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**Book Review:**

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**CRUX INVICTA: *Il-Kurcifiss Mirakuluż***

***Ul-Kapuccini f'Għawdex***

(Malta: Midsea Books, 2020) pp. 476

ISBN 978-99932-7-752-1

This book weaves a rich tapestry of Capuchin life in the Maltese Islands around the *leit motif* of the history of the Crucifix that exists in the Order's friary in Gozo. Against the backdrop of the development of the cult of the crucifix from the earliest days of the Christian era, both in the Catholic world at large and in these islands in particular, the author delineates the vicissitudes of the Gozitan Crucifix from its manufacture in Sicily in 1683 by an as yet unidentified artist of merit, through its sojourn in Malta, whither it had been brought by the Knight Miceli, until its final resting place in the Capuchin friary of Gozo. For this last donation a debt of gratitude is owed to the zealous Gozitan de Soldanis whose efforts were crowned when it came to be deposited with the Capuchins who had freshly opened their friary a stone's throw away from the Citadel at *Forn il-Ġir*. This exposition, which one can think of as the narrative bole of the tree, spreads its branches in six chapters whose appendices, christened *excursus* by the author, heavily laden with fruit, droop pregnantly. In these *excursus* the author draws out a richness of detail about the hundred-and-one objects of interest encountered in the respective chapters. The minutest datum is supported by full documentation, as is evident from the voluminous bibliography at the end of this work of encyclopaedic proportions.

One cannot help but be impressed by the intricate weave of the narrative with life in the Gozitan milieu and the social implications one can derive therefrom. Thus, by way of illustration, one notes how an unostentatious mural decoration

inside the friary, portraying the Lord's Passion, should have Gozitan overtones encapsulated in the iconic plant of Gozo, *Għerq il-Ġeneral*. Likewise, one is struck by the unexpected resistance shown by the Franciscan Conventuals to the erection of a *Via Crucis* within the confines of the Capuchin compound on the legal pretext that the two friaries were situated within a mile of each other; on reflection, however, one should not be at all surprised in view of the endemic partisanship of Maltese and Gozitan folk. Equally telling was the corresponding reaction exhibited by "the other side" when, having finally obtained the Curia's consent for the erection of the Way of the Cross, the blessing of each station during the inaugural ceremony, was euphorically accompanied by the letting off of petards.

These are but a couple of examples, among several others, merely to whet the appetite of the reader by giving the flavour of what to expect. This book is to be recommended to all who have the history of Christianity in these islands at heart, not only to the specialist who is able to wallow in a sea of citations, but also to the average household that claims to be Maltese.

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