

## Book Review:

# Hajja u Mewt. Il-Mard u s-Saħħa f'Għawdex fi Żmien l-Arcipriet Dun Martin Camilleri 1910-1921

Mario Saliba

Gozo (2021); 346 pages

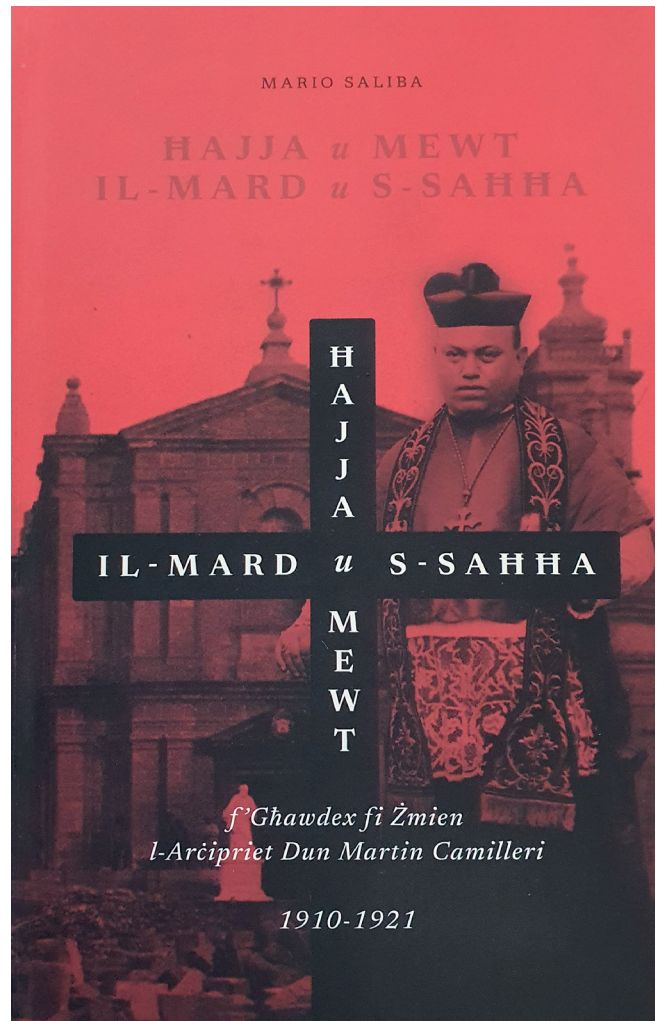
REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

*Hajja u Mewt. Il-Mard u s-Saħħa f'Għawdex fi Żmien l-Arcipriet Dun Martin Camilleri 1910-1921* is the name of a new publication by Gozitan doctor Mario Saliba. The book gives a detailed account of the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918/19 set within the broader context of the sanitary conditions and medical history of the island of Gozo during that decade. The book has just been published to commemorate the centenary of the death of Camilleri which occurred in 1921.

Mario Saliba's book is inspired by the clerical figure of Archpriest Martin Camilleri but it is no biography. Neither is it a history of the elitist establishment that may have surrounded this eminent parish priest who is considered as one of the most renowned among Nadur's pastoral leaders. On the other hand, this book provides us with a 'history from below'; in fact, Saliba presents us with the socio-economic milieu in which Camilleri's pastoral role unfolded at the end of, what was then known within the British empire as the Edwardian era.

Camilleri became parish-priest in the same year in which King Edward VII died and was succeeded by his son King George V. Although Malta was a colony of the empire, Gozo was very much Malta's backwater. If one would like to understand prima facie the notion of Gozo's double-insularity, he cannot do better than to read Saliba's work. It is in fact a masterpiece in Gozitan social history and this becomes clear as soon as one reads Dr Michael Refalo's introduction.

I get the impression that the author felt motivated to publish this work not merely due to the centenary commemoration mentioned above but also due to the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on himself as an individual as well as on the entire



Maltese community. Being a general practitioner himself and having had a lasting interest in the history of health and medication on his native island from his early days as a student of medicine, Saliba is truly the ideal person to provide us with such a meticulous study. He has written many articles about the subject and, having been a doctor for more than forty years, he is in the best position to write about the subject.

While the entire book makes for interesting reading, the sixth chapter offers a scientific

glossary of the main ailments that struck the Maltese islands throughout the ages. However, the author does not merely provide the reader with scientific information; as an able medical person, he shows us how the different diseases affected the common folk and how mortality was part and parcel of early 20th century Gozitan daily life. The title of the book encapsulates very well the contents of the publication. The style in which the book is written is attractive to the point that the reader may – with an exercise in self-control – manage to read the book in one sitting. Having said this, the great amount of empirical knowledge that features so systematically in Saliba’s book gives it such prominence that one will certainly go back to it from time to time, since to a certain

extent, this publication can almost be considered a reference book.

Dr Mario Saliba’s book is of interest to the general reader but will go down very well with students and researchers in local history. It will also attract the attention of those who have a keen interest in our nation’s medical history. As to the inhabitants of Nadur, Gozo’s most populous village, I can only say that this book should find itself on their bookshelves together with the various others who have already been written about it in the past decades. Last but not least, the book is self-published and can be obtained directly from the author (email: [mariosaliba@gmail.com](mailto:mariosaliba@gmail.com)) or from the bookshops in Gozo.

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## Book Review:

### Kannibali Demokratiċi u Drammi Oħra

Joe W. Psaila  
Gozo: BCD Printing Gozo (2021); 320 pages

**REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD**

After spending a lifetime of service in the field of education, Gozitan author Joe W. Psaila seems to have decided not to put his feet up and enjoy his retirement passively but rather dedicate his energies to a different type of work: that of writing. This is not to say that Psaila’s contribution to literature is merely synonymous with his advancing age; on the other hand, I believe that now he has more time to himself and he is spending it in writing both poetry and prose.

Kannibali Demokratiċi u Drammi Oħra is neither a purely poetical opus nor a piece of prose in the literal sense of the term. It is rather a collection of dramatic works. A dramatic work has been conventionally defined as a play for theatre, radio, or television. Psaila’s present work fits in well to this definition; his works have attracted various producers of radio programmes and

cultural events. However, beyond their utilitarian perspective, Psaila’s dramatic works are a feat sui generis. This particular collection consists of three sections. The first one bears the name of the main title of the book; the second part consists of three plays inspired by three distinct historical events while the third and last part is of a more religious nature.

The local political milieu has caught the interest of our author various times before. In fact, his latest two publications *Il-Purgatorju 360* (2014) and his *Pranzu Statali* (2018) are both clear reflections of his timely preoccupations with the local socio-political context, always set within the wider European background. Being well read in the history of political thought, philosophy and local anthropology, Psaila’s work makes for interesting reading. It will attract the attention