are available and a number of cases that involved clerics on Gozo came to be settled in, or had transcripts made for, that tribunal, affording thereby valuable information.

Fifteenth, and early sixteenth-century life on the Maltese Islands was characterized by a protracted series of corsair incursions, increasingly daring in conception and execution and devastating in consequence. It is clear, for example, from the earliest extant *Capitoli* of c. 1410 that Gozo was bearing the brunt of these *razzias* which were reducing it to near-extinction for which reason funds were being sought to build a tower on Comino as a countercheck against the Saracens who were using that island as a hideout and rallying ground.

The arrival in Malta, in 1530, of the Knights Hospitallers, the sworn enemy of the Turk and of his ally, the Barbary corsair, ironically, actually exacerbated the situation because the Ottomans who had ousted the Order from Rhodes in 1522 now turned their eyes to these islands in their

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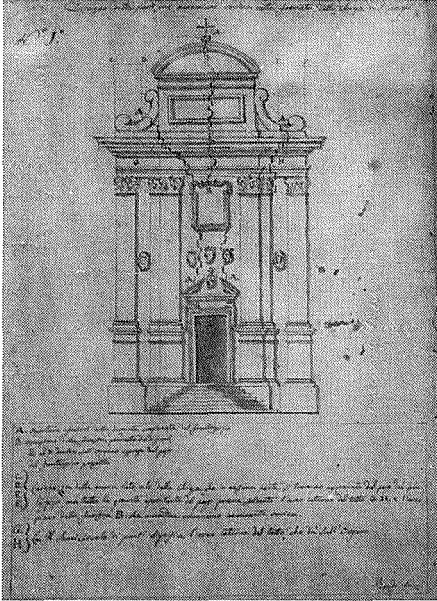
\* The author wishes to express his gratitude and appreciation to Rev. Dr Joseph Busuttill, the Floriana Curia Archivist, who kindly and generously made the material accessible to the author.

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bid to rid themselves of the Order once and for all and to gain supremacy over the Central Mediterranean. To achieve this end they had to chase the Order out of these islands. After 1530 attacks are recorded with increasing frequency. On Gozo alone, the Order's chronicler Giacomo Bosio, lists incursions in 1533, in 1540, 1541, 1544, 1545, 1546, 1547 and in 1550. The invasion of July 1551 and the Great Siege of 1565 are to be interpreted against the backdrop of this sustained escalation of pressure on the Order.

The all-out attack of 1551 headed by Sinan Pasha and Torghud Ra'is – better known here as Dragut – began with a landing on Malta. They reconnoitred the newly-constructed fortifications of St Angelo and Birgu which they must have assessed to be too strong and too daring for them to attack then. After hovering around Mdina, the armada headed for Gozo and its weakly defended *Castello*. It was, perhaps, a personal score that Dragut needed badly to settle with Gozo – namely the death of his brother during the landing of 1544 – that lent weight in favour of this decision. Bosio describes how the bombardment of the *Castello* began on Friday 24 July, half an hour before noon, and continuing with incessant noise and fire until the following Sunday. The exertions of a lone English bombardier who happened to be in the *Castello* at the time were soon silenced for good and the end became inevitable.

Bosio recounts eye-witness accounts of the finale – “*Dicono e raccontano ancor hoggidi' i vecchi Gozitani con Gran Passione della rovina della Patria loro*” – how the Governor of the island, Fra Galatiano de Sesse, lost control of the situation so that the poor besieged ended up as if they had no leader. Many, availing themselves of windows that punctured the *Castello* walls, sought to escape by climbing down the walls with ropes on the side that was not being attacked. Sunday 26 July saw the end of the tragedy when the doors were opened for the enemy to ransack the fortress. The heroic stand made by a Sicilian soldier who killed his family and died sword in hand to free himself and those dear to him from slavery have not gone unforgotten. The rest – some 700 men and from five to six thousand women and children – were all dragged into slavery with the sole exception of 40 old and decrepit men. The Turk ravaged the rest of the island before setting off with his booty loaded onto the vessels, as legend would have it, at Ras in-Newwiela. Bosio concludes that when the Turks had left, the Grand Master and his Council sent the Order's galleys



The 17th century façade of St. George's Parish Church at Rabat, constructed between 1672 and 1678, during the time of Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner. A church previously standing on the same site was destroyed during the siege of 1551.

to Gozo to salvage any munitions that might have escaped the plunder and the few Gozitans that managed to avoid capture. These returned later to the island when the scare of a renewed attack had abated and settled again under the Governorship of Fra Pietro Olivares who tried to restore the place to the best of his ability. It does not escape Bosio's comment that a multitude of law-suits ensued over the question as to who had the rights over the property left behind by those who had died or who languished in slavery. Special commissioners, he states, were appointed to settle these disputes.

Faced with this description of the state of affairs one can pose various questions, including:

1. What happened to this great multitude of people?
2. How many never made it back to their homeland?
3. Who were the Gozitans that were never captured?
4. Who came back from slavery?
5. How was the island resettled so that within a century the population had attained the pre-1551 level?
6. What became of the captives' property and, in particular, their lands?

## *The 1551 Siege of Gozo and Repopulation of the Island*

There appears to have been a semblance of a return to normality by 1553. The first notarial records appeared in that year; the first of which being dated 28 October. The baptismal records of the *Matrice* start on 27 September 1554. The earliest dated law-suit also comes from that year. It is relevant to note the surnames of the people that appear in these documents; most of them are typically Gozitan. If we break down the surnames that appear on Gozo after 1551 into groups by the year of first occurrence, then we get the following list:

### **List 1**

*1551-1556*

Amaira, Basili, Beniabin, Bonnici, Calabachi, D'Avola, De Apapis, De Caci, De Laurerio, De Luchia, De Manuelli, De Marino, Madiona, Montagnes, Navarra, Nicolachi, Parnis, Plathamone, Sansuni, Santoro, Theobaldo. (21 surnames)

This first group probably represents the ones that escaped capture altogether or were sufficiently well-off and fortunate enough to be able to arrange redemption soon after capture. With the passage of time more surnames of Gozitans appear. The next list includes those encountered on Gozo in Notarial and Court records wherein they are described as "Gaulitanus", as opposed to "Melitensis" or "Siculus".

### **List 2**

*1557-1566*

Algaria, Aragonisi, Bacbac, Bernardo, Biscon, Bongibino, Cavallino, Caxaro, Cefai, Cini, Chappisa, Cozullura, Critelli, Dallo, Episcopo, Federico, Frontina, Gaduara, Gamich, Hordob, Kettut, Kinzi, Mannara, Mejlaq, Pontremoli, Refalo, Rigio, Saliba, Vella. (29 surnames)

*1567-1576*

Anfasino, Balistrera, Barba, Bercax, Bringheli, Castelletta, Chabarra, Ciappara, Cremona, Dandalona, Dejf, Fantino, Ferulla, Gentili, Guarreri, Gurabe, Machnuc, Magro, Mompalao, Sala, Sans, Scotia, Theume, Xiricha. (24 surnames)

*1577-1586*

Anastasio, Bayada, Barberi, Chumi, Finara, Gauci, Haber, Mintuf, Mochtara, Modlum, Origiles, Scavuni, Vagnolo. (13 surnames)

But other typically Gozitan surnames, albeit not described as such, surface also in the Parochial registers of this period. These include among those not already mentioned:

**List 3**

Alagona, Bianco, Brunetto, Dolfín, Farmusa, Fontana, Gambino, Mercieca, Sahona, Soria, Xeibe, Xiberras. (12 surnames)

One concludes that the surnames in these lists actually account for most of the surnames appearing in the Crociata List of 1533 as well as for others not figuring there. The ones not accounted for are the following:

**List 4**

Agueina, Aluisa, Baruni, Bellia, Buhagiar, Calimera, Cap, Cappellano, Cianba, Coleiro, Darmanno, Delia, Ebejer, Falzon, Farrugia, Florentina, Frankinu, Gerardu, Giarda, Lazú, Lazarun, Marinara, Micheli, Mollica, Peregrino, Reke, Sammut, Xaura, Xluc, Xucula, Zabbar.

One can safely deduce that the people represented by the surnames Agueina, Aluisa, Calimera, Cianba, Gerardu, Giarda, Lazú, Lazarun, Marinara, Xaura, Xluc and Xucula ended their days in slavery as these surnames are never encountered again either in Gozo or in Malta, except occasionally as place-names.

**The Captives**

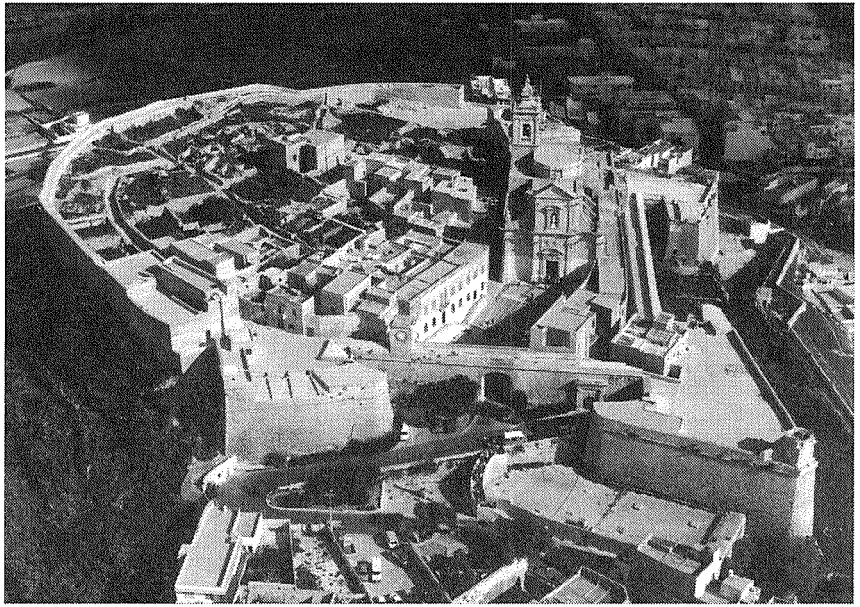
There were, of course, several others with surnames appearing in these lists who were still captives decades after 1551. Yet the fact that practically all pre-1551 surnames actually re-surfaced after the tragedy is rather surprising. By way of explanation, one seeks to quantify Bosio's '*molti*', who in desperation scaled down the sheer north face of the *Castello*. Assuming that these were, in their majority, able-bodied males whose number is some unknown quantity X, considering that some 700 men were taken into slavery, that the total population was around 5,500 and that the ratio of 'able-bodied males' to 'the whole population' is, on average, 1:5, then the resulting straightforward equation yields  $X = 500$ , approximately. If there were some 500 surname-propagating males on Gozo soon after the catastrophe, then one can conclude that the 100 or so

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surnames listed above must have been in their large majority escapees and that only a small number of male captives, namely the very well-off, were actually redeemed. This thesis finds support from other sources: Professor Wettinger, an expert on slavery, asserts in his doctoral thesis that most of the adult male captives were soon 'used up' at the oars of the large Ottoman fleet of galleys.

Most of the evidence points towards Constantinople as the city whither the Gozitans were dragged and where they languished: In 1565 Federico Fruntina is known to have died in slavery in Constantinople, in 1556 Petrus Salibe tried to redeem his daughter Angela who was in Constantinople. The court-case Critelli vs De Apapis shows that the whole family of Johannes Saliba alias Deydud and his wife Agnes, *née* Critelli, and their four children, all less than 10 in 1551, were in Constantinople; by 1560 Johannes had died in the '*Darmuso delli Captivi del Grand Turco*' of that city. Several of the witnesses at that trial refer to several '*Gozitani captivi come lo detto Joanni morsi in detta turri*'. In a similar case, Fantino vs Ferriolo, a number of witnesses declare that they themselves were taken captives to Constantinople and later freed. One was Don Leone Pontremuli, Canon of the Cathedral, who says he spent 14 years in Constantinople. Another was Franciscus Fantino who did 10 years. Yet another was Andreas Rogiles who states that he spent 18 years '*in Barbaria et in Livanti*'. Andreotta Brancato does not state how long he was in Constantinople. Leonardus Bongibino says that he was unfortunate enough to have returned from captivity just three years before being taken again in 1551.

The Magnifica Domina Damma Rapa must have been fortunate enough to have had enough money to buy herself out by 1555; her will was drawn up by the Gozitan Notary Don Laurentius de Apapis '*apud Civitatem Constantinopolim intus cortile domorum Magnifici Domini Oratoris Sacre Majestatis Domini Regis Francorum*'. Fra Paulus Bayada of the Augustinian Friars was less fortunate; he says that he spent more than 14 years there before being released and that both his parents were then still in captivity. It transpires from a third case, De Nicolachi vs De Manuele, that Petrus De Federico was taken to Constantinople with his family, consisting of his wife Betta and their four children. By 1552 Petrus was already dead and his wife died not long after. Of all the four children that survived till 1560 was Mariana who had reneged her faith.



**An aerial view of the *Castello***

Presented in court was a letter written by Petrus De Federico's father, Antonius. He addresses his appeal for redemption to the Grand Master, writing on 23 August 1552 from Gallipoli la Romania; he is known to have died soon afterwards.

Other court proceedings yield the names of several other unransomed captives in Constantinople; among these one encounters Gismundo de Alagona and his sons, Salvus Apap, Johannes Axac, Antonius and Angela Bayada, Guillelmus de Biscon, the sons of Antonius Cavallino, Leonardus Chappara, Paula the wife of Andreas Chappara, Johannes Dallo, Peruna the wife of Andriotta Gambino, Ioannella the widow of Andriotta Gambino, Paulina wife of Dominicus Gambino, Leonardus Gamich, Gregorius Hagius, Antonius Hordob, Antonio wife of Mathias de Manuele, Dianora de Manuele and her daughters Ysabella and Beatrix, Malgarita the widow of Antonius Mercieca, Paulina the wife of Gregorius Mercieca, Ioanna wife of Fridericus Mongebino, Martinus Mule, Ascania wife of Joannes de Nicolachi, Bernardus Parnis, Don Johannes Rapa (Vicar

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Foraneus of Gozo and Canon of the Cathedral), Ioannella the wife of Leonardus Rapa, Matheus Rapa, Margarita Rogiles, Thomasius Said, Decia wife of Matheus Saliba, Imperia Saliba, Paulus Theume, Inigus Vagnolo, Dionysius Vella, Hieronymus Xicalune and Lucas Xiricha.

The case, referred to, of Mariana de Frederico who at the age of 12 reneged her faith, under pressure for survival was not an isolated instance. Another case, quoted by Wettinger, indicates similar accommodating stances as well as points to the fact that some, albeit in a minority, did not end up in Constantinople but were taken to North Africa. The case concerns Paula the wife of Andreas Chappara. Witnesses testify that she was taken to Tagiura together with other Gozitan captives. Eventually she was purchased by a Turk and taken to Tripoli where she became his mistress and bore him various offspring. She eventually became his wife and reneged her faith. This court-case is found in the Bishop's Curia records at the Mdina Cathedral at which archives can also be found records of Church collections that were organized after 1551 to raise funds for the ransom of the Gozitans. The boxes opened in April 1552 were found to contain 51 *uncie*, not a small sum but quite insignificant to deal with the vast proportions of the catastrophe; it could only free at most four captives!

Two months later another 5 *uncie* were collected – Qormi is singled out for its meanness in contributing '*tri parvuli tantum*'. In April 1553, the Cathedral itself provided all of 2 *tari e 2 grani*. Interest in the Gozitans was definitely dwindling, but not interest in their property. The court cases, dragging on for decades, even to the end of the century, show keen interest in the rival parties eager to establish closer degrees of affinity to the poor victims to be appointed trustees, and eventual heirs, of their property. Some of the details are quite unedifying. In this connection, a fragment of a *bando* by Grand Master de la Sengle, dated 14 December 1553, has come to light among these court proceedings:

*'...per conservari li beni dili poveri captivi invita ali lor proprii congiunti..che debeano gubernarili como oriundi...[et] anderanno a stari et habitari cum familia in dicta insula como donni di tucti li beni et qualuncha altra possessioni...'*

This *bando* may well have been a first prompt that set off the scramble for the acquisition of unclaimed property.



## Emigration from Gozo

Returning to the Gozitans that somehow escaped captivity, one gleans from the notarial records that a number of them opted to leave Gozo permanently in the wake of the tragic events. A number of them even went to Sicily and settled there. Among these one can list chronologically: Franciscus Balistrera at Trapani (1558), Paulus Saliba at Licata (1561), Jacobus de li Boffi at Sciacca, Francina Tellerixio at Agrigento and Petrus Rekec at Licata (all in 1562), Petrus Mintuf at Sciacca and Malgarita Malatesta at Nicoxia (both in 1563), Antonius Mintuf at Sciacca (1564), Zaccarias Salibe at Heraclia (1565), Michael de Luchia at Heraclia and the orphaned brothers Dominicus and Salvator Chettut at an unspecified place in Sicily (all in 1568), Petrus Bacbac at Agrigento and Petrus Subtili at Licata (both in 1569), Paulus Hordob at Messina (1570), Magister Angelus Gaduara at Agrigento (1571), Georgius Chini at Trapani and Andriotta Balistrera at Heraclia (1572), Leonardus and Jacoba Barnaba at Sciacca (1577), Francesco Theuma at Xicli (1590), and so on.

One can adduce two main reasons for this mini exodus to Sicily:

- (i) in the wake of 1551 and in view of the looming threat of 1565, the Order issued a number of *bandi* (between 1561 and 1565) encouraging people not useful for combat to evacuate themselves to nearby Sicily;
- (ii) a number of Gozitans, and Maltese for that matter, had family connexions in Sicily.

It is becoming increasingly evident that in pre-1530 years several Sicilians were condemned to exile to these islands and some actually settled here. This was definitely the case of the Castelletti family and must account for a number of Sicilian surnames found here in this period.

Other Gozitans yet looked for safety behind the increasingly strong fortifications of Malta, especially after 1565. Thus, a similar chronological listing would include: Fangius de Manuele at Rabat, Malta (1553), Antonia la Goczitana and Peruna la Goczitana, paupers at Santo Spirito Hospital, Rabat Malta and Antonius Cappello at Mdina (1554), Andreotta Cattut alias Fantin at Birgu (1555), Leonardus Gaduara at Birkirkara (1562), several surnamed Ciangura at Qormi after 1564, Antonius and Antonella de Anfasino at Birgu (1565), Nicolaus Petrus Balistrera

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(1568), the Navarra family (1569), Betta daughter of Manfre *dictu* Dondolana (1570), Johannes de Manuelli alias Mintuf at Senglea (1574), Antonius Guarreri at Burmula (1576), Paulus de li Buffi (probably present-day Boffa) at Senglea (1577), Andreas Amayra at Senglea (1578), Ferdinando de Anastasio at Senglea, Antonius Bonnici at Birgu, and Andreas Sueyde at Valletta (all in 1580), Matheus Mahnuc at Rabat, Malta, and Andreas Guerrer at Senglea (both in 1590), Lucas Saguna at Hal Kbir near Siġġiewi and Johannes Xeibe at Birgu (both in 1591), Thomas Hordob at Birgu (1609) and so on.

Worth noting is the preponderance of Gozitans in Valletta and the Three Cities, a trend that was to continue. The distribution of Gozitan surnames in Malta in 1687 shows that all 16 Fontanas were at Valletta, Each of the surnames Amaira, Cavallino, Fnara and Mintuf was to be found solely at Senglea, Of the 44 Merciecas, 39 were at Cottonera and at nearby Tarxien. Of the 30 Madionas, 12 were at Cottonera and the rest in Valletta. Four of the 5 Bajadas were at Cottonera, 29 out of the 41 Chumis were at Bormla and Senglea, half of the Dandalonas were at Cottonera and 11 out of the 35 Theumas at Birgu. Of considerable linguistic interest are certain speech peculiarities to be found in common between the otherwise unrelated regions of Cottonera and Gozo. Particular reference is made to the uvular pronunciation (*qoph*) common to both and exclusively encountered there in contrast to the glottal stop (?) used in the rest of the island. The persistence of this genuine, original Arabic pronunciation in an area where intense intercourse with foreigners is much more likely to dilute original traits of the language is a very surprising phenomenon indeed. But the one-way Gozitan influx in the sixteenth century goes a long way to explain its presence.

### **Immigration into Gozo**

In contrast with the rather meagre evidence for Gozitan post-1551 presence in Gozo, the records, both notarial and ecclesiastical abound with information about Maltese and Sicilians, especially the former, settling pretty permanently on the island to fill in the vacuum created by the absentee Gozitans. Starting with the foreigners first, each of the individuals in the following chronological listing is described by his locality of origin, usually some town in Sicily, and as *'habitor hujus terre et Insule Gaudisii'*.

**List 5**

Jacobus Pocurobba Siculus (1557), Antonius de Pixi de Montileone (1561), Joannes Maria Parascandalo Neapolitanus (1567), Jacobus de Lorenzo de Verona and Joannes de Marino de terra Vizini (1568), Nicolaus Cirino Siculus, Antonius Reveddu de Modica, Petrus de Soltano Siculus (1569), Michael Zalubriki and Nicolaus de Sciacca Siculus (1570), Vincentius Chiaramonti Siculus and Vincentius de Xurida Siculus (1571), Santorus Cantedda Siculus, Joannes Cincomani Siculus, Bernardinus de Florina Siculus, Filippus Cuchinella Siculus, Andreas Calimera de terra Raphaudi, Petrus Sudano Neapolitanus and Joannes Fava de Nari (all in 1572), Magister Paulus Straquadaino Modicano, Santorus Cantella Siculus, Matheus Rabbito Siculus and Joannes Allegro Gallicus (all in 1573), Marianus Metaddo de Terra Mohac (1575), Guillelmus Gascon Gallicus (1577), Marianus Metallo Siculus and Bastianus Carnimolla scarparius Syracusanus (1578), Thomas Hernandes Lusitanus, Hieronymus de Gianti Grecus and Franciscus Ziza Siculus de civitate Mohac (1580), Magister Andreas Gliacca Siculus (1583), and so on.

A couple of entries in this list are worth remarking on. The occurrence *Petrus de Soltano Siculus et habitator terre et Insule Gaudisii* both represents the earliest appearance of the common Gozitan surname Sultana as well as answers the enigmatic absence, noted by Wettinger, of this seemingly Semitic surname from medieval lists. A number of other surnames have similarly taken root sufficiently to persist here till today or till quite recently, including Parascandalo, Carnemolla and del Giante. Of particular linguistic interest are the Sicilian surnames Metaddo, Cantedda and Reveddu which soon after their arrival reverted to the non-dialectal forms Metallo, Cantella and Revello respectively, doubtlessly in an effort to integrate better in an alien environment. This kind of cultural pressure that warps and moulds the language manifests itself whenever mutually alien cultural tendencies come into contact. The same phenomenon of accommodation was also evident, for example, in the case of the Gozitan Petrus Rekić (the thin) who, soon after settling in Sicily, changed his surname to the common Sicilian surname Subtili (also meaning, the thin).

But by far the most abundant records relate to Maltese who emigrated to Gozo. The following list includes only those who are known to have settled in Gozo permanently, described as *habitator hujus terre et Insule*

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*Gaudisii* and excludes those described as, for example, *reperiens in presentiarum hic Gaudisii* or *in presenti hic Gaudisii existens*. The period covered is, in most cases, 1565-1580 and the ordering is by locality of origin.

### **List 6**

*Attard*: Petrus Flamengo, the son of Leonardus Attardo, Dionysius Vella.

*Balzan*: Augustinus Mifsud, Pasqualis Grima.

*Birkirkara*: Jacobus Parnis, Dominica Grillo.

*Bisqallin*: Thomas Zahra, Marianus Aczuppard.

*Bordi*: Hieronymus Zarb, Angelus Canchun and family, Joannes Cassano.

*Bubaqra*: Michael Zammit, Marianus Camilleri.

*Dingli*: Ambrosius Gambino.

*Farrug*: Jacobus Chaxixe.

*Gharghur*: Simon Canchun, Agnes Sammut, Laurentius Bezine, Pancratius Burg.

*Ghaxaq*: Antonius Bonnici, Leonardus Bonnici.

*Gudja*: Dominicus Dirbes, Dominicus Vella.

*Kbir*: Francia Cakie.

*Lija*: Ioanna Bertelli, Simon Galie, Blasius Vella, Leonardus Attard.

*Luqa*: Marcus Bisayle, Silvester Bisayle, Paulus Seihel, Nicolaus Vella.

*Millieri*: Gregorius Camilleri.

*Mosta*: Johannes Xebirras, Damma Attard, Lemu Xerri, Dominicus Sammut, Leonardus Vella.

*Naxxar*: Johannes Spiteri, Gregorius Galie, Simon Canchun, Franciscus Zarb, Bendu Spiteri, Leonardus Stivala, Markisia Galata, Ferrandus Fenec, Joanni Portelli, Dominicus Spiteri, Catarina Zambac.

*Notabile*: Not. Thomas Gauci, Alphonsus Cassar, Gregorius Haius, Michael Ferriolo.

*Qormi*: Bertus Schembri, Blasius Cardona, Bertus Burg.

*Qrendi*: Ambrosius Mangion.

*Rabat*: Paulus Cumbo, Dominicus Debono, Bertus Xeibe, Not. Ferdinandus Ciappara, Ysabella Dusa, *Magister* Vincentius Liftec *ferrarius*, Ioannellus Cumbo, Vincentius Grima, *Magister* Antonius De Guevara.

*Safi*: Nicolaus Vella.

*Siggiewi*: Joannes Bonello, Joannes Tabuni, Aloysius Pachi, Dominicus Haxac, Ambrosius Cafor, Andreas Miczi, Petrus Mamo, Marianus Pachi, Joannes Calleya, Zacharias Bonello, Andreas Mamo.

*Xluq*: Andreas Mangion.

*Żebbuġ*: Ambrosius Burg *dictus* Tingheire, Petrus Maniun, Andreas Gatt *dictus* Langro, Marcus Attard, Paulus Burg *dictus* nuaitar, Dominicus Zahra, Joannes De Brincat, Marcus Mamo, Simon Burg, Nicolaus Vella, Vincentius Paris.

*Żurrieq*: Salvus Saliba, Hieronymus Xicalune, Antonius Callus, Vincentius Saliba *manumissus*, Augustus Carcheppo, Joannes Hili, Silvester Habdille, Matheus Saliba, Antonius Micci, Oliverius Micci, Marianus Camilleri, Dominicus Cachie, Dominicus Callus.

*Unidentified*: *Notarius* Carolus Casha, Antonius Tabuni, Matheus Sapiano, Iorlandus Muscat, Thomas Carbot, Johannes Hagius Galtir, Dominicus Grego, Zacharias Zammit, Simon Zammit, Jacobus de Albano, Antonius Spiteri, Antoninus Haius, Antonius Mallia, Joannes Paulus Bonnici, Marcus Bigeni, Petrus Chantar, Benedictus Mangion, Jacobus Burg, Dominicus Cumbo, Jacobus Xuereb, Dionysius Vella, Stephanus Bigeni, Martinus Mule, Joannes Grima, Philippus Spiteri, Thomas Sammut *dictus* Hudic, Andreas Mellechi, Marianus Vella, Josephus Frendo, Gregorius Hagius, Cosmanus Carcheppo, Ioannes Attard.

From this information one concludes, firstly, that the vast majority of émigrés into Gozo, some 60%, came from just three main regions in Malta: (i) Naxxar, Mosta, Gharghur, (ii) Żebbuġ, Siggiewi, and (iii) Żurrieq, Safi, Qrendi. Secondly, that a time-series analysis of the data shows that the rate of growth of numbers going into Gozo was increasing steadily with a maximum reached c. 1580. Thirdly, that each of the following common Maltese surnames, each of which was totally absent from pre-1551 Gozo, have persisted on Gozo till today as is evidenced by the intervening *Status Animarum* records. These include: Agius, Attard, Azzopardi, Bezzina, Borg, Camilleri, Cassar, Ciantar, Cumbo, Debono, Frendo, Gatt, Grima, Mallia, Mangion, Muscat, Pace, Portelli, Psaila, Schembri, Scicluna, Spiteri and Xuereb.

## Motivations

One questions the motivations behind the mass migration of Maltese into Gozo after 1551. One asks whether or not the migrants were prepared to give up the relative safety of Malta for rather unprotected life in Gozo in

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the hope of gaining a reward commensurate with the risk, such as, the acquisition of real estate abandoned by unransomed Gozitans. Much information on this aspect can be gleaned from the notarial records that shed light on the occupations, activities and way of life of the Maltese migrants in Gozo.

### *Land Ownership*

It should be affirmed at the outset that the well-to-do Gozitans who were captured in 1551 soon got themselves ransomed because they held the necessary funds and means to do so. These include such well-known names as De Apapis, De Alagona, Castilletta, Navarra, Plathamone and Pontremoli. Although few in number they commanded most of the landed possessions on the island as can be deduced from their wills and testamentary inventories. Furthermore, there is evidence that those Gozitans who decided to quit for good by settling in Sicily often sold their possessions to other Gozitans, usually kith and kin, who opted to stay. Thus a large number of lands certainly remained directly in Gozitan hands; details are given in the original paper.

It is also apparent from several of the deeds that others, while still in captivity, were holding on to their lands through procurators in Gozo who administered their estates. These procurators were, in practically all cases encountered to date, other Gozitans closely connected to the captives, as after all, was prescribed by De la Sengle's *bando*. The exceptional instances were two in number one of whom, Joannes Haius *dictu* Galtir was married to a Gozitan.

It is more likely that some may have engineered to walk into a fortune by marrying into a well-to-do Gozitan family. Quite a few marriages are recorded at this time in which one party is Gozitan and the other Maltese. From a study of the data, it appears that there is a clear dichotomy between pre-1570 and post-1570 matches. In the former period it is invariably the case that a Maltese girl is marrying a Gozitan man and that the exact opposite is true for the latter. This clearly confirms the obvious fact that in the early days after 1551 Gozitan society was predominantly male with the disparity between the sexes evening out within a couple of decades. It is also apparent that the relatively few marriageable women, who had the whale of a time because much in

demand, went for foreigners and not for Maltese. That males far outnumbered females in the early decades is further confirmed by the disproportionately high number of prostitutes in Gozitan society. In a small community of around 1,400 between 1561 and 1566, no less than 7 so-called *peccatrici* are recorded in the baptismal records as giving birth. It is relevant to note that after 1551 the defence of the *Castello* was given increased attention by the Order and that, consequently, the strength of the military personnel there was augmented. At this time, also, Gozo continued to be used as a place of temporary exile and imprisonment for recalcitrant knights.

### *Labour*

One concludes that the attraction of an easy take-over of property in Gozo could not have been a primary motivation for Maltese migration. In fact, in contrast with the lack of evidence for this hypothesis, a mass of information exists showing that what they were in pursuit of was nothing more remunerative than hard work, mostly agricultural. It is patently clear from List 6 that the localities of origin of the Maltese migrants were the rural areas of Malta, excepting the mere handful from Mdina, to the total exclusion of the Three Cities and, later on, of Valletta as well. That this farming community continued to live by the land on Gozo is evident from innumerable notarial deeds. At one end of the spectrum one encounters those who offered their manual services in the fields and on the estates of well-to-do Gozitans, for a pre-determined stipend and for a fixed term, which contract was often renewed. A typical deed would be:

*Hieronimus Zarb de Casali Gadir il Bordi Insule Melite habitator terre et Insule Gaudisii...se obligavit personaliter servire Antonio Gentil Gaulitano...in eius rure pro anno uno continuo et completo incipiendo...*

Child labour was not excluded. By our standards an extreme case, but by no means uncommon then, was the typical deed:

*Magister Gabriel Bondino faber Melitensis habitator hujus terre et Insule et Gaudisii...conduxit et conducit operas et servitias Salvi Bondino eius filii minoris etatis annorum duodecim...Petro Parnis...in omnibus servitiis rusticis et urbanis pro anno uno...et hoc pro mercede seu verius pro victu, vestitu et el calzaro necessario....*

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Another attraction for Maltese farmers was availability of much fertile land in Gozo for short leases (*ingabellatio/qbiela*), usually for four years' duration, again often renewable. Subcontracting was also common. The Maltese farmer leased not only the fields he tilled but also the house he inhabited, sometimes even the flocks of sheep and goats he reared and the stock-yard that housed them. A common arrangement was the establishment of a partnership (*soccida*) between the farmer on the one hand and the owner on the other whereby, for a pre-determined number of years, the owner contributed stock and the farmer contributed labour and management; returns were then divided by agreement. One such typical contract was that signed by the Gozitan Ioannes Refalo and the Maltese Dominicus Spiteri, nicknamed Brundina, who, on 8 November 1568, agreed to form a 2-year partnership in respect of two oxen fit for ploughing, complete with harness and ploughshare. Spiteri bought a half-share off Refalo for 10 uncie; he also contributed half of the seeds required to sow land leased to Refalo. Profits were to be divided equally after first deducting expenses of the lease. It appears that the most a first-generation Maltese farmer in Gozo could aspire to was part-ownership in partnerships of this kind and eventual ownership of flocks and cattle, but not, as shown, land acquisition. This is exemplified by the case of Lemus Xerri, another typical Maltese farmer, whose will was drawn up in 1581. He left his heirs substantial property in livestock but not a single span of land on Gozo.

### **Conclusion**

By way of summing up, one concludes that an appreciable number of Gozitans, predominantly male and certainly more than hitherto claimed, managed to escape the tragic depopulation of Gozo of 1551. Others, in their majority the better off, arranged to get themselves ransomed and found their way back to these islands. Most of these went back to their lands on Gozo, but a sizeable minority took refuge, even permanently, either in Sicily or in Malta, mostly in the Three Cities.

Although not immune to internal strife, typified by the legion of squabbles over property acquisition, as far as outsiders were concerned, the original Gozitan community emerges as a rather compact, closely-knit and closed group, very jealous of its possessions and averse to the



intrusion by Maltese outsiders into their affairs. This is evidenced by the fact that procurators for the enslaved were almost exclusively Gozitan, and that the sale of lands by Gozitans who opted to leave for good was invariably an internal affair, even where go-betweeners were concerned. Any penetration of the Gozitan phalanx by Maltese was only achieved, in the long term, by marriage. Yet the small population could not cope with the management of land capable of supporting a far larger community, so that the attraction of Maltese and foreign immigrants to fill this void was inevitable. Again, the roles of Gozitan land-owners and Maltese labourers are seen to be quite distinct and well-defined. In spite of this immigration, the population increased in size only gradually, so that it took about a century to reach the level of 1551.

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**DON LORENZO DE APAPIS (1501c.-1586)  
A SIXTEENTH CENTURY  
PARISH PRIEST AND NOTARY**

**Eugene F. Montanaro**

**H**earth was what the people needed during the darkest century of Gozo's history, and Don Lorenzo de Apapis was the man to provide it.

For a skeletal biography of Don Lorenzo de Apapis there are three principal sources of information, namely, Monsignor Pietro Dusina's report of 1575, the notarial register of Don Lorenzo de Apapis, and Don Lorenzo de Apapis' last will and testament.

When the Apostolic Visitor, Mons. Pietro Dusina, visited Gozo, in the year 1575, Don Lorenzo was 74 years old "*etatis annorum septuaginta quatuor*". Hence he was born *circa* 1501. In Dusina's report, Don Lorenzo is qualified as "*Presbyter Gaulorum, et Vicarius Foraneus*". We also learn from Dusina's report that Don Lorenzo was Parish Priest at the Parish Church of Saint George.

**Family Background**

By means of his will, published by Notary Tommaso Gauci on 9 May 1579, Don Lorenzo established a benefice, which he endowed with a parcel of land in the district *Nigleret*, designated *Nigrit*. He ordained that the first beneficiary of the endowment was to be his relative, the *Chierico* Giovanni Domenico Vella. Successive beneficiaries were to be appointed by the descendants of his heirs, in perpetuity. And from the *Guljanas* relative to Gozitan benefices, and drawn up during the 17th and 18th centuries, we come to discover the identity of quite a number of descendants of the heirs of Don Lorenzo de Apapis. We learn, among other things, that Don Lorenzo de Apapis was the son of Leonardo Apap and Garita née

Debuis. In 1509, his uncle, Don Antonio Apap, had founded the benefice *Ta Guet Milach* alias *El Habel ta Don Laurenzo*, in the district *Ta Habel Melach*.

From the *Guljanas*, it would appear that the descendants of Don Lorenzo's heirs tended to mix with the leading, well-to-do families of these islands. Let us take some random examples. Don Lorenzo's sister, whose Christian name remains obscure, married Mario Testaferrata, and her daughter Antonia in turn married the Noble Salvus Vella. In 1589, Antonia's son, the Chierico Giovanni Domenico Vella, married Maddalena, the daughter of Dottor Melchiorre Cagliares. Their son, Dottor Melchiorre Vella Cagliares married Gusmana Cumbo – better known as Gusmana Navarra – at Mdina, on 15 November 1615. Our information concerning Don Lorenzo's family background remains scanty, but not altogether obscure!

However, for a fair appraisal of the man – Don Lorenzo de Apapis – it becomes imperative for us to capture the flavour of the age in which he lived, through events both great and small. Above all, his achievements, as well as his failings, ought to be measured against the background of the standards and accepted opinions of this age.

During the first half of the 16th century, Gozitan society still comprised a handful of noble families, evidently of Sicilian origin. The island was apparently a place of exile; indeed, in 1538, Jean De La Vallette, the future Grand Master, was sentenced to four months jail in Gozo, to be followed immediately by an uninterrupted two-year confinement to Tripoli, for aggressive behaviour. At the same time, most of the *beduini* on Gozo did own small parcels of land, in contrast to the Sicilian situation where farmers owned no land, which belonged in its entirety to the Crown, the Barons or the Church. Gozo, however, was not strong enough to repel the constant *razzias* effected by Muslim corsairs, most notably by Dragut.

It emerges from various contemporary sources that Don Lorenzo's family belonged to the landed gentry. Don Lorenzo was born, relatively speaking, a wealthy man. By the end of his long life he was a revered priest and notary public, but success never spoilt him. Even in his 80s he still worked tirelessly, in spite of his having experienced a two-year stint as a Turkish slave, following the 1551 invasion of Gozo by the Muslims.

Gozo, of course, had no Seminary, the clergy being trained largely by an apprenticeship-like system. This was no different from the situation in Malta and in so many other places abroad. It is also worthwhile to recall that, in the presence of Mons Pietro Dusina, Don Lorenzo himself asserted: “*Qui non c’è Mastro di Scola*”.

In these circumstances, it comes as no surprise that Don Lorenzo vindicated his priestly orders with these very words:

*“La prima tonsura me la diede insieme con li quattro ordini minori in un giorno insieme il Vescovo de Nasis dell’Ordine di San Domenico che era titolare, et pagai due scuti per questi Ordini, et me li domandò prima che mi ordinasse, perche altrimenti non mi haveva ordinato, et ebbi la licenza dal Vicario... et havea allora d’anni venti cinque in ventisei... et mi ordinai in una Quadragesima, et per questi Ordini Sacri, cioè del subdiaconato pagai un scuto... per l’altri Ordini non ho pagato niente...”*

Turning to his office of Parish Priest, Don Lorenzo informed Mons. Dusina that “*La mia Parochiale mi fù conferita dalla bona memoria di Monsignor Cubelles, et perchè un’altro l’haveva impetrata prima in Roma, il Vescovo mi disse che io li pagassi una pensione di cinque ducati...*” Clearly, Don Lorenzo’s speech was particularly incisive.

Don Lorenzo de Apapis was a character, and being Gozitan, he was a Gozitan character. His speech in the presence of Mons Dusina, is a remarkable combination of respect, heroic outspokenness and outright familiarity, all attributes which in Gozo are generally accepted as a national characteristic. We have noted that he held the office of vicar *foraneus*, a cleric who held his ecclesiastical court with right of appeal to the vicar general’s court in Malta (or the bishop’s court, when the bishop happened to be on the island). From his birthplace, Don Lorenzo inherited “a factual tone”, which is perhaps best exemplified by the words he utters to illustrate one particular aspect of his work as vicar *foraneus*:

*“Li di’ di festa dichiaro l’Evangelo al Popolo, et contra quelli che non servano le feste ci sono due pene, una pecuniaria, et l’altra corporale... la pena pecuniaria è di sette tarini e mezzo, et poche volte s’esige, la faccio distribuir a poveri, ma quando non la volessi dar a poveri, la piglieria per me, perche a me tocca”.*

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In nomine domini amen Anno domini Incarnatus 1565.  
 Mense aug[ust]i die vero xij ergo mensis augusti  
 Anno Simp[licio] p[ro]p[ri]o Notarij firmo et rep[re]sent[ati]o[n]is Antonellae  
 mulieris uxor homin[is] Antonii de Amfasino de Birgu in insula  
 gaudet degens ad p[re]s[ent]i Th[er]i nona circ[um] m[en]s[ur]e h[uius] corpore  
 languens et toto facie in iram sana in mente et rationis  
 compos et d[omi]n[us] t[em]p[or]is in sidu[m] rep[er]it in se sub silentio vita sua  
 fineret et d[omi]n[us] t[em]p[or]is in se sub silentio vita sua  
 quider[is] d[omi]n[us] t[em]p[or]is in se sub silentio vita sua  
 mente in g[ra]t[ia] iurech[is] totu[m] nichil p[ro]p[ri]o h[uius] n[on] p[ro]p[ri]o t[em]p[or]is  
 ma[n]u[m] me[is] i[n]f[er]a m[en]te co[n]s[er]u[er]it t[em]p[or]is t[em]p[or]is ad ver[um] an[im]a[m] p[ro]p[ri]o  
 p[ro]p[ri]o et assumptis facer[is] p[ro]p[ri]o in h[uius] q[ui]e q[ui]e modus cu[m] s[an]s  
 p[ro]p[ri]o et annulans p[ro]p[ri]o q[ui]e et s[an]s t[em]p[or]is t[em]p[or]is

**Introductory paragraph of the last will and testament of Antonella de Amfasino, drawn up by Notary Don Lorenzo de Apapis in Birgu in 1565 at the height of the Great Siege.**

Mons. Pietro Dusina's report of 1575 thus reveals many personal traits and a fair bit about Don Lorenzo's life. In this report a remarkable human being still speaks, and it is in Mons. Dusina's written record of his apostolic visit to Gozo that we find the real Don Lorenzo - a man full of flash and fire, passion and vigour, pride and humility, enormous self-confidence, and fear and trembling.

Ironically, Don Lorenzo's strength seems to stem from the same sources as his disadvantages. Everything about his Gozo suggests smallness, helplessness, obscurity, dust, small-town insignificance. But Gozo was the outermost bulwark of Christendom, *in frontieria barbarorum*. Her membership of the universal Church, with its international institutions and language, created a permanent connection between this island and Europe, and a vital, if tenuous, cultural link with Italy. Yet Gozo lacked even the most rudimentary coastal defences. Don Lorenzo no doubt drew courage and inspiration from his deep-rooted faith. But there were many times, especially during the second half of the sixteenth century, when everything he seemed to do was repulsed by a stronger, more confident

enemy, and the Gozitan bulldog was forced to lick his wounds and await a better day.

### **1551: The Supreme Test**

Don Lorenzo's was a life spent, it seems in retrospect, in meticulous preparation for the supreme test which awaited him in 1551-1552. Sixteenth-century life on Gozo was characterised by a protracted series of corsair incursions, increasingly daring in conception and execution and devastating in consequence. In his study *The Maltese Corsair and The Order of Saint John of Jerusalem*, Dr Paul Cassar has shown that, in regard to piracy, our ancestors appear to have been sinners as well as sinned against. It is undeniable, however, that the Ottomans, who had ousted the Knights of St John from Rhodes in 1522, now turned their eyes on the Maltese Islands in their bid to rid themselves of the Order once and for all from the Central Mediterranean.

1551 was a brutal, bloodstained year for Gozo; not so bad if you were a Muslim, but exceedingly dangerous if you were an unarmed peasant or, indeed, a member of the educated sedentary class. This was the fateful year which saw the dispersal and destruction of most of the community on the island. The Turks under the leadership of Sinan Pasha and Dragut crossed over to Gozo on 22 July, after plundering the Maltese countryside. The Gozitans withdrew into the Castello. Sinan Pasha deployed his artillery near Rabat's Main Gate and in the immediate precincts of the Parish Church of Saint George. Giacomo Bosio recounts how the bombardment of the Castello began on Friday 24 July, half an hour before noon: "*Sinam Bascia... fece nondimeno sbarcar nove grossi connoni, con molt'altri pezzi d'artiglieria minuta. E piantate havendone parte alla banda di Sirocco, nel luogo della Porta Reale del Rabbato, e parte per mezogiorno, alla Chiesa di San Giorgio, con giusta e incrociata batteria, cominciò a battere le muraglia, nel Venerdì, a 24 Luglio, mez' hora innanzi al giorno, e andò sempre con gran furia, e con gran fracasso continuando fin alla seguente Domenica...*"

Sunday 26 July saw the end of the tragedy when the doors of the Castello were opened for the enemy to ransack the fortress. Some 700 soldiery and from five to six thousand souls were dragged into slavery. A few hundred

Gozitans are reputed to have escaped over the walls of the Castello during the night-time, and the enemy also seems to have spared some 40 old and decrepit men. The Gozitan prisoners, amongst them Don Lorenzo de Apapis, were taken on board the Turkish vessels, at first to the next stopping place, the neighbourhood of Tripoli, and after the fall of that town, to Constantinople.

It must be said here that the well-to-do Gozitans who were taken into slavery in 1551, soon got themselves ransomed because they possessed the necessary means to do so. Don Lorenzo de Apapis was certainly back in Malta, more precisely in Birgu, by 28 October 1553. On that very day he published the will of the Gozitan Guillelmus de Manuele alias Mollica.

Once ransomed from slavery, Don Lorenzo was plunged into the role of leader of the Gozitan community at the darkest moment in his island's history. He was no longer a young man. The physical and mental burden he bore every single day thereafter would have broken men half his age. Professor Stanley Fiorini (1986) has argued convincingly that the population in Gozo increased in size only gradually, and that it took about a century to reach the level of 1551. Poverty and hunger were rampant. The other major headache for Don Lorenzo and his fellow Gozitans, was the safety of the island. The island still lacked adequate coastal defences. Raiding by corsairs continued during the latter part of the sixteenth century. There are records of attacks in 1560, 1563, 1572, 1574, 1582, 1589 and 1599. In 1582 four galiots from Bizerta put a raiding party ashore and some 70 persons were taken in slavery from Rabat.

### **Mons Pietro Dusina's Visit**

Hence it comes as no surprise that when Mons Pietro Dusina visited Gozo in 1575, the Parish Church of St George – the Church administered by Don Lorenzo – was in shambles. Following each and every Muslim raid, the very walls of that Church needed buttressing or reconstruction. This results very clearly from the notarial register of Don Lorenzo de Apapis. During the course of the years 1560-1565 a number of well-to-do Gozitans bequeathed legacies to be employed in the maintenance and reconstruction expenses of the Church. The standard legacy in this respect, runs as follows: "*Item pro suis male ablatio incertis legavit ecclesiae parrochiali*

*Sancti Georgii Rabbati Guadisii pro suis marammatibus et reparationibus tarenos...*” – this particular legacy was in fact bequeathed by Margarita widow of Antonius Farruge, in her will published by Don Lorenzo de Apapis on 28 March 1560.

In this frightening scenario, Don Lorenzo contributed generously towards the upkeep and running of the Parish Church under his care, the more so since his parishioners were now few and poor. For example, from his own pocket he defrayed the expenses incurred in the purchase of wax and oil for use at the Church of Saint George:

*“... et io non sono obligato di comprare cera, ne oglio alla Parrochia, perche le comprano li Parochiani prima che se ne erano assai, ma da poi che sono stati pochi, et poveri, che non hanno potuto, l’ho comprato io”.*

Clearly, the Gozitan’s powers of resilience were remarkable, if not miraculous. Don Lorenzo and the survivors of the *razzia* of 1551, stood to be counted, and held their ground. In this respect, de Apapis is to be all the more commended since with his professional background and wealth, he could easily have retired to a life of peace and comfort in nearby Sicily, or even Italy. But the task he chose to affront was nothing less than an interminable struggle to ensure the survival of his island home.

De Apapis, it is true, was rarely out of controversy or confrontation, and never out of earshot. It appears he would do anything to keep busy in time of stress. He was at times pugnacious and assertive; he is known to have refused assistance to Don Leonardi De Dallo, the Rector of Savina Church, when the latter requested him to furnish the means to light the candles at Savina. De Apapis however vindicated his conduct on the grounds that one occasion, de Dallo “*l’habbia maltrattato et messo li mani addosso*”. Again, Mons Dusina had felt it his duty to admonish Don Lorenzo for resorting to the Gallican rite when celebrating Mass. Local historians have tended to blow up these petty failings of his out of all proportion.

On the other hand, it is most unfortunate that the memory of Don Lorenzo de Apapis has been tarnished by the assertion made in a recent publication, that Mons Dusina instructed Don Lorenzo to refrain from



selling merchandise from a shop owned by him. This gross historical injustice results from a misinterpretation, or, better still, incorrect translation of the words “*Dominus habita notitia, quod predictus Don Laurentius publice Tabellionatus officio fungatur...*” The word “*tabellione*” denotes a notary public, a member of the legal profession duly authorised to draw up and publish public deeds – it does not denote a shopkeeper!

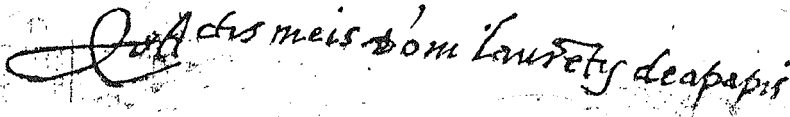
None the less, the blunder has served to obfuscate a significant aspect of Don Lorenzo’s personal history and productive achievement. Indeed, as we shall see, communal solidarity is also at play in much of Don Lorenzo’s professional work as a notary.

### The Notarial Register

The notarial register of Don Lorenzo de Apapis comprises some 104 notarial deeds, and is preserved for posterity at the Notarial Archives at Valletta. The register contains some 212 folios, and has an index. The deeds are written in Latin, but in common with most contemporary Maltese notaries, Don Lorenzo does on occasion resort to technical terms current in Sicily – “*marammatibus*” for example. Now in his report of 1575, Mons Dusina asserts that Don Lorenzo knew very little Latin – *aliquantulum* is the word used by Dusina. On the other hand, the deeds in the register suggest that Don Lorenzo was a fluent writer of Latin. Besides, the deeds also suggest that he did pursue a course of legal studies. Certainly, Don Lorenzo had a reasonably sound knowledge of the intricacies of the Roman law of succession.

Don Lorenzo practised his profession as a notary during the course of the years 1540-1583. His notarial register contains no deeds for the period running from March 1551 to September 1553 – roughly a two-year interruption which seems to tally with the period of time he spent in captivity. Perhaps a matter of further interest is the assertion made by Don Lorenzo in the presence of Mons Dusina, that he charged a standard fee of a *tarino* for his efforts: “... *et quando uno viene per presentare qualche scrittura, io ce metto la mano per presentazione, et mi tocca un tarino...*”

Don Lorenzo’s notarial register bears two very confused titles, namely (1)

A facsimile of a handwritten signature in cursive script, enclosed in a rectangular border. The signature reads "Lorenzo de Apapis" and is written in dark ink on a light background.

**Facsimile signature of Notary Don Lorenzo de Apapis**

*Testamentarium Publici Tabelionis Per Apostolica Auctoritate*, and (2) *Registro del Not. Don Lorenzo Apapis*. Both titles, it would appear are eighteenth-century accretions. They certainly did not emanate from Don Lorenzo's own hand. Now it must be admitted that practically all the deeds in Don Lorenzo's notarial register are wills. But in spite of one of its titles, the register is not a register of wills, for it does comprise a couple of deeds of sale and the occasional Inventory of Immovable Property. Curiously enough, the register contains no marriage settlements. On further reflection, however, the abundance of wills in Don Lorenzo's notarial register is not so anomalous, but rather somewhat redolent of the social vicissitudes of contemporary fellow Gozitans.

The explanation for this lies in the fact that for years after the *razzia* of 1551, Gozitan captives were to be found in Constantinople, interminably negotiating their release or reporting each other's death to enable their next of kin to dispose of their property, and husbands and wives to remarry. It took time for things to settle down again, and for life to assume its normal tenor. The depopulation of Gozo gave raise to several litigations concerning the captives' property.

In the prevailing circumstances, public wills became useful instruments for vindicating and clarifying title to property after one's death. And it is fairly evident that this expedient was resorted to both by the landed gentry and by the peasants who owned small parcels of land. But quite a number of Gozitan testators were also anxious to bequeath legacies to be employed in the redemption from captivity of their relatives and immediate next of kin. It is important to recall that during the years

1540-1557, Don Lorenzo de Apapis was the sole native-born Gozitan notary exercising the notarial profession on Gozo. Few, if any, on the island could read and write. De Apapis was, so to say, the right man at the right place. And it can hardly be doubted that in the eyes of the small Gozitan community, De Apapis became something of a celebrity, a personality warranting respect and deference. Be that as it may, his house was open to rich and poor alike, his services were offered to one and all.

The wills in don Lorenzo's notarial register, set in an identifiable context, have in fact proved an indispensable tool for historians seeking to reconstruct the sombre history of Gozo, for the period 1551 - 1600. Thus, in his study concerning the island's resettlement following the Muslim attack of 1551, Professor Stanley Fiorini writes: "What evidence there is for the information available is mainly gleaned from the deeds of notaries working in Gozo during the period under review: 1551c - 1600. The more important of these were the Gozitan Notary Don Lorenzo de Apapis (1540-1583) and the two Maltese notaries Thomas Gauci (1557 - 1616) and Ferdinando Ciappara (1573 - 1610)". (Fiorini 1986: 206-207). Moreover, the deeds in the register also offer valuable information concerning the old Gozitan place-names. In this regard, Professor Godfrey Wettinger remarks: "Notary Laurencius de Apapis resumed his activity as a notary after his return from captivity, drawing up innumerable wills referring to places by their old names familiar to him from pre-1551 days" (Wettinger 1980: 198).

Put another way, there can be scarcely any other notary in our islands whose life was so bound up with the events of his time, and so compellingly illustrative of them, as Don Lorenzo's.

But there is more to it than that. Don Lorenzo ignored personal risk to travel to enemy territory to visit fellow-Gozitans, and offer them his services and support. The Magnifica Domina Damma Rapa was fortunate enough to possess the financial means to buy herself out of her captivity. But for some unknown reason she was detained at Constantinople, and on 15 May 1555, Don Lorenzo de Apapis published her will (sic) "*apud civitatem Constantinopolim intus cortile domorum Magnifici domini oratoris Sacre Majestatis Domini Regis Francorum*".

Tragedy and war did not halt Don Lorenzo's endeavours to alleviate the plight of his parish and his fellow-Gozitans. Indeed, the Great Siege of 1565 saw him on in Birgu. On 12 August 1565, he published at Birgu the will of "*Antonella mulier uxor Antonij de Amfasino habitatrix terre et Insule Guadisij degens ad presens in hac nova civitate Melite*"

That staunch woman, Antonella de Amfasino, remained steadfast in her loyalty to her Gozitan parish, and amidst the clamour of screaming men, and no doubt apprehensive at the glint of steel catching the bright sunlight, resolved to bequeath a legacy of two *tareni* to the Gozitan Parish Church of St George. And de Apapis, ever daring and indefatigable, always sought ways of taking the battle to the adversary.

### **The Will of Don Lorenzo de Apapis**

In a public life spanning nearly 50 years, de Apapis held three important offices, that of Parish Priest, Vicar Foraneus, and notary public. His visits to and dealings with Malta and alien lands were numerous down the years. He endured, and survived, captivity, and the hardships of two terrible sieges. When he died in 1586, aged 85, he was the most well-known man in Gozo, and perhaps the greatest Gozitan of the century.

Monsignor Dusina's report of 1575 tends to show that problems of eradicating superstition and ignorance and enforcing celibacy of the clergy were as serious in the Maltese Islands as anywhere else at the time. But from what we have already recounted, it emerges clearly that Don Lorenzo de Apapis was generally inclined to practise the beliefs he preached to his flock. A final glimpse of his benevolence and humanitarian spirit is caught by a random inspection of certain dispositions contained in his will, published by Notary Tommaso Gauci on 9 May 1579. Therein, he bequeathed legacies to the Venerable Hospital of Saint Julian at Gozo, to the poor on the island, to the Corpus Christi Confraternity, and to the Confraternity of the Holy Rosary. He founded a marriage legacy for orphaned girls, and endowed it with the income to be derived from land situated in the district of Żebbuġ.

His relatives also stood to benefit by his will. He appointed as his sole universal heir, his sister's daughter, namely, Antonia wife of the noble

Salvus Vella. To Antonia Vella he also bequeathed his dwelling house, situate within the Castello. "*loco domorum palatiato cum eius stantiis... in quo ad praesens ipse Reverendus testator habitat, positus intus hoc castrum gausdisii in ruga di cashio...*"

To the Chierico Giovanni Domenico Vella, Don Lorenzo bequeathed his chalice and his religious books.

Finally, Don Lorenzo ordained that he was to be buried in the *matrice*: "... *ac voluit et mandavit quod eius cadaver sepelliatur et sepelliri debeat intus matricem ecclesiam istius Insulae gausdisi...*"

Don Lorenzo's will is a remarkable document. It gives the most succinct and purposeful exegesis of the testator's beliefs and aspirations. Written at the time when a dying man sees his whole life as one and makes his final assessments, it has the importance of a final souvenir and of piece of evidence crucial to the understanding of a man, who, though he may have ended his life on a lonely isle of misery and neglect, wished nevertheless to discharge what he believed to be a sacred debt towards his relatives and his beloved country.

## A Forgotten Personality

It remains impossible to give a complete narrative of Don Lorenzo's career, or an exhaustive analysis of his thought. That exercise would require the availability of additional primary sources concerning his personal history and writings, if they exist at all! It will take generations to reach a satisfactory estimate of the man, of his contribution to the well-being of his fellow-Gozitans.

We live in an age when the vilification of our heroes is the norm rather than the exception, and where respect for such qualities as courage and dedication plays a very poor second in our media to the desire to expose any and every flaw.

It is to be hoped that the Gozitans can spare a moment for reflection and salute a man who was never devoid of hope, and who cherished above all things the well-being of his island-home.

The world is so interconnected, especially today, that boundaries are beginning to disappear and chauvinism has little place in it. Great men and great events are not the property of any given nation. None the less, it seems that past generations have forgetfully overlooked a Gozitan who had an uncanny ability to make do with what's available, and a wonderful resourcefulness that always finds the right solution to a problem. Somehow, Don Lorenzo de Apapis makes one feel good to be Gozitan!

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## **SOME NOTES ON THE HISTORY OF GOZO AND ITS OLD CITY UNDER THE KNIGHTS OF ST JOHN**

**Albert Camilleri**

**I**f you have been to Gozo you cannot have failed to notice how different it is from Malta. Unlike Malta which has several large, sheltered harbours, Gozo is almost completely unindented. Seen from the air it looks like a tub floating on the sea, and some claimed that it got its name from its shape. The old name of Gozo was *Gaulos* which in Phoenician meant a tub. Gozo has practically no harbours, Marsalforn is more of a beach than a harbour, while Mgarr, where the ferry today puts in, is an artificial harbour built only a few years ago. Its surface is broken by several high flat hills looking into deep and wide valleys running down to the sea. It is surrounded on all sides by high almost vertical cliffs except for the south-eastern part which slopes gradually to the sea. Apart from the Capital at Rabat, there are in Gozo today 11 villages of which some like Xaghra, Nadur and Xewkija are quite large, while others like Kerċem, San Lawrenz, Ghasri and Munxar are still little more than a cluster of houses grouped around the village Church.

Most of the people of Gozo earn their living from the soil and even those who have a regular job, either with the Government or a private employer, are part-time farmers. As with most farming communities the people of Gozo are a friendly, but hardy and independent race, deeply suspicious of anything emanating from the central authorities in Malta most of whose laws and enactments they consider as incomprehensible and senseless impositions. The Gozitans' deep mistrust of anything coming from Valletta is not due solely to the usual insufferance of farmers of central controls and meddling, but is also rooted in a long tradition of neglect from the central Government.

For hundreds of years, even up to very recent times, the people of Gozo were left more or less to fend for themselves in very difficult and often

dangerous times and they have learned to look after and fend for themselves quite well. Unless one understands this historical process which conditioned their lives for so long one cannot understand and appreciate Gozo and its people.

### **The Siege of Gozo**

In the history of every nation some events are so momentous and convulsive as to leave an indelible mark on the character of the people. For the Gozitans, such an event took place in 1551. In the summer of that year, the Gozitans were overtaken by such a great calamity - a catastrophe of such proportions, that it remained impressed upon their minds in such a way as to condition their outlook and way of thinking for all time. On the 24th of July, 1551, Sinam Pasha, the Turkish Admiral and the corsair, the dreaded Dragut, after having failed to overpower Mdina, the old Capital of Malta, crossed over to Gozo with a fleet of 140 galleys, and after a siege of three days captured the Citadel, commonly known as the *Gran Castello* carrying away into slavery practically the whole population of Gozo, about 4000 inhabitants, all of whom had taken refuge in the old poorly fortified city. Only about 300 men managed to escape by scaling down the walls during the night. The newly appointed Governor of the Island, the Knight Fra. Galaziano de Sesse of the Language of Aragon, and the Archpriest of the Church of the Citadel were among the prisoners.

During the siege which lasted from Friday to the following Sunday, the only help which the Grand Master attempted to send from Malta to the besieged Gozitans was the dispatch of a small boat with gunpowder and some arquebuses. The boat, which was piloted by Paolo de Nasis, one of the *jurats* of Gozo, was intercepted and captured by one of the Turkish vessels besieging the island. Before leaving, Sinam Bassa and his men set fire to the Parish Church in the citadel, to the Public Archives and in general wrought as much havoc as he could. That is why most of the documents and records about Gozo date only from 1551. The Knights of St John had taken possession of the Maltese Islands in 1530; during the period of 21 years that followed they had done practically nothing to strengthen the defences of the old city, the only fortified place in the island, which had been left in its ruinous state.



To add insult to injury, the Grand Master, unwilling to leave Gozo practically deserted, had sent over, together with the newly appointed Governor Fra Pietro d'Olivares and the new garrison, a colony of Maltese to work the fields. The Gozitans, in time, began to filter back. Some escaped from captivity and others were ransomed by funds raised by Mgr Domenico Cubelles, the Bishop of Malta, and by funds raised by the bestowal of a plenary indulgence granted by Pope Julius III to those who contributed to the release of the Gozitan slaves.

As was natural they did not appreciate very much finding their land occupied by Maltese, and so many lawsuits ensued that the Grand Master had to send over from Malta 12 lawyers working free of charge to handle the disputes concerning the ownership of the land. The Gozitans had learnt their lesson. They realised that for the Grand Master and the Maltese they were expendable and that if they were to survive, they had to defend themselves and their interests on their own.

### **The Old City**

The old city of Gozo which was built on the foundations of the old Roman town had included the citadel and the greater part of present Rabat. It is generally believed that the four Crosses at Porta Reale, St Francis Square, Tombs Square and another which was placed in St Ursola Street, on the way to Gharb, mark the limits of the old town, with the citadel incorporated in it. Its walls extended from the citadel, to the North East through lands known as 'Il-Haġġarija', to the point where there is the first Cross just at the corner of the road to Marsalforn. At this place there was sited the main gate and as a matter of fact this place is still known as 'Ta' Putirjal', which means exactly the main gate. It then extended along where today there is Main Gate Street, through lands called 'Il-Habel ta' l-Isptar', until it reached St Francis Square, then turned through what is today Vajringa Street, to Tombs Square, where there was a second gate known as 'Bieb il-Ghajn' or 'the gate of the Fountain'; it then turned again to the north to join up with the walls of the citadel at St Ursola Street where there was the third gate known as 'Bieb il-Gharb'. It is interesting to know that the present road leading from Tombs Square to St Ursola Street, was up to some time ago known as 'Ta' Wara s-Sur' that is 'By the Bastion'. It is also known as 'Id-Dawwara'

During the Muslim period the greater part of this town had to be abandoned as the old crumbling walls could not be defended any more and the city was reduced to the area now occupied by the *Gran Castello*, the only part of the old city which could be reasonably defended against attack, as it stood on high ground. To this day the city has remained within these limits. The part which was abandoned by the Arabs was gradually reoccupied and became the suburb, the *Borgo*. The city continued to be inhabited up to the coming of the British though by that time only a few houses were still occupied and Rabat had usurped the function of the old city.

### **The Deserted Countryside**

The first thing one has to understand about Gozo is that for hundreds of years before the coming of the Knights of St John and for quite a long period after their arrival, the only inhabited place was the city. All the people were crowded within its walls. The countryside had been abandoned. This process had probably began towards the end of the Muslim domination. The continuous raids by pirates and corsairs had made the countryside totally unsafe to live in. The people worked the fields around the town during the day and retired to the safety of the walls during the night.

We have no trace or record of the existence of any village in Gozo before the closing years of the seventeenth century. Indeed the first two parishes outside the walls apart from the parish of St George, in the *Borgo*, were only set up in 1679. One at Xewkija with 630 inhabitants and the other at Għarb with 517 inhabitants. The siting of these two first villages to be recognised as independent parishes is indicative of the precarious state of affairs. Għarb is in the west, the most secure part of the island as it is guarded by unscalable cliffs, while Xewkija though being on the east of the island, that part from where danger was most likely to be expected, was quite near to St Martin's Tower, better known as Garzes Tower, which was built by funds left by Grand Master Martino Garzes at Mgarr, on high ground near Żewwieqa in 1605, to protect the harbour and the *Fliegū*. This tower was more than a coastal tower being built in the shape of a small castle rather than of a tower, with its own Chapel and tavern. It was large enough to offer shelter to the people,

mostly fishermen, who had began to settle around the two small chapels of St John Baptist and St Bartholomew at Xewkija.

It took almost another ten years for four other parishes to be set up. In 1687 Sannat with 370 inhabitants, Nadur with 493 inhabitants, Żebbug with 367 inhabitants and Casal di Sant'Antonio tal-Caccia or ix-Xaghri tal-Herrenia, today better known as Xaghra, with 565 inhabitants were all dismembered from the *Matrice* at the Citadel and set up as new and independent parishes. In other words in 1687 there were living in the countryside 2945 people, less than half the population of Gozo, as we know that at the same time in the city and the *Borgo* of Rabat there were living 2991 people.

### Continuous Raids

The reluctance of the people of Gozo to venture into the countryside was more than justified. The siege of 1551 was not an isolated incident. Turkish raids had been going on for a long time before this date and continued down to the middle of the 17th century. Quite big raids are recorded as having taken place in 1560 when a lot of people were carried away as slaves; in 1561 Dragut himself landed on Gozo and was only put to flight after a fierce skirmish with the Gozitan Cavalry; in 1583 Rabat was sacked and almost completely destroyed; in 1598, 40 galleys under the command of Bassa Cicala appeared off Gozo without landing men, and again in 1645, nine galleys of Biserta were sighted. Not only was it dangerous to live in the country, but also to spend the night in the *Borgo*. Because of this ever present danger the Franciscan Friars who had their convent in the *Borgo* in 1606 were given a small plot of land in the citadel near St Martin's Cavalier to build a place where they could sleep at night as they were afraid to remain in the *Borgo* during the night.

This building in the shape of a large store is still standing. Even those who had a house in the *Borgo* tried to acquire a small pied-a-terre in the citadel in order to have a place where to sleep in safety. The danger at night could be gauged from the fact that there was a law requiring all women and children on the island to sleep in the citadel which was only repealed in 1637.

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### *Coastal Towers*

The gradual spreading out into the country which took place in the 17th century kept pace with the gradual strengthening of the defences of Gozo. As already stated in 1605 Garzes Tower was built at Mgarr. In 1669-70 the *Universita'* of Gozo built the Tower at Dahlet Qorrot in Nadur, which came to be known as 'La Torre Nuova', and in 1689 built the three towers at Dwejra, Xlendi and Mgarr ix-Xini. Finally in 1720 the Tower of Marsalforn was built with funds from the 'Grand Master Alosio de Wignacourt foundation'. This replaced an older smaller tower.

Furthermore eleven guard posts were also built. These were small observation posts scattered along the coasts placed on high ground and at vantage points each of which was manned by three guards who kept watch through the night. These guard posts were placed at: 'Fandeno' (near Dahlet Qorrot); 'Santa Maria' (Marsalforn); 'Tal-Bacrat'; 'Il-Colla l-Bajda' at Xwejni, 'Ras el Vecca'; 'Wied el Ghasri'; 'Salvatur' at Dwejra; 'San Simeone'; 'Ras el Hops'; 'El Tmagen'; and 'Ras el Tafal'.

Later on some of these posts were converted into coastal batteries such as the one at Santa Maria and Qolla s-Safra at Marsalforn. Three batteries and a redoubt were built both at Marsalforn and at Ramla and a small fort at Ras il-Qala, at the tip of Qala facing Comino. These fortifications together with St Mary's tower, on Comino, built by Victor Cassar, son of Girolomo Cassar, completed the defensive system of Gozo. Later on in 1756 Fort Chambray was built. The idea behind the design of this fort was to provide Gozo with another fortified city but it never materialised as no one bought land to build houses in it.

As can be seen the process of resettling in the countryside was a slow and laborious one. The people of Gozo did not forget 1551 quickly and clung tenaciously to the safety of their city. This is the reason why the history of Gozo is really the history of its city. When people talked of Gozo it was the *oppidum gaulos* they really meant. This is also probably the reason why the city of Gozo never acquired a name of its own which is rather strange considering that even small villages have a name of their own. In Gozo the city was Gozo.



## Government of Gozo

During the 400 years between the definite conquest of Malta from the Arabs by King Roger the Norman in 1120 and the ceding of our islands to the Order of St John by the Emperor Charles V in 1530, the Government of the island of Gozo was in the hands of an official appointed by the King of Sicily called the *Capitano della Verga* or *Capitano d'Armi* aided by a body called the *Universita'* formed of four *jurats*. When the Order took over, the Grand Master Villiers de l'Isle Adam wanted to abolish the office of the *Capitano della Verga* and appoint in his stead a Governor who had to be a Knight. The Gozitans resisted this move as they claimed that by an old privilege granted to them by the King of Sicily the *Capitano della Verga'* had to be chosen from among the members of the local noble families. The Grand Master gave way and for some time this office was retained.

In 1551 the Order imposed its will and the office of *Capitano della Verga* was abolished and replaced by that of a Governor who had to be a Knight of the Order. The last *Capitano della Verga* was the Noble and Magnifi-

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cent Andrea Castelletta. The Knight Fra. Galaziano de Sesse of the Language of Aragon was appointed the first Governor of Gozo. He is remembered not only as the first Governor of Gozo but also as the man who had the misfortune to preside over the great catastrophe of 1551.

The old *Universita'* of Gozo seemed to have carried on very much as before. This was probably due to the fact that the Order could not make its presence sufficiently felt on the island because it was represented by only two officials, the Governor and the Deputy Governor, both of whom had to be Knights of the Order, all other officials were locals. The functions of the Governor and his deputy were strictly military. He was the head of the armed forces on the island and in charge of the fortifications. The civil administration was in the hands of the *Universita'*. The Governor, for example, was expressly forbidden from committing people to prison without the written order of the civil judge.

### *Governor's Court*

Although the Court of Gozo was called the Governor's Court, the Governor had only the right to attend at its sittings as a sort of honoured guest. It was presided over by a civil judge salaried by the Order who was more often than not a Gozitan, who heard all civil and criminal cases. The Court of Gozo was a Court of first instance with the same jurisdiction as that of the *Corte della Castellania* at Notabile and Valletta and from its judgements an appeal lay to the Court of Appeal in Malta known as the *Supremo Magistrato di Giustizia*. It had the Fiscal Advocate who was the state attorney and prosecuted in all criminal trials. The Court had its own Registrar who was a Notary, clerks and other officials. The Governor only presided in trials where the accused was a member of the garrison and even in this case although he was the judge he had to be assisted and take the advice of the civil judge or of a lawyer.

## **Garrison of the Island**

The Governor was at the head of all the armed forces on the island which numbered over one thousand men and were collectively known as the Militia. The armed forces in Gozo were made of three formations:

*The Cavalry.* This comprised 60 mounted men divided into three squadrons under the command of the Deputy-Governor. It had its own standard-bearer (*alfiere*), its *bandolieri*, *turcopali* and *trumpeteers*. The cavalry had a very important function as it sallied forth to attack and try to throw back into the sea or to destroy any enemy force which might land.

*The Infantry.* The infantry, known also as *Il Reggimento Antico* comprised: the coast guards armed with long-barrelled guns who manned the coastal towers and guard-posts, who numbered 392; the garrison of the citadel which consisted of a sergeant, four capurals and nine guards; and a squadron of thirty musketeers to be used as a reserve force. The infantry was under the command of the First *Jurat*.

*The Muschetteers.* In 1648 a new regiment of muschetteers was formed by Grand Master Lascaris numbering 460 armed men divided into four squadrons. This regiment which also did guard duty in the towers and guard posts was probably also under the command of one of the *jurats* as the weekly roll-call of both this regiment and of the infantry was one of the duties of the *jurats*. The infantry assembled for the roll call in front of the *Banca Giuratale* at It-Tokk while the muschetteers assembled at St Francis Square.

## Military Regulations

All males between the ages of 16 and 65 were subject to military service and had to enrol within 8 days of attaining 16 years either in one of the regiments or in the coast guard. They had to provide their weapons and their own horse if they joined the cavalry. In case of any enemy landing, a mortar was fired from the citadel and all men had to assemble at the Main Square called to this day It-Tokk.

All coast guards had to be at their post by the time the second 'Ave Maria' had sounded and were to remain on duty till morning. If any enemy vessel was sighted, one of the guards was to ride as quickly as possible to the citadel to report to the Governor. The Governor would then order the firing of as many mortar shots as vessels sighted. The signal would be received at St Mary's Tower on Comino and relayed to St Agata's Tower (the Red Tower) at Mellieha, from there it was relayed to Mdina and from Mdina to Valetta.

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So that within about a quarter of an hour the Grand Master in Valletta would know of any hostile vessels approaching our shores. In the evening a curfew was imposed. After the firing of the signal call '*il tocco*' from the walls of the citadel, at the second '*Ave Maria*' all shops had to close and anyone found going about without a pass would be arrested.

This briefly was the military setup on the island of Gozo by the time the rule of the Military Order of St John was drawing to a close.

### **Civil Administration**

As already stated the civil administration of the island remained broadly in the hands of the *Universita'* of Gozo. Before going any further it would be better to explain what was the *Universita'* and how it came about. The *Universita'* was a city government which evolved in Italy in the middle ages. Such city governments resulted from the struggle between the cities and the Emperor, who was their nominal ruler, for a greater say in the running of their own affairs. This system of local government was also introduced in our islands, although it is not certain when this took place. We had the *Univerista'* of Malta with its seat in Mdina and the *Universita'* of Gozo. They were two governing bodies independent of each other, though they usually acted together when they had some petition to make to the Emperor and later on to the King of Sicily.

The *Universita'* passed laws which were known as *Bandi*, administered public funds, fixed prices of foodstuffs, especially the price of corn which was called the *meta*, checked all weights and measurers used by vendors and traders, took care of and administered public buildings and property, and looked after the sanitary requirements of the community. But above all the most important function of the *Universita'* was that of operating the *Annona*.

The *Universita'* was responsible for the food supplies needed for the island most of which, especially corn, were imported from Sicily. A system was evolved whereby the *Universita'* borrowed money from the population to have a large capital at its disposal. With this capital the *Universita'* bought foodstuffs, especially corn, from abroad when the prices were low, and stored them in its own stores. When supplies were scarce and prices high,



the *Universita'* sold food to the people at relatively low prices. This operation was called the *Annona*. The *Universita'* also used this capital to lend money to the farmers to enable them to buy seeds and other necessities and to pay debts.

In Gozo the *Universita'* borrowed money at 4 percent though in the early stages the rate of interest was as high as 8.4 percent. Part of the capital borrowed it used to buy corn from Sicily, the rest it lent to the farmers who repaid the *Universita'* in kind by selling to it their crops. In June on the feast of St John the Baptist, the *Universita'* fixed the prices at which it was to buy the crops from the farmers, this was called the *meta*. In November on the feast of St Martin, the *Universita'* fixed the prices at which the crops were to be sold in the shops and also by the *Universita'* itself. This was called the *contra-meta*.

### The *Universita'* of Gozo

The *Universita'* of Gozo had its seat at the *Banca Giuratale*, which was always in the *Borgo*. It looks as if the *jurats* wanted to stay and have their seat in the *Borgo* to emphasise their independence of the Governor who resided in the citadel. The *Banca Giuratale* is still standing at It-Tokk. It was built in 1733 under the Governorship of Fra Paolo Antonio de Viguier during the reign of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena and had replaced a much older building which had become too small and patched up. It is probable that originally the old *Banca Giuratale* was situated in some other place because of the prohibition of putting up any building in front of the glacis of the citadel.

The *Universita'* was not only in charge of all the civil administration, but was also involved, though under the overall control of the Governor, in the defence of the island. At first it was responsible for all expenses involved in the defence of the island and as shown it built most of the coastal towers. Later on, a sort of arrangement was arrived at with the Order, whereby the Order would pay the salaries of the troops and any capital expenditure involved in building new fortifications and the *Universita'* would be responsible for the maintenance of the fortifications and contributed for part of the salaries of some of the military officials.

## **Taxes**

To carry out its commitments, the *Universita'* needed funds and it was for this reason allowed to impose taxes. We know of several taxes which were imposed at one time or another on the people of Gozo. Most of these taxes were gathered by the *Universita'*. In 1572 after calling a *Consiglio Popolare* in the *Matrice*, the *Universita'* imposed a tax of *un grano per ogni cartuccio di vino e due piccoli per ogni misura d'oglio*. There was at one time a tax imposed on the sale of bread called *il bollo del pane*, a tax on wine and victuals sold and on the export of all animals to Malta. The Governor used to levy a tax on all bullocks used for ploughing which was called *Vardia* as the revenue derived from it went to pay the salaries of the guards.

Another ingenious method used by the *Universita'* to raise funds was the system known as the *Lanteria* or *Ceppuna*. This was a sort of animal prison. A field was set apart and rented every year to the highest bidder. Any animal found straying about could be taken to the *Ceppuna*, as it was called, and the owner had to pay a fine to the person who rented the field to get it out.

## **The Jurats**

The *Universita'* was composed of four *jurats* who held office for one year though they could be reappointed again for any number of years. During their term of office they held the rank of Captain of the Militia and enjoyed all the privileges which went with such rank. As the *Universita'* passed laws and regulations, it had the right to see that these laws were respected and enforced. It therefore had a Court called the *Corte Giuratale* which sat at the *Banca Giuratale* and was presided by the *jurats* in which cases involving violations of its laws and regulations were heard. This Court could impose fines not exceeding 15 *tari*. Because of this judicial function, the *jurats* while in office were also considered as judges and had the right to wear judges robes consisting of the silk toga and biretta.

The *jurats* were expected to attend daily at the *Banca* for the dispatch of their normal duties. They had to make regular inspections of the stores and granaries in their charge and to be present when the corn and other

crops were brought in by the farmers and to check the quality and amount of crops brought in and to issue receipts to the farmers. Once a week they had to take the roll call of the two foot regiments and to visit the hospital for males which was built outside the walls of the citadel in present St Francis Square. Every three months they had to inspect the coastal towers belonging to the *Universita'* and see that everything was in a good state of repair. In June of every year they had to inspect and check all the wells and cisterns which were found in the citadel to see that they were kept clean and full with fresh water brought from the *Gran Fontana*.

They also regularly checked the wells in the countryside to see that the water was not left stagnant and that the wells were kept clean and covered. They kept at their *Banca* a set of all weights and measures then in use, and all vendors and traders had to have their weights and measures stamped by the officials of the *Univerista'* before they could make use of them. Finally they had to calculate and fix the fair price of foodstuffs from year to year.

#### *Coat of Arms*

The *Universita'* of Gozo had its own coat-of-arms which consisted of three hills on a black background surmounted by an open crown. This coat-of-arms can still be seen on the facade of the Governor's Palace and over the walled-up old main door of the law courts in the citadel. It is not known when or how the Gozitans acquired or adopted this coat-of-arms but it has been used by them since time immemorial.

#### *Officials of the Universita'*

Apart from the four *jurats* the *Universita'* had the following officials: *The Treasurer*. This official kept all accounts, received dues and payments and paid out sums on the order of the *jurats*.

*The Notary*. This official kept all the records and files of the *Universita'* and drew up and published all contracts entered into by the *Universita'*.

*The Cattapani*. There were four such officials. They had the duty to supervise shops and traders to check their weights and measures and to see that they were not selling goods above the fixed prices. They were also responsible for enforcing all other regulations issued by the *Universita'*.

*The Storekeeper*. He was in charge of all the stores of the *Universita'*.

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*The Capitano della Piazza.* He was in charge of all public places and was responsible for keeping public order.

*The Giudici Idiotti.* There were two such officials. They were lay magistrates who heard minor cases where the value did not exceed two *once*.

The *Universita'* had also the following employees on its payroll:

*The Doctor*, whose salary was 140 *scudi* .

*The Surgeon* , whose salary was 50 *scudi* .

*The Herbist (Aromatorio)* , whose salary was 55 *scudi*.

*The Armourer*, whose salary was 33 *scudi*.

*The Teacher of the Grammar School*, whose salary was 20 *scudi*.

### **The Medieval City**

A brief picture has been attempted of the way people in Gozo lived during the period of the Knights of St John. A short description of the city itself now might not be out of place. To the Gozitans the *Gran Castello* is and has always been the city - 'Il-Belt'. To this very day you can find old people in the villages who would not know what you are talking about if you talked to them about the 'citadel or 'Il-Kastell' as to them this place is still 'Il-Belt'. Fortunately the name painted on the wall of the street going up to the Citadel still retains the correct version in Maltese as it is given as 'It-Telgha tal-Belt'.

The citadel in its present proportions and with its streets, (though not their names which are an unfortunate recent addition) has stood probably since before the Norman conquest of 1120 and it contained within its walls not only the houses of the principal families of Gozo and of the other inhabitants, but most of the public buildings and offices. Some of these, including the Church, were rebuilt and enlarged during the 17th century, but otherwise the city remained the same, a medieval city with its small uncomfortable and insanitary houses huddled together and on top of each other filling every space available. For hundreds of years the people of Gozo lived, prayed, made merry and died in this place. It is indeed a great pity that a monument of such great historical importance should have been left to decay and fall into ruin.

Before it was abandoned and left to fall to pieces in the city were to be found

the Church known as the *Matrice* (today the Cathedral), the Palace of the Governor, the Courts of Justice and Public Archives, the Palace of the Bishop of Malta, three prisons, a small hospital for poor women, several large stores of the *Universita'*, the barracks of the garrison, two small chapels, a good number of taverns and shops and several private houses. In 1701 there were still 56 private houses occupied and 17 already abandoned and in a state of decay. There were 68 large cisterns for drinking water which were filled from rain water and water carted from the *Gran Fontana*, the main fresh water spring on the way to Xlendi.

### **Plan to Abandon the City**

Following the siege of 1551, the idea was mooted about that the city should be abandoned and razed to the ground and a new city built on the tableland overlooking Marsalforn Bay, as it was claimed that even if repaired and better fortified, the old city would always remain at the mercy of enemy guns which could be placed on Gelmus hill and on Quljat hill. This hare-brained idea lingered on till 1670 when it was finally put to rest by Count Antonio Mauritio Valperga, an Italian military engineer, who in a report presented to the Council of the Order on the 13th May 1670, rebutted the claims in favour of a new city at Marsalforn and the idea of abandoning the old city. Instead he submitted a plan for strengthening the defences of the old city and for enclosing the whole *Borgo* with new bastions. This plan although approved by the Council, was never carried out as it was too costly, but fortunately it served the purpose of saving the old city.

### **The New Defences of the City**

Although it is generally agreed by all historians that the principal reason why the city of Gozo was captured so easily in 1551 was the poor state of its defences on the south eastern part, built in the old manner without flanking bastions for cross-firing, and without a ditch, the situation was not remedied quickly and it took quite a number of years before it could be said that the fortifications on this side were sufficient to make the city adequately defensible. But little by little things began to improve. A deep ditch was dug extending from the small fort on the east facing Xaghra to the gate on the west. A glacis or esplanade was formed sloping downwards all along this



**The plan of Count Antonio Maurilio Valperga for Rabat and its *Castello*.**

ditch and no houses were allowed to be built or trees planted in front of the glacis. Two strong bastions, one facing south-east, and the other south-west, (connected with a curtain) were also built. The small fort on the east connected by a tunnel cut into the rock, and a ravelin on the west to guard the gate, completed the outer defences. The ravelin has unfortunately disappeared and been replaced by unsightly constructions.

On the inside, two cavaliers, one of St John facing east, and the other of St Martin facing west, were later added. The city was provided with three powder-stores, one near the old sally-port and the other two on top of the two cavaliers. The access to the city was by means of a long steep flight of steps going up what today is Castle hill, then over a stone bridge turning sharply to the right, then over a wooden drawbridge through a small and low gate. These fortifications rendered the city practically impregnable as on the northern side the high walls were built on unscalable rock cliffs. The city walls were armed with 33 canons distributed along the different vantage points.

Although most of the military engineers who were sent from time to time to inspect the fortifications of the city and suggest improvements drew up

plans of the city, to date only two plans of the old city of Gozo have been uncovered. One is the plan which is to be found in the last plate (Folio XVI) of *The True Depiction of the Investment and Attack suffered by the Island of Malta at the Hands of the Turks in the year of Our Lord 1565* published by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio in 1582. This plan is not at all accurate and does not show any of the buildings or streets; as far as the fortifications are concerned it is most probable that the fortifications shown on this plan were meant to suggest works rather than the actual fortifications of the city at the time. The other plan we know of is the plan of the city and *Borgo* drawn up by Count Valperga and submitted with his report to the Council of the Order. Although the main scope of this plan was to show the new works which Valperga suggested should be made to enclose the whole *Borgo* and make it one whole with the city, it is a very accurate and detailed plan both of the city (citadel) and of the old part of the *Borgo*.

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## IN SEARCH OF GOZO'S ANCIENT TOWN: WRITTEN AND NON-WRITTEN SOURCES

**Pawlu Mizzi**

The controversy over the origin of Gozo's main town has been the subject of much research during the past years. There is general agreement that it originated from an inland settlement in central Gozo during the Bronze Age. However, two sites are quoted for its location: one, as being that on a flat-topped small hill, the other on a humped meadow just beneath it. The former is claimed to have been a Greek *acropolis* (Bres 1814), the latter, the site of the old Roman *oppidum*.

Another suggestion which, in my opinion, contains a sort of a compromise between these two theories (Bonanno 1990) contends the existence of an upper city and a lower city. This latter suggestion is almost identical to an older one by Can. Gian Piet Francesco Agius de Soldanis in his *Il Gozo Antico-Moderno e Sacro-Profano*, some two hundred years earlier.

Those who are acquainted with historical publications on Gozo and have read Agius de Soldanis, will agree that *Il Gozo Antico e Moderno*, which may be said to be a compendium of places, churches, events, persons, and all that made Gozo since the Deluge, has since served as a primary source material to those writing about their home-town. Many, in fact, – not excluding, of course, those writing about the main town of Victoria – refer to Agius de Soldanis as “the father of Gozitan historiography”. Some still look at him as a model, almost an idol, whose glorification of Gozo has become synonymous with patriotism.

The excessive exaltation of Gozo has naturally given rise to anomalies and anachronisms. Sometimes whole passages or episodes were invented to glorify Gozo, a device not unusual with biased writers. Abela, for instance, invented a Maltese medieval period to give a picture of a Catholic Malta; Valentini created a royal visit by Frederick IV to set up



a Maltese link for an Italian heritage; and the Jesuit Gerolamo Manduca literally fabricated Pauline traditions to give a sound base for an alleged Apostolic origin of Christianity in Malta. It is thus no wonder that even in Gozo today, some writers appear to be much more arduous in their use of imagination than in their research in the history of their island.

I propose three main considerations in my search for this ancient town. The first regards the antiquity of the site as an urban centre; the second regards the cultural development effecting its social and economic activities; the third regards the physical size of the site and its exact geographical location.

### **Documented Sources**

In 1960 Dr Trump, then Director of the Museum of Antiquities, supervised the digging of a sewer trench at It-Tokk in Victoria. The trench went down 3.70 meters deep touching the surface of the clay strata. At the lowest end it revealed shreds of the Borg in-Nadur phase, over which lay a thin level of Punic remains. The trench was a real mine of information for those willing to make use of unwritten sources. In the midst of Roman remains there was at least one cellar with empty wine jars and a building littered with fifth-century oil-lamps, of which one had Christian markings. The rest in the upper strata consisted of deposits of rubbish belonging to various ages from the Mediaeval to the modern, much of which disturbed because of more recent development. The condition of the deposits made it abundantly clear that human activity was never absent from the Bronze Age to modern times. Trenches also excavated in various localities within the walls of the *Castello* did not yield anything prior to the late medieval times. A report of the findings at It-Tokk and the *Castello* was published in the *Annual Museum Report*. Besides, all prehistoric antiquities found on site at It-Tokk and elsewhere in Gozo were catalogued and indexed (Evans 1971).

This stratification confirms that the general social and political structure of Gozo's past was identical to that in Malta. It will be, thus, helpful before going through further considerations, to review the various phases in the general framework of Gozo's history.

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### *The Prehistoric Period*

Gozo had a long prehistoric period identical in its eras and phases to that in Malta. According to Renfrew (1975) a lot of what has been written about prehistory is inadequate and needs to be revalued in the light of 'the New Archaeology' from the United States. Measured with the anthropologist's new time-yardstick, the impressive temples at Ġgantija became a milestone in human activity, the first stone temples in the world (Renfrew 1975). They are the product of a highly organized society, built by 'a chiefdom society', with a complicated hierarchical system consisting of minor village chiefdoms and sub-chiefdoms under the leadership of one head-chief. Members of minor chiefdoms lived scattered in habitations in various regions away from the temples. None, however, seem to have built their huts on hilltops. They preferred the lowlands, places like L-Imrejzbiel in Ghajnsielem, and Taċ-Ċawla, on the outskirts of Rabat (Veen and Van der Bloom 1991).

Long before civilization dawned on Gozo, man had already long settled in and about It-Tokk. Trump is of the opinion that 'about the middle of the [second] millenium the scattered open settlements were largely abandoned in favour of defensible sites on many of the flat-topped hills of the two islands of Malta and Gozo'. As in Sicily these had 'bell-shaped cisterns and silos'. However, Trump (1972) asserts that 'in Malta [proto-urbanism] did not develop further'. Settlers preferred sites which were closer to arable lands with natural nearby streams. The abundance of pottery, coins and incised marble, as well as the foundations of dwelling huts with adjoining kilns found in the area of It-Tokk are among the primary source materials for an outline of Gozo's early urbanization.

The site today occupied by the old quarters of Rabat was in its earliest times a humped meadow bordering with a number of valleys: Wied Marsalforn beginning from Fomm il-Gir on the north, Wied ta' Żejta and Ta' Hadidu on the east, Wied Siekel up to the top of Triq tal-Ghajn on the south, and "Is-Saccaya" (Lunzjata) on the west (Bowen-Jones *et. al.* 1961). It appears that by the third century B.C. this site developed into a bustling municipal town. According to a stone tablet there were in it at least four temples needing repairs. There was also a council of administration (Heltzer 1993). This inscription should "give us a better idea about the Gozitan society" (Vella 1995) long before the Romans set foot

on the island. The urns and other funerary potterware found in Punic graves along Il-Vajringa should also add further to our knowledge of the culture of this early Punic period (Caruana 1886).

### *The Romans*

After the arrival of the Romans in 218 B.C. the number of inscribed archaeological remains in the neighbourhood of It-Tokk increased. They included statues, coins, oil-crushers, ceramic tiles, glass jars, amphorae, anchors, oil-lamps and foundations of private homes, all within the wall that surrounded the town itself. Other Roman remains were found in Ramla, where a Roman villa was uncovered during the first decade of the twentieth century (Bonanno 1993). Literature about this Roman period has increased since Abela (1647) published the texts of some of the Latin epigraphy discovered in Rabat.

The text of Roman epigraphs found in the ancient quarters of the Roman town around the church of St George is included in the *Corpus Inscriptorum Latinorum X*. These are also quoted by Onorato Bres in his *Malta Antica Illustrata* (1816). A. A. Caruana, who explored and surveyed the area between 1881 and 1897 has also given a comprehensive report of the more important remains he found in *Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Cemeteries* (1898). More recent literature on the period include Coleiro (1971), Azzopardi (1992), Buhagiar (1986;1993) and Bonanno (1990).

### *The Byzantines*

There is little documented evidence about the people or the way they lived during the rule of the Byzantines in Gozo. Except for the usual legends, told in sermons to enhance belief in miraculous protection, literature about the period is lacking. One particular story with a historical background, that of General Belisarius and his visit to the *Matrice*, is as fictitious as the rest, particularly when one considers that the General hardly had time to touch off Malta in his pursuit of the Vandals. However, one interesting non-written source is available. This is a seal bearing the name of Theophylact, an *archon* whose function was that of a civic and military administrator. It is to be presumed that Gozo had a town and was then for some time an autonomous or semi-autonomous island probably under the central authority of a *dux* in Malta (Luttrell 1979).

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According to a contemporary geographic list in the *Descriptio Orbis Romani* attributed to George of Cyprus, Gozo was regarded as an independent town, one of fourteen under the Sicilian province of Syracuse. The interesting study by Brown (1975) on Byzantine Malta is very revealing.

### *The Arabs*

The Arabs, who ruled the island after the Byzantines, are even as scarcely documented. Ibn Khaldun is perhaps the most important source. He lived during the twelfth century but he is the one who informed us that the Arabs came to Malta in c. 870 (Amari 1880). El Edrisi, the geographer of King Roger, tells us that Gozo was one hundred miles east of Pantelleria and had a fine harbour. Arab authors, included by Michele Amari in his *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* (Amari and Schiarparelli 1883), are indispensable for any study of the period.

Unfortunately, Amari missed Al Himyari who records that for almost a century the islands were left almost uninhabited. The thin layer of the Arab period recorded at the It-Tokk trench almost corroborates Al Himyari. Until recently no Maltese historian seems to have been aware of Himyari's information and consequently the idea that Gozo had for many years been uninhabited has not been discussed seriously. This may not be accepted by a number of writers of ecclesiastical history. Some insist that Christianity had under no circumstance been interrupted in the Maltese islands. Mgr Luigi Vella (*Nicol Ghabdul*) assures that at least some of the Gozitans had preserved their Christian faith and that as soon as Count Roger 'liberated' them, the *Matrice* was re-opened and re-consecrated.

The complete absence of toponyms with Latin roots, however, bears different witness. Besides, the fact that the Count had to fight hard before bringing the Gozitan Muslim leaders to submission leads one to think that there were no "Greeks" on the island.

The recent publications by both Wettinger and Brincat will definitely help to understand the period better. In the meantime the scholar could rely on two most tangible sources of Gozo's dark period during the rule of the Muslims: Gozo's toponyms and Gozo's language.

*Toponyms*

Toponyms are indeed important historical sources in Gozo's medieval period. A look at the map of the central Mediterranean will undoubtedly help us to discover the different linguistic strata in the region. Berber, Arabic and Sicilian accretions are cemented in place-names as shreds in soil. In Gozo, thanks to its secluded geographical situation, such linguistic stratification had been preserved and is today a most valuable source for the researcher. Comparison and assimilation between toponyms in Gozo and Malta and those in neighbouring lands, like Sicily, Pantelleria, Lampedusa and Tunisia, reveal almost identical lexical and morphological structures. Place names denoting topographical descriptions, like *marša*, *ras*, *cala*, *djebel*, *djir*, *furnu*, and *burgj* or *bradj* are common in all countries speaking Semitic languages. Naturally not without changes in their semantics (E. Serracino-Inglott 1974-83). A *burdj* (pl *bradj*) in Sicily is *borgo*, meaning town (Aquilina 1981-86). But in Gozo it retained its old meaning of 'grave'. As *Burdj el Djedid* in Tunisia. Hitti in *History of the Arabs* relates how the term underwent semantic changes from grave to tower, and eventually walled-town by the Ottoman Turks who sacked Lebanon during the fourteenth century. There are also other names as *rahl* <sup>ʿ</sup>*amrūn*, *rahl al djedid*, *rahl* <sup>ʿ</sup>*ammār*, *alhadjar*, *djardutah*, *aldjudran* and *almaderadj*, in travel accounts of thirteenth century Sicily by El Idrisi and Ibn Djubayr which correspond to places in Malta and Gozo.

*Civitas and Oppidum*

The urbanized centres in the central areas in both Malta and Gozo have since Roman times taken their name from that of the island itself. Thus that in Malta became known as *Melitae Civitas* while that in Gozo, *Gaulos oppidum*. Both *civitas* and *oppidum* are natural geographic terms, the former to denote the principal administrative centre of a district or region, the latter given to walled-towns on the periphery. Both notions were kept by subsequent rulers, but they translated the terms into their own language: as *Medina* (city) in Malta and *Il-Ħaġar* (town) in Gozo. These, naturally, have undergone frequent changes in their semantics. Because of the structural alterations as the town developed from a Roman *oppidum* to a feudal *borgo*, and during the late Middle Ages to *subborgo*, Il-Ħaġar became Ir-Rabat and more recently Victoria. When Wettinger's complete work on local topography is published, the histo-

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rian may be in a better position to assess the significance and importance of the earliest toponyms as documented in ancient deeds and notarial archives.

### *Il-Haġar*

Of primary importance in this search is the early name by which this ancient town was known. It appears that *Ir-Rabat* was at some time called *Il-Haġar*. This emerges from a curious appellative applied to a statue of St George placed on a site which was on the boundary walls of the old town *San Ġorġ tal-Haġar*. The appellatives merit serious consideration. Some philologists may translate *al-Haġar* as "of stone" but Preca (1904) defines *Il-Haġar* as *muro di recinto*. This agrees with the description of towns with names of "*Hadjar*" as given by Hitti. The oldest walled-town by this name recorded on a tablet belongs to the seventh century B.C. The ruins of Naqab Alhadjar, still extant in the Middle East, might give an idea of what a walled-town by the name "*Hadjar*" looked like. In Sicily and in Tunisia the name is not uncommon. Others, with similar connotation, have had their name translated into the language of the dominator. *Djebal* in Phoenicia was hellenized as *Byblos* and *Alhadjar* in Matera (Sicily) was latinised as *Sassi*. Ibn Giubayr, on his famous journey from Andalusia to Mecca during the thirteenth century, visited the walled-towns known as *Alhadjr*. *Alhadjar* in Berber morphology is a name of unity. It is derived from *hudjrah* which according to early documentation, is a small house (Caracausi 1983).

Ta' Haġrat is another place-name of Berber formation as *Tasanat*. *Haġrat* here is not the construct state of *haġra* having the modern meaning of "a stone" but of the old *huġra* meaning "a house". It's also logic that the toponym refers to "a house" and not to "a stone". The word *huġra* for house is still recorded in the Maltese idiom. We say for instance "*ġew il-festa b'haġarhom*" or in the plural "*bi hġarhom*" meaning "they come to the feast with their house" referring to their family and not "they come to the feast with their stones".

### *Ir-Rabat*

Rabat, too, is another of the toponyms that has been discussed by a number of scholars. Some say it derives from Rabbath, the goddesses



**A general view of development of the town of Rabat from Ta' Gelmus Hill.**

(Bonnici 1975); others from the verb '*rabat*' or '*rabad*', to tie, and, consequently, Rabat is the name of the suburb in relation to the city (Bezzina 1993). Some even dare relate the name to the fact that merchants during the Middle Ages normally tied their donkeys outside the gate of the city. Rabat is also sometimes erroneously mixed with *Ribat* (Bonnici 1975). In fifteenth-century Sicilian documents Rabat was the *borgo* or *borgium* but later it is referred to as *Suburbju oy Rabatu*. Wettinger (1980) keeps this latter meaning. So does Professor Aquilina (1960) who is in turn also quoted by Caracausi (1983) as having this meaning. It is however plausible, in the absence of documented evidence, that the name Rabat was adopted for the old town by Sicilian immigrants who filled administrative posts on the island following the rise of the Catalans after the death of Martin the Elder in 1509.

One of the earliest cities to be called by this name was Rabat in Morocco (*Everybody Encyclopaedia* 1958). The term then acquired a double meaning: a port and a city. In Spain a town was known in the eleventh century as *Arrabal* (Corominas 1976). Neither El Idrisi nor Ibn Giubayr encountered on their journeys places, bearing such a name. However, Sciacca had a *Rabbatu* in 1290, Castronovo in 1300, and Palermo in 1375. In Gozo the earliest record of the name Rabat is documented in 1450.

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It is suggested by some lexicographers that place-names preceded by an indefinite article and ending with a *T-marbuta* give an idea of possession. In grammatical terms they may be regarded as nouns in the construct state. Ir-Rabat is one of these. It is made up of “*raba*” plus the *T-marbuta*, an abbreviated form of the suffix ‘*atum*’ used in Classical Arabic for the feminine, as explained by Professor Aqulina in his *Maltese-Arabic Comparative Grammar*. Michele Amari notes in his *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* (1880) that “*raba*” is the plural of “*rab*” which means a “field with houses”. If this is the case the new etymology of Ir-Rabat could shed new light on the early history of Gozo's old town.

Further consideration is suggested following the new revelations about the report of Gilibertus Abate, Governor of Malta, who in c.1241 sent Frederick II an account of the taxes assessed in the *castrum* of Gozo. The original report is lost, probably destroyed with other important documents by the Nazis in 1943. A copy of it had been reproduced in 1888 by Edward Winklemann in his *Acta Imperii Inedita Siculi XIII* (Innsbruck, 1888). Recent studies on it by Illuminato Perì (1967), Vella (1975) and Luttrell (1979) show that it contains discrepancies which may have been caused by some omission in Winklemann's copy. It is the first documented evidence of the ancient town of Gozo during the Middle Ages. It was then considered one of the three important *castri* of the Maltese Islands.

### *Castrum*

Three considerations would seem to be in order here. The first is to consider whether at the time of Gilibertus in Gozo there was a *Castello* or a walled *borgo*., or whether there were both. In this latter case there would have been two *castri* in Gozo, and consequently the number of *castri* in the archipelago would not have been three as stated in some documents but four. The second consideration is about the size of the *castrum*. Gilibertus' *castrum* contained a population of 366 families, Christian, Arab, and Jewish, as well as their animals, their *centimoli*, their *tube*, their *concerie*, and their *tintorie*. Which of the two *castri* could hold at least 2000 people? A small round *Castello* on the hill or a walled *borgo* that was at least four times its size (Luttrell 1979)? A third consideration is that at the time the Anjovins took over the islands from the Hohenstaufen in 1263, there was no particular *Castellano* for Gozo.



It was only after 1276, when the island was attacked by the Genoese and depopulated, that there appeared for the first time a *Castellano* who was entrusted with the civic and military administration of the island. It is suggested that the presence of a *Castellano* could only appear when some type of castle was built. Documents on Gozo from the *Archivio di Stato di Napoli* analysed by Laurenzia and Ruggiero Moscati are abundantly clear. Arman Muntanier, a contemporary writer present during the take-over of Gozo from the Anjovins, records that admiral Loria first took the town and then he laid siege to the castle before its Anjovin leaders finally gave up (Agius de Soldanis). Later documentation, provided by the will of Gulielmo de Malte made in 1299, gives proof that this castle was the exclusive fortified home of the *Castellano* and his intimate *servientes* or collaborators. It also served as a place of exile for noble dissenters of the Aragonese rulers (Bresc 1974).

### The Development of Gozo's Historiography

Until the nineteen-thirties very little had been written on Gozo. Interest in history gained momentum soon after the publication of Dun Ġuzepp Farrugia's translation of Agius de Soldanis' *Il Gozo Antico e Moderno* in 1936. A number of history books and historical guides on Gozo were since put in print. The list is long and not possible to reproduce here in full. I pick some titles at random. In 1937 Gatt published *A Guide to Gozo*, a pictorial guide, amply illustrated with photographs by Carmelo Buhagiar, Gozo's top photographer. About the same time Dunstan G. Bellanti published his work *Why Malta? Why Ghawdex?* a work of linguistic and toponymic interest. Publications practically stopped during World War II, but soon after came the big drive from the newly set up St Michael's College of Education. Its principal, Bro Leo Barrington, laid the foundation for more scientific research in history with his publication of *Malta, Our Island Home*, a tiny booklet intended for use by school teachers. A number of undergraduates from St Michael's College of Education, enkindled with enthusiasm for Malta's past, undertook postgraduate courses in history. A Faculty of History was set up at the University of Malta, and in compliment to the *Archivio Storico di Malta*, the *Melita Historica* became the venue for the more important historical articles. After the early sixties there appeared Brian Blouet's *Gozo*, Trump's *Malta: An Archaeological Guide* (1972); and lately Fr Charles Cini's

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priceless contribution, *Gozo: the Roots of an Island*, in which top Maltese scholars such as Bonanno, Wettinger, De Lucca and Buhagiar have important articles on the various aspects of Gozo, historic, economic and artistic.

There are besides, these writers, other scholars who wrote important papers and books on Gozo. Luttrell (1975) wrote a report on *The Gozo Castello* for UNESCO. Chapter eight in Hoppen (1979), *The Fortifications of Malta by the Order of St John*, might be more illuminating particularly if read in conjunction with Bresc's article (A. Luttrell's translation) *Malta dopo il Vespro Siciliano* (MH, Vol. 7, No. 3 1974). The story of the origin of the earlier *Castello* has not yet been told. Bezzina's version (1993) of its development from an ancient *acropolis* to a medieval *cittadella* is not very convincing. It takes too much after Agius de Soldanis whose aim was that of glorifying his island-home with an early Christianization and a privileged antiquity for both the aristocratic and the ecclesiastics in the *Castello*.

This *Castello* was generally regarded as an old medieval fortification where the nobles of the island had their homes and where the ordinary inhabitants found refuge in times of attacks by the corsairs. For some it was also the symbol of the Aragonese Crown represented by lords ready to extract taxes and anxious to secure loyalty and obedience through oppression. Like in Sicily, the Gozo *Castello* was indeed the fortified abode of these pitiless feudal lords. But in real fact it was 'the city of administration' (Thake 1994). Until the late Middle Ages few were privileged with a residence within its gates, except, of course, the political dissenters who needed extra supervision and were kept in seclusion, isolated from the rest of the community in some remote part of the *Castello*. It was only after the threat of Hafsid corsairs increased during the earlier half of the fifteenth century that occasionally its gate began to be raised for the *popolo minuto* who were panicking with fear and distress due to the lack of security. By then the *Castello* was literally in ruins and there were hardly any people left willing to repair it. Disease and hunger were rampant and those, who could find means of transport, were ready to leave the island (Leopardi 1960).

Documentation is not scarce from this period onwards. The *capitoli* in the Palermo archives are a real source of light on this awkward situation as

shown in specialized papers on the subject by eminent scholars. In the *Archivio Storico di Malta*, Moscati, Laurenza and Valentini had already brought to our notice the works of Gianbruno and Genuardi and Winklemann. Later in *Melita Historica*, E. Leopardi (1960) and J. Galea also wrote interesting articles. More recently Bresc, Luttrell and Wettinger increased further the bibliography on the period. Further studies are in preparation by Wettinger on the toponyms.

Besides this written material, unwritten sources are also numerous. The derelict houses within the *Castello* as well as the architecture of those still standing might tell more truth than the numerous articles told to tourists. These are often told that the ruins date from the earthquake of 1693 and that the "gothic" windows are reminders of the Normans. A report of 1693 drawn immediately after the earthquake says, however, that the damage caused was almost insignificant and that the fallen houses, some sixteen in number, had fallen in disuse since the modernization of the *Castello* during the early decades of the seventeenth century. The architecture of one of the standing houses was identical to that of Palazzo Montalto in Syracuse or other Ventimiglia palaces in other parts of Sicily (Luttrell 1979). These Ventimiglia, one must recall, were for a long time very powerful on the island, particularly when Malta fell under their control as part of the quadripartite which ruled over Sicily after the death of Frederick IV. An old well, still extant under the present Cathedral, once stood in front of the chapel of the Annunciation. This could have made an important part of a medieval *piazza* before the restructuring of the old *Matrice* during the closing decade of the sixteenth century. The present *piazza* was then still inexistent. Its site was occupied by a block of old buildings acquired and demolished by the Chapter of the Collegiate in 1706 to make room for the flight of steps leading to Gafà's magnificent church.

#### *Misinterpretation of Terms*

An important source relating to the history of Rabat are the *capibrevi*, *bandi* and other official decrees sent to the *curia Gaudisii*. Pity that some terms relating to Gozo are often misinterpreted. The term *Terra* is a classic example. For some writers it is just another term for territory. In the late middle ages it was, however, used to describe an urbanized centre in a distant rural area of a diocese. It contained a number of *casalia*

and had at its centre a *Castello* and/or a walled *borgo*. This *borgo* held in it a "Tokk" with administrative buildings as well as houses of Government and of defence. Yet the central administration was conducted from the *Castello*. Consequently the *Castello* and the *terra* became almost synonymous. Until the middle of the thirteenth century Sicily had 150 of these *terre*. Gozo, however, was not one of them. Notaries then used the term *castrum* to signify the walled *borgo*. The *Castello* was known as *qas'r*, an Arabic term which the Sicilians latinized as *cassarum*. During the latter half of the fourteenth century Gozo was often referred to in official documents as *terra et insula Gaudisii*.

medieval ecclesiastical terms are likewise as confusing. Take the term *parrochia*. There were then three types of churches in that category. Some were called *parocchia*, others *cappella*. The former was generally supported by the *elemosina* of the people, the latter by benefices, usually bequeathed by a baron or some other feudal patron. In Malta because of the distance from the Cathedral at Mdina, they had a baptismal font. The Gozo *Castello* was also privileged with a *cappella*. Such *cappelle* were also authorised to administer not only baptism but also other sacraments and to hold divine office and other liturgical services, including Mass, on Sundays and feast-days. A *cappella* with a baptismal font was called *chiesa baptisimale*, that administering other sacraments *chiesa sacramentale* (Magri 1649) The Cathedral was then the only parish church of the diocese. However, it could delegate the *cura animarum* to a particular church in distant towns on the periphery of the diocese that were cut off physically from the Cathedral. Towns that were traditionally the site of the old Roman *oppidum* and whose parish organization dated from the beginning of its Christianization also kept their parish status. After the Fourth Lateran Council these early parishes had the duty of setting their own cemetery attached to them and to bury or refuse Christian burial to those who disobeyed the Precepts of the Church. They alone had the right to administer to the faithful the sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist during Pentecost (Addis, *et. 1883*).

One other term which is ambiguous and needing clarification is *Matrice*. The term was defined by Wettinger (1973) as 'a parish which had at least one other parish that was dismembered from it'. Alessandro Bonnici (1975) discussed the term in an almost identical way, suggesting, as is contained in *The Catholic Encyclopaedia*, that a church could be called

*Matrice* because of three main reasons. It could, among other things, be a church which was more important than others. Luttrell (1975) explains that a *Matrice* 'is not necessarily a parish from which at least another parish was dismembered'. In a recent paper Fiorini (1995) confirms that judging from the contents of a fifteenth-century document 'it is clear that the term matrix is used here in opposition to the smaller chapels abutting onto the major structure'. This naturally changes the whole concept of the *castello's Matrice* as a "Mother of Churches" in Gozo and brings it closer to the historical truth of being "a Mother-Church" for other smaller churches in the neighbourhood (Longhitano 1977). The myth of the *Matrice* as Mother of Churches is probably the consequence of legends about the origin of the *Castello* within which it stands.

### *The Story of the Castello*

Up to the end of the sixteenth century the *Castello* or *Castellaccio* was just a small round medieval fort on Borg Gheritu, a tiny flat-topped hill some 400 meters to the north of Rabat (Bosio, G. *Historia*. See also Boisgelin 1804). In 1599, almost 50 years after its sacking by the Muslim corsair Sinam Pasha, Giovanni Rinaldini, an Italian military engineer, made plans for a better and more modern city near Marsalforn and advised that the *borgo* together with its *Castello* should be razed to the ground. Funds, however, were lacking, and the intrigues that followed from a handful of noble land-owners who owned land at Ghajn Damma and from one or two high ranking members of the clergy who were afraid lest they might lose their position, disrupted Rinaldini's good work. Until a decision was taken by the Council, Grand Master Garzes proposed the modernization of the old *Castello*. Work started in 1599 and by 1622 the crown work was ready (Hoppen). Enquiries on the suitability of the new site were carried out with various other consultants. In 1640 Francesco Bonamici testified before Inquisitor Tempi that Ghajn Damma was blessed with nature's best gifts, water, good stone, vicinity to a harbour, and security. He also drew plans for the fortifications and estimated for the cost of works. In 1670, Maurizio Valperga, another Italian engineer, came with different plans. He advised on new fortifications around both Rabat and the *Castello*, assuring that these could resist any siege for longer months. His recommendations concerned *particolarmente il Castello, che potrebbe servire in ogni evento, come d'una cittadella*.

## *In Search of Gozo's Ancient Town*

The history of the *Castello* before the thirteenth century is nowhere documented. What has been written about it is, in all probability, an eighteenth century fabrication. The earliest story, as we often hear it today, was written by an anonymous 'historian' in 1704. This is the story he told:

*Il castello è antichissimo sendo fabbricato in un medesimo tempo che fù fabricata la città notabile, e ciò prima della passione di Cristo nostro Signore qual castello dall'anno 1551: in quella parte prima della depredazione di detta isola è stata una città a campione di quella di detta Notabile et aveva la sua porta Reale sin ove vi è situata la Croce per pi quattro venti. Ia per questo detta contrada si dice di Porta Reale e le sua mura circondavano la maggior parte di detto borgo, e ivi sono sin al presente li vestigii di dette mura. e stimando allora la Sacra religione Gerosilomitano che l'isola suddetta non sarebbe mai popolata da poter munire con gente, e guardare una simile città, fu ristretto castello, come al presente si ritrova, il quanto è ben nutrito e fortificato con sue mura e bastioni ben alti ed eminenti con suo fosso per parte di levante, mezzodì, e ponente, per tramontana però far maggior parte tutto rocca ruina somigliante alle mura di detta Città Notabile.*

The story appears to have been well received. In 1714 Dott. Gio. Giuseppe Caxaro added more details to it. In 1727 Can. Adeodato Formosa in a memorandum asking for the recognition of the title of *Insigne* for his *Matrice*, sent to the *Sacra Congregazione* in Rome the story of the above quoted anonymous writer. A covering letter to an influential Monsignore recommended, for the love of the Virgin Mary, that the petition be considered with urgency. In compensation for his good services Can. Formosa promised 500 *scudi*. The following is the story contained in the memorandum in support of the alleged antiquity of the *Matrice*:

*L'essere la nostra Colleggiata fondata ed eretta in un luogo non poco conspicuo costa dalle ragioni infrascritti. Poichè il Gozo fù anticamente Città abitata dalle più famose e valorose Nazioni, ch'avessero mai signoreggiato nel mondo che fù città si vede ocularmente dai vestigii, che sin a questi tempi s'osservano dell'antiche mura, e dal nome dalle tre porte che nella menzionata città vi erano, ch'ancor vi rimane, e sono la porta Reale ch'èra situata verso la Croce, la porta della Fontana che guarda verso mezzogiorno, e la porta del Garbo che era fabricare dietro di Sabina che guarda a ponente.*

About twenty years later Agius de Soldanis also repeated the same version of the origin of the *Castello*. He confesses, however, that there were no written documents to support it. The following is his description:

*Principava il suo muro, dove oggi siede il castello dalla parte di Levante e tramontana, dimezzava il podere della haġġeria persino l'altro detto habel ta l'esptar, ed in questa strada, dove appunto è situata la croce de' limiti della S. Matrice Chiesa, il luogo vien chiamato della porta principale della città, ta port rial, dove finisce la clausura sudetta tal habel ta l'esptar v'era il secundo muro verso la parte di mzzo di sino alla punta quasi del cimitero posto vicino alla chiesa di S. Agostino, sotto questo bastione o sia muroeravi la strada si oggi appellata ta wara isour, aveva la sua porta il bastione che riguardava la stradadella gran Fontana chiamata bieb il haijn: da quella punta del cimitero il bastione si stendeva in sotto il castello, posto alla volta di ponente, in questo fuvvi la terza porta detta bieb el gharb.*

This fabricated story of the classic origin of Gozo's old town had by the beginning of the nineteenth century become the basis of the island's history. Onorato Bres regarded the *Castello* as the product of the Greeks. So also imagined Boisgelin. Caruana (1898) called it *acropolis* and described the *Tat-Tomba* district as the suburb of *Gaylos*. Others, after him, blew the same trumpet and in 1907 Mgr Luigi Vella, who was then compiling a history of Gozo, recorded in his *Nicol Ghabdul*, a historical novel about the last years of the Muslims in Malta, that the walls of Gozo's *Castello* bounded:

*mill-bidu tat-triek ta Fomm il-Gir, illum tal Cabuccini, dan is-sur chien jibka sejjer sal misrah ta San Frangisk, minn hawna chien ighaddi ma tul it triek tal Vajringa sal misrah ta Santu Wistin, jinzel lejn it triek tad Dawwara sa wara ta Ghedrin biex jibka sejjer sakemm jakat ir-Rabat min-nahha tal Lvant. Minn erbgha bibien kbar cont tista tidhol ir-Rabat.*

This description fits almost perfectly into some artistic impressions of ancient Rabat. A design, probably by the Capuchin Padre Luigi Bartolo, is contained in Agius de Soldanis' *Il Gozo Antico e Moderno*. A similar impression was drawn by a certain Rénatus Carabott for John Bezzina in 1970 and reproduced in *Telstar u l-Berqa*. In his

booklet *The Gozo Citadel* published in 1993, Rev. Dr Joseph Bezzina also reproduced a map showing the same hypothetical delineation of the old town. All three are almost identical and are a visual reproduction of the description first fabricated in 1704 and later repeated by clerics Can. Formosa and Agius De Soldanis.

### **Different Topography**

Documented evidence proposes a different topography of the urbanized centre during the late Middle Age. There was a castle on top of a small hill, a walled-town some 400 paces away, and two *casali* or *hadjarijas* with hardly ten houses in each. The walled-town, called by the Romans *Gaulos oppidum*, was the abode of the people or *plebs*. It had its own *Toccu*, where the *Banca Giuratale* stood, its market place and a parish church then referred to as *parroecia terre et insule gaudisii*. It was enclosed within a wall which had entrances on all four sides. The main entrance or gate was called *Putirjal*. The walls of this town were still extant when the Knights of St John came to Malta in 1530. Bosio in his *Historia* describes how the Governor of the island on his first visit was received at the town's main gate and how he was then accompanied with pomp flanked by soldiers on horseback until the gate leading to the stairs of the *Castello*. When Bishop Cagliares established the parish boundaries between the *Matrice* of St Mary and the Parish Church of St George in 1623 these same walls served as demarcation line. D. H. Trump was very specific about the town's boundaries. According to him they could be traced almost accurately by plotting the different necropoleis around it. Graves were, in fact, found (and recorded) in various localities outside a radius of about half a mile from the centre of the ancient quarters of Rabat.

On the south, along Il-Vajringa, Caruana uncovered an extensive Punic and Roman burial place; on the east, in St Francis Square and along Taht ta' Putirjal (erroneously called Main Gate Street) Caruana also unearthed a number of Roman hypogea; on the north all along Il-Ħaġarija, not far from the ditch of the *Castello* and across *Salita del Castello* about one hundred graves with human remains were found (Caruana 1889); on the western side, from Sabina Square to Fuq it-Tomba (also mysteriously renamed St Augustine Square) there were various medieval cemeteries, Muslim and Christian. Within the area enclosed by these boundaries the

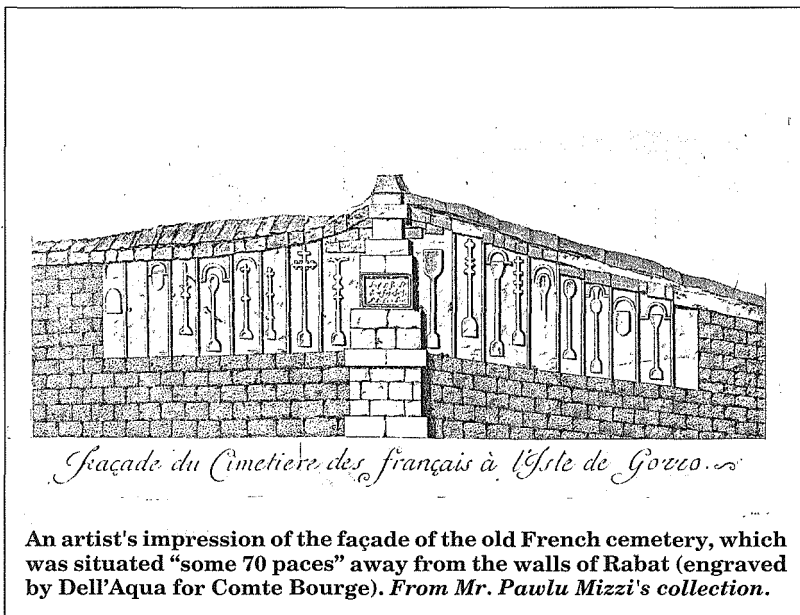


activity of man has been amply recorded. Remains of various historical phases, from the Bronze Age to late medieval. Pottery from the late Tarxien phase was found at It-Tokk and in St George's Square. Punic inscription, found "not near the citadel" speaks of the people and their temples (Vella 1995), while another, much later in date, of their government and their Roman *municipium*. (Bonanno 1993). Roman coins and other inscriptions were found beneath St George's church. Other important remains include a Byzantine seal, olive crushers, huge medieval stone mills and Muslim pottery (AMR 1905-1962).

It is indeed a pity that the continuous environmental changes that took place during the past 3000 years are often overlooked when the original size of Gozo's old town is discussed. During the Bronze Age the earliest urbanized site could not have been bigger than a small field with a few detached stone huts on it. In Semitic terminology it was only a "rab" – a field with houses (Amari 1880). In Roman times it developed into an *oppidum* that is a walled-town. The Kufic graves unearthed in Sabina Square suggest that until the twelfth century its shape and size had not changed.

Medieval documents often referred to this *oppidum* as *castrum* (Winklemann). Then during the latter half of the thirteenth century another *castrum* was set up on a hill some 400 meters outside its northern wall. This was the home of the *Castellano* after 1276, when Reynaldi de Palearia began to be entrusted with its custody (Moscati). Since then at least two other settlements must have grown just beneath the walls of this *Castello*. These were similar to the types of *casali* also existing in Sicily in the vicinity of feudal castles. These *casali* could be as small as having only three houses but they could be bigger, very rarely though more than ten houses (Perì). A *casale*, which in Arab speaking countries were also sometimes called *hagarija* meaning a small settlement of *hu gar* (small houses), also had its own *cappella*. During the fifteen century there were two of these *cappelle*, one dedicated to the Virgin Mary and the other to Saint James. In 1545 Bishop Cubelles included them as parishes in his list of churches but in 1575 they were suppressed because they had neither a parish priest nor parishioners.

Tangible traces of this old town were destroyed as a result of uncontrolled urban development after the sixteenth century. In 1603 Grand Master



Wignacourt ordered Vittorio Cassar to pull down the *muraglia* of Rabat. With it two *hadjariji* were completely lost. Another monument which has been lost is the old cemetery of Rabat until 1946 called "Ic-Cimiterju ta' fejn Santu Wistin". Its disappearance is perhaps the gravest loss for the national heritage. Originally there were two cemeteries: a small "French" cemetery and a bigger one referred to as early as 1435 as *cimitero di San Agostino*. The latter cemetery had some ten small chapels built on it. Some, however, were in a bad state when Mgr Dusina visited them in 1575. The smaller one was about seventy paces outside the walls of Rabat and had a perimeter of two hundred paces. There was in it a chapel, which was a *patronato regii*, dedicated to St John the Evangelist. It also had at least twenty eight graves with carved tomb stones all belonging to members of the nobility said to have accompanied the saintly king Louis of France on a Crusade to Tunis in 1276. In 1575 both cemeteries were considered a lair for thieves. After the establishment of the parochial boundaries of the two Rabat parishes in 1623, this small cemetery as well as its *contiguo altro cimitero di San Agostino* began to be blessed during a procession from the *Matrice* on all Souls Day. In 1757 Bishop Alpheran de Bussan built a new boundary wall around the two cemeteries.

## **Interpretation of Historical Remains**

The search for the ancient town becomes even more complicated as one digs deeper into the darkness of time. Links with the ancient world are often intraceable – sometimes even deviated by inaccurate narratives or misconceived provenance of historic relics.

The M. Vallio marble stone encased in one of the sides of the old gate of the *Castello* is one of these loose ends. It cannot be seriously considered as a documented evidence of the antiquity of the *Castello* unless accompanied by details of its provenance. The stone came from the old Roman town where similar inscriptions on marble have been found. As it stands, however, it is doubtful whether the stone was put there to document a historic event or used as just another block of ordinary masonry brought from another place to fit into the construction of the wall. Similar stones were often used for this latter purpose. One was also once encased in a corner of the garden wall of the Capuchins' convent and another in the base of St George's church.

Another loose end in the history of Gozo's ancient town and one which deserves particular attention in our study is the gothic chalice in the Museum of the Gozo Cathedral. Here again no decent legend tells a story. Yet many know that this chalice was found in the old façade of St George's church and it is probably one of the two chalices mentioned by the Vigar General, Can Pier Francesco Pontremoli in his report of the Pastoral Visit in 1633 (ACM 56). This chalice may lead to further clues in the complicated jigsaw-puzzle of this ancient town's past. It is the earliest ecclesiastic Christian relic found so far on the island, identical in its gothic shape to those used in Mozarabic Spain during the 8th and 9th centuries.

A similar type of chalice was also used by Greek priests who were sent to evangelize the Muslim communities in liberated towns in South-eastern Sicily. These Greek priests are said to have come to Malta and Gozo too and, as elsewhere, they brought with them their saints and their cults – among these St George, and the Byzantine or similar rite. Churches dedicated to St George, dating to these early times are found in Catania, Caltagirone and in other towns on the eastern half of Sicily. Gozo, too, has the parish church of its main town dedicated to St George. In addition this

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church had a chalice with Illyric markings, a clear sign of contact with the Greek Church, and officiated its divine services in the Gallic Rite.

There were then four parish churches in all using it. These were the Cathedral of Mdina, Naxxar and Żebbuġ in Malta, and St George's in Gozo (NLM 643). There is no indication why other churches had not used it or why it was used in the above-mentioned churches only. Indications show that with the early Christianization of the islands during the immediate decades after the end of Muslim Rule in Malta, the Arab-speaking inhabitants, like the Muslim converts in Sicily, preferred non-Latin priests to evangelize them.

When Mgr Dusina visited Malta the Gallic Rite had long been defunct. Yet it continued to feature in several documents until the sixteenth century. Magri points out that the Gallic Rite was often mixed up with the Mozarabic. It is, in fact, generally held that only the Mozarabic Rite was used among Arab-speaking Christians (Magri 1649. *cf. Mozarabico*). Reminiscence of it is still extant in Toledo where the rite has been preserved. In Malta, inhabitants still use Mozarabic liturgical terms in their daily prayers. "Alla", a variant of "Allah" used by the Mozarabics in Andalusia, is a common term in Maltese prayer books. So also are the names of the Sacraments, *maghmudija*, *qrar*, *tqarbin*, *żwieġ* and *quddies*. These terms are said to have been also common among Maronites (Aquilina 1973). They are indeed, a living monument of a time when the old town housed a mixed society of Jews, Arabs and Christians (Luttrell 1979).

### **Conclusion**

The search for Gozo's ancient town does not stop here. Many of the old registers in archives both in Malta and abroad have hardly been dusted. So also have many of the stones of the town's humble houses, the old mill, the bakery, the tavern and all the places that had once heard the wailing of children terrorized by looting pirates. These too are waiting for the day when the young scholar, the archaeologist, the anthropologist and the social scientist could study their scars and decipher the hardships that deprived our forefathers of their rights and identity. Some may be aware of this call but are unwilling to translate that awareness in writing. They

may be scared to reject tradition. Perhaps the very thought of disclaiming what they once claimed to be as true gives them a feeling of unease. Others, on the other hand, may be too over enthusiastic to reject tradition.

It may need skill and patient research to find out whether Gozo's ancient town was in its origin an *acropolis* of an island of dreams and legends or a humble *oppidum* inhabited by real men and women once forming part of the *plebs Gaultitana*.

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## **REFLECTIONS ON THE HISTORIOGRAPHY OF HOSPITALLER GOZO**

**Victor Mallia-Milanes**

**I**f I were asked to describe the state of our historiography today, I would not hesitate to define it as one experiencing a general crisis. Ironically, this crisis has been the result of the overwhelming quantitative progress achieved by our local archival researchers, Gozitan and Maltese, the massive accumulation (or should it be called a 'monstrous agglomeration?') of new factual knowledge about our past. The remark may sound unfair, but I think it would be unfairer still, perhaps, if the hard truths which sometimes need telling are either left untold or masked beneath a purposely vague or ambiguous language. Indeed the purpose of this brief communication is to provoke discussion, a rethink, not so much on our Hospitaller past as on the way this past has been, and is being, approached and reconstructed.

### **Focusing on Events and Parochialism**

From a study of most of what has been written on Gozo in the recent past, and of most of what is being written at present, even by professional historians claiming specialization in particular fields, two increasingly clear ideas emerge.

The first is that too much importance, almost absolute attention, is given to the historical event. Most of our histories are histories of past events, chronicles assuming different shapes and forms, some more sophisticated than others, all focusing with varying degrees of emphasis on particular episodes, or chains of episodes, and individuals. Each is allowed to assume, singularly or collectively, the status of an end in itself, when its primary function should be, ought to be, solely a means to a deeper meaning, a step

further to a better understanding of a deeper reality. This is too unacceptably traditional, completely at odds with developments and achievements in the historical discipline. Either in their individual capacity or in their totality, events do not constitute the ultimate social reality. Their importance is only relative.

The second idea concerns what may be termed parochialism or insularism – the bane of our historiography. The Gozitan past has long been, and is still being, by and large historically approached in complete isolation from the rest of the Mediterranean world. Is it because of our geographical isolation that, in the exercise of their profession, most of our historians prefer to remain, if I am allowed the expression, ‘inamenable’ to new ideas and techniques, new methods and approaches, which historians in other countries have been for decades and decades employing to their discipline? Whatever the driving force which persistently motivates this unpardonable adherence to the traditional approach, the major flaw lies in one’s concept and understanding of the idea of history. The ultimate objective of history writing is the faithful reconstruction of social reality in the past; its essence, the permanence of change. J. H. M. Salmon, a leading British historian of France, once summed up this idea very neatly: ‘No change, no history’ (Salmon 1987: 4). It is the intimate combination of the three Braudelian levels of historical change which ultimately constitutes the totality of man, the totality of social reality (Braudel 1972: 17-22 and 1238-44; Braudel 1958: 725-53). A total history of Gozo is a *desideratum*; and so is, in this sense, that of Malta.

### **Histories of the Short Term**

Most of our histories are histories of the short term, and most of the writers of our past are reluctant to move away from, to go beyond, the drama and spectacle of ‘great events’. Most of us, including some of our most reputed professional historians, enthuse over the reconstruction of what in the long-term context proves to be trivial and relatively insignificant. These are often urged on, perhaps instinctively, by a forceful innate desire to be the first to discover new documents, new facts, new events, new minute details, in the false belief that ‘documentary authenticity was the repository of the whole truth’. They still feel the need to allow themselves be borne along by one document after another in the hope of



**The Gozo Castello from the roof of St George's Basilica. Photo: J. Farrugia.**

seeing the fascinating chain of facts and events reconstituting itself, as if that was the sole and ultimate end of history writing. To them, the discovery of a name which had not been hitherto included in an endless list of similar names, is a historiographical achievement in its own right.

A classic example of the history of events is the trauma experienced by the Gozitans in 1551. Was this event of any real outstanding significance to the historical development of Gozo? Was it, in the true sense of the term, a sharp dividing line?

The criterion I would employ in defining its importance to the long-term history of Gozo is to endeavour to assess the magnitude of change which it could have possibly brought about. If the post-1551 Gozo may be justifiably termed 'a new Gozo', how much of it may be unquestionably attributed to that event? In the long-term vision of historical development, a 'new Gozo' (in the shape of a new land-settlement pattern, the rise of villages radiating from the *Castello* and their gradual development into parishes) only begins to emerge during the seventeenth century, or perhaps at the very end of the sixteenth. But, then, was not this to a considerable degree the result of an overall defence strategy that was then being adopted by the Hospitaller Government (Vittorio Cassar's tower at Mġarr, erected in 1605, appears to have been the first symptom of this change), and in part the result of developments in the wider

## *The Historiography of Hospitaller Gozo*

Mediterranean context, including the gradual but noticeable decline of the Ottoman power?

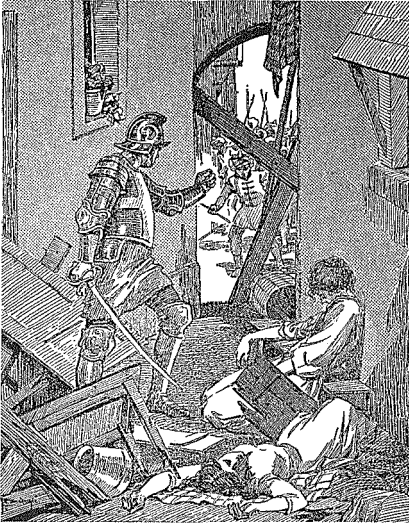
Substantial modifications to the *Castello* did not take place until almost fifty years after the event, at the turn of the century, 1599-1601, under the magistracy of Martino Garzes. A new fortress, Fort Chambray, was built as late as the eighteenth century.

To attribute the 'new Gozo' to the tragedy of 1551 is to assign to the latter episode permanent qualities which do not appear to have belonged to it. The quality of whatever life was left during the fifty years or so immediately following 1551 does not appear to have been any different from the years immediately preceding it. When a structural change did in fact occur, it was the product of other forces.

### **Long-Term Perspective**

Such histories are inattentive to the long perspective of the underlying permanent structure. We have, for example, brilliant, fully documented histories of the beautiful churches in Gozo, with details regarding their origins and promotion to parochial status, with masterly descriptions of their building, their modifications over the years, their rich architectural styles and artistic masterpieces, with accurate lists of parish priests, and so on. We know as much of the Arabs and what they did on Gozo as scraps of documentary and archaeological remains allow. We know of the Gozitans' devotions to particular shrines and cults. The list can go on indefinitely. But then, we do not have a history of Christianity in Gozo, of religion, of culture, or indeed of civilization.

We know, or we can fairly easily know by consulting the rich archival documentation of the Hospitaller Order of St John, what each successive Grand Master – from L'Isle Adam to Hompesch – did for Gozo. We know with precision the military and architectural history of the *Castello*, Fort Chambray, and other coastal towers. We can read at leisure the technical views of the several military engineers visiting and reporting on early modern Gozo. But do we really have a total, long-term history of security and defence of the island? Was security after all a question of purely military interests, with no deep social and psychological implications?



An artist's impression of the heroic act of Bernardo de Opuo – whose story about the killing of his family, during the attack of 1551, is legendary. (Drawn by R. Caruana Dingli and reproduced from S. Laspina's popular *Outline of the Maltese History*).

How revolutionary was the military policy and strategy adopted by the Hospitallers to Gozo? Were there no stable elements, elements of continuity, behind whatever structure military innovations assumed over the centuries?

Such 'constraints' as the geophysical structure and geographical location of the island, its insular nature, the character and quality of the people, all these were, and are, determining forces which it would be wrong to ignore, even though they are hardly to be found in archival documentary sources. They are important because they are real, because they are permanent, stable ingredients of social reality, and therefore of the shape and form which change imperceptibly assumes over the ages, just as determining as innate spiritual constraints, mental frameworks, or attitudes of mind.

It is only fairly recently, for example, that one historian found it difficult to acknowledge the role played by the geophysical structure of Gozo in determining the identity of the island as distinct from that of Malta. He even went so far as to define the character and quality of the land, the force of insecurity, and the economy as 'non-historical factors'. Immobile and constraining as these elements always are, they definitely constitute

a major force of historical change. Indeed, even the influence which Sicily, for example, exerted on the culture of Gozo, at different times and in different shapes and forms, should, indeed must, be in part attributed to Gozo's geophysical character, with all that this implies – its smallness, the perennial inadequacy of food supplies; the paucity of its natural resources; the geographical proximity of the two islands; and a growing population with ever-growing aspirations. It was precisely these factors which had ultimately determined the Maltese islands' dependence – first economic, and then political – on nearby Sicily.

### **Acknowledging the Elements of Permanence**

While acknowledging that all history is human history, most local historians fail to acknowledge these elements of permanence, of stability, of imperceptible survival in the vast domain of man's social, economic, and cultural activity. Was the Gozitan of 1800 entirely, absolutely, different from his ancestors in 1530? Although his long Hospitaller experience had structurally changed for the better his outlook in general, his style and way of life, his education and standard of living, his tools and machinery, his furniture and his clothes, and the value he attaches to leisure, certain characteristic elements and values were too deep and structural to be uprooted – his language, his religious convictions, his deep devotion to the family, his attachment to the field and boat. All these have survived to the present day. All these had been constraining qualities to his wide exposure of foreign influences, to his formative experience of foreign cultures. Archival documentation alone does not provide sufficient evidence of this phenomenon of change.

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## FROM WHEAT TO BREAD THROUGH THE GOZO WINDMILLS

Joseph M. Attard Tabone

Until recently the characteristic bare round towers of old windmills, together with the steeples and domes of our churches, were prominent features of the landscape of the Maltese Islands. The type of windmills which have survived in Malta were introduced during the time of the Order of St John of Jerusalem (Lanfranco 1993: 60). They were usually sited slightly away from the village they served, on high or open ground, unobstructed by other buildings in order to make the most efficient use of the wind. In towns they were built on the highest part of the bastions to catch the mildest breeze for smooth operational performance and no building in their vicinity was permitted to rise more than one storey high (NAM, PW 1826).<sup>1</sup>

Windmills could not be operated in a high wind because this would cause great damage to the mechanism as well as to the structure of the windmill itself. On many occasions serious damage was caused to windmills by gales and electric storms and in some cases lives were lost. At the other extreme, on calm days, windmills were powerless. Millers would wait eagerly for days on end for a favourable wind. But when it came, a few sharp blasts into the “*bronja*” from the roof of the windmill, meant that the miller was summoning his clients to bring the corn to be turned into flour. The “*bronja*” is the triton-shell, better known as the trumpet-shell of which there are two species “*Charonia lampas*” c. 50 cm. and “*Charonia variegata*” c. 35 cm. Both are now very rare in our waters. Their pointed end or “*calcarella*” as it is known in conchology, was broken off and when blown in a trumpet-like fashion from the roof of the windmill, they produced a sound that echoed all over the village.

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1. A request by Teresa Eynaud to build another storey at 32 Sda Mezzodi and 23 Sda Piattaforma was refused after the authorities consulted the millers of the two windmills situated nearby on the bastions of Valletta.

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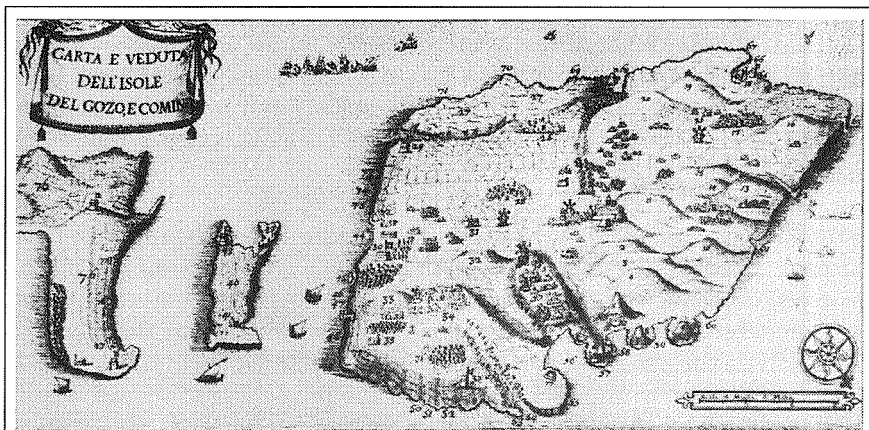
After the church, the windmill was one of the most important focal points of village life. Evidence of this is more readily found in our street names than in our history books. Streets and alleys leading to windmills were frequently named "Windmill" or "Mill" street, and there are at least twenty in Malta and six in Gozo. In some cases the street name has outlived the windmill.

Like the old chapels and the bastions, the windmills are monuments from the past. But there was a time when they played an important part in the socio-economic life of the population. Before the introduction of steam, oil and then electricity, as sources of power, the windmill was the quickest and perhaps the cheapest and most efficient system of grinding grain. It was my intention to start with a plea for the protection of our windmills because, besides being themselves national monuments, they remind us of the daily toil of the majority of the population in bygone days.

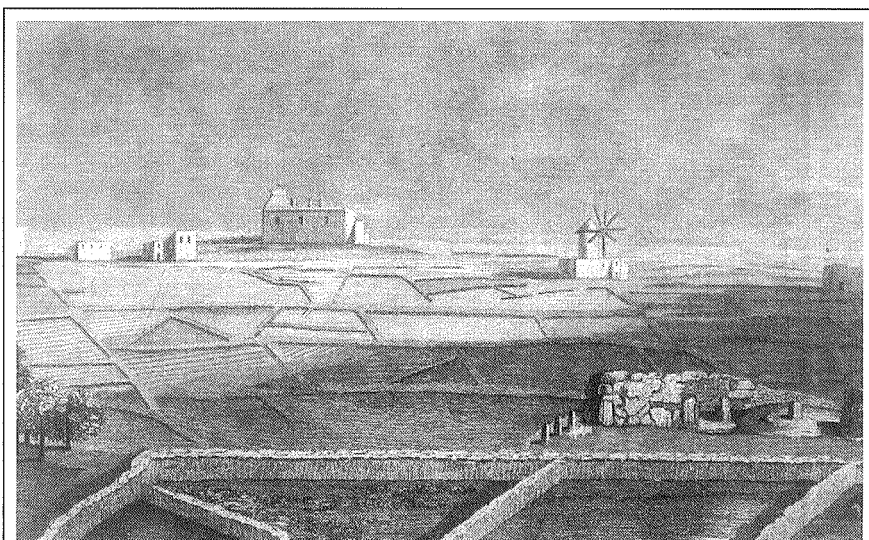
If future generations are to appreciate fully the functioning of windmills and their grace, it is essential that they should be preserved inside a buffer zone and not swallowed up by high buildings. This will help us to understand the hardship suffered by earlier generations in producing their staple diet at a time when poverty and hunger drove beggars out knocking at doors for a piece of bread. Small wonder that after windless and stormy days millers were given a special dispensation by the ecclesiastical authorities to work on Sundays and days of obligation. Millers were also exempted from guard duties by the government of the Order, so that they could look after their windmills by day and by night (NLMAOM 1188).<sup>2</sup> Surprisingly, windmills have passed unnoticed and to a certain extent ignored by our historians.<sup>3</sup> A booklet on Maltese bread was published a few months ago by Medigrain, the organisation responsible for monitoring milling of flour and bread-making, so that the traditional characteristics of the local bread is preserved (Hubert Chiron 1994: 7). In the introduction, the Chairman, of the company, Joseph Agius stated that, "Although the cultivation and grinding of wheat and production of bread in Malta has been taking place since antiquity, it seems that these activities are hardly recorded in the history books. The

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2. After a petition to the Grand Master made by the Commission of the Manoel Foundation to exempt the miller of Casal Caccia [Xaghra] from guard duties, it was decided that he should be treated like the other millers in Malta and be exempted.
  3. A short section on the Maltese Windmills is included in Vella (1979): 304 - 308. Some of the information given is inaccurate. The best study on the Maltese windmills carried out so far is that by Le Lourd (1982: 317-331).





An 18th century map of Gozo showing the five windmills built by the Order of St John. Pen drawing (24.5 by 38.7 cm) by Padre Luigi Bartolo (c. 1681-1753) in *Gozo Antico-Moderno e Sacro Profano* [c 1745] by G. F. Agius de Soldanis.



The Xaghra windmill circa 1820. The parish church is the background and Ġgantija in the foreground.

few references made to windmills in some of the parochial histories of our towns and villages are brief and often inaccurately researched.”

### **Grinding of Grain in Antiquity**

Potatoes were introduced into Malta comparatively recently, during the early British period. Therefore, for many centuries bread was the principal diet of the population, especially of the under-privileged. Maltese bread was usually made from a mixture of wheat and barley, called “*mischiato*” or “*mahlut*” which was either grown locally or imported.

In Malta and Gozo evidence of the grinding of grain has been found dating from prehistoric times. Several hard stone querns were found in different archaeological sites in Gozo, like Santa Verna and the Gozo Stone Circle.<sup>4</sup> The recent excavations conducted in the latter have proved that the inhabitants of Gozo living during the 3rd millenia had good, healthy teeth. This shows that their staple food, probably bread made of some cultivated cereals, was unadulterated with grit and finely crushed (Camilleri and Stoddart 1992: 5). During the Bronze Age, besides querns, stone mortars were used to crush cereals. These two types of implements were found on the Bronze Age village of Nuffara Hill. During the Borg in-Nadur Period, (c. 1500-700 BC) a number of silos were hewn into the top of this hill in the live rock. Until recently, very little was known about them because the majority had been rifled in the past. In 1960 one of the these silos was located. It clearly called for closer investigation and, on being excavated it showed signs that originally it had been plastered with clay and used for the storage of cereals (Museum Department 1960: 4-5, Fig. 1).

During the Punic and Roman periods hand-stone mills were in use and at some time during the Early Medieval Period this device was complemented by the grinding mill driven by animals of burden - donkeys, mules or oxen. This mill is known in Maltese as “*mithna tal-miexi*” as distinct from “*mithna tar-rih*” a windmill. It is usually referred to as the animal-driven mill, “*centimolo*” in Italian. This was widely used in medieval

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4. Several complete querns and some fragments have been traced built into rubble walls, surrounding these archaeological sites.

Malta and Gozo.<sup>5</sup> Man has always tried to harness the forces of nature. Around 25 BC the Roman engineer Vitruvius was the first to describe the watermill. In Europe, water-power for grinding was harnessed a thousand years before we find any authentic mention of windmills. There is no definite evidence as to when windmills came into use. The first undisputed date for a windmill in England is 1191. By the late 12th century windmills were also being built in different parts of France and Flanders.

### The Early Windmills in Malta

In Malta we find the first windmill illustrated in the "*Insulae Melitae Descriptio*" by the Abbé Jean Quentin d'Autun, known as Quintinus. This booklet was published in Lyon in 1536, barely six years after the arrival of the Order of St John (a copy of this very rare publication is found in the Gozo Reference Library, Victoria). The windmill in question is shown on that part of the promontory now known as Senglea, with an unidentified building illustrated beside it, which might have been a bakery or a lime kiln. Although this windmill disappeared centuries ago, the area is still known as "*L-Gholja tal-Mithna*", Windmill Hill (Bonnici 1981: 26). In several contemporary engravings of the Great Siege of 1565 like those of Nicolo Nelli and Antonio Lafreri, one and sometimes two windmills are shown on or near this site within the walls of Fort St Michael. These windmills also appear in the wall paintings by Perez d'Aleccio in the Presidential Palace at Valletta, and compare closely to the thirteen windmills situated on the mole of the city of Rhodes which the Knights left behind on that island when they were thrown out by the Turks in 1522 (Torr 1887: 38; Sire, 1994: 143).

For about a century the principal method of grinding grain in the new city of Valletta was the animal-driven mill. In the new bakeries of the Order, the Maltese architect Girolamo Cassar had built twelve of these mills which were operated by mules (NLMAOM 439, f.270; de Giorgio, 1985: 169).<sup>6</sup> By 1672 there were fourteen of these mills and thirty mules were

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5. According to Prof. Godfrey Wettinger, practically every village in late medieval Malta had at least one animal-driven mill (personal communication). Also *vide* Wettinger (1993: 624).

6. Amongst the buildings attributable to Gerolamo Cassar in Valletta, the author includes the windmills. It is clear that he is confusing the mule-driven mills with the windmills.

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being used to operate them (NLMAOM 748, f.36). Besides, most of the Auberges had their own animal-driven mill and a bakery (Mifsud 1914: 108).

### **Windmills Under the Order of St John**

The history of the Maltese windmill as we know it today started during the reign of Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner (1663-1680). On 22 September, 1674, the Council of the Order authorised the Cotoner Foundation to start work on windmills at Bormola, Żebbuġ, and Floriana (NLMAOM 262, f.35). The design of the mechanism and structure was introduced from the Balearic Islands where windmills similar to ours still abound (Baroja 1952: 275, 325, 339). Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner was himself a Majorcan.<sup>7</sup> To provide a Foundation for the upkeep of Fort Ricasoli, he acquired land, developed urban property and built warehouses and windmills. Other Grand Masters who came later founded their own "*Fondazione*" and built more windmills. The establishment and growth of these foundations was important, for the income derived from them made a significant contribution to the Treasury, gave the Order a stake in the local economy and provided the Knights with a means of raising agricultural productivity (Blouet 1963). Besides the three windmills already mentioned, Grand Master Cotoner built another seven, all in towns and villages in Malta. (NLM Treas. 300 Ser B.; Treas. 38 Ser. A. ff.21v, 55v, 223). The exact date has not yet been firmly established of two other windmills built in Valletta at the expense of the Treasury at about this time (NLMAOM 262, f.88v).

When Cotoner died, Gregorio Carafa (1680-1690) was elected Grand Master of the Order and like that of his predecessor, his Foundation built ten windmills, this time allocating one to Gozo (NLM Treas. 96 Ser. B.). The third Grand Master who contributed to the building of windmills was Raymundo Perellos (1697 -1720). The Perellos Foundation provided for three windmills, one at Żejtun, another at Naxxar and one at Xewkija (NLM Treas. 137 Ser. B(2): 287, 317; NLMAOM 763, ff 114-115v). The last of the Foundations of the Order to embark on the building of windmills was the "*Fondazione Manoel*". Grand Master Manoel de

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7. Nicolas Cotoner succeeded his brother Rafael (1660 - 1663) as Grand Master of the Order. Their hearts are buried in the Church of San Jaime at Palma, Majorca. (Vide Arthur Foss, Majorca (London 1972): 126.

Vilhena (1722 - 1736) spent a great sum of money from his personal purse in endowing his Foundation. Of all the Grand Masters, he was the greatest benefactor to Gozo. He built eight windmills, three of them in Gozo. He developed the valleys of Ramla and Mgarr for agriculture and built a series of shops, stores and a tavern at Mgarr (NLM Treas. 26 Ser. A, ff 423-431). During his Grandmastership, a better hospital for men was also built and a seat for the *Gozo jurats* was erected at Rabat known as the *Banca Giuratale*.

In all, thirty-three windmills were built under the Order, five of them in Gozo. Every Foundation had its own Commission made up usually of high ranking members of the Order who administered its property including the windmills. The Commission decided on the terms of the contract, the duration of the lease, replacement of millstones and any repairs. By 1798, when the Order was expelled from Malta by the French, there were thirty-one windmills in operation and leased as such. Several of these had to be rebuilt after their structure started to give concern. Four of the five Gozo windmills went through this transitional stage.<sup>8</sup>

It was the Government of the Order which ensured that the public was being given reasonably good service by the millers and bakers. For example on 15 February, 1783 a "*Bando*" was issued by Grand Master de Rohan and read to all bakers and millers not to risk grinding any grain which was not clean of stones or other material injurious to health under penalty of having half the provisions found in the mill confiscated, besides other penalties which the Grand Master deemed fit (NLM Libr. 429 VII/9, *Bandi* 1780-1784, f.141).

## Windmills in Gozo

The first windmill in Gozo was built by Grand Master Carafa in the late 1680s under his Foundation. At that time the population of Gozo was about 5,700 and according to the historian Abela writing a few years before, the Island exported a small quantity of grain to Malta. It was eventually decided that a windmill in Gozo was a necessity and this was sited on the outskirts of Rabat, surrounded by arable land on the very

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8. As far as it is known, the windmill at Xewkija is the only exception and this makes it the oldest of all the Gozo windmills.

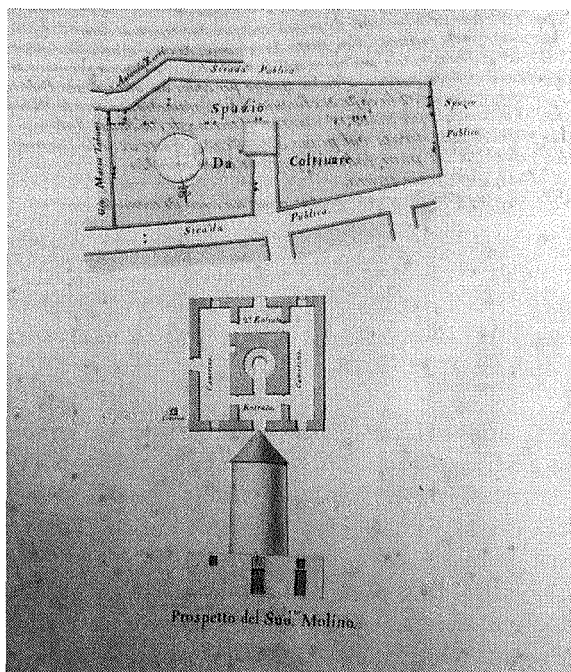
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spot where the Bishop's Seminary is situated today. This new windmill, and the other nine which the Carafa Foundation built in Malta, were let in 1691 for ten years to Domenico Grixti and later to Giuseppe Caruana of Luqa and M'Angelo Micallef of Lija. Then in September 1724, the Commission of the Carafa Foundation auctioned the lease of these windmills to different millers. The auction notices of windmills were usually read in churches before or after mass and the parish priest was remunerated by the Foundation's Commission for the services rendered.

From 1 February, 1769, Angelo Xicluna took a 29-year lease on the Rabat windmill at 340 *scudi* annually (Notarial Archives Valletta, Notary Antonio Grillet, 16/897, Sept 30, 1781, ff.18-18v).

A report drawn up in 1778 stated that this windmill was in need of serious structural repairs and some fittings were totally unserviceable. At first it was suggested that it should be either sold or turned into small houses. But on 30 September, 1781, it was sold at 175 *scudi* to Canon Giovanni Maria Cauchi, the Procurator of the Women's Hospital in Gozo, who wanted the site for a new hospital to replace the old St Julian Hospital in the Citadel. In the meantime, the Carafa Foundation bought a plot of land between Rabat and Sannat where a new windmill was built under the supervision of the *Maestro dei Molini*, Angelo Camilleri (*Ibid.*, ff. 16-21). On 30 April 1783, two new millstones for this windmill were transported to Gozo on the *Galera Capitana* and soon the windmill was operational and handed over to Angelo Xicluna at a new lease of 400 *scudi* annually (NLMAOM 660, ff.303, 329). Francesco Xicluna was the next miller who took over the management of this mill in 1794 for eight years at the increased rent of 623 *scudi* annually.

The second windmill in Gozo was built by the Perellos Foundation on the outskirts of Xewkija at the beginning of the 18th century. The plan is unique in Gozo as it is hexagonal and it is the only windmill in the island with its original oven, though this is now blocked by a wall. Gio. Maria Xicluna was the miller in 1738. Soon after Xicluna died, his widow married Simone Galea who together with his stepson Michele Xicluna, renewed the lease in 1742. This windmill was operated for many years by members of the Xicluna family, who were a versatile family of millers and millwrights.



**Site-plan and prospect of the first windmill built at Nadur in 1727. Photo by courtesy of the Director of the National Library of Malta.**

On 31 August 1724, the State Council of the Order decided that a windmill should be built halfway between Rabat and Għarb. The expense had to be met by Grand Master de Vilhena from his Foundation and, just like the other windmills built by this Grand Master, the revenue collected was to go towards the maintenance of Fort Manoel (NLM Treas. 26 Ser A, f.423).

In 1725 the same Foundation decided to build another windmill at Xaghra and two years later another one at Nadur (*Ibid.*, f.424, 425). These three windmills were more or less built on the same plan, with living quarters for the miller's family and a cistern for an adequate water supply, besides the workshop and the milling tower. The Għarb and the Xaghra windmills also had a bakery attached to them. Although the construction of the Nadur windmill started later, this went into operation before the other two. On 1 September, 1730, it was leased to Francesco Buttigieg. The Xaghra windmill was leased to Paolo Refalo on

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17 June, 1731, and the Gharb windmill to Angelo Zahra on 1 August, 1731, both for a period of four years.

Forty years later, an inspection was carried out on the property of the Manoel Foundation in Gozo. This was followed by a report signed by Mastermason Andrea Psaila. It was damning, especially on the windmills of Xaghra and Gharb, which were described as suffering from serious damage owing to bad quality stones and mortar having been used in their construction. Wide fissures could be noticed in the walls and it was recommended that these two windmills should be dismantled and rebuilt (NLM Treas. 32 Ser A).

At Xaghra, Baron Francesco Gauci on behalf of the Manoel Foundation negotiated the purchase of a plot of land at the price of 400 *scudi* so that a new windmill would be built on a better site than the old one (NLM Treas. 31 Ser A Sept. 5, 1786; March 6, 1788). Francesco Gauci belonged to the landed gentry and was the only titled Gozitan at that time. Because he was giving sterling service to the Order in Gozo, he was created Baron "ta' Bullara" after a big area of arable and garigue land which he owned at Xaghra around and beyond what is today the Cornucopia Hotel. Baron Gauci supervised the building of the new Xaghra windmill and for this service on 23 November, 1789, the Foundation presented him with a beautiful faience table service made in Marseille. When the windmill was completed with all its fittings, it was handed over to Marcello Xicluna on 1 February, 1787 at an annual rent of 400 *scudi*. Besides an increase in rent certain obligations were imposed in the Contract of Lease. First of all the miller had to give seven roses on the 1st of May to the three officials of the Foundation, three to the President and two to each Commissioner. To the Treasurer he was obliged to give two healthy cocks on Christmas Day and two healthy hens on Easter Day. If he failed to give the poultry, he had to pay two *scudi* and six *tari* for each bird. This kind of obligation was known as "*carnaggi*" (NLM Treas. 28 Ser. a (1), f.69V).

Before deciding on the demolition of the Gharb windmill, the Commissioners of the Manoel Foundation sent the mastermason Pietro Scerri and the mason Giovanni Scerri to inspect the building. They subsequently reported that the windmill was no longer serviceable and that it should be rebuilt. By April 1784, the new windmill was completed. Its leaseholder was Giorgio Xicluna. Giorgio's son Salvatore was the next



tenant. Besides his rent he had to give seven roses to the three members of the Foundation's Commission and two cocks and two hens to the treasurer who at that time was Gio. Battista Abbate of Valletta (*Ibid.*, f.68v).

Apparently, the Nadur windmill was built structurally unsound like those at Xaghra and Gharb. On 9 May, 1787, it ceased operating as it was in a dilapidated state. It was, therefore, decided to build a new windmill on a new and better site taken on perpetual lease from Count Bologna and Baroness Testaferrata. By 9th November of the same year, a new windmill was ready with all its gears and fittings. On the following day it was handed over to Damiano Xicluna, brother of Giorgio the Gharb miller, at the annual rent of 350 *scudi* and on the same terms of contract as those made to the millers of Xaghra and Gharb (*Ibid.*). In 1946, members of a Commission formed to draw up a list of monuments of the Islands, mentioned in their Report foundations of a windmill at Nadur. This could have been the remains of the first windmill. Although the whereabouts of these ruins were not specified in this report, Old Windmill Street at Nadur, which is a considerable distance away from the nearest windmill, could indicate where it was situated.

## Gozo Windmills under British Rule

The Knights of St John of Jerusalem lost Malta to the French in 1798 and by 1800 the Maltese Islands were under the protection of the British Crown. Between 1805 and 1808, the five Gozo windmills had their lease renewed for twenty-nine years at the rate of from 710 to 750 *scudi* annually, as well as six head of poultry, equivalent to Lm53.25c and Lm58.75c in 1995 currency (Public Records Office - Kew n.d. :208). These exorbitant rates, compared with the low cost of living, show that the Gozo windmills were being operated for long hours.

James Somerville, was the Collector of Land Revenue in Gozo. He had succeeded Archibald Dalzell on March, 1818. Besides the collection of rents he was responsible for the administration of the Gozo windmills. He also deputised for the Lieut. Governor of Gozo when the latter was absent from the Island. He exerted his powers as Collector of Land Revenue with an iron fist, especially when his recommendations were approved "*in*

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*toto*” by the Chief Secretary to the Governor, Sir Frederick Hankey, a person disliked by all classes of Maltese (Hamburger, 1985: 103). Tenants of windmills were often made to either pay the rent or face eviction, and the windmill would then be leased to the highest bidder. When the miller did not have enough money to pay the arrears and his guarantor failed in his obligations, the Collector would seize the miller’s property, sometimes in the form of land, furniture, agricultural produce, livestock or poultry. In one case at Rabat, Malta, the loom of the miller’s wife, the only source of income left to the family, was also taken away and sold in auction (NAM, PW 6: 180; P.W. 8: 194).

Throughout the 19th century the population of Gozo increased from 14,340 in 1842 to 18,960 in 1891. To earn a living many Gozitans were forced to emigrate to North Africa or find work in Malta mainly as hard stone cutters (*baqquniera*) or in soft stone dressing (*naġġara*). In 1822 the Government monopoly of foreign corn was abolished and the fixed rate of duty on wheat was changed two years later into a graduated scale that fluctuated according to market prices (Clare 1988: 135-6). Wheat was then imported mainly from Egypt but later also from ports on the Black Sea, often from Odessa.

An increasing population faced with little prospects of employment and the grave economic situation created great discontent in Malta during the 1820s and the early 1830s (Clare 1988: 146-7). These deteriorating conditions on the Islands forced the British Government to set up a Commission of Enquiry tasked to report on grievances and to consider nothing less than “the introduction of a permanent and salutary system of policy” (Hamburger 1985: 103). Malta did not have an industrial revolution in the 19th century, but this Commission served to shake up an oppressive and antiquated administrative system, to unsettle the Maltese Establishment, to introduce the freedom of the press and to set forth a more stringent economic policy.

On 26 March 1838, the Governor of Malta received instructions from London to make certain changes which included the abolition of a number of highly paid offices. Not only were the Chief Justice, the Attorney General and the Treasurer stripped of office, but other lesser offices were to go, including Lieutenant Governor of Gozo, Magistrate of Markets for Gozo and Collector of Land Revenue in Gozo, a post which

had been occupied for nearly twenty years by James Somerville (Hamburger 1985: 104).

At the same time, a Notice was published in the Government Gazette declaring that the monopoly of windmills, enjoyed by the Government for over 150 years, would be abolished and “any person who may be disposed to undertake their construction for their own profit or advantage” may do so (Malta Government Gazette, 1838). This was a step forward in liberalisation of trade. In the meantime, animal-driven mills were mushrooming everywhere and tenants of windmills were finding it difficult to compete, as their rents were very high and according to the new contract of lease they had to make good for any damage or repairs in the windmill. This also involved the replacement of millstones, which were very expensive parts. Petitions to the Government for the reduction of rents were sent in dozens. It was the policy of the Government to reduce the rent when this was reasonably justified. These petitions throw a lot of light on the social situation of the miller and the structural and mechanical condition of the windmill, and without this information no study of our windmills during the 19th century will be complete.<sup>9</sup>

In Malta, the first private windmill to be built was that at Mellieha about 1849, followed by others in different villages. Private capital was not as forthcoming in Gozo and it took some years for the Island to see the first privately-owned windmills. In fact, members of two prominent Maltese families of millers were the first to invest in private windmills in Gozo, the Camilleris of Żejtun, known locally as “ta’ Randu” after their father Ferdinandu, and the Grechs of Mosta. In the mid 19th century three brothers, Lorenzo, Giuseppe and Randu Camilleri settled in Gozo and took over the Government owned windmills of Xewkija and Nadur.<sup>10</sup> In 1853 they built a windmill between Qala and Nadur, known as Ta’ Sufa (NAM, PW 14: 340-1; Xerri 1994: 10-11)<sup>11</sup> and another two at Rabat around 1856. They also built one at Sannat, followed by the last one at Qala, known as “ta’ Randu”, like the one situated in Victoria behind St Augustine’s Priory.

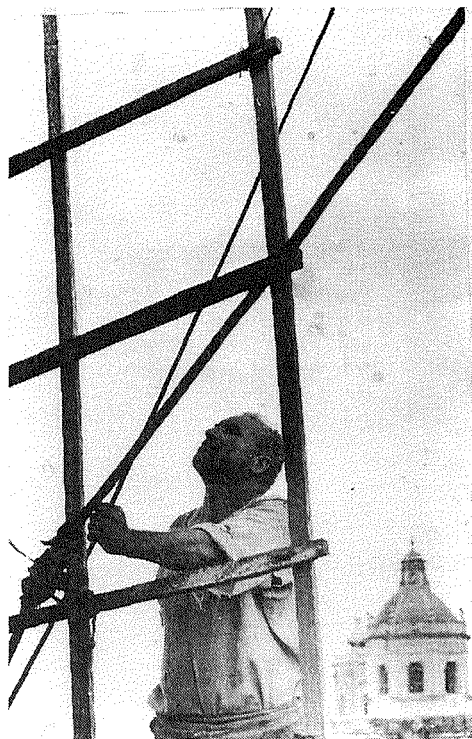
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9. Many of these original petitions are found under section “Petitions to Governor” or “Petitions to Lieut Governor” and usually copied briefly with decision taken in Section “Public Works”, NAM.

10. I am indebted to Lawrence Camilleri of Xewkija for this information, who is a descendant of this family.

11. There are a number of inaccuracies in this short note. The windmill at Nadur is also called “ta’ Sufa” after one of the miller’s family nickname.

## The Gozo Windmills



**Guzepp Grech, the last miller of the Xaghra windmill, inspecting the anchorage of the sails in 1960, after he restored the windmill single-handed.**

The Grechs were based at Xaghra, and for some time in the 1850s Pietro Grech ran the windmill there with several others in Malta. In 1853 a litigation in court ensued between Paolo Grech and his son Michele over the tenancy of the windmill at Xaghra. Michele lost the case and in 1857 built one not far away from that of his father, in Ġnien Xibla Street (NAM, PW 16: 479).

In 1858 another windmill with a completely wooden tower was built by Luigi Camilleri from Żabbar, known as “ta’ Nonu”, after his father Antonio, and later as “il-Gerrieffi”. A year later, Giuseppe Grech built another one in the same village, probably at Wilġa Street (NAM, PW 16:163, 502).<sup>12</sup>

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12. For this information I am also indebted to Anthony Calleja of Ghasri. Guzepp Vella, *Iż-Żebbuġ, Il-Paroċċa ta Santa Marija* (Gozo Press 1987): 50.; Andrea Vella, *Iż-Żebbuġ u il-Graġja Tiegħu* (stencilled publication): 264-6.



**Francesco Galea who introduced steam power for milling in Gozo. Photo by courtesy of Victor Galea Pace.**

Other private windmills were built at Żebbuġ by Ġalent Vella in 1859 to replace a donkey-driven mill (Vella 1987: 264-6) and one close to the village of Ġħarb, in 1865. Two smaller windmills were afterwards erected, one at Santa Lucia by Francesco Gatt who had a bakery and a donkey-driven mill in that locality (NAM, Petitions “Simmons”, Vol. 21, no. 3522)<sup>13</sup> and the other by Toni Cefai known as “tax-Xarrab” on the windswept heights of Ġaqra Street, Żebbuġ.<sup>14</sup>

Round about 1880 there were fifteen windmills in all working in Gozo. This created frantic competition among the millers who were now spread all over the Island. When roads were very bad especially in winter, windmills in rural areas like the one situated opposite Cardona Tower on the Victoria/Ġħarb road, suffered dire consequences. It was found convenient, therefore, for both client and miller to send someone with a

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13. Information also given by Krispin Gatt, 83 years of Santa Lucija, through Marija Calleja.

14. I am indebted to Ġanni Saliba 81 years of Ġħasri for this information, who as a boy lived near this windmill.

## *The Gozo Windmills*

horse-drawn cart to collect corn from different parts of the Island to be ground and afterwards delivered as flour and bran. The horse had a bell tied round its neck and this alerted the public that the corn collector was approaching. Alternatively a trumpet-shell was used.

Steam-power for grinding was introduced in Gozo in 1887 by Francesco Galea locally known as "ta' l-Erbgħa". He built a steam-driven mill at Mġarr on a plot of land overlooking Mġarr Harbour which he took on perpetual lease from the Government. In 1899 he started the construction of a bigger steam mill at the lower part of Strada Corsa, Victoria (NAM, Petitions "Smyth", Vol. 9, no. 1257; Vol. 35, no. 5148; Petitions "Fremantle", Vol. 7, no. 1305).

This building, later known as the Pax Flour Mill, with its elegant stone chimney and the year 1899 sculpted on top, was unfortunately demolished in 1991. Other steam-driven mills were later installed at Nadur, Xagħra and another at Victoria opposite what is now called Rundle Gardens, followed by one at Għarb and another at Żebbuġ in 1908. The mechanisation of the milling industry in both Malta and Gozo delivered a mortal blow to the windmills. Most of them had to close down and were used solely for habitation. Those which did not, were mostly used for grinding cereals for animal feed or broad beans for use as bait in fish-traps.

Other private windmills, like that of Żebbuġ were pulled down and replaced by a steam-driven mill. The windmill at Sannat was turned into a lime kiln and it is said that its fittings and millstones were fixed to the windmill at Qala.<sup>15</sup> The privately owned windmill at Għarb had to close down when Michele Portelli opened a steam-driven mill in the vicinity and its miller, Antonio Cassar was compelled to emigrate to Australia in 1916. While Australia was sending its young men in their thousands to fight and die in the battle-fields of Europe, Malta and Gozo took the opportunity to send hundreds of emigrants to that country to seek a better income for their families. Another miller who joined Cassar in Australia was Vincenzo Grech of Xagħra. The windmill at Għasri in Lighthouse Street was destroyed by a whirlwind which hit that part of the Island around 1939.<sup>16</sup> It also caused great damage to the aqueduct on the Ta'

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15. Information given by Marija Muscat of Sannat through George Azzopardi.

16. Frēnc Attard of Għasri informed me that he witnessed the tower of this windmill being blown away.

Pinu Road. The windmill at Xewkija ceased operating in 1886 after a big fire rendered it completely unserviceable (NAM, "Simmons", Vol. 18, no. 5640).

The windmill at Qala was perhaps the most recent to be built and the last of all the windmills in Malta and Gozo to stop working. It was operated incessantly and clandestinely at night-time during the last war when the grinding of wheat was controlled by special regulations. Until the late 1960s the miller was still accepting the occasional small quantity of wheat, maize or broad beans to grind. The doors were completely closed to its clients when it ceased operating and was sold to a German resident (Buttigieg 1980: 82-4). The Qala windmill together with that at Xaghra, are the only two windmills in the Maltese Islands which are still equipped with all their fittings and in good running order, relics of bygone days. The windmill known as Ta' Xarolla at Żurrieq is at the moment under restoration and there are plans to turn it into a museum sometime in 1996.

### **Technology of the Maltese Windmill**

The anatomy and technology of the Maltese windmill is in itself a fascinating subject<sup>17</sup> and those interested would do well to pay a visit to the Xaghra windmill which is now one of the most attractive and instructive museums that we are lucky enough to have in Gozo. There it can be seen how wheat was ground into flour. Millstones were imported from Barcelona. To be kept in good running order and to maintain fineness in grinding, the two stones had to be dressed or sharpened periodically, as they became dulled after some time in use (Attard 1987: 3; Attard Tabone 1990: 8-9).

Millwrights are for the most part unknown. They left no records or drawings. The work was ingenious, honest and expressive of the best tradition of their craft. Those who worked and repaired windmills were usually men of considerable force of character with a capacity for hard work. They were masters of many trades, from carpentry and smithing to gearing wheels with wooden cogs and dressing millstones. They had to

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17. For the technology of the Maltese windmill and its technical terms *vide* Galea (1963); Zammit (1929); Spiteri (1995); "It-Tahhan u l-Mithna tar-Rih." In-Nazzjon Taghna 5 Ottubru 1987.

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be tough physically too, and like the millers most of them were illiterate. This description fits exactly the last miller of the Xaghra windmill, Ġuzepp Grech, who was an accomplished millwright. To him we owe the pleasure of enjoying the last of our windmills, complete with the tools he and his ancestors used in the milling trade, and now a national museum of great ethnographic interest (Attard 1987: 3; Attard Tabone 1989: 8-9).

Throughout their two hundred years of working life, windmills in Gozo were dominated by members of three well known families of millers and millwrights, the Xiclunas, the Grechs and the Camilleris. Members of these families were involved in the milling trade in both Malta and Gozo. During the 1820s the Xiclunas were running the mills at Lija, Siggiewi, Bir-id-Deheb, Luqa and Qrendi in Malta and at Xaghra, Gharb and Xewkija in Gozo. They were an enterprising breed.

### Conclusion

In this day and age when windmills are regarded all over the world as national monuments, we are in duty bound to preserve them for future generations, with the rest of our national heritage. In providing for the protection of our monuments, the Museums Department, our politicians, our fledging local councils and our planners should show wisdom in saving them from encroaching development. The modern concept is to protect the surroundings of monuments as well as the monuments themselves. If we do not show sufficient regard for these modern practices, Ġgantija and the Citadel, our showpieces in Gozo, could risk being delisted by UNESCO as world heritage sites.<sup>18</sup> This would certainly be a great blow to our prestige within the international community.

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18. Attempts have been made during 1990 to widen the original road, leading to the Xaghra windmill known in the old days as *Vicolo Molino* or *Sqaq ta' Karkar*. On this subject *vide* *L-Eghjun* (January-March 1990) No. 4: 3. Also letter from J. Bajada, Secretary Moviment Ċiviku Xaghra, to Minister for Gozo, 4 March 1990, requesting the protection of the Xaghra windmill and its surroundings. In the last thirty years, more than ever before, major archaeological and historical sites in Gozo like Ġgantija, Ta' Cenc and the Citadel have been under constant threat by encroaching physical development. Regarding Ġgantija *vide* Mallia: "Prehistoric Monuments at Xaghra, Gozo - Another appeal for their Preservation." *Times of Malta*, 19 January 1983: 20; Letter from Gozo: "Cultural Revolution." *The Democrat*, February 12, 1983: 9; Amor: "Prosit Tassew Xaghrin", *Il-Ġens*, 30 June 1995: 20; "Bejn ix-Xaghra u Salisbury", *Il-Ġens*, 25 August 1995: 10.



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## GOZO AND ITS MUSIC

**Joseph Vella**

**M**alta has a long, established and glorious musical tradition. Documental evidence in this regard harks back to the beginning of the 16th century although, of course, circumstantial evidence points to a far earlier period. Gozo, on the other hand, has generally been regarded as being a cultural backwater where music is concerned. However, the role and modality of music making in Gozo over the last four centuries or so has hardly even been scratched by historians, and I am sure that future in-depth studies in this regard will not only contradict this misconception but will show that Gozo has had its own niche (albeit a limited one) in the history of music of these Islands.

The course of Gozitan music making in its three main dimensions can be classified into four categories, namely (1) vocal/ orchestral activity, (2) folk singing and (3) bands.

### **Vocal and Orchestral Music**

Judging by the music found, for example, in the archives of the Gozo Cathedral, and in private ones like those of Fr Joseph Farrugia, Mgr John Gauci and my late father Mro Ġanni Vella, one must come to the conclusion that ever since the 18th Century, musical tradition in Gozitan churches must have been quite a healthy one. These archives represent a wide selection of works by Gozitan, Maltese and Italian composers. The variety attests to the fine taste of Gozitan ecclesiastical authorities who seemed keen to ensure that nothing but the best would be performed during the various services.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See for example *Messa Soleme in Re* (MS 17) and *Messa Breve in Do* (MS 18) by F. Azzopardi; *Messa da Requiem* (MS 124) and *O Salutaris Hostia* (MS 165) by P. P. Bugeja; *Antifona Beata me Dicent* (Ms 512) by G. Spiteri Fremond; and *Gloria in Re* (Ms 435) by Dr Paolo Nani - all found in the Gozo Cathedral Archives.

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Some of the Italian composers represented are Domenico Amore, Michele de Ferraris, Pietro Varvaro and Giuseppe Parisi. One of the best composers in the history of Maltese music, namely Francesco Azzopardi, is also generously represented in the above collections. Besides, about a dozen works of his are only found in the archives of the Gozo Cathedral (e.g. Ms 17, 18, 59, 72, 73).

Another important contemporary composer, Pietru Pawl Bugeja, seems to have been very popular in Gozo. No less than 66 works of his are to be found in the Cathedral archives alone. Apparently when it came to performing these works, the main difficulty seems to have been that often the church authorities did not have the means (i.e. the musicians) needed for their execution. The *cappella* at the Mdina Cathedral in the late 18th and early 19th Centuries consisted of three or four violins (playing 1st and 2nd), cello, and organ, together with 2 oboes (sometimes doubling on the flute) and 2 horns (also playing trumpets, at times). There were also four singers, Soprano, Alto, Tenor and Bass. From circumstantial and written evidence, we know that the *cappella* (meaning resident orchestra) of the Gozo Cathedral followed closely the above set up. However, when it came to certain orchestral and vocal elements, we find that very often these had to be brought over from Malta. This was especially the case for the major festivities.

## *Church Music*

Church organizations often felt they had to have that something extra for the musical side to match the pomp and circumstance of the ceremonial service. In 1820, for example, we know that the Cathedral made use not only of guest singers and musicians from Malta, but also brought over a *maestro di cappella*. In time, local Gozitan musicians started to fill this important post. Among these we find Vincenzo Bondi who was *maestro di cappella* at the Cathedral during the period 1849-1871, and Giorgio Mercieca who occupied the same position during the years 1882 through to 1892. Adriano Lanzon held the post intermittently between the years 1844-1894.

Part of the duties of a *maestro di cappella* was to compose music for the numerous church functions which, at that time, peppered the religious calendar. All the three above mentioned musicians, Bondi, Mercieca, and

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Lanzon, were prolific composers whose works abound in church and private Gozitan archives. Unfortunately, their activity was limited to Gozo, and so they are hardly even known in Maltese musical circles.

Antonio Calleja taught music and singing at the Gozo Seminary during the latter half of the last century. He was also a very good bass singer and an efficient pianist, besides being a discreet composer. He liked to call himself a *compositore dilettante* as evidenced by the frontispiece to his "Kyrie per basso obbligato e cori con piena orchestra" (Cathedral Archives Ms. 198).

Another important figure in Gozitan music circles of the late 19th and early 20th centuries was Anton Buhagiar (1861-1932), popularly known as Toni "ta' Lucija", Lucija being his mother. Buhagiar served as *maestro di cappella* for several churches and composed a great variety of music, although, apparently, no works of his are represented in the Cathedral Archives. Tradition has it that he was also a very good violinist who set a certain interpretative standard to be looked up to and imitated by fellow Gozitan musicians. Other minor composers of the period included Giuseppe Debono, Anton Camilleri and Giuseppe Grech.

However, the custom of importing *maestri di cappella* from Malta prevailed even throughout this period. Thus we witness visits by members of the Nani, Diacono, and Bugeja families. These musicians were among the best that Malta ever produced and there is no doubt that, by their involvement, they helped to raise the standards of music making in Gozo. The tradition of bringing over *maestri di cappella* from Malta was especially strong in some of the Gozitan villages, and lives on to the present day (witness Xaghra, Nadur, and Ghajnsielem).

## Mgr Giuseppe Farrugia

During the span of seventy years starting from the middle of the 19th century, Mgr Giuseppe Farrugia was perhaps Gozo's most famous man of the arts. He was born on the second of June 1852 and died on the 18th of March 1925 after a fruitful life spent in artistic endeavours and scholarly pursuits. He was a very good musician, whose works, in their conception and treatment, were often ahead of what was being written contemporaneously even in Malta. Farrugia wrote various masses, psalms, antiphons and hymns, and a few secular works. He is best known



**Mgr Giuseppe Farrugia (1852-1925) man of culture, distinguished prelate, erudite intellectual and outstanding composer of sacred music.**

for the music he composed for the feast of St George which is still played in St George's Basilica in July. As Stephen Attard in his thesis "Mgr Giuseppe Farrugia - His Life and Achievements" rightly says, Farrugia is surely one of the jewels in the Gozitan musical crown.

### *The Influence of the Operatic Style*

Reference has already been made of the influence that Italian music had on local composers. This was especially true as regards Italian opera, the style of which permeated all facets of local music making. The compositions that were written for the church services towards the end of the 19th century were for all intents and purposes operatic style pieces simply taken out of their context. The "*stile ballabile*" as it was known, became the fashion and was abused to the point where Pope Pius X, in 1910, issued a decree, known as the "*Motu Proprio*", to put an end to these secular infiltrations and to curb the stylistic excesses that had made churches more like opera houses, than places of worship.

It is true of course that local churches, since time immemorial, had served as the "poor man's concert hall" and, in this regard, they had performed an immense service towards the dissemination of musical culture. But the extremity to which the situation had developed is clearly illustrated by the following. At the Cathedral in Gozo, before the actual church

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service began, it was customary for the orchestra to play an introductory piece to serve as a kind of overture to the religious ceremony.

Of course, this introduction was neither conceived nor treated like, say, the sober chorale preludes of J. S. Bach. Rather, the orchestra struck up popular overtures from operas like the ones from *Semiramide* and *L'Italiana in Algeri* by Rossini, or Donizzetti's *Gemma di Vergny* or the one from Verdi's *Nabucco*. All the above music, purposely arranged for a reduced church orchestra can still be found in the Archives of the Gozo Cathedral. There are also others arrangements of works by Gasparo Spontini, Saverio Mercadante, Domenico Cimarosa, and Luigi Marescaldi.

The line of *maestri di cappella*, who died in recent years, but whose contribution to music making in Gozo is worthy of mention, includes musicians like Giuseppe Giardini Vella, Mgr Giuseppe Debrincat and Ganni Vella.

## The Operetta

In the 1930s, the cult of the operetta began to find a fertile ground in Gozo, and productions of this genre became very popular. Operettas, vaudevilles, and plays with incidental music, took a tremendous boost during the last war when quite a number of refugees, mostly from the Valletta and the Cottonera areas, crossed over to Gozo to avoid the aerial bombardments which (luckily for the Gozitans) were not as heavy and constant as those in Malta. These included accomplished actors, singers and musicians, and their involvement proved to be like a shot in the arm for local musical life. Productions like *The Geisha*, *Cuor di Ben* and *La Piccola Olandese* are still fondly and nostalgically remembered. Both my father, Ganni Vella, and Giuseppe Giardini Vella were very active in this line of musical activity.

## Classical Music

The influence of the classical music *repertoire* was almost non-existent before the forties both in Gozo and in Malta. Everybody, of course, knew the names of, and could hum, numerous excerpts from opera composers like Bellini, Donizetti, Verdi, and Puccini. Others like Bach, Handel, Haydn, Mozart, even the great Beethoven himself, meant little or nothing to local audiences.

## *Gozo and its Music*

It was only after the war, with the advent of the mass media, that Maltese and Gozitan music lovers began to be exposed to these great masters and to realise that music-making meant other things besides opera - quartets, oratorios, symphonies, instrumental concertos and the like.

In Gozo, the former British Institute (which was housed at It-Tokk in Victoria) played an extremely important role in the cultivation of this *repertoire*. Guest musicians who were invited to give concerts there came not only from Malta but also from Britain. These groups (mainly *trios* and *duos*, besides soloists) introduced local audiences to many an established classical piece. The British Institute also encouraged local music by commissioning concerts involving Gozitan instrumentalists. These Gozitan orchestras very often had to resort to a guest or two from Malta to strengthen their forces, but there is no doubt that a healthy musical life started to be nurtured through this initiative.

I remember my father telling me that one of the conditions that the local representative of the British Institute would impose whenever he was commissioned to put up a concert, was that at least one work by a British composer should be included. Obviously, this was one way for the British Administration to try to loosen the cultural ties with Italy that in this regard had made Malta look (and sound) like just another Italian province.

### **The Folk Element**

As regards the folk element in Gozitan life, *ghana*, of course, formed an intrinsic part of the people's entertainment. The *ghannej* and the guitar formed an inseparable couple, the former taking the lead in the proceedings and the latter providing the musical support. In *ghana* the music obviously takes a secondary role to the literary element. Its main interest, in fact, lies in the improvised rhymes of the singers who often compete with each other in a pungent, witty dialogue.

The short instrumental breaks in between stanzas serve not only for the singer to catch his breath, but also provide the necessary few seconds for the *ghannej* to think up and formulate his next intervention. On special occasions (carnival, weddings), other folk instruments would make their



appearance - the *fifra* (reed flute), *tambur* (hand drum), *tamburin* (tambourine), the *rabbaba* or *zuvzafa* (friction drum), the *grajna* (bull's horn with a reed as a mouth piece) and *bronja* (sea shell horn), the *flejguta* or *bedbud* (flute of Pan) , and the *zaqq* (Maltese bagpipe).

## Gozitan Bands

The fifes and drums were, of course, a constant and regular feature in festivities held during the time of the Knights of St John not only on secular (read mostly military) occasions but also during processions and other types of public religious manifestations. Maltese and Gozitan bands as we know them today are the direct descendants of these musical groups.

With time, fife and drum groups began to lose their essentially military character by having any other available instruments (mostly wind) joining them. This process gradually led these groups to lose their original military flavour to become more and more civilian orientated. By the turn of the 19th century, Malta was replete with these makeshift-type of bands. These were never formally organized and combinations varied widely depending on random availability of instrumentalists.

In official circles these groups were referred to as *bande popolari*, that is popular bands. It is interesting to note that while in popular jargon, these *bande popolari* in Malta were called *baned tat-trieq* literally meaning street bands, the term used in Gozo was *baned ta wara l-bibien*, the nuance of which is rather difficult to translate in English (a literal translation is 'bands which play on the doorsteps of houses?'). The role of the *bande popolari* was mainly to contribute to the merry making on national festivals (*L-Imnarja* and *Lapsi* for example) or to enhance the secular, social element of the town or village *fešta*. But sometimes bands were also called to accompany the religious procession as it threaded its way through the winding streets of the locality. As time went by the involvement of the *bande popolari* in the social life of the islands became even more marked and widespread. Most social or civic occasions of a personal or family nature that suited some kind of celebration (and, of course, in the villages of Malta and Gozo everybody knew what was happening to everybody else) would see the local *banda popolare* tripping

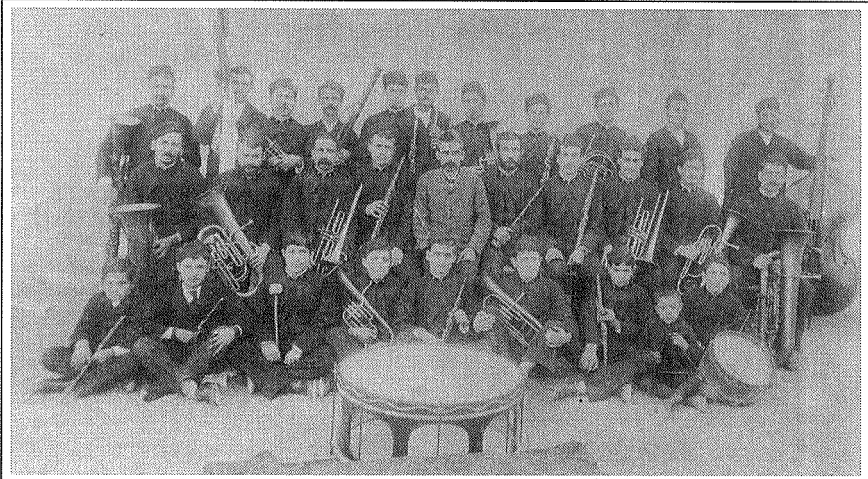


The *banda ta' Fefu* of Gozo. A small band which during the middle of the 18th century was generally invited to take part in fiests and other happy occasions. The caricature is by "Vampa" pen-name of Pietru Attard. From the collection of Mr. Pawlu Mizzi.

its way to the particular household, unannounced and uninvited. Forming themselves in a semi-circle in front of the main door, they would then start to play their lungs and hearts out, stopping only after whoever it was inside decided to come out not only to thank them but, more importantly, to pay them.

These occasions would include events like winning a court case, passing a public examination and getting a new appointment or a promotion. This custom was still thriving in Gozo right up to the early 1950s. When Governor Le Marchant visited Gozo in 1864, we know that a *banda popolare* (curiously enough made up mostly of blind musicians) was "imported" from Malta. But it was the outstanding success of the legendary *banda ta' Fefu* (alias *banda ta' Indri*), led by the blind Valletta born Andrea Borg, that in the early 1880s provided the final impetus towards the formation of the first two Gozitan bands in Victoria, namely *La Stella* and *Leone* band band clubs.

Andrea Borg's band visited Gozo in 1872. As regards the establishment of the first two Gozitan bands on an acceptable professional formation, and not haphazardly put together as was the case with the *bande popolari*, due credit (not often acknowledged) should go to British military bands.



***La Stella Vincitrice* Band, in the 1880s. This photo is believed to be the first ever of a band in Gozo.**

Ever since the beginning of the British presence in Malta, a British regiment used to be barracked at Fort Chambray in Mġarr. In true British tradition, all these had their regimental bands which were often invited to play on town and village squares. At times, they even participated in the religious processions on the feastday of the local village saint. There is no doubt that their musical involvement in Gozitan life helped to create a better awareness of the finer points of band playing.

In the context of regimental bands, it is appropriate to mention the English composer Albert Kettelbey, the writer of such popular works like “In a Persian market” and “In a Monastery Garden”. Kettelbey, for a time, was the band master of a regiment stationed in Gozo during the Great War. They were camped at the western periphery of Victoria in the then open fields facing Kerċem and Santa Luċija. It is said that his other popular work “Bells across the Meadows” was composed when he had heard the church bells of Kerċem pealing in the distance across the fields on a calm Sunday evening. I believe that the archives of the *Leone* Band Club include a very early copy of this work which was donated to the late Giuseppe Cordina by the composer himself.

However the musical culture of the two Islands was so deeply rooted in

Italian traditions that soon bands could not but look towards Italy, both for their *repertoire* and for their musical ideals. At the turn of the century, this manifests itself in the widespread practice among the better and more established bands to "import" Italian conductors to lead them. In Gozo we meet with names like Alfonso Cina' and Giuseppe Giardini Vella (*La Stella Band*), and Giovanni Giumarra and Orlando Crescimanno (*Leone Band*).

Coming to the present, we find that music in Gozo plays a significant part in the social life of the people. Besides the two band clubs in Victoria, already mentioned there are four village clubs - Xaghra, Nadur, Xewkija and Ghajnsielem.

### **Recent Times**

Music in Gozo has become part and parcel of the island's culture. Good quality performances are produced in the two Gozitan opera houses, the *Astra* and the *Aurora*. Past and recent productions in these theatres have put Gozo in a very favourable light not only with Maltese opera buffs, but also with foreign visitors.

The contribution that the band clubs make to Gozitan life is very important, and the role of the band in the village *fešta* is of major importance.

Music is also taken very seriously at the academic level. The proportion of students taking up musical studies today is far greater than it was 20 or 30 years ago, and many Gozitan musicians (singers, instrumentalists and composers) have asserted themselves on a national and international level.

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## MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY GOZO FROM AN UNPUBLISHED CONTEMPORARY SOURCE

**Franco Masini**

A slim manuscript volume containing sixty-four pages and three pages of a rudimentary index throws considerable light on life in Gozo in the mid-1800s. The volume written in Italian and measuring 22 cm by 16 cm has a very modest and unobtrusive title page. In block letters we find the word 'GOZO' to which the words '*memorie sul*' were subsequently added, thus resulting in the title of '*Memorie sul Gozo*'.

The origin and authorship of the volume is unknown. It was found among the papers of my late father and there are no indications at all of how, why and when it came to be written. It is penned in a very clear hand and by a very organised and observant person who, it seems, was determined to record certain events, incidents and personalities. He was also remarkably interested in the topography of Gozo, very carefully listing places and minutely describing locations. It appears to have been written over a span of time, maybe years. There are indications that he added on to what he had written earlier and in very few cases are there traces of '*pentimento*'.

### **An Observant Author**

I am most intrigued by the identity of the author. He appears to be a non-Gozitan, possibly someone from Malta who had a job to do in Gozo, or a civil servant transferred, or possibly promoted, to Gozo. I deduce this from the fact that he seems bent not only on 'discovering' Gozo but in recording very carefully his 'discoveries'. An interesting observation is the fact that not even the minutest detail escapes his notice. It is more than obvious that the notes were for his personal use or reference as there

appears no intention at all from the contents, layout and presentation of this document to indicate that they were meant for publication in any form. The author is definitely an incurable note-taker who seems to have been intoxicated with Gozo as little by little he explored it village by village, location by location recording this along the way.

Basing myself on facts gleaned from other sources and comparing the unmistakable handwriting I venture to suggest that the author is Gio-Francesco Fenech who was a Registrar of the Gozo Courts in the mid - 1800s. This is confirmed by several other manuscripts in another volume in my possession. This volume contains specimens or in certain cases copies of judicial acts of the Gozo Courts. There is also a detailed description in this latter volume of a post-mortem examination. In this particular volume there are copies of documents in which he gives his name and describes his position as that of '*Registratore*'. I believe that it would be useful to probe further into the identity of this person as he seems to have been a very meticulous, well-read and organised person. He probably hailed from Cospicua because in the manuscript we are discussing today there is a detailed timed trip from Cospicua to Rabat Gozo.

### **Communications between Gozo and Malta**

Communications between Malta and Gozo have always been a subject close to the heart of people in Gozo. Today one can cross over by air, by sea and even by skimming over the waves. Time has been compressed in a way that it takes you literally minutes to cross the distance between the two islands: not so at the time this manuscript was written. The sea crossing alone took 1 hour 15 minutes. A trip from Cospicua to Rabat, Gozo by coach with two horses and by boat from Marfa to Mgarr made by the author on Tuesday 8th November 1859 took 5 hours and 45 minutes. He meticulously breaks down the journey and carefully notes that the weather was good. He also notes the distances from one place to the next. He also indicates which direction of the wind is favourable for the boats crossing in either direction. As we are dealing with lateen boats with sails, we can image how sensitive it would have been to have the right wind blowing. He carefully lists the best wind direction for boats proceeding from Marfa such as the south wind and south west as well as the north

Notari del Gozo. — nel 1858

Judoro Xuezeb Fa liena ie figlio di Elena — eu tal tatar.

Giuseppe Grima (tar-ragna)

Giuseppe Cremona tal Galia — ie ta Galia

Antonio Salibra (ta Gaskal tal rain)

Antonio Portelli (ta c-ot.)

Nicolo Tabona (Pecieru.) mori 29. Gennaio 1862. —

Nicolo' Causini (ta Causin tu boros.) eu ta Sidora, eu ta Liana eu  
ta C-ogs-og. (lepp' Cioqioff)

Michel' Anjelo Rafalo (pavre) (ta pau KK ta bronka.)

— Vincenzo Rafalo (figlio)

— Giorgio Mallia (ta Tabib ic-c-keiken.)

— Francesco Calleja (ta Annuta Bru.)

A list of Gozitan notaries in 1858, reproduced from *Memorie sul Gozo*.

east. He then cautiously notes that '*col maltempo non valgano niente questi venti ma valgano col buon tempo*'.

From Gozo to Malta the best winds are westerly, north westerly and north. He then lists the best sailors for these crossings, two sailors who are identified by their nick-names viz "Il-Mans" and "l-Imzejjen" senior.

## Transport of Products

An interesting list of the fares payable for transport of products or commodities throw some light on possible traffic which constituted the commercial lifetime between the two islands.



Timber and wooden beams are charged 10 pence (or 6 *tari*) per trip. One hundred and ten *salme* of clover seeds drew a charge of £1-2s-11d and a court case ensued which finally ended with a charge of 1 *grano* 30 per *salma*. Another interesting list is that for land transport between Mgarr and Rabat. For instance a barrel of oil or wine is charged at 2 *tari* while a cask would be charged 12 *tari*.

For every *salma* of grain, beans etc. the charge is 5 *tari*. A bag of sugar 5 *tari*, for a bale of cotton 3 *tari*, for a bundle of tobacco from 4 to 5 *tari*, a container for chicken *grani* each. Chicken 5 *grani*, goat or sheep 2 *tari*. The agricultural nature of most traffic is obviously dominating the scene.

### **The Lighthouse at Ġordan**

Occasionally one stumbles on to events or descriptions in the manuscript which throw considerable light, this time literally so, on life in or rather off Gozo. A case in point is the lighthouse at Ġordan, still a beacon for seafarers.

A short account of the installation of the light house at Tal-Ġordan gives certain interesting details. It was first used on the 15th October, 1853 and the first attendant was Publio Zammit from Floriana.

The lighthouse had 21 lights, seven on each of its three sides. The brass reflectors are plated with silver to give the best effect. Each reflector cost £21. He also speaks about the consumption of oil. This consumption is of between seven and eleven quarts a day according to the time and the quality of the oil. In all it almost consumes one hundred barrels a year. The light house openings have large glass faces which cost £2 each. The roof is made of iron while a lightning rod protects the whole tower. The light house is equipped with an alarm clock which sounds every four hours. The said clock is powered by weights.

The lighthouse is visible from 38 miles which makes it more powerful than the one at St. Elmo in Valletta which is only visible from 18 miles out at sea. On the same hill is the telegraph which at the time of writing (in 1859) was going to be transferred to Ras il-Wardiġa in the North of Gozo.

## **Ġgantija Temples**

One outstanding monument in Gozo is the temple complex of Ġgantija which overawed the nineteenth century Gozitans as it does modern day residents and visitors alike. Our ubiquitous author did not fail to visit the place.

He describes the Ġgantija temples with the usual care which he does other sites. He also takes the trouble to make a rough sketch of the two temples.

He places these temples in the land belonging to Don Giuseppe Xerri of Xaghra whose nickname is “ta’ Žigzig”. He describes what he calls ‘the chapels’ and indicates a cross which is sculpted near the main apse of the first temple. He claims that the cross was made to commemorate the death at this place of Wenzu “ta’ Haniex” fifteen or sixteen years from the date of his visit which is on the 29th September, 1859.

During his visit he was told this by Domitilla “ta’ Dingkina” a widow who resided in those parts and who presumably used to show people around the temples. He also mentioned that in Xaghra there was a renowned palm tree which was planted in 1728 by Maria Grazia wife of Giacomo Hili. The said Grazia was the grandmother of Don Francesco Hili “ta’ Sebghu”

## **Gozitan Locations**

The manuscript lists some of the larger villages and dedicated some space to a detailed description placing an emphasis on topography, physical geography and some lore.

A quick overview of some villages will give an idea of the details which the author recorded and particularly the names and nicknames as well as location of houses which only an on the spot visit could make possible. Starting with the village of Qala, he describes its frontiers so to speak. From Dahlet Qorrot by the sea to the street near Il-Ġebel il-Wieqaf. It is situated like a peninsula between Nadur and Ġhajnsielem from both of which it is separated by the street near il-Ġebel il-Wieqaf. He then

describes various places. For instance a place called Margra where there is a cross called *is-Salib ta' Margra* or *Magra*. There is also a spring of water and a garden called *il-Ġnien taz-Żebbuġ* which is rather large and planted with olive and orange trees. Along the street there is a canal through which water flows towards Tal-Wileġ passing through the said garden ending in the valley of Hondoq ir-Rummien.

He then describes the area near the old church of Qala dedicated to the Immaculate Conception built according to the author towards the year 1780 when the parish priest was Don Francesco Sapiano whose portrait was to be found in the sacristy. The author says that a statue where the church was erected was then placed in a niche on the facade.

An interesting description is that of the tiny island called *Il-Hagra Tal-Halfa*. This is sited beneath the Wileġ and is of an area of some 3 or 4 *mondelli*. From the part facing Gozo it is inaccessible because it is high and perpendicular but the side facing the open sea is in fact accessible. In summer it is used for pasture, the goats and sheep being transported by boat. He also mentions a military fort which is guarded by Maltese soldiers. This is presumably Garzes Tower which was eventually dismantled.

The certainty that the author relied on a personal visit to the places in question can be ascertained by a marginal note stating that he made a trip by horse drawn carriage at a rather slow pace from the Qala church to Rabat in Palm Street in an hour and twenty six minutes on the 4th October 1859.

The village of Għarb is claimed to be divided in several areas. These are: (1) Tal-Fgura; (2) Fuq il-Blata; (3) Santu Pietru; (4) Berbuba; (5) San Lawrenz; (6) Kap San Dimitri and (7) Ghammar.

He further spells out a reference to each site. Tal-Fgura, he tells us, is near the blacksmith's shop in the entrance to Għarb. Fuq il-Blata is near the house of the Cantore Caruana. The old church of Għarb is in Santu Pietru. Kap San Dimitri is in Berbuba. Beneath the church of Tal-Virtut there is the valley of Tal-Virtut with a plentiful spring of water where there is a public washing place. He lists the places on the road from Rabat to Għarb. From Triq ta' Wara s-Sur till right up to the stone village cross

## Mid-Nineteenth Century Gozo



Early 19th century lithograph showing Mgarr Harbour, with Garzes Tower (right) and the road to Rabat (left). The lithograph (10.5 by 15.5 cm) was designed by Eduard de Montulé for Charles Brocas (c. 1821). From the collection of Dr. Albert Ganado.

at the centre of the village each street or site is identified such as Ghajn Tal-Hamimiet, Torri Cardona etc. The church he describes as having one bell tower with a clock.

He mentions the small church of San Dimitri with its altarpiece of St. Demetrius. He describes minutely the figure of the woman in the altarpiece. She is dressed in the *geżwira* and she is covered with the *culqana* in sky blue with white stripes. Near her is her son in chains. He says that she is the first woman buried in the new parish church of Gharb. Her residence, he claims, was in Cape San Dimitri. He visited the place on the 7th October, 1859 and found the house a pile of stones. The small church was built some 40 years prior to his visit in 1859 by the master mason Felice of Gharb.

Regarding Nadur, the author list again some territories such as Wied Xghajma, Mizieb ir -Rih or Ghajn Xriku. There is a place called Blata ta' Sigori where there is the rural home of Angelo Vella son of the late Michele "ta' Lip" or "ta' Prama" or "ta' Folti", a farmer from Nadur. In the

parish church there is preserved the body of the martyr St. Coronato whose feast is celebrated on the first Sunday of November. He believes that the name Dahlet Qorrot is derived from the name of a Turkish Commandant named Qorrot who landed once in that place. He mentions that in Ta' Hida there lives one called Blackhouse.

Żebbuġ is not too well described. He says that the parish church was built in the time of Parish Priest Francesco Vella when Alpheran was Bishop. In the said village there is a piece of land called Ta' Ċenċ overlooking Qbajjar Bay behind the lands Ta' Castelletti on the hill named Ta' Bram. On this land there is a spring. The land in question belongs to Don Salvatore Galea "ta' Piet" from the same village. In the limits of Żebbuġ there is a hill called Aveċċa where reputedly gold could be found. This was thoroughly prospected, says the author, but unfortunately gold was never found.

Perhaps the most detailed area of Gozo which is featured is that of Marsalforn. It has long been held, though this is not recognised by the Local Government Act 1993, that the valley Wied Riggū bisects the village into two sides, one appertaining to Xagħra and the other to Żebbuġ. The author seems to follow this tradition and in fact in the three descriptive pages he has written the description in two adjoining columns headed 'Limiti Casal Caccia' and 'Limiti Casal Żebbuġ'.

His detailed description with the name of each plot of land must be a source of interest not only to the students of geography but also to those of topography. He identifies sites by their owner. For instance, on the Xagħra side he describes the Habel ta' Marsalforn as touching the house of Magistrate Pace. Il-Bajja tal-Qittiena is a territory of 9 salme belonging to Count Sant while the lands tas-Sruġ belong to Camillo Sceberras.

On the Żebbuġ side there is Tal-Qormia near the house of Fr Axisa. Ta' Cassia, property of an officer of the Royal Malta Fencibles. Habel ta' Ċarrut or Ta' Parsott touching the walled garden of Dr. Mallia. Interestingly in this particular case he mingles Italian with Maltese possibly putting on paper what has been literally told him by a resident or a local. There is an entry regarding *Il-Barumbara* or the Battery of Friar Axisa, where there is the house of Dr. Mallia, of Ċikku Farrugia in front of the rooms of Calleja, Bondi', Ta' Brajgu.

## **Building in Stone**

There is also a very interesting reference to the type of stone used for buildings. This time he also gives the source for this technical information. Master Painter Giuseppe Briffa "ta' Bertu" from Rabat who knows the area well informed the author that the best building stone was to be found in the lands Ta' Ċejla near that of Ta' Gonzales once owned by Dr Fenech of Rabat and later bought by Don Luigi Ascias known as "ta' Pixxet" from Żebbug. The land in question is in the limits of Żebbug at Il-Qbajjar. From this land was quarried stone for the construction of the house of Archpriest Cassar about 70 years prior to 1859 which house now belongs to Dr. Nicola Spiteri. The house, we are told, was therefore constructed well before the coming of the French in 1798.

The above descriptions are only a sample of what the manuscript contains. It is not possible to reproduce all that there is as otherwise it would occupy too much time. A closer look with comparative notes and cross references could perhaps occupy me in future.

## **Incidents**

The manuscript contains a few examples of incidents which I came across in the very interesting pages of this wonderful manuscript.

There are various references to people accidentally drowning either in the sea or else in wells. For instance, on Sunday 4th August 1861 at about two in the afternoon at Qbajjar, two lads accidentally drowned. One was aged 15 years and called Giuseppe Sultana and the other Luigi Refalo 14 years old, both from Xaghra. Their funeral was held at the Xaghra parish church the next day where they were also buried. There is a note that Magistrate Carbone held an on the spot enquiry which lasted from the six till about midnight.

A similar incident is reported as having taken place much earlier that is on the 24th June 1803 when two ladies from Rabat nicknamed "ta' l-Alfier" aunts of the two priests Mercieca of Rabat of the same nickname. By a stroke of luck the mother of the two priests who was also swimming with her sisters was saved. The incident was witnessed by Notary Niçolo'

Tabone, the ex-Police Sergeant Calleja, the weigher Pačikk “ta’ Kurun” from Xaghra all quite young at the time. It is not unlikely that one of these eye witnesses recounted the story to the author after all these years.

Finally there is a very terse reference to a court case involving an old priest and a man with an eye glass. Don Michele Cassar “ta’ Skjazzu” from San Lawrenz who is always the deacon in the feasts celebrated at Gharb Parish Church and who is fairly old at the time of writing came across Stanislao Tortell who was looking at the church of Gharb through an eyeglass. Full of righteous indignation, he unhesitatingly attacked him with a stick, accusing him of magic!

### **Conclusion**

The above descriptions are only a sample of what the manuscript contains. We have given only a cursory and fleeting look at this document. This, I believe, should whet the appetite of researchers for a more detailed analysis of the wealth of facts and figures revealed in the pages of this document. As it was not meant to be published it is written out in a form which is obviously meant for ease of reference. This has ensured a certain informal frankness in expression and reference to persons by name and in most cases by nickname. In fact at times in transcribing events or incidents I have felt as if I were figuratively looking over the shoulders of the author as he penned his notes.

The social history of Gozo as indeed that of Malta is crying out to be written. The published sources are scarce and it is therefore on documents such as the one thus traced today that social historians have to rely. No one knows exactly the amount of material, mostly in private hands, which would shed light on our social history. It is therefore necessary to make an appeal to all those who happen to have documents of this type to look after them and possibly to publish them so that scholars and all those interested in the past of our island could become familiar with them.

## **THE BRITISH RULE AND GOZO 1800-1964**

**Joseph Bezzina**

**O**n 28 October 1798, the flag of the British Empire fluttered for the first time upon the Maltese archipelago from Saint John Cavalier within the Gozo Citadel. That day the French troops on Gozo under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Lockey surrendered to Captain Alexander John Ball who had been sent earlier by the British Rear Admiral Sir Horatio Nelson to organize the blockade against the French. Yet as recorded in a letter written by Ball off Gozo and despatched to Nelson, “the place was [later on] delivered up in form to the deputies of the island”.

The Gozitans remained masters of their own island for twenty two months, until the French troops capitulated in Malta on 5 September 1800, when the whole archipelago passed under the protection of the British Crown.

Gozo at the time had one town and seven villages or parishes, as it was the establishment of a Roman Catholic parish that raised the status of a hamlet to that of a village. In 1800, the population was close to 16,000. In March 1842, according to the first census taken by the British, the population was 14,342; of these 6809 or 47.5 percent were males and 7533 or 52.5 percent were females. These figures include 12 foreigners living in Gozo on census day. The population, after an initial decline in the first three decades of the nineteenth century, began rising steadily to climb to 20,003 by 1901 and to 25,975 by 1967.

Taking in consideration the political, economic, social, cultural and religious factors, the British rule in Gozo may be divided for convenience into the following five periods:



1. 1800-1814, a time of instability, yet some prosperity;
2. 1814-1842, the years of poverty and depression up to the first census;
3. 1842-1887, a period of innovations and reforms;
4. 1887-1921, from a majority of elected members to self-government; and
5. 1921-1964, the struggle towards independence.

## **The Early Nineteenth Century**

Malta and Gozo passed informally under British protection on 5 September 1800. On 27 March 1802, through the Peace of Amiens, the islands were restored to the Order of the Knights of Saint John. Several steps were taken in that direction, but to the satisfaction of the Maltese the restoration did not materialize. The informal protection prolonged itself for several years. Finally, by the Peace of Paris of 30 May 1814, the archipelago was to belong "in full rights and sovereignty to His Britannic Majesty." It was a sovereignty acquired not by force of arms but founded on the "love of the Maltese and the voice of Europe."

The first period of British rule was a time of considerable instability, yet some prosperity was not wanting. The two main sources of income under the previous government of the Knights were foreign revenue accruing from the Knights' extensive properties in Europe and the export of cotton. Literally, all the people of the island shared from this income which came to an abrupt end with the change in government. The disturbance in these two sources was however cushioned by the commerce generated as an effect of the continental system. The system launched by Napoleon barred British trade with continental Europe and as a result a good number of British firms established branches in Malta to develop clandestine commerce with Italy and the continent. Malta also became an important entrepôt.

The Gozitans benefited indirectly from the boom. Their cereals and agricultural products brought higher prices in Valletta momentarily substituting the Knights' spending and the cotton industry. The boom was ushered off by a plague epidemic in 1814. It bogged trade in a morass of quarantine restrictions made by other Mediterranean ports on Malta. The people began feeling the full effects of the change in their traditional sources of income.



**The Banca Giuratale (Rabat) enlarged and redesigned by the British to centralise the administration of the island (1875).**

### **The 1814-1842 Period**

By the passage of years, the British had fully understood the strategic importance of the islands for their expanding Empire and though Malta and Gozo were formally handed over to the British in 1814, the British had formally decided to stay the previous year. On 16 July 1813, through the General Instructions handed to Sir Thomas Maitland, the first colonial Governor, they gave Malta its first Constitution — twelve were to be given throughout their rule, the last granted independence to the archipelago.

The first British Governor took several drastic steps vis-à-vis Gozo. So as to have absolute say in the local administration, on 15 October 1814, he suppressed the post of Governor of Gozo. The suppression of the *Universitas*, the local municipal Council that had functioned since around 1397, followed suit unceremoniously on 31 December 1818.

To help him in the government of the island, on 25 June 1815, he chose six *luogotenenti*, one for each of the six districts in which the islands were divided. These were in turn helped by deputies in each village. The *Luogotenente* for Gozo, the sixth district, was a resident in Malta and he had six deputies to help him. He could not care less for far off Gozo but,

as a matter of fact, he had hardly any say in the administration. Things remained unchanged under his successors and the creation of a Council of Government through a Constitution granted on 1 April 1835 did little to meliorate the situation.

This centralization of the administration led to the elimination of Gozo from the picture and the island was left in a complete state of abandonment. The British who had so willingly replaced the Order did precious little to substitute the foreign revenue previously spent in the island. Besides, due to several reasons, the cotton industry had failed. The result was widespread poverty. As attested by the 1836 Royal Commission instituted to inquire into the affairs of Malta and Gozo, poverty reigned supreme on Gozo.

The Gozitans however began working out their own salvation. One example suffices. The *Collegio del Gozo*, the only school on the island at that time, had a book, *Trattat fuq l-Obbligi tal-Bniedem*, printed in Livorno, Italy. An increase in education, it was correctly concluded, would help the people to better their low standard of living.

### **Innovations and Reforms**

The year 1842 marks the beginning of better times. On 21 March 1842, the Government took the first census of modern times. Until that time, no real count had been made of the population, so much so that the census proved current estimates to be 14.85 percent too high for Gozo. Better planning could henceforth be made for the benefit of the island. Around the same time the British authorities voted the money for the first large public building enterprise in Gozo: the Ghar Ilma — Citadel aqueduct. It was such major public works that relieved, even if temporarily, the widespread poverty. Inaugurated on 6 September 1843, this aqueduct not only brought sufficient water to the town of Gozo, but also provided some income for a large number of unemployed.

On 11 May 1849, in the third Constitution granted to Malta, the British created a Council of Government with eighteen members. Eight were to be elected from one each of the eight districts in which the islands were divided. In Gozo, the eighth district, 281 persons were entitled to vote for

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the Gozo candidate; of these only 128 resided in Gozo, the other 153 were Malta residents (including 34 priests) qualified to vote for the Gozo candidate by property at Gozo and Comino. 259 voted; Adrian Dingli, a lawyer of Gozitan extraction, was elected with 117 votes.

Malta and Gozo were slowly witnessing an economic revival. It was ushered in during the Crimean War (1854-56) when the large movement of troops through the island revived commerce on a grand scale. Eventually, the opening of the Suez Canal on 17 November 1869, brought an increasingly number of ships to the island. These events led to a revival in other fields. After 1846 the lace industry began to be organized on professional lines. In 1855, the first grand scale Industrial and Agricultural show was organized on the feast of *Santa Marija*. As a result local agricultural products and handicrafts became more in demand.

Big strides forward were also made in the field of education. Up to 1842, there was only a single primary school at Rabat. Then several others were inaugurated: in 1842 at Nadur, in 1859 at Gharb, and in 1862 at Xaghra and Xewkija. An upper primary school, something between a primary and a secondary institution, was opened in 1851. A full secondary school offering both arts and science subjects was opened by the church as an annex to the Seminary on 4 November 1866. A public library was founded on 21 November 1853 and it was eventually transferred to the present specifically built premises in March 1896.

Most means of communications were also upgraded. In 1848, a telegraph station made possible the transmission of messages between the islands. After 1862, when the Mgarr-Nadur road was built, a better road network began to take shape. But most important of all was the inauguration, after a government subsidy, of a reliable steamer service between the islands. On 13 June 1885, the "Gleneagles" became the first iron screw steamer to operate between Malta and Gozo with the result that traffic and commerce made big steps forward.

The Government civil service was reshuffled from the 1850s onwards, and in 1875, the Banca Giuratale (built 1733-38) was enlarged to serve as Gozo's administrative centre. Without doubt the most salient event during the period under consideration was the establishment of the Diocese of Gozo with full British backing on 16 September 1864. The

British not only did not pose any obstacles in the erection of a new bishopric, but even showed themselves favourable to the Gozitan wishes. The autonomy gained as a result by the Gozo Church led public spirited citizens to seek better treatment for Gozo in other fields too.

## **Towards Self-Government**

During the 1870s, the elected members split into Reformists (pro-English) and anti-Reformists (not anti-reform as in fact they were more liberal, but anti-English and thus, automatically, pro-Italian). Their leaders eventually succeeded in piloting a better Constitution, granted by Letters Patent of 12 December 1887. The elected members of the Council became a majority and the Council had power to legislate on most matters relating to internal affairs and also controlled finances. Due to a chain of events, most especially because of successive divisions in the Council over policies of expenditure, on 3 June 1903, the Colonial Office revoked the previous Constitution and granted another that witnessed a reversal to the 1849 situation.

1887 marked the Golden Jubilee of the accession of Queen Victoria to the throne. After a petition promoted by local Anglophiles, on 10 June 1887, the centuries-old name of Rabat, the town of Gozo, was officially changed to that of Victoria, and the town was elevated to the status of a city.

Among the most significant progress during this period, one can point out the opening of schools in the other villages of Gozo, the organization of evening classes in existing schools for those adults desiring to learn to read and write, as well as the inauguration of district libraries in the same school premises. For the entertainment of the people, in 1910, the Government began the laying out of the public gardens inaugurated as Villa Rundle, after Governor of the day Sir Leslie Rundle, in 1914.

The 1880s also witnessed an unprecedented movement for the emancipation of women. This was the side effect of the foundation of two female congregations: the Franciscans of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in 1880, and the Dominicans of Saint Catherine of Siena in 1889. Both of the Congregations had the declared object to cater for the education and training of poor girls to enable them to earn a living. Eventually, both played an important role in the local social field.



A commemorative inscription within the Citadel: the British connection continues.

### **The Post-1921 Period and the Road to Independence**

By Letters Patent of 14 April 1921, the British Government decided to give Malta a Parliament with wide self-governing powers — a most important step in the Maltese process of state formation. The election that followed in October saw the emergence of the first Gozo party, the Partito Democratico Nazionalista of Enrico Mizzi, a party which contested the Gozo district only and elected the four candidates it fielded: Enrico Mizzi, Luigi Camilleri, Guzè Micallef, and Alfons Maria Hili. The first Maltese Parliament was inaugurated on 1 November 1921.

Initiative in local affairs passed from British to local hands. One of the most important enterprises in the pre-war era was the inauguration of the first power station on 1 August 1926, though it was to take thirty years before electric current could be distributed throughout the island. On 23 June 1929, the Government initiated the modernization of Mġarr harbour by the building of a breakwater. Construction went on until 1935, but by summer 1932, steamers began, for the first time, to berth alongside and discharge passengers and cargo directly onto the quay.

During the Second World War (1940-1943), Gozo was declared a non-military zone and hence a place of refuge. Thousands of people from Malta found refuge on the island. This did generate a large amount of commerce but it also created many problems.

The post-war years witnessed a general revival. As the process proved slower in Gozo, several public spirited citizens, led by the lawyer Dr Francesco Masini, founded the Gozo Party to hasten the process. Its foundation made it clear to one and all that "Gozo is out to make its voice heard." The party gained three of the five seats from the Gozo district in the October 1947 election and throughout the 1947-50 legislature they went out of their way to revitalize the island's economy and modernize its infrastructure. Very significant for Gozo's future was the programme of enlargement of existing schools and the building of modern ones to cater for the post-war baby-boom.

The 1950s witnessed several political upheavals and in April 1958, the islands passed once again under a colonial administration. That same year, other public spirited citizens formed the Gozo Civic Committee to press forward the island's needs. After petitioning the British authorities, the Governor, Admiral Sir Guy Grantham, got the approval from the Colonial Office for the formation of the Gozo Civic Council. On 14 April 1961, the Council was formally established as a statutory local Government and it became responsible for local affairs. Though dominated by extreme parochialism, it proved on the whole beneficial to the island until its abolishment on 4 December 1973.

After gaining once more a degree of self-government in February 1962, the Nationalist Party, who had won the election, immediately sought independence from Great Britain. Malta and Gozo became a sovereign state within the Commonwealth on 21 September 1964.

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## THE DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS FOR GOZO

**Mario Tabone**

**T**his paper attempts to explore a prospective view, a possible scenario for the future of Gozo. This exercise is not intended to be in the nature of a prophecy, but an invitation to an imaginative leap to the future.

Gozo is at present going through a historical watershed. Up to a few years ago, the island languished in the periphery of national life, with primitive services, bureaucratic neglect, lack of opportunities in all sectors and, in fact, constituted the “backwoods” in the national psychology. There is usually a metaphor to symbolise the back of beyond in most countries; it is usually geographic in character, like the East or the South; for so many years, Gozo was the metaphor for backwardness. In the last few years, Gozo has made a quantum jump in development—from a third World backwater, located in a corner of the national field of vision, to a central position in national consciousness. There has been a veritable awakening, an explosive and unprecedented expansion in all services and sectors of social life — health, education, infrastructure, administration, transport, public works, employment and sports.

Directly represented in Cabinet, decolonised, so to speak from centuries of central hegemony, Gozo found its voice and identity and confidence and created a bonanza in entrepreneurship, investment and business activity in general, raising the standard of living and social expectations. No doubt, growth has peaked in Gozo — and now, let us not cavil or begrudge this prosperity — after all Gozo had to make up for centuries of neglect and marginalisation.

But where do we go from here? Are we to pursue, frenetically, further expansion and development? Should we maintain the pressure on land utilisation? Should we occupy, crowd, hem and choke open spaces? Is Malta to be assumed as the role model? Is our aim to convert Gozo into



a commercial and industrial hub, mesmerised, as we all are, by the glittering success of a Hong Kong or Singapore? Do we believe in a path where the hectic tempo of activity and frenzied statistics continue to rise to a crescendo? Is this course the “open sesame” to a humane future or the fateful key to a Pandora’s box?

The proposals to be made in this paper, in reply to these questions, are underpinned by a particular point of view based on the following premises:

1. Gozo is another centre of national life and not just another peripheral district;
2. Gozo expects and deserves parity – as distinguished from identity – of development with Malta;
3. No social or ecological system is capable of infinite development;
4. “Development in Gozo is not only a matter of social justice but a *sine qua non* for the attainment of national development” (see Tabone 1992: 4-6).
5. National life is enriched by the co-existence of different models of development and a diversity of options.
6. The landscape, social fabric, the organic balance between countryside and towns and villages – in short, the unique charm and topography of Gozo can be irretrievably savaged in one generation.
7. Development can be broadly defined as the mobilisation of all resources (human and natural) to attain the maximum standard of living and the highest quality of life for all; “quality of life” is crucial in the equation, since there may be ‘developments’ which are neither sustainable nor defensible from the human point of view since they impoverish the quality of life or irreversibly degrade the environment.

### Choosing the Options

A bi-polar tension and dialectic between two contending scenarios may promote the psychological health of a country. In the case of the Maltese islands the two scenarios may be termed, for convenience, the urban-industrial, on the one hand, and the arcadian, on the other.

The first pole may be characterised by intense commercial and business development, compressed into densely populated down-town areas or industrial heartlands, where nature has been practically displaced by

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man's incessant termite activity, factories, offices, traffic jams, power plants, tight schedules and the breathless rat-race.

The attraction of this pole is the money it generates and material advancement it ushers in, but it has its ugly side. As early as 1904, Max Weber, in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* cautioned that the mighty cosmos of the modern economic order is creating an "iron cage" for man. And, back in the sixties, Marcuse, in his *One Dimensional Man* opined that: "The people recognise themselves in their commodities; they find their soul in their automobiles, hi-fi sets, split-level homes and kitchen equipment". In short, man is short-changed, reduced to his own meretricious products.

The other pole may be characterised by open spaces, the archetypal wild west and rolling steppes, the green countryside, where man is still integrated in the rhythms of nature and still has time to stand and stare.

The attraction of this pole could be associated with a call, buried deep in our psychology, of the hinterland, of pristine nature, where the works of man are in harmony with their surroundings. In our small country, Gozo is a symbol of the primeval, arcadian call. Gozo is real, very real; it is also a mental landscape.

With Thoreau (1854) in his *Walden*, we wonder: "Why should we live with such hurry and waste of life?" Modern man has a dire need for a refuge from what Rousseau calls *le tourbillion social* (the social whirlwind).

In its extreme form the second pole is associated, in the context of Gozo, with a pastoral way of life – a *presepju*<sup>1</sup> scenario – which, in the case of Gozo, is neither realistic nor defensible. After all, Gozo is not a *presepju* and the Gozitans are certainly no *pasturi*.<sup>2</sup> Rather, Gozo's "green option" should aim for high-grade development and the use of science and technology to harmonise: development, conservation and enrichment of the environment, renovation of urban areas, containment of population pressure, and maintenance of traditional culture.

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1. *Presepju* is a three dimensional model of the Christmas nativity scene with a crib taking centre stage. It is exhibited in many Maltese houses during christmas time.

2. *Pasturi* are the small statuettes in the *presepju* representing the main figures associated with the nativity, including the shepherds.



**St Francis Square, Victoria, prior to the 1930s: an attractive picture, when even the urban centre of Gozo looked like a scene from a *presepju*. The island was however characterised by widespread economic backwardness.**

It is being suggested that, rather than follow the traditional industrial model pursued by Malta, Gozo should choose the “green option” just briefly described. It is important to stress at this junction that this option does not imply resignation to underdevelopment or the abandonment of technology.

Gozo is an ecological-cultural niche which is worth preserving and nurturing. Incidentally, the environment does not connote solely a physical dimension but also a living, complex structure of beliefs, relationships, traditions and values. Historically, societies developed haphazardly, buffeted by the whims of nature and man. Now, they can be steered by the use of the imagination and the implementation of goal-oriented policies.

## **Some Suggestions for Gozo's Development**

Development, of the sustainable type, is a vast and complex subject, and it has been treated at some depth elsewhere (see for example the UNCED 1992; United Nations 1995; Bank of Valletta 1992). All this paper intends to do is to highlight some ideas and suggestions in the hope that this would stimulate further thought and public debate.

### *Space*

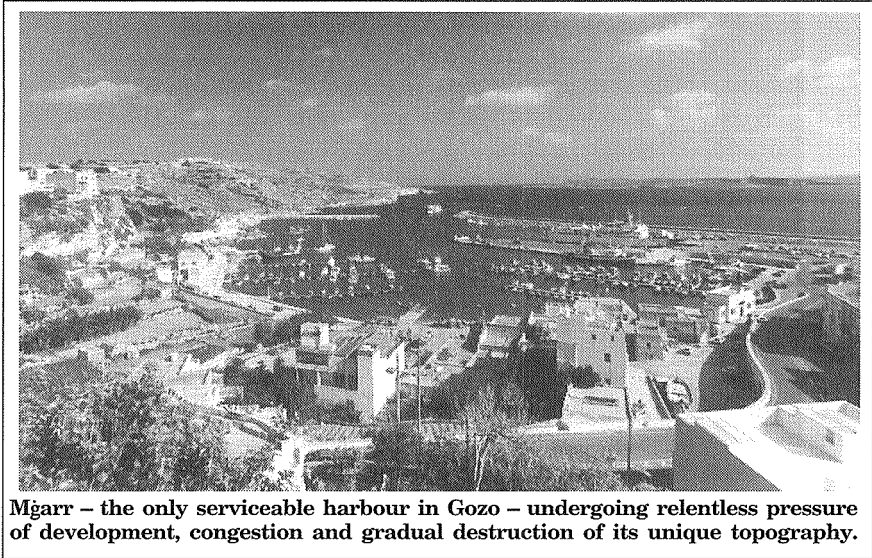
Space is the major constraint on our development. Whereas it is true that we cannot change the size of our islands, we are in a position to increase space. Certain facilities can be located underground; car-parks, stores, electricity substations, pumping stations, petrol and gas storages etc. The technology already exists and policy-makers ought to be aware of this dimension. The environment would be spared and construction and engineering stimulated. For example, a large multistorey, underground car-park can be built under the one adjoining the Bus Terminus at Taht Putirjal; such a facility would decongest the city, especially over week-ends and in summer, and promote the development of more pedestrian zones.

### *Stone Quarries*

There are a number of deep, abandoned stone-quarries scarring the landscape. There are a number of ways in which these could be utilised. It is possible, for example, to site a helicopter pad with attendant infrastructure, e.g. car-park, terminal and other support services in these quarries.

With some imagination and daring entrepreneurship, quarries could be converted into holiday complexes or even housing estates, with hanging or terraced chalets or flats and a large central swimming pool. Such an enterprise would pose engineering challenges and open up new aesthetic vistas.

One could also site a large, marine aquarium, together with an on-land experimental aquaculture centre. Finally, and perhaps less ambitiously, some of these quarries could be converted into orchards.



### *Ports*

Malta has had the singular advantage of having several natural, deep-sea harbours. Historically, brisk commercial, social and political developments sprouted and flourished in areas adjoining harbours.

Gozo, on the other hand, is poor in natural coastal indentations, and Mgarr is practically the only serviceable harbour. But, perhaps, it is time to think about building a man-made harbour to take regular and intensified passenger and cargo traffic. This would relieve Mgarr of the relentless pressure of development, congestion and gradual destruction of its unique topography. The yacht marina could be extended, more berthing facilities made available for the fishing fleet and the inimitable natural amphitheatre, that is Mgarr, artfully developed.

### *Aquaculture*

Aquaculture is a nascent industry but already burgeoning. There are three areas ripe for development: fish hatching, fish feeding, and fish farming. The Mediterranean, sad to say, is becoming biologically poorer.

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It is time for science to come to the aid of traditional fishing. Some fishermen may be encouraged to diversify their activities to fish farming, especially the young. New skills and ambitions have to be promoted.

Malta is already exporting impressive tonnage from fish-farms and this is bound to increase. The future fisherman may be one with a science degree in marine biology.

### *Marine Station*

Being a small island surrounded by sea, our stake in the sea is unavoidably of a high order. A marine station would serve a number of major functions, including the monitoring of the quality and safety of sea-water and the surveying fish stocks by using state of the art technology.

Other useful purposes of a marine station could include the study of the dynamics of the surrounding seas, wave amplitude, currents and coastal erosion; the study of the submarine eco-system and biodiversity; and the teaching of basic science courses to fishermen, including fish-stocks, reproductive cycles, migration and so on.

### *Building*

The planning criteria and parameters adopted nationwide for building do not necessarily apply to Gozo. There are specific characteristics of Gozo which need particular attention.

A Structure Plan for Gozo should ascertain that:

- buildings do not drip down from the plateaux;
- ribbon building development should not destroy the traditional topography or relatively isolated villages surrounded by countryside;
- certain landscapes and vistas of natural beauty have to be salvaged from irresponsible land speculators;
- massive, cyclopean structures destroy the aesthetics of the natural scale of the Gozitan landscape and ought to be disallowed;
- the extensive use of underground space should be actively investigated and adopted;
- the ratio of built-up to non-built up areas in Gozo should be radically different from that in Malta.

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### *Ecozone*

Gozo can be declared an ecozone, where strict control of air pollution is enforced and would-be factories required to comply with recommendations laid down by a qualified body, such as the Clean Technology Institute of the University of Malta.

Traffic pollution in such a zone would have to be brought down to a relatively low level. Towards this end public transport could gradually be converted to electric motors. After all, distances in Gozo are not great and speed is not important.

The noise level, especially in certain areas, should be regulated, controlled and abusers penalised.

Private houses and factories could be induced by tax rebates to adopt energy-saving devices, like solar heaters.

There are large areas on the island crying out for a programme of afforestation.

A number of problems threaten the eco-system; local research in this regard should be funded to come up with the solution to local problems rather than the cavalier importation of ready-made pat schemes.

### *Agriculture*

The Gozitan community has been an essentially agricultural one. Agriculture "... is not only an economic model, but a holistic scenario, involving type of architecture, tempo of life, social behaviour, stability of family relationships and belief systems and an exquisite balance with the environment, optimising the rigours and generosity of nature to create a tenaciously lasting way of life. Agriculture, therefore, is not only an economic activity, not only one of the pillars of sustainable development, but an essential dimension of the future course of Gozitan evolution, as it is deeply rooted in Gozitan history and psychology" (Tabone 1994:7).

The agricultural sector in Gozo is on the decline. From 1971 to 1991 the number of full-time farmers dropped from 1600 to 225; agricultural land

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went down from 26,000 to 15,000 *tumuli* and from 1971 to 1983, the idle agricultural land in Gozo jumped from 24.5 to 47.8% of all idle agricultural land in the Maltese islands. To arrest this decline, one needs a paradigm shift — away from the industrial and commercial model to a more positive perception people have of agriculture. This need not be the social and economic backwater that the younger generation think that it is. With the introduction of scientific methods, proper management, fair pricing and adequate funding, agriculture could still offer a prosperous livelihood.

The School of Agriculture must be geared to offer high-grade courses to prepare a generation of motivated and enlightened agricultural workers and businessmen. This is a sector where investment in science and technology ought to have priority. Agriculture can wed the apparently antagonistic trends of conservation and development, offer a broader choice of education and work, and preserve for cultivation the wide-open spaces in Gozo.

### *Water*

Water is the major limiting factor on agricultural development and environmental enrichment. An intensive study, using an Integrated Research Management approach is vital regarding production, consumption, distribution and conservation of water.

Apart from its production from bore-holes, a Reverse Osmosis plant may be necessary. As in so many other areas, there may not be one, magic solution but a number of solutions. The use of blue clay reservoirs in valleys could certainly help small-time farmers, especially if the irrigation system is upgraded.

It is estimated that only 5 % of total land cultivated in Gozo is classified as irrigable, so the problem of water and irrigation is one of some magnitude. In this regard, the re-utilisation of wind-driven water-pumps should be re-assessed.

### *Science Park*

The basic concept underlying the construction of a Science Park is to



invite a number of high-tech companies to set up house for research purposes. It is important to emphasise that they would not be engaging in any production and that the research and research methods would not involve biological or toxic hazards or other environmental dangers. Companies who are likely to be attracted towards a Science Park would normally have high-flying scientists of the first order, who can interact with local University and other educational institutions and upgrade levels through their intellectual input.

### *Education*

Education is the bedrock on which any future can be based. There should be more emphasis on science teaching at all levels, in primary, secondary and vocational schools.

The Gozo Centre of the University should now plan science courses in fields like agriculture, marine biology or environmental science. Young people still seem to opt, preferentially, for traditional professions, like doctors, lawyers and architects. This is a well-known social phenomenon, leading young people from historically depressed areas to hanker for bourgeois ideals and social legitimisation. It is time for educationists and vocational advisers to enlighten the young that the stage has been superseded. We need scientists, engineers, technologists and scientific workers in all spheres.

There are a cluster of areas that could utilise the expertise of Gozitan scientists including soil erosion and enrichment; disposal of liquid and solid waste; renewable sources of energy; the conservation and creation of beaches; the cultivation of plants and trees suitable for our terrain and so on.

### **Conclusion**

This main argument in this discussion on the development options for Gozo is that the future of Gozo does not lie in what one might call the Third World fallacy: that the way to conserve Gozo as a particular ecosystem lies in underdevelopment. On the contrary, the path lies in greater sophistication, in the astute choice of social goals and the

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adoption of scientific methods to solve practical social and environmental problems.

In any scenario, like in any paradise, lurk some demons and I would like to finish by cautioning against three temptations:

- it may not be true that the more and the bigger, the better;
- Gozitans should conserve traditional skills and cultivate new ones in order to retain a viable community with an identity;
- Gozitans should beware of the temptation to become, simply, caretakers (builders, drivers, caterers) for an ever-expanding and rapacious tourist industry.

This paper has dealt with one aspect of the complex drama of modernity, namely development, where we are no mere bystanders watching the cue of a whimsical director — but in fact, actors and protagonists. To be a bystander is to be a guilty bystander, after all.

We have to appreciate the tools of modern life to overcome the problems of under-development as we have to understand the mistakes of the past to stall and dam the problems of over-development.

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## THE CONTRIBUTORS

**Mr Joseph M. Attard Tabone** was born at Xaghra, Gozo in 1936. He was educated at the Gozo Lyceum and in 1955 joined the Malta Police Force, reaching the rank of Senior Inspector and retiring in 1981. His interests include Archaeology, Ornithology, Melitensia and Travel. In 1960 he founded the Xaghra Cultural Centre. Two years later with others, he founded the Malta Ornithological Society. He is now its Honorary President. Between 1959 and 1961 he collaborated with the Museum Department in field sites in Gozo. He located a Temple Period Hut at Ghajnsielem and identified two lost archaeological sites mentioned by Jean Houel in 1778, namely, the St Paul Catacomb and the Xaghra Stone Circle (both in Gozo). He was instrumental in saving the tools of the Xaghra Windmill and worked hard for it to be converted into a museum. He is a member of the British Museum Society. He has lectured on bird protection, Maltese Archaeology and on several 19th century Maltese artists in Malta and overseas. He is also a member on the Heritage Advisory Committee of the Planning Authority.

**Rev. Dr Joseph Bezzina** was born in Rabat, Gozo. He had his higher education at the University of Malta and at the Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome. He was ordained priest in Rome by Pope Paul VI in 1975. He holds three history degrees, including a first class Honours doctorate in Church History, and has also won the Pope's Award, the University's highest honour, after being placed first in the 1982 finals. He also specialized in Archivology and Library Science. He is Head of the Department of Church History, Patrology and Christian Archaeology in the Faculty of Theology of the University of Malta, as well as lecturer in Church History and allied subjects in the same Faculty, in the Faculty of Arts and at the Sacred Heart Seminary in Gozo. He is also the keeper of the Bishop's Archives, Gozo, and of the Gozo Section of the National Archives and acts as advisor on archives to the Government of Malta. He is the author of over twenty books in English, Maltese, German and French, and of several papers in scientific journals.

**Professor Anthony Bonanno** studied and graduated at the Universities of Malta and Palermo and at the Institute of Archaeology, London University. He has taught Archaeology and Classics at the University of Malta since 1971. He is now Professor of Archaeology and Head of Department of Classics and Archaeology at the same University. Between 1990 and 1992 he was also Dean of the Faculty of Arts and between 1987 and 1992 he served on the Council of the University of Malta. He has convened two international conferences. He has authored a large number of scientific papers and various publications on Roman Art and Maltese Archaeology.

**Professor Lino Briguglio** directs the Gozo Centre of the University of Malta and the Islands and Small States Institute at the Foundation for International Studies. He lectures at the University of Malta and acts as consultant on island affairs to international organisations. He studied at the University of Malta, the University of Oxford and the University of Exeter, U.K. where he obtained a doctorate in Economics. He has published a large number of scientific papers and authored several books on topics related to Economics and Island Affairs.

**Dr Albert G. Camilleri** B.A. (Hons) History, LL. D. was born in Valletta in 1934, of Gozitan parents. He was educated at St Aloysius College (1945-1951), the Royal University of Malta (1951-1958). He was called to the Bar in 1959. Dr Camilleri was chairman of the Public Service Commission (1987-1992). He was appointed chairman of the Permanent Commission against Corruption in 1993. He has a keen interest in History and has carried out original research on the History of Gozo.

**Rev. Dr Joseph Farrugia** was born in Victoria, Gozo, in 1954 and educated in Gozo. In 1978 he proceeded to Rome where he acquired two post-graduate degrees in Theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. In 1983 he joined the academic staff of the Sacred Heart Seminary in Gozo, where he still lectures in Dogmatic Theology. In 1988 he became lecturer in the Faculty of Theology at the University in Dogmatic Theology. He has participated in various international conferences and

is the author of *The Church and the Muslims*, amongst other publications. Fr. Farrugia, who is deeply involved in the promotion of Gozo's culture, is the University Gozo Centre's coordinator of the highly successful series of public lectures focusing in the History and Culture of Gozo which started in 1994.

**Professor Stanley Fiorini** is Head of the Department of Mathematics at the University of Malta. His main interest in Maltese History is the late medieval period on which he has written a number of papers and three books. He is the former president of the Malta Historical Society and editor of a number of publications of the same society.

**Mr Edwin Lanfranco** graduated in Botany from the University of London. He is a lecturer of Botany and Evolutionary Biology in the Department of Biology, Faculty of Science, University of Malta. He is actively involved in research on the floristics and vegetation, both land and marine, with particular reference to the Maltese Islands. He is also very much involved in environmental conservation work. He serves on various national and international committees and consultative bodies in relation to conservational botanical associations. Mr Lanfranco is currently involved in compiling an updated list of flora of the Maltese Islands.

**Professor Victor Mallia Milanés** BA, MA, PhD, FRHistS (Lond.) is Head of the Department of History of the University of Malta. His special research interests are Venice, the Order of St John and the Mediterranean in early modern times. His publications include *Louis XIV and France* (London: Macmillan, 1986), *The Origins of the Second World War* (London: Macmillan 1987) *Descrittione di Malta - Anno 1716: A Venetian Account* (Malta: Bugelli, 1988), *The British Colonial Experience. 1800-1964: The Impact on Maltese Society* (Malta: Mireva, 1988), *Venice and Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Aspects of a Relationship* (Malta: PEG, 1992), and *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798: Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem* (Malta: Mireva, 1993). He is the General Editor of the annual *Library of Mediterranean History*.

**Mr Franco Masini** was educated at St Aloysius College, B'Kara and the University of Malta where he read Arts graduating B.A. and obtaining the Diploma of Legal Procurator. He is Deputy to the Managing Director at Farsons. He has had an active business career of over thirty years and has had an important role in the sphere of organised business. He is a former President of the Malta International Fair (1974-76), the Federation of Industry (1983-84 and 1994-95) and the Malta Employers Association (1993-94). He sits on a number of councils and committees including the University Council. He is a director on the Board of the Bank of Valletta, the Food Chain Group and Wands Ltd. among others. Gozo born Franco Masini has been writing, broadcasting and lecturing on Gozo for the past forty years.

**Mr Pawlu Mizzi** was born in Rabat (Gozo) and educated at the Gozo Seminary and the University of Malta from where he graduated BA (Gen). He teaches History and Maltese in various public and private schools. Mr Mizzi is the author of various historical articles with special interest on Gozo. He edits *Heritage*, the popular magazine which builds up into an *Encyclopedia of Maltese Culture and Civilization*. He is a pioneer in Maltese publishing, and is the founder of Klabb Kotba Maltin and Midsea Book Ltd.

**Dr Eugene P. Montanaro** was born in Victoria, Gozo in 1947. He graduated LL.D. in 1981. He currently exercises profession of Notary Public. Dr Montanaro has published a number of studies on Maltese sculptors and painters, amongst whom Francesco Vincenzo Zahra (1984), Mariano Gerada (1986), and Pietro Paolo Azzopardi (1982). He is also the author of *The Sculptures at the Grotto of St Paul* (1990), and *Popular Statuary* (1989).

**Dr Mario Tabone** qualified M.D. from the University of Malta. He has specialised in ophthalmic surgery. He has been particularly interested in the applications of laser in his speciality. He is an Ex-president of the Medical Association of Malta, and an active member of the Malta Council

for Science and Technology. He has written several papers on the relevance of science to social development.

**Professor Joseph Vella** was born in Victoria Gozo in 1942. He is one of Malta's leading contemporary composers. He has written for a wide spectrum of musical combinations, including chamber, choral and symphonic works. Compositions of his have been performed all over Europe, the USA, and Japan. He has also commercially recorded three compact discs of his works, with the Sofia Philharmonic Orchestra. His activities as a conductor have taken him to Italy, Spain, France, Germany, Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Sofia, Tokyo and Canada. His pioneering work in the revival of old Maltese music has led to a wider knowledge and appreciation of an important part of our national heritage which, up to the late 60s was almost completely neglected. In this field he has researched, edited and performed previously unknown masterpieces by both Maltese and Italian composers, which over the years, he has presented in concerts not only in Malta, but also in Germany, France, and Spain. He has contributed articles to several local and foreign publications, and he has participated and read papers at music conferences in Malta, Italy, France, England, Turkey and Greece. Joseph Vella is an Associate Professor at the University of Malta.

**Dr George Zammit Maempel** graduated from the Royal University of Malta as a Pharmacist (1948) and later as a Doctor of Medicine and Surgery (1952). He worked as a General Practitioner in Birkirkara and later as a Field Physician with Oasis Oil Company in the Libyan Desert (1977-88). He developed a keen interest in Maltese Geology and fossils in (1945-48) and later followed a course in Engineering Geology at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (1966-68). He was awarded a UNESCO Fellowship in Museography in the Federal Republic of Germany (1969) and joined the Museum Department in charge of Geology and Palaeontology Section and of Ghar Dalam Cave and Museum (1967). He devised and actuated the Geology and Palaeontology Halls at the Natural History Museum in 1973, and was appointed Part-Time Curator in 1989. In 1988 he retired from medical practice and



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devoted himself to Palaeontological research and Curatorship. For his contributions and research in the field of Maltese Geology and Palaeontology, in 1992 he was honoured with the Award of the *Medalja ghal-Qadi tar-Republika* (M.Q.R.), a medal for the distinguished service to the Republic and in 1993, with the conferment of the Degree of Doctor of Science (Honoris Causa) from the University of Malta. Dr Zammit Maempel is member of various local and foreign scientific societies, including the Palaeontological Association, Palaeotological Society of America, Geologists Association, Geological Curator's Group, Societa Toscana di Scienze Naturali (Pisa), Society for the Natural History (UK), History of Earth Sciences Society (USA) and Member of the International Commission on the History of Geological Sciences (INHIGEO). He is the author of *An Outline of Maltese Geology* (1977), *Pioneers of Maltese Geology* (1989), *Ghar Dalam Cave and Deposits* (1989), *The Folklore of Maltese Fossils* (1989) and a number of scientific papers in refereed international journals.

## **A FOCUS ON GOZO**

This is the third volume published by the University of Malta Gozo Centre. The first two books dealt respectively with Tourism and with Culture in Gozo.

The present volume contains a selection of papers originally presented in the form of lectures during the course entitled *A Focus on Gozo*, which the Gozo Centre organised in 1994-95.

Such is Gozo's small size that one can mistakenly assume that the personality and character of the island are of little significance, and need not be studied and understood. The contents of this volume show otherwise. The title *A Focus on Gozo*, was chosen precisely because the editors felt that it is very worthwhile zooming in on a number of areas related to the island's physical and cultural development, to understand the multifaceted impacts that have shaped the island's character as we know it today.

Gozo possesses a character which is distinctly perceptible and intrinsically its own. It is a character rooted in its physical features, its geographical location and abides in the island's geology, insularity, natural territorial features and vegetation.

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