

Arkiivju

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Journal
of the
National Archives of Malta
and the
Friends of the National Archives of Malta



Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of *Arkivju*. This is a new publication which has two principal objectives. The first is that of bringing together research work on archives and from archives. In fact in each issue of this annual journal one will find articles which discuss and explore archives as a subject in themselves, and other academic articles which base their subject matter on what is found in the National Archives of Malta. In this way these two principal related themes will be presented in one publication. The second objective of this journal is to act as a showcase of what one can find at the National Archives of Malta – made up of its three depositories located at Rabat (head office) and Mdina in Malta and at Victoria in Gozo.

Interested future contributors thus can submit articles on archives and archival studies in general or about the National Archives of Malta or other archives in the Maltese Islands in particular. Alternatively one can submit articles which are partly sourced from the various archival resources found at the NAM. The editorial board thus invites all interested researchers to contribute to future numbers of *Arkivju*. It also augurs that readers will find *Arkivju* an interesting and valuable addition to their libraries with contributions that augment the spectrum of research already in existence.

Comm. Dr George Cassar
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The main entrance of the Head Office of the National Archives housed at the old hospital of Santo Spirito in Rabat

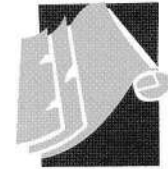
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Maltese coat-of-arms approved by the Secretary of State found in Circulars from S. of S. 1873 to 1876 (3.ix.1873) n.5

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Friends of the National Archives of Malta

The main scope for the FNAM is to take active initiatives to support the National Archives of Malta in its remit to preserve and protect the archival heritage of Malta.

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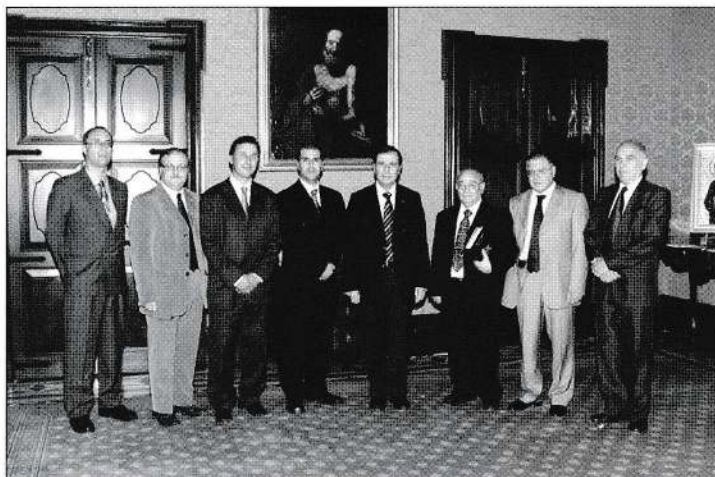
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*The FNAM committee with the
President of Malta during a courtesy
visit on 3 July 2009*

From left:

Martin Hampton, George Cassar,

Steve Borg, Noel D'Anastas,

H.E. Dr George Abela, Max Farrugia,

Gerald Bugeja, Frederick Cauchi Inglott

The National Archives of Malta: twenty years after the first legislation

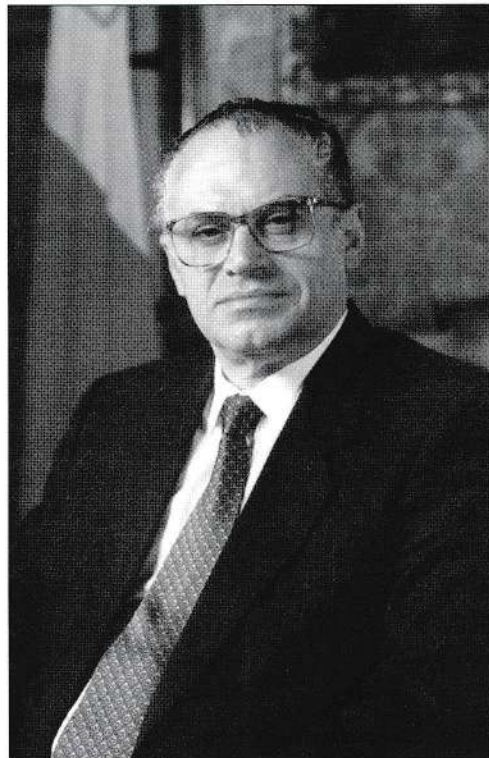
Charles J. Farrugia

Way back in 1971 the first attempts were made to set up a central government archives at Casa Leone in Santa Venera. Later the archives were moved to the Palace in Valletta, from where a dedicated service was given to the few researchers who frequented what was known as 'the Palace Archives'. In 1990, the Maltese Parliament approved the National Archives Act which established the National Archives of Malta as the main entity responsible for public archives. As time passed by the need for a new legislation was felt, especially to strengthen the records management aspect of the 1990 Act. This came about in 2005 with the National Archives Act (V, 2005). This article looks back at the last twenty years from the first national archives legislation in Malta, and highlights actions taken by the National Archives to facilitate access to its holdings. It also looks at what is being planned for the years to come.

The first National Archives Act – 1990

The National Archives of Malta was set up by an Act in Parliament piloted by the then Minister of Education and the Interior Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici. Most of the drafting of that Act was done by the Minister himself with a lot of input and consultation with the members of the Public Records Committee.¹ The Act was approved in Parliament on 23 January 1990 and received the Presidential assent on 30 January 1990.²

The Act invested the Minister of Education with the authority to determine the place or places which were to serve as National Archives. It also appointed the Librarian (a post created under the Public Libraries Ordinance of 1937) as *ex officio* Curator of the National Archives of



Dr Ugo Mifsud Bonnici, who was Minister of Education and the Interior during the drafting of the Archives Act

Malta.³ Under the Act, the Minister also had the option to appoint an Advisory Committee.

The appointment of the first Advisory Committee was made by the Minister of Education and Interior, on 1 June 1990.⁴ It was chaired by Dr Albert Ganado, with the Librarian and Curator of the National Archives, Mr John Sultana, serving as Vice-Chairman. The duties of Secretary to the Committee were assigned to Mr Joseph Caruana, at the time officer-in-charge of the National Archives.⁵

An innovation in the set up of the Committee was that the Director of Libraries and Archives was not appointed as member of this body. This was done on purpose in order to give further



*The present location of the National Archives of Malta
– the former Santo Spirito Hospital, Rabat (Malta)*

freedom to the members of the Committee to evaluate the operations of the Department. However, in order to enhance co-ordination between the Department of Libraries and Archives, the National Archives Advisory Committee and the Public Libraries Advisory Committee, a working committee was set up.⁶ This became the Joint National Library and Archives Action Committee. It was composed of the chairpersons, deputy chairpersons and secretaries of both advisory committees. This working group was expected to meet the Minister of Education every other month in the presence of the Director of Libraries and Archives.

The National Archives Act also stipulated the type of documents to be deposited in the Archives. These included the authentic texts of all the Constitutions of Malta; the debates of Parliament and its predecessor institutions; authentic texts of all laws, treaties, proclamations, ordinances; administrative documents of Ministries, Commissions, Authorities and Boards; records on various media such as maps, photos, negatives, etc; and whatsoever is acquired from outside the administration, being of the same nature of the other documents already mentioned.⁷

The law also provided for archives already regulated by a particular law, to remain

regulated under that legislation. This clause referred mainly to certain archives with a long standing tradition such as the Public Registry and the Notarial Archives.⁸

In paragraph 6, the National Archives Act legislates that documents may not be taken out of the National Archives, without the written permission of the Minister of Education. This clause did create a number of inconveniences to the Archives administration. Whenever documents were needed for exhibition purposes, a written request had to be made to the Director of Libraries and Archives. The recommendation for approval or rejection of the request was then sent, together with the request, to the Minister of Education who in turn would issue or refuse the permission. In the case of documents which are to be taken out of the National Archives for copying purposes, the permission was only granted as long as the document is always in the custody of a member of staff of the National Archives.⁹

Other preservation obligations were included in the paragraph about the duties of the curator. Under the previous act the curator was obliged to preserve and where necessary restore, catalogue and index all documents, as well as establish the manner in which the public may study the documents or make reproductions from them. These functions were actually carried out by the Head of the National Archives. The regulations for access and reprographic services are available in the reading room of the National Archives.

Limitation on access was at the discretion of the Minister of Education in the cases where the material in question may contain information which has been obtained by a public authority under an obligation of secrecy or confidentiality; contain obscene or pornographic material; contain material which might prejudice the security of the State or the personal safety of any individual.¹⁰

The last clause of the Act authorised the Minister of Education to make regulations in particular about the manner of public access, the types of reproductions from official documents, and the fees that are to be paid for any service that may be given in the National Archives.¹¹ Although the National Archives



One of the digitisation laboratories of the National Archives at the Legal Documentation section in Mdina – more than 500 volumes have already been digitised

Advisory Committee formulated rules and regulations conditioning the access to particular categories of records, these were never in any way reflected in regulations added to the Act.¹² This was one of the main reasons why the archives sector was feeling that the legislation was becoming anachronistic, even just a decade after its enactment.

The developments taking place internationally also mitigated towards a more updated legal framework. Up to the year 2000 there were no specific international directives or regulations conditioning the access to archives. The first such policy document came about in the form of a *Recommendation on the Access to Archives* by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States of the European Union.¹³

The second National Archives legislation – 2005

The 2005 legislation reformed both the administrative structure of the National Archives and the professional basis of the same institution.¹⁴ It segregated the National Archives from the libraries sector. Following the reform, the National Archives functioned as a government entity with its own legal persona, and annual budget. The professional archival aspect of the

reform included the creation of the office of the National Archivist, with responsibility for overseeing not only the National Archives, but the whole archives sector.

The functions of the National Archives as defined in article 4 of the legislation are to:

- (a) safeguard the collective memory of the Maltese nation and protect the rights of citizens through the selection, preservation and access to the archives in whatever medium to the highest of standards;
- (b) establish and maintain a register to be known as the National Register of Archives;
- (c) to monitor with powers of inspection the recordkeeping practices within public offices;
- (d) accept and acquire private records of national significance by gift, purchase, bequest or deposit;
- (e) provide leadership to Maltese archives in such areas as preservation of archival records, records management and national cooperation schemes;
- (f) promote the professional training of archivists and records managers.

In order to support the Minister responsible for the sector, the same legislation provides for the appointment of a National Archives Council. The legislation built on the tradition of the previous National Archives Advisory Committees. However, the Council has a much more specific advisory role than the previous committees. In contrast to previous committees, the law also stipulates who shall be on such a Council.¹⁵ The functions of the Council are the following:

- (a) to promote the National Archives and other record keeping entities;
- (b) to ensure and facilitate the collaboration between the different stakeholders with direct or indirect responsibility for the protection and management of the archives sector;
- (c) to advise the Minister on the management of archives in Malta;
- (d) to draw the attention of the Minister or of any organisation or person responsible for archives to any urgent action that may be considered necessary for the better management of archives and records;
- (e) to advise the Minister on any matter arising from the provisions of this Act and on any other matter referred to it by the Minister.

The law goes into detail about the structure of records management in public entities and departments and obliges heads of departments to appoint records officers. It also provides for collaborative structures in the form of a National Archives Forum, which is to be convened on a bi-annual basis. The Forum is to discuss the *Report on the State of Maltese Archives*. This is a very healthy empowering clause, as it puts the sector under scrutiny every two years. The National Archives Council published the first 'State of Archives Report' on-line on 15 October 2008.¹⁶ The same report was discussed during the first National Forum on Archives inaugurated by the Hon. Dolores Cristina, Minister of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport on 22 October 2008.

The 2005 legislation made it possible for the National Archives to function in line with

defined targets stipulated annually in its Estimates which are presented to Parliament. It also allowed for a tailor-made system of grades, promoting archival specialisation rather than library or other general training. In this context, it was possible for the staff of the archives to focus more on the core operations. The system of archival arrangement was streamlined to comply with the internationally acceptable ISAD(G) standard. Work also started on the organisation and description of the various *fonds* of the archives.¹⁷

The way forward

The last four decades have witnessed the development of the Malta national archives concept. From the initial storage room at Casa Leone in Santa Venera the National Archives has developed into a well-equipped institution. Focus during the first decades was on the buildings, shelving and equipment. The legal developments that took place in the 1990s gave a strong backbone to the institution. The next natural development was investment in the human resources. The courses which were developed at the University of Malta specifically in archives and records management bridged the gap.

The status of the National Archives registered rapid development also on an international level. This was confirmed with the appointment of the National Archivist as the Chairman of the Association of Commonwealth Archivists and Records Managers (ACARM) in 2008 for a term of four years. The salient event came about in 2009. Malta hosted the 41st International Conference of the Round Table on Archives with the theme 'Imagining the twenty first century activist: new strategies for education and training'. This event gave the opportunity to 250 archivists from 91 countries to visit Malta and learn about our archival holdings and systems. It was also a privilege to have the Universal Declaration on Archives approved in principle during the same event.¹⁸

During 2010 the National Archives worked extensively on establishing the National Register of Archives. Apart from being a legal requirement, we believe that this web-based facility will change the landscape of Maltese



The official logo of the 41st International Conference of the Round Table on Archives held in Malta in 2009

archives services. It will be a tangible measure against fragmentation, and the secretive mentality of certain archive providers. In the near future the National Archives will be

providing training to archive owners on the use of this tool which is already on-line.¹⁹

Another focus will be on recruiting more qualified staff at the National Archives. This will make it possible to focus on areas which are still weak, mainly records management in government departments and entities, and the preservation and conservation aspects of the institution.

All these changes need to be disseminated as much as possible. The National Archives intends to keep using the best methods of communication including its website and other innovative technology-based methods.²⁰ The more we manage to put records management and archival practice at the core of government, the more the chance we have to fulfil the remit entrusted to us – that of “preserving the collective memory of the Maltese nation.”

APPENDIX 1

Recommendation No. R (2000) 13 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to member States on the European policy on access to archives

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 13 July 2000 at the 717th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers, under the term of article 15.b of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Considering that the aim of the Council of Europe is to establish closer union between its members and that this aim can be pursued by common action in the cultural field;

In view of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, in particular Articles 8 and 10, and of the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to the Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108);

In view of Recommendation (81) 19 of the Committee of the Ministers to member states on access to information held by public authorities and Recommendation (91) 10 of the Committee of the Ministers to member states on the communication to third parties of personal data held by public bodies;

Considering that archives constitute an essential and irreplaceable element of culture;

Considering that they ensure the survival of human memory;

Taking account of the increasing interest of the public for history, the institutional reforms currently under way in the new democracies and the exceptional scale of changes which are taking place in the creation of documents;

Considering that a country does not become fully democratic until each one of its inhabitants has the possibility of knowing in an objective manner the elements of their history;

Taking account of the complexity of problems concerning access to archives at both national and international level due to the variety of constitutional and legal frameworks, of conflicting requirements of transparency and secrecy, of protection of privacy and access to historical information, all of which are perceived differently by public opinion in each country;

Recognising the wish of historians to study and civil society to better understand the complexity of the historical process in general, and of that of the twentieth century in particular;

Conscious that a better understanding of recent European history could contribute to the prevention of conflicts;

Considering that in view of the complexity of issues connected with the opening of archives, the adoption of a European policy on access to archives is called for, based upon common principles consistent with democratic values;

Recommends that the governments of member states take all necessary measures and steps to:

- i. adopt legislation on access to archives inspired by the principles outlined in this recommendation, or to bring existing legislation into line with the same principles;
- ii. disseminate the recommendation as widely as possible to all the bodies and persons concerned.

Explanatory note appended to Recommendation No. R (2000) 13

I. Definitions

1. For the purposes of the present recommendation:

a. the word "archives" has the following meanings:

- i. when it is written with a lower case "a": the totality of the documents regardless of date, form or medium, produced or received by any individual or corporate body during the course of their business and transmitted to the Archives for permanent preservation; unless otherwise stated, the present recommendation is only concerned with 'public archives', that is, those produced by official authorities;
- ii. when it is written with an upper case "A": the public institution charged with the preservation of archives;

b. the word "access" has the following meanings:

- i. the function attributed to Archives to make available to users the holdings they have in their custody;
- ii. the fulfilment of their function;

c. "access to archives" means the possibility of consulting archival documents in conformity with national law. This notion of access does not cover the exploitation of documents leading to derived products which shall be subject to specific agreements;

d. "user" means any person who consults the archives, with the exception of the staff working in the Archives;

e. "protected personal data" means any information relating to an identified or identifiable individual of communication to the public without risking injury to the interests of that person.

II. Legislative and regulatory texts

2. In European countries, the responsibility for setting out the general principles which govern access to archives lies with the legislature and, therefore, shall be governed by an act of parliament. Practical arrangements will be divided between acts and regulations, according to the laws of each country.

3. Acts and regulations concerning access to public archives should be co-ordinated and harmonised with the laws concerning related areas, in particular with that on access to information held by public authorities and that on protecting of data.

4. The criteria for access to public archives, defined in law, should apply to all archives throughout the entire national territory, regardless of the Archives responsible for their preservation.

III. Arrangements for access to public archives

5. Access to public archives is a right. In a political system which respects democratic values, this right should apply to all users regardless of their nationality, status or function.

6. Access to archives is part of the function of public archives services, for which, as such, fees should not to be charged.

7. The legislation should provide for:

- a. either the opening of public archives without particular restriction, or
- b. a general closure period.

7.1 Exceptions to this general rule necessary in a democratic society can, if the case arises, be provided to ensure the protection of:

- a. significant public interest worthy of protection (such as national defence, foreign policy and public order);
- b. private individuals against the release of information concerning their private lives.

7.2 All exceptions to the general closure period, whether relating to the reduction or to the extension of this period, should have a legal basis. Responsibility for any closure or disclosure lies with the agency which created the documents or with its supervisory administration, unless national legislation assigns this responsibility to a particular Archive. Any closure beyond the usual period should be for a pre-determined period, at the end of which the record in question will be open.

8. Finding aids should cover the totality of the archives and make reference, should the case arise, to those which might have been withheld from the description. Even when finding aids reveal the existence of closed documents, and as long as they do not themselves contain information protected by virtue of legislation, they shall be readily accessible so that users may request special permission for access.

9. The applicable rules should allow for the possibility of seeking special permission from the competent authority for access to documents that are not openly available. Special permission for access should be granted under the same conditions to all users who request it.

10. If the requested archive is not openly accessible for the reasons set out in article 7.1, special permission may be given for access to extracts or with partial blanking. The user shall be informed that only partial access has been granted.

11. Any refusal of access or of special permission for access shall be communicated in writing, and the person making the request shall have the opportunity to appeal against a negative decision, and in the last resort to a court of law.

IV. Access to private archives

12. Wherever possible, *mutatis mutandis*, attempts should be made to bring arrangements for access to private archives in line with those for public archives.

APPENDIX 2

The *fonds* identified so far and available for research at the three National Archives repositories

	Code	Title of fonds	Start date	End date	Repository where it can be accessed
1	ABP	Amministrazione dei Beni Pubblici	1784	1976	Head Office, Rabat
2	ACA	Supremae Appellationis Curiae et Tribunal Publicae Audentiae	1531	1777	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
3	AG	National Archives (Gozo Section)	1999	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
4	AGR	Agriculture	1915	1956	Head Office, Rabat
5	APV	Appellationem Coram Probo Viro	1744	1797	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
6	ARP	Air Raid Precautions and other Wartime Correspondence	1934	1945	Head Office, Rabat
7	CA	Civil Abattoir	1891	1986	Gozo Section, Gozo
8	CAE	Camera Computorum Communis Aerarii	1552	1796	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina

9	CAN	Curiae Episcopalis et Provicarialis Notabilis Civitatis	1587	1824	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
10	CC	Civic Council	1959	1973	Gozo Section, Gozo
11	CCA	Curiae Capitanalis	1538	1814	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
12	CCP	Corradino Civil Prisons	1851	1988	Head Office, Rabat
13	CCR	Gran Corte Criminale	1814	1899	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
14	CDA	Corte d'Appello	1814	1899	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
15	CDC	Corte del Commercio	1814	1899	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
16	CDE	Civil Defence	1944	1972	Head Office, Rabat
17	CDM	Consolato del Mare	1697	1814	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
18	CG	Curia Gubernatoriali (Courts of Law)	1609	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
19	CGU	Corte Governatoriale	1800	1814	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
20	CI	Charitable Institutions	1859	1947	Gozo Section, Gozo
21	CIN	Charitable Institutions	1816	1956	Head Office, Rabat
22	CLV	Tribunale Civile della Gran Corte della Valletta	1800	1814	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
23	CP	Circulars and Posters	1814	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
24	CPA	Corte Civile: Prima Aula	1814	1899	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
25	CSA	Corte Civile Seconda Aula	1814	1899	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
26	CSG	Chief Secretary to Government	1813	1921	Head Office, Rabat
27	CUS	Customs Department	1724	*	Head Office, Rabat
28	DF	Documentaries and Films	1988	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
29	EDU	Education	1922	*	Head Office, Rabat
30	EGA	Epoca Gallica	1798	1800	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
31	GB	Malta Government Savings Bank	1853	1978	Gozo Section, Gozo
32	GL	Gurdan Lighthouse	1877	1981	Gozo Section, Gozo
33	GMR	General and Miscellaneous Reports	1800	*	Head Office, Rabat
34	GOV	Despatches	1800	1940s	Head Office, Rabat
35	HI	Hospitals and other Institutions	1841	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
36	HOM	Head of Ministry	1921	1934	Head Office, Rabat
37	IR	Inland Revenue	1903	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
38	LC	Local Councils	1993	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
39	LEM	Department of Labour and Emigration	1948	1989	Head Office, Rabat
40	MCC	Magna Curia Castellaniae	1543	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
41	MG	Ministry for Gozo	1987	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
42	MH	Medical and Health Department	1875	1970	Gozo Section, Gozo
43	MIL	Maltese Personnel in the British Forces	1800	1970	Head Office, Rabat
44	LGA	London Gazette	1816	1948	Head Office, Rabat
45	MP	Monte di Pietà	1817	1979	Gozo Section, Gozo

46	NDX	Indexes of the Above Tribunals	c. 1530	*	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
47	OAB	Officium Auditorum pro Alienatione Bonorum	1783	1797	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
48	OBC	Officium Bullæ Sanctissimæ Crociatae	1744	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
49	OCD	Officium Causarum Delegatorum	1540	1813	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
50	ODD	Officium Causarum Delegatorum et Domorum	1672	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
51	ODM	Officium Commissariorum Domorum	1555	1798	Vide supra Officium Causarum Delegatorum Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
52	OJN	Officium D.D. Juratorum Notabilis Civitatis	1559	1811	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
53	OMB	Officium Syndicatus Congregationis Munium et Belli	1646	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
54	OMS	Officium Magistralis Secretiæ	1604	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
55	OPM	Office of the Prime Minister Files	1947	*	Head Office, Rabat
56	OPU	Official Publications	1813	*	Head Office, Rabat
57	OSI	Officium Civile Sacræ Inquisitionis	1605	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
58	OSO	Officium Syndicatus Officialium	1597	1715	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
59	OVS	Officium Venerandæ Seniscalliæ	1604	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
60	PA	Photographs. Albums	1945	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
61	PD	Police Departments	1889	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
62	PDE	Private Deposit No. 1-Maritime Insurance of Biagio Tagliaferro	1853	1868	Head Office, Rabat
63	PM	Plans and maps	1860	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
64	POL	Police Records	1900	*	Head Office, Rabat
65	PST	Public Secretary and Treasurer	1800	1813	Head Office, Rabat
66	PW	Public Works	1840	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
67	PWD	Land Revenue and Public Works Department	1814	1921	Head Office, Rabat
68	SAU	Sacra Audentia	1538	1788	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
69	SCA	Suprema Corte D'Appello	1803	1814	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
70	SG	Secretariat to the Government	1803	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
71	SJM	Supremum Justitiæ Magistratum	1777	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
72	SN	Street Naming	1987	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
73	SS	State Schools	1845	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
74	ST	Statistics	1667	*	Gozo Section, Gozo
75	TAR	Tribunal Armamentorum	1602	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
76	TBP	Tribunale per l'Amministrazione dei Beni Pubblici	1800	1814	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina

77	TDR	Tribunal Debitorum Religiosorum	1776	1798	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
78	TSJ	Tribunal Segnaturæ Justitiæ	1799	1800	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
79	TSP	Tribunal Fabricæ Sancti Petri de Urbe	1625	1716	Legal Documentation Section, Mdina
80	UG	Universitas Gaudisii	1560	1819	Gozo Section, Gozo
81	ZM	Miscellanea	1575	*	Gozo Section, Gozo

Notes: * Denotes that further material is being added spanning the date further. Access is still limited under the 30 year rule.

APPENDIX 3

The Universal Declaration on Archives as agreed in principle in Malta in 2009

Archives record decisions, actions and memories. Archives are a unique and irreplaceable heritage passed from one generation to another. Archives are managed from creation to preserve their value and meaning. They are authoritative sources of information underpinning accountable and transparent administrative actions. They play an essential role in the development of societies by safeguarding and contributing to individual and community memory. Open access to archives enriches our knowledge of human society, promotes democracy, protects citizens' rights and enhances the quality of life.

To this effect, we recognize

- the unique quality of archives as authentic evidence of administrative, cultural and intellectual activities and as a reflection of the evolution of societies;
- the vital necessity of archives for supporting business efficiency, accountability and transparency, for protecting citizens rights, for establishing individual and collective memory, for understanding the past, and for documenting the present to guide future actions;
- the diversity of archives in recording every area of human activity;
- the multiplicity of formats in which archives are created including paper, electronic, audio visual and other types;
- the role of archivists as trained professionals with initial and continuing education, serving their societies by supporting the creation of records and by selecting, maintaining and making these records available for use;
- the collective responsibility of all - citizens, public administrators and decision-makers, owners or holders of public or private archives, and archivists and other information specialists - in the management of archives.

We therefore undertake to work together in order that

- appropriate national archival policies and laws are adopted and enforced;
- the management of archives is valued and carried out competently by all bodies, private or public, which create and use archives in the course of conducting their business;
- adequate resources are allocated to support the proper management of archives; (including the employment of trained professionals);²¹
- archives are managed and preserved in ways that ensure their authenticity, reliability, integrity and usability;
- archives are made accessible to everyone, while respecting the pertinent laws and the rights of individuals, creators, owners and users;
- archives are used to contribute to the promotion of responsible citizenship.

International Council on Archives (ICA) General Assembly
La Valette, Malta,
November 2009

Notes and references

- 1 The Public Records Committee held its first meeting at the National Library in Valletta on 7 February, 1986. It was chaired by the Librarian Mr John Sultana and its members were Mr Ġużè Cassar Pullicino, Mr Michael Ellul and Mr Ernest Mallia. Mr Joseph Caruana acted as secretary. This Committee was replaced by the National Archives Advisory Committee in 1990.
- 2 *Malta Government Gazette*, no. 15,2333 (30.i.1990).

- 3 Malta's Public Libraries Ordinance was passed in 1937 and amended in 1955, 1962, 1963, 1965, 1966, 1976, and 1983. Section 4 of the Ordinance states that "...all libraries to which this Ordinance applies shall be under the direction of an officer to be styled Librarian, who shall also be the keeper of manuscripts and public records conserved in such libraries."
- 4 Ministry of Education files, ME 114/78/44 (1.vi.1990). In 1990 the ministerial duties for education and the interior were joined within one ministerial office.
- 5 The other members of the committee were: Maj Albert Abela, Dr Maurice Agius Vadalà, Dr Joseph Bezzina, Mr Ġużè Cassar Pullicino, Mr Michael Ellul, Dr Stanley Fiorini, Mr Charles Galea Scannura, and Mr Patrick Staines.
- 6 Ministry of Education, ME114/78/100. Minutes of the meeting of the Joint National Library and Archives Action Committee (12.v.2000).
- 7 National Archives Act, Malta, 1990, Section 4, paragraph 1.
- 8 The Public Registry was originally regulated by Act XII of 1927 and other subsequent amendments in it. It is under the charge of the Director of the Public Registry and offers its services to the public from its main office in Valletta. The Notarial Archives is regulated under Act No. XI of 1927. Its head is the Chief Notary to Government and its main offices are in Mikiel Anton Vassalli Street, Valletta.
- 9 This is often the case when it comes to reproduction of large maps or drawings of the Ordnance Department for which on-site facilities are not available at the National Archives.
- 10 National Archives Act, Malta, 1990, Section 4, paragraph 2.
- 11 Ibid., paragraph 10.
- 12 On 30 May 1994, a sub-committee of the National Archives Advisory Committee submitted guidelines to regulate access to personnel ex-servicemen records. The sub-committee was made up of Dr Maurice Agius Vadalà, Mr Michael Ellul, Maj A. E. Abela and Mr Joseph Caruana.
- 13 Full text in Appendix 1.
- 14 <http://www.gov.mt/frame.asp?l=1&url=http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/lom.aspx?pageid=27&mode=chrono> (accessed on 27 Sept 2010).
- 15 Membership on the National Archives Council consists of: (a) a Chairperson; (b) the Superintendent of Cultural Heritage *ex officio* or his representative; (c) the Chairperson of Heritage Malta *ex officio* or his representative; (d) the National Librarian *ex officio* or his representative; (e) the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister *ex officio* or his representative; (f) a person to represent the non-governmental archives or records centres; (g) three other persons chosen from amongst persons known to be users of and familiar with archives, records management and information professions, or working in non-governmental organizations dedicated to information and archives, one of whom shall be appointed by the Minister responsible for Gozo.
- 16 http://www.education.gov.mt/ministry/doc/pdf/national_archives/archives_report_2008.pdf (accessed on 27 Sept 2010).
- 17 The list of *fonds* identified till now is published in Appendix 2.
- 18 The text of the Declaration is reproduced in Appendix 3.
- 19 https://secure2.gov.mt/nationalarchives/nationalregisterofarchives.aspx?page_info_id=5 (accessed on 27 Sept 2010).
- 20 Amongst these tools the National Archives is using Facebook to communicate with the public. <http://www.facebook.com/home.php?#!/pages/Rabat-Malta/The-National-Archives-of-Malta/113051358723786?ref=ts> (accessed on 27 Sept 2010).
- 21 Following an objection from South Africa the resolution was not finally endorsed and was re-discussed during the ICA Annual General Meeting in Oslo, Norway on 17 September 2010, where it was approved. The only words added to the Malta Declaration were those reproduced here in brackets.

Charles J. Farrugia is Malta's National Archivist. A Commonwealth Scholar, Mr Farrugia holds an Honours Degree and a Masters Degree in history from the University of Malta, a Post Graduate Diploma in Records Management from the University of Northumbria at Newcastle, and a Masters in Archives and Records Management from University College London, U.K. Mr Farrugia was council member of the Malta Library Association for a number of years and is a founding member of the Friends of the National Archives of Malta and of the Maltese National Committee of the International Council of Museums (ICOM - Malta). He is also a member of the Society of Archivists of the U.K. Charles Farrugia has authored two books on Maltese local history, one of which has been awarded the prize by the Ministry of Education for the best researched book published in Malta during 1998. In 2006 he published the history of Maltese archives and in 2008 edited a collection of 27 essays on archival themes. Mr Farrugia represents Malta on the European Archives Expert Group and the Working Group on the Digitisation of Cultural and Scientific Heritage. He lectures in the course leading to a Diploma in Archives and Records Management at the University of Malta, and was also the host and organiser of the 41st International Conference of the Round Table on Archives which was held in Malta in 2009.

Celebrating 10 years of collaboration on archival education in schools

For the last 10 years the National Archives has collaborated with Ms Evelyn Pullicino in organising outreach events.

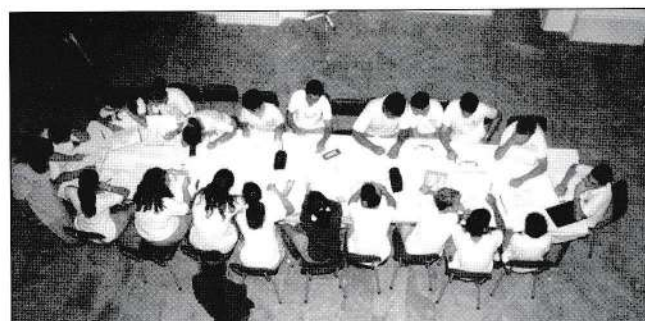
Herself a keen researcher and graduate in history, Ms Pullicino has shown great enthusiasm and dedication in her attempts to make students love archival work, and the thrill of first hand contact with the original documents. She brought over her first groups when she was a teacher at San Anton School, at a time also when the Friends of the National Archives were coordinating sponsorship for the digitisation of documents. She also encouraged the San Anton School to make a donation for the said project.

All visits were well-planned in advance, and Ms Pullicino spent several hours in our reading rooms identifying the right mix of original sources and logistical plans in order to make the visits a worthwhile experience. On these occasions she collaborated with our staff to create work books for the visits.

On moving over to the Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary, Ms Pullicino intensified her outreach support. We started involving the students in practicum work at the archives, and also issue a certificate for that experience. The staff of the National Archives thanks Ms Pullicino for the support she has given throughout the last ten years, and also the schools which have also supported her and the Archives in bringing the young to appreciate the wealth of archival sources we have in our repositories.



Ms Evelyn Pullicino addressing her students during one of the educational tours at the NAM in Rabat



One of the first groups brought over by Ms Pullicino working at the main chapel of the Archives on the first work books she produced



One of the groups of students from the Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School during the presentation of certificates following their practicum at the archives – from left also: the Head of School Ms Pauline Miceli (fourth), Magistrate Joseph Cassar, President of the Archives Council (fifth), Mr Charles J. Farrugia, National Archivist (sixth), and Ms Evelyn Pullicino (ninth)

Outreach at the National Archives of Malta

Cecily Rizzo

"Effective outreach is more than an event or a series of activities. It is the process of assessing and developing institutional capacity to meet the needs of under served audiences."¹

The Society of American Archivists defines outreach as a process involving the identification and the provision of services to "constituencies with needs relevant to the repository's mission, especially under served groups, and tailoring services to meet those needs".² Reaching out to various sectors of the public is a proactive approach adopted by archives to promote their collections and to ensure that they do not simply serve as storehouses for records. Outreach programmes help in raising awareness about archives and the rich heritage that waits to be explored.

Archives, especially National Archives, have the duty not only to preserve records for future generations but to make their collections accessible. To this effect, the National Archives of Malta proclaims in its Mission Statement that its mission "is to preserve the collective memory of the Maltese nation through the protection and accessibility of all public archives regulated by the Archives Act".³ Opening up archives and offering access to archival documents give scope to the acquisition and preservation of the documented history of the people and the nation. Yet in today's knowledge-based competitive world, just making the collection physically or virtually available is not enough. Archives cannot afford to sit back and await researchers to come to them, but need to devise various ways to attract users. Reaching out has become an indispensable core function similar to marketing practices adopted by the business sector. This is in accordance with what today's Malta National Archivist had stated way back

in 2004 when he said that the current viewpoint is that outreach in archives is not a subsidiary occupation for the archivist but a duty.⁴

Outreach activities can take various forms, including the holding of exhibitions, lectures and workshops, promotion through publications, online access over the internet as well as the organisation of open days and educational programs. This paper focuses on an outreach educational activity at the National Archives of Malta that was designed and implemented for a particular user group, in line with the above-mentioned statement by the Society of American Archivists. The following exposition covers the preparation and planning stage, the actual activity, an analysis of the outcome and some conclusions for the future.

Planning and preparation

The objective of the proposed activity was to introduce archival services and resources to secondary school students in an experiential and hands-on manner that went beyond a simple school visit. The whole idea was to expose young history students, who are not usually allowed to carry out research at archives, to primary sources. This project was to be based on the proposal put forward by Vella that students' visits to historical sites should go beyond "passive looking and listening or sightseeing"⁵ and the view expressed by Anderson and Moore, of elevating a field study trip from just a "nice day out" to a "historical experience".⁶

Furthermore, the outreach activity was to serve a dual role; namely that of introducing students to archives and that of making available primary sources for the teaching of history. This meant reaching out not only to young students

who might be visiting the archives for the very first, and perhaps the only time, in their lives, but also to any accompanying teachers who would be able to experience the didactic benefits of making use of primary sources in the teaching of history. Thus, besides promoting the archive, this outreach exercise would be an opportunity for potential growth in the number of patrons and an investment in prospective researchers.

Once the target group was identified, the next step in the planning process involved that of conducting a survey of resources and facilities available at the National Archives. This survey was necessary to determine logistics and to select suitable documents on which to base activities. An analysis of the premises revealed that there was ample space where both individual and group work could be held. As regards choice of material, various factors had to be taken into consideration. These included ensuring that the documents selected were in a language that the students would be able to understand and that the material was legible, comprehensible and of interest to them. Moreover, as it is imperative that preservation always takes precedence over access, any documents that were to be selected had to be in a good state and could be reproduced. Finally, another determining factor was diversity since it was deemed important

to widen, as much as possible in the short time available, the students' exposure to primary sources.

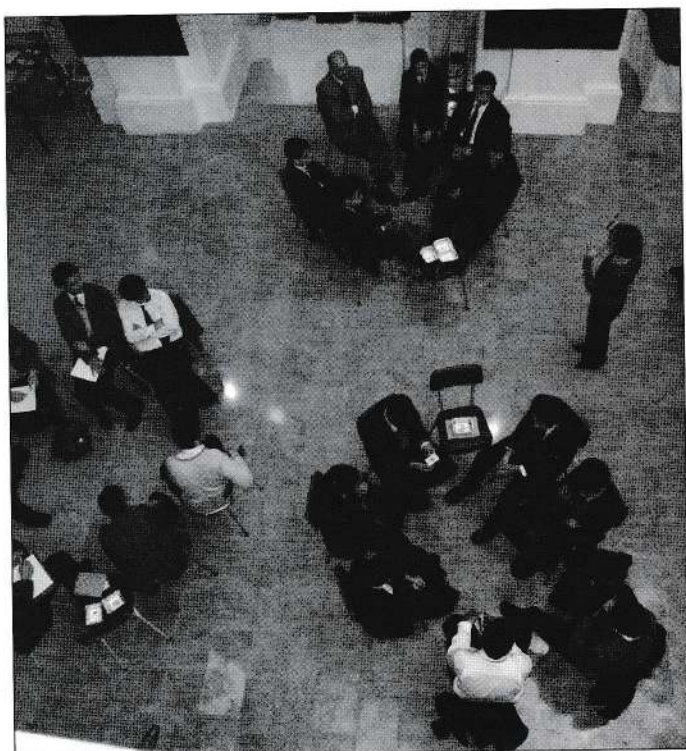
It is perhaps relevant at this stage to broadly explain the importance of the use of primary sources in the teaching of history and consequently further justify the reason behind this approach as an outreach exercise. Teaching history using primary sources emphasizes the distinction between "history" and the "past". As Vella explains, the past is what actually happened while history is just the interpretation of this past; in other words, history is an "intellectual debate".⁷ For years, history was presented to students as a series of established and irrefutable facts. According to Osborne, textbooks were "written at several removes from the sources" and history was reduced to a "memory subject".⁸ This traditional view of teaching history eventually began to be challenged and the concept of New History began to take root. This scenario and the increase in awareness about the benefits of *doing* history with students formed the setting for this outreach exercise. Added to this was the strong belief in the emotional experience of holding the past in one's hands since such an encounter can do much to diminish the feeling of history being a dead or dull subject. As Aris notes, "effective history teaching... must bring pupils in contact with primary evidence".⁹

In this light, five records were identified and chosen as having potential for the teaching of history to the targeted group. These documents varied in structure and content as well as in the type of finding aids used to trace them. They were:

- 1 A printed extract from a published Colonial Annual Report on Malta 1911-12 which included a table of statistics on the state of health in Malta at the time;

- 2 A handwritten letter dated 1842 by the Secretary of State for the Colonial and War Departments in reply to a petition on the dockyard in Cospicua;

- 3 A handwritten letter dated 1902 on the Language Question in Malta addressed to the Lieutenant Governor and Chief Secretary;



The author of this article explaining to students the details on how the hands-on workshop will function

4 A photo taken in 1912 showing Porte des Bombes; and

5 A photo portraying a street in Valletta decorated for the Royal Visit in 1912.

Following the selection of the documents, the whole programme of activities could be finalised. This programme had to reflect the dual objectives of the exercise. It was therefore decided to structure activities based on an introduction to archival education and on teaching history using primary sources. The choice of activities, just like the selection of primary sources, required careful planning. Various aspects had to be taken into account, including the question of mixed abilities and different learning styles. Thus activities were designed to vary from whole group sessions to individual tasks and to work in small groups. The programme was also planned in such a way as to ensure there was time for students to talk and share ideas with their peers, to ask questions and to learn on an individual basis and through group work. Keeping in mind the importance of giving students an experiential hands-on opportunity, the goals set for all activities were those of attracting students' attention, getting them to participate and motivating them to learn.

The finalised programme was broadly as follows:

Welcome address and introduction to the National Archives

Part I

Exercise A: ice breaking exercise focusing on archival education

Exercise B: reading room exercise and introduction to finding aids

Break

Part II

Group work sessions using documents and photos

Evaluation

Tour around the National Archives

End of programme

The final steps in the preparatory stage involved inviting schools to participate in the activity, setting a date and times for the



Students under the guidance of Mr Tony Camenzuli filling out answers to questions related to original documents at the reading room of the National Archives

implementation of the programme, drawing up lists of special requirements, such as flip chart, pencils, etc., printing of handouts and any other ancillary organisational work.

Implementation

The outreach event was held as scheduled. The whole group consisted of 18 students coming from two different schools and three accompanying teachers.

Participants were welcomed as a whole group and given a brief presentation about the National Archives, including its history, its role as custodian of the nation's documented memory and the archival collection. This was followed by a brief introduction to the unique nature of primary sources and the archive's concerns involving preservation and access. The time allocated to these introductory talks was kept brief as much as possible. The students were then invited to form themselves into three groups to create a more relaxed atmosphere in which they would be able to speak up and discuss among peers. The ice-breaking exercise further helped to put the students at ease and get them involved as early as possible in the day, while serving as a means of obtaining feedback on the students' perception and knowledge of archives.

The five resources used in the exercise

1

MALTA, 1911-12.

21

The general state of health of the Island during the year was satisfactory except for an extensive epidemic of measles and some cases of cholera.

The following table shows the number of cases of infectious diseases reported, and the number of deaths from each disease, including cases and deaths in the Fleet and Garrison, during the past two years:—

	1910-11.		1911-12.	
	No. of cases.	No. of deaths.	No. of cases.	No. of deaths.
Asiatic cholera	—	—	116	85
Chicken-pox	189	—	190	—
Diphtheria	64	12	38	9
Enteric fever	127	28	248	59
Erysipelas	90	9	68	4
Puerperal fever	17	6	17	11
Influenza	620	9	75	5
Malarial fever	8	—	9	1
Measles	15	—	2,891	144
Mediterranean fever	300	35	277	26
Scarlet fever	13	—	42	—
Small-pox	43	4	7	2
Tubercular phthisis	244	167	228	155
Whooping cough	260	8	38	1
Total	1,990	278	4,244	500

Of the seven small-pox cases, two were landed from ships. The usual preventive measures were successful in checking the spread of the infection.

There was an increase in the number of enteric cases, which were scattered over a considerable part of the Island. The distribution of the cases in time and locality excludes all suspicions of contamination of the public water supply.

There was a considerable epidemic of measles which is mainly responsible for the increase in the infantile death-rate.

Cholera infection was conveyed with the immigration of some 2,000 refugees from Tripoli and Cyrenaica. The outbreak was of a very short duration and very limited in extent. The preventive measures taken were successful in stamping out the disease.

Mediterranean fever still shows a decrease among the civil population, and has practically ceased altogether in the Fleet and Garrison.

During the year, 15,341 goats and sheep were inspected by the Sanitary Authorities; 386 were found infected and destroyed.

The number of vaccinations performed by district medical officers in Malta and Gozo was 4,923, of which 4,762 were successful.

The death-rate amongst children under 12 months was 267.21 per 1,000 births, as against 236.93 in the previous year. There

1 A printed extract from a published Colonial Annual Report on Malta 1911-12 which includes a table of statistics on the state of health in Malta at the time (source: NAM/GMR/604)

2 A handwritten letter dated 1842 by the Secretary of State for the Colonial and War Departments Lord Stanley to Governor of Malta Sir H. F. Bouvarie in reply to a petition on the dockyard in Cospicua (source: NAM/GOV/2/1/38)

3 A handwritten letter dated 1902 on the Language Question in Malta addressed to the Lieutenant Governor and Chief Secretary (source: NAM/CSG/02 - 6111/1902)

2

1842
Cospicua
2 March 1842

Sir

I have the honour to acknowledge the receipt of your despatch No. 14 of the 11 of January last, with the Petition therein enclosed, that the inhabitants of Cospicua have addressed to the Lieutenant Governor, praying that his Majesty's orders should be taken from the circumstances which they conceive will result to them from the proposed restriction

H. F. Bouvarie L.G.

3

Valetta, 20th September, 1902.

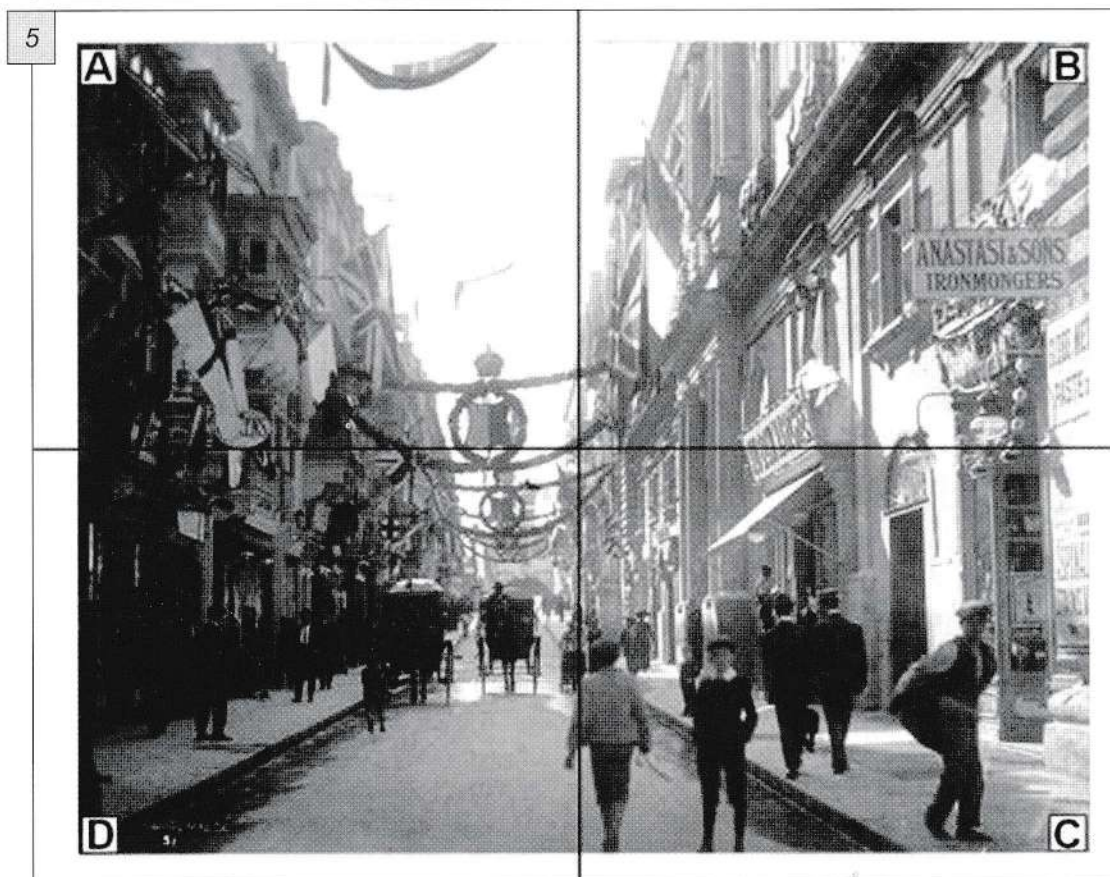
The Honourable
E. de Meriville Esq.
Lieutenant Governor
and Chief Secretary to Govt.
Malta.

Sir,

Having invariably taken a great interest in the cause of Education, but not in Politics, I beg most respectfully to offer my individual opinion on the Language Question in Malta, in the hope that you will be good enough to give to my suggestions your favourable consideration and be pleased eventually to act upon them if they should meet with your approval. I shall thereby have the satisfaction of having contributed in some way towards the solution of a much owned question and of seeing the studies in Malta prospected with as much care to the benefit of our growing youth.

I have already on previous occasions given publication to my ideas on the subject in a pamphlet, the purport of which may be recapitulated in the following:—

The Maltese language, spoken



4 A photo taken in 1912 showing *Porte des Bombes* (source: NAM/PHO 1709/1912)

5 A photo portraying a street in Valletta decorated for the Royal Visit in 1912 (source: NAM/PHO 1720/1912)

The ice-breaking exercise consisted of handing out pictures which the students had to identify as relating to one of three categories: (a) archives, (b) library and (c) archives and library. The pictures were to be placed into three separate containers provided for the purpose. Once all the pictures were posted, a short discussion ensued, first in small groups and then in the large group, with emphasis placed on archival education. The approach adopted was to get students talking about a known environment, namely their library experiences and then guiding them to the relatively unknown world of archives. This was done by first highlighting differences between the two entities, such as borrowing books as opposed to doing research and the library classification system as opposed to archival arrangements. These contrasts led to a short explanation on the basic archival principles of order and provenance and the importance of finding aids.

This session was followed by a visit to the reading room where students worked individually through a set of questions, using their sense of observation and their analytical skills. The idea was to help students note and appreciate the practical measures taken to minimise risks for the collection when handled by users in the reading room. During this session, participants were asked to sign the attendance register and sit at desks, going through a researcher's experience. They were also shown different finding aids and how primary sources that they would be working on were traced; namely using index cards, an electronic catalogue, a printed catalogue, an original index and a compact disc on which digital images are stored.

The programme continued with a short break, bringing the first part of the archival experience to an end. The break also served as an occasion to mingle with participants and get some feedback in an informal atmosphere. Once reassembled, students were shown the selected original documents that had been placed on display. They were then asked to reform into small groups and given surrogates of historical records together with any relevant transcripts and sets of questions aimed at stimulating peer discussion. Each group was given ample time to comment on all three documents as well as the two photos. The teachers present kept a

low key throughout the discussion. The session was concluded with a brief summing up and an exchange of views on the exercises held in the second part of the day's programme. This was followed by an evaluation of the whole event. A questionnaire was also distributed and duly filled in by participants.

A behind-the-scenes tour of the National Archives brought the whole programme to a close. This activity was deliberately held at this stage as it was felt that the students would be in a better position to appreciate the way this institution fulfils its role as custodian of the nation's documented history. In other words they could visually see the result of such archival work as cleaning, boxing, labelling, arrangement and storage, that goes behind the efficient and effective service offered and that depends on a professionally organised archive.

Evaluation

(a) Students' perspective:

The overall feeling expressed by students at the end of the day's activities was quite positive and encouraging. In fact when asked to describe the visit in one word, the majority (10) said "interesting". There was only one negative response; this said "(sorry) boring". Chart 1 gives a graphic representation of the students' answers.

Asked to state which was the preferred activity, the majority (12) opted for the group discussions using archival documents and photos. The behind-the-scenes tour was not included in the evaluation form. The responses to this question are being reproduced in Chart 2.

Questioned about the time factor, nearly all the respondents stated that enough time was allotted for the three main activities mentioned above. However, one student felt more time was needed for the introductory session while three others wished they had more time during the reading room visit. One of the students claimed there was not enough time for the group exercise.

Finally, asked whether they would like to change or include something in the programme, ten students did not have anything to add but

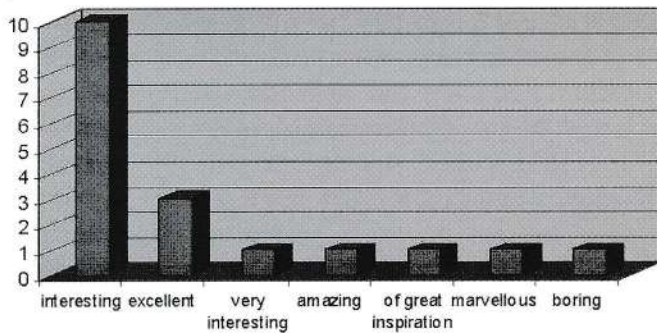


Chart 1 – Students' description of the visit

the rest expressed some interesting comments. Two said they would like more information on the care and restoration of manuscripts, another two said they would have liked to carry out some research, while another three wished they had more time to view primary sources. Moreover, one student said that it would be interesting to get a chance to see past photos about one's town or village. It is perhaps worth noting that all of the students said that this was the first time that they had visited the National Archives.

(b) Teachers' perspective

Feedback from the history teachers who attended the programme was also positive. Conversing with them during the course of the day, they conveyed reassuring remarks, with one of them saying that the occasion provided him with foundations on which he could build further. This teacher also declared that he had never tried using primary sources with students but that after this experience, he would be willing to consider it. This comment highlights the benefit of giving teachers an opportunity to experience the National Archives' resources. Feedback from the teachers included a suggestion to demonstrate microfilming and digitization to students and another to expose students to other primary sources not necessarily from the National Archives collection.

Conclusion

It is widely acknowledged that advances in technology, coupled with the abundance of existing information and easier retrieval methods, have changed the world in which archives and other information providers operate. The electronic world however is not the only factor that is affecting archives. A certain element of self-sufficiency and a self-service supermarket mentality seem to be

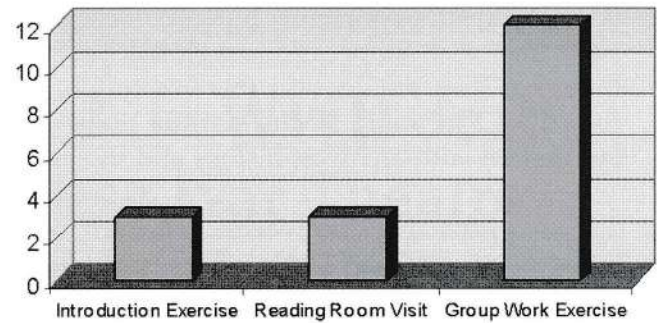


Chart 2 – Students' favourite activity

pervading the knowledge-based industry. At the same time, one also finds a growing thirst for information and an increase in cultural awareness along with a rise in consumer consciousness, resulting in more demanding customers. Archives cannot be immune to any of these tendencies and should be prepared to tackle such challenges.

In this environment, archives need to accentuate their relevance not simply as custodians of historical records but also as suppliers of information. Years ago, Blais and Enns commented on "the most disturbing findings" of a study in the United States in the late 1980s which had revealed that a high proportion of scholarly work was being carried out without consulting primary sources.¹⁰ One dares not think what the situation is today when access to secondary sources has become so much easier. From an archives point of view, these findings also raise concern regarding the underutilisation of archival resources. It therefore becomes imperative that archives try to be proactive and to reach out to as wide an audience as possible. However, as Blais and Enns argue, "It is not enough to know that there may be pertinent or interesting information in archives; a user must learn how to retrieve that information".¹¹ Archival education thus becomes an important function that archives should embrace if they want awareness to lead to use.

It is in this respect that this outreach experience has attempted to demonstrate how the National Archives of Malta can fulfil its role as educator by designing a programme that is tailor-made for students and by exposing young persons to primary sources. The project has also shown how the National Archives' collection can be used for the teaching of history without endangering the priceless resources. Opening up archives to young users under supervision

is definitely an opportunity and an investment. For some, such an occasion might be the only time that they would visit this institution but for others this might be the starting point of a fascination with archives, history and research.

This proactive outreach approach can become an effective tool in the promotion of the National Archives and its collection, guaranteeing a future for the archives and the spread of education and culture among upcoming generations. As Ericson insists, "Outreach should be treated as a basic archival function".¹² T.I. Ericson, a former President of the Society of American Archivists, further advocates that outreach

a. should be part of an archive's normal work, not treated as an added responsibility;

- b. should be ongoing and not just a series of haphazard short-term projects;
- c. should be balanced with other activities;
- d. must be integrated with other activities and not undertaken in isolation.¹³

It is moreover worth reiterating his claim that it is outreach that ensures that the historical documents preserved at archives are used. Echoing his assertion: "The goal is use... Identification, acquisition, description and all the rest are simply the means we use to achieve this goal. They are tools. We may employ all these tools skilfully; but if, after we brilliantly and meticulously appraise, arrange, describe and converse our records, nobody comes to use them, then we have wasted our time."¹⁴

Notes and references

- 1 Society of American Archivists, *Glossary - outreach* from <http://www2.archivists.org/glossary/terms/o/outreach> (retrieved on 19 Sept 2010).
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 National Archives of Malta, *Mission statement*, from https://secure2.gov.mt/nationalarchives/Default.aspx?page_info_id=93 (retrieved on 19 Sept 2010).
- 4 C.J. Farrugia, 'A vision for the National Archives', *The Sunday Times of Malta* (10.x.2004), 38-9.
- 5 Y. Vella, 'Creating on site history activities for school children; an action research project', *Journal of Maltese education research*, 3/2 (2005), 23.
- 6 C. Andersen & A. Moore, 'Making history happen outside the classroom', in H. Bourdillon (ed.), *Teaching history* (London, UK, 1994), 202.
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- 8 K. Osborne, 'Voices from the past: primary sources: a new old method of teaching history', *Canadian Social Studies*, 37/2 (2003), from http://www.quasar.ualberta.ca/css/Css_37_2/CLvoices_from_the_past.htm (retrieved on 20 Sept 2010).
- 9 M. Aris, 'Resources for teacher-designed units: some general guidelines', in R. Brooks, M. Aris & I. Perry, *The effective teaching of history* (London, UK, 1993), 98.
- 10 G. Blais & D. Enns, 'From paper archives to people archives: public programming in the management of archives', *Archivaria*, 31 (Winter 1990-91), 108.
- 11 Ibid., 106.
- 12 T.L. Ericson, 'Preoccupied with our own gardens: outreach and archivists', *Archivaria*, 31 (Winter 1990-91), 114.
- 13 Ibid., 114-5.
- 14 Ibid., 117.

Cecily Rizzo graduated Bachelor of Library, Information & Archive Studies (B.LIAS) from the University of Malta in 2008, basing her dissertation on outreach at the National Archives. She has been involved in libraries since 1998 after obtaining a Diploma in Library & Information Studies. Her work has been mostly concentrated in a research library in a media environment and in a school library but she has retained an interest in archives. She presented a paper on outreach at the National Archives of Malta at the International Council on Archives Section on Archival Education and Training (ICA-SAE) seminar *Global and community perspectives in archival education*, held during the International Conference of the Round Table on Archives (CITRA) in Malta in November 2009.

The Agius Bequest: A private archive created on WWII death casualties in the Maltese War Theatre of Operations and held at the National Archives of Malta

Frederick Cauchi Inglott

The *Agius Bequest* was presented to the National Archivist, Mr Charles Farrugia, by Ms May Agius, the sister of its creator, the late Mr John Agius M.B.E; the ceremony was held at the National Archives, Rabat, Malta, on 14 August, 2007.

The *Bequest* is the result of a lifetime's dedication to the compilation of a comprehensive, detailed and accurate list of death casualties, both civilian and British military service, which occurred during World War Two. The List has definite parameters: it includes the names of all Maltese civilian casualties who were living in Malta, as well as all Maltese service personnel stationed at Malta, as well as Maltese merchant seamen¹ serving abroad, world wide, during the War. The List also includes the names of British service personnel and civilians who lost their life during the War whilst stationed at Malta, and also in the Maltese and/or the Mediterranean WW II theatre of operations.

For many years, until his untimely and tragic death in 2005, Mr John Agius was recognised as one of the authorities on this subject, both locally, and abroad, and was internationally consulted on the theme. His specialisation proved to be a great boon to the National War Museum Association of Malta, of which he was a founding member and in which he continued to serve as a committee member until his demise.

Differing time spans have been suggested to encapsulate the various episodes of Malta's wartime struggle during which times the casualties occurred. Wartime campaigns varied in importance during the diverse campaigns

and battles from one area of conflict to another throughout World War Two. For example, when D-Day and the ensuing invasion of mainland Europe commenced, the importance of the then current and similarly combat intensive Italian Campaign appeared to diminish. However, the peak time of the Siege of Malta during 1942 drew world wide attention because of its direct association with, and impact on, the then ongoing North African Campaign. The two principal time spans which are taken into consideration in this article are as follows: (i) the time between, and including, the days officially recognised as to when World War Two hostilities commenced, and when hostilities ended in Europe; and (ii) the period which encompassed the actual 'Second Siege of Malta' during which time some 7,000 death casualties occurred.²

Malta's strategic importance during World War II

The aim of this article does not include a historical treatise on Malta during World War Two. However, basic historical background should prove to be contextually helpful to explain why such a high concentration of casualties occurred among the three British military services and Maltese civilians in such a limited war zone. A dominating factor of Malta's strategic military value was undoubtedly its location at a vital communications crossroads in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea. Overall German/Italian war strategy demanded the capture of the Suez Canal in order primarily to gain access to the Persian Gulf petroleum fields, petroleum being an indispensable war commodity. The occupation of the Suez Canal by the Axis powers

would have had the secondary aim, and benefit, of cutting off the Allied lines of communication through the Mediterranean, from Britain's Far Eastern colonies and Australia. This would have further obliged Allied shipping to re-route and sail round the Cape of Good Hope, lengthening the sea journey by many weeks, and greatly exposing it to enemy submarines operating in the Atlantic.

The strategy of the Axis Powers had two options to achieve this objective: one option was via the Balkans and Greece (a German invasion of Crete did in fact take place); the second option was a sea route from Italy and Sicily, to Tunisia and Libya, and then *via* a land route along the North African coast to Egypt, eventually linking up with the Italian coastal East African colony of Ethiopia. As Libya was an established Italian colony, and at a very short distance from Italy, it became the most advantageous crossing-point for provisioning the Axis forces fighting in North Africa, and used as a base to spearhead a thrust into Egypt.³ Malta lay across this main line of communications in this maritime bottleneck; because of the aggressive British naval and air actions from forces based on the Island which stifled Axis transportation of men, fuel and war materiel destined for the North Africa campaigns, Malta was subjected to massive aerial bombardments to neutralise its potential.

In addition, Malta was also a naval staging port between Gibraltar and Alexandria, enabling vital war supplies and troops to reach the Commonwealth forces stationed in Egypt, which mounted counter offences against Axis invasions into Egypt. The Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force suffered heavy losses in protecting the various convoys, to which one must add the losses of so much merchant shipping.

The local land force in Malta was of divisional strength, and included various logistic military corps. Some 30,000 troops were stationed in Malta in its defence, and included practically all the different types of combat and supporting corps of the British Army (this is quite evident in the *Bequest*); the infantry, consisting of both British and Maltese Regiments, were deployed around the Island to defend it against invasion, and were assisted by elements of field artillery.

Field engineers had the task of preparing obstacles, such as minefields and barbed wire entanglements. Artillery was used in a coastal defence role. However, it was the heavy and light anti-aircraft artillery regiments, along with Royal Air Force fighter planes, which bore the brunt of the fighting in the air battles on and around Malta.

In order for the Axis Powers to neutralise Malta's potential as an air force and naval base, the Islands became the target of one of the longest and most concentrated heavy Axis aerial bombing campaigns against the Allies throughout the War, resulting in the high casualty rates on land and at sea by the Islands. By mid-1942 Malta had endured almost 2,500 air raids, during which almost 7,000 tons of bombs are estimated to have been dropped. The 'Second Siege of Malta' (2 years and 11 months) is considered to be the longest siege of WW II, after the Siege of Leningrad.⁴ Whilst visiting Malta on 2 August, 1942, Field Marshall Lord Alanbrooke, the CIGS, wrote in his diary: "The destruction is inconceivable and reminds me of Ypres, Arras, Lens, at their worst during the last war...."

The *Agius Bequest* involves itself precisely with the five elements (military and civilian) which were involved in the Maltese context, in its composition and arrangement. The intricate collaboration among these bodies was further homogenised because Maltese nationals had long voluntarily engaged into the British Services; other Maltese were caught up in the local National Service for the duration of the War, very often serving shoulder to shoulder with British service personnel. Many Maltese nationals served on British and Commonwealth merchant shipping throughout the World.

This article attempts to bring out the authenticity, correctness, and intrinsic values of the *Bequest*; it should establish a wider background on the varied subjects and human aspect related to this specific theatre of operations during World War Two. A number of books could be consulted on the period, not least those books written by Maltese authors who were themselves primary sources of information.

Mr John Agius M.B.E. – a profile

In 1936, a young Mr John Agius came across an advertisement in the newspapers for a job as a clerk at the Royal Air Force Headquarters in Valletta. His application was accepted and he commenced work as a clerk/stenographer on 24 October 1936 at RAF Headquarters, situated at No. 3 Scots Street, Valletta. Possessing a punctilious and reliable nature, the RAF staff came to value his services. At the outbreak of the War he was promoted to Clerk i/c Orderly Room at the Headquarters, which entailed "maintaining records of Officers, Airmen and Civilians".⁵ When World War Two was declared he was allowed to carry on in this sensitive position.

John Agius, experienced the Second World War in the prime of youth, at an age which tends to be over receptive to its surroundings and events; his work brought him face to face with the true reality of the War having to concern himself with the records of all the servicemen and civilians working for the RAF. His position gave him the occasion to encounter many Royal Air Force men and officers of all ranks. RAF pilots were the war heroes of the hour at the time, both in United Kingdom as well as in Malta. In his capacity as a clerk he had the occasion to come across information⁶ (actually personally discussing their exploits with the pilots themselves, as one of his colleagues has confirmed), often having to record the demise of the many young pilots of his own age. As such he may be considered as a primary source of information in many instances.

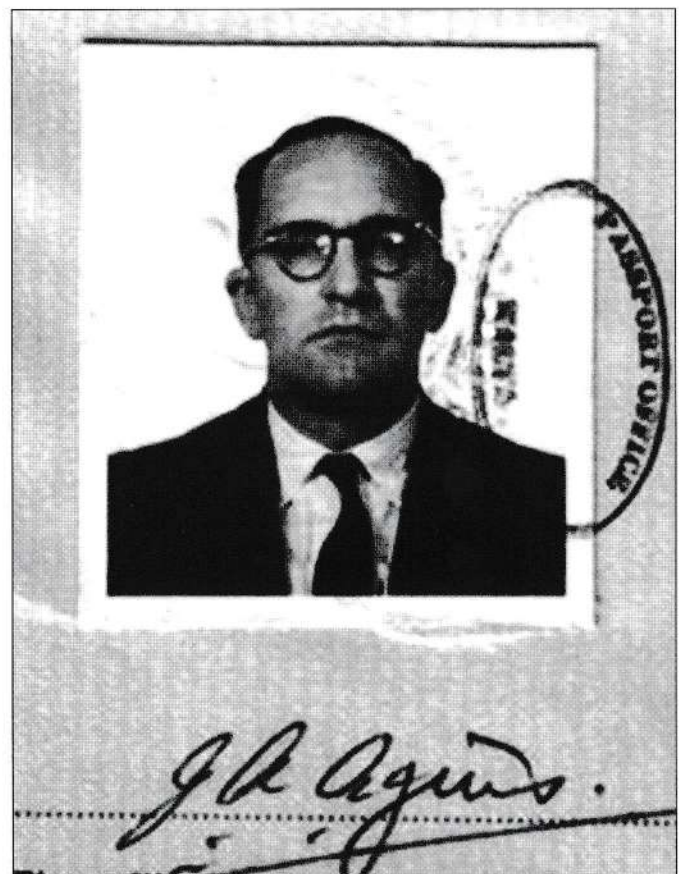
He was, evidently, more knowledgeable on the records of RAF personnel rather than on those of the other two armed services. In his private life, as a Maltese civilian and as an ARP official, he was also experiencing civilian deaths and destruction wrought by the bombs falling around him. This closeness to the tragedies, erupting so near to him, left an indelible mark which transformed him into one of Malta's acknowledged War chroniclers.

The British authorities eventually, and deservedly, decorated him for his work in the historical and archival fields. This involved, amongst other historical and literary contributions, ensuring that every person

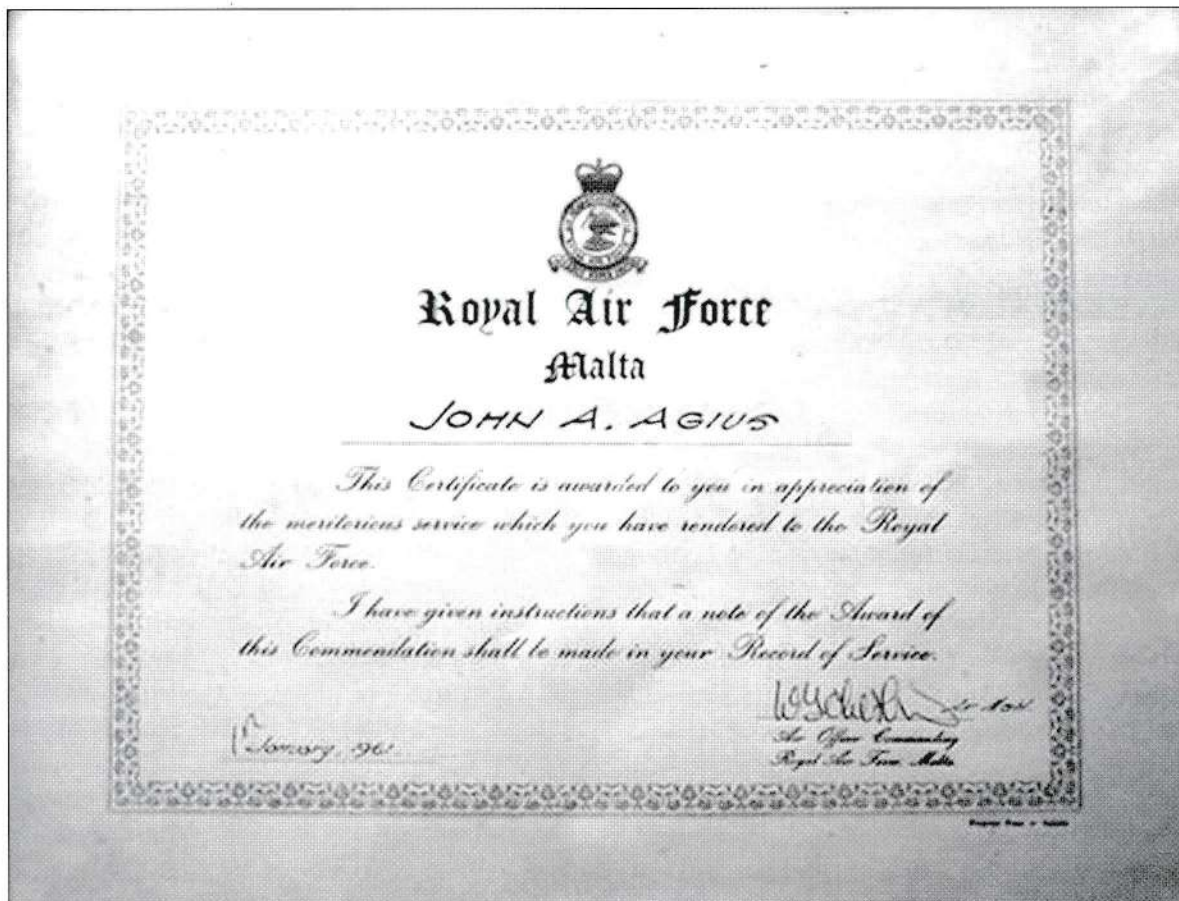
known to him to have died as a result of the War effort was identified, each casualty being suitably registered, even if the body had never been recovered.

One should add that his opportunity to grasp and absorb what was currently taking place in Malta during the war years was not solely confined to his work: his sister May had taken up a position as personal secretary to Mabel Strickland before the War, and served in this capacity for thirty years until her retirement in 1968. Mabel Strickland⁷ was active at the thick end of the political and military events of the time, and possibly having some say in some national decision-making during the War years. Moreover she had established, and was the Editor of, the *Times of Malta*, the leading English language newspaper in the Maltese Islands. As her personal secretary, May Agius must have had a good insight into significant events of national importance which were taking place, and was probably a party to some sensitive information during the War years.

John's personal wartime experiences are very well portrayed in an interview⁸ with James Holland in preparation for the latter's



Passport photo of John Agius dated 1980



AOC's Commendation for meritorious service rendered to the Royal Air Force, 1961

book *Fortress Malta: An Island under Siege: 1940-43*.⁹ Some of his experiences are also very well documented in the interview with the *Sunday Times* (Malta) correspondent Joanna Ripard, which were published in two articles on 31 March and 7 April 2002.¹⁰

He was awarded the Defence Medal for having served with ARP. He received a good report for his services in the Royal Air Force from his Officer Commanding, and went on to serve for a total of forty-two years after the War. In January 1961, he received an AOC's Commendation for his work. Following a promotion board in October of the same year, he was promoted to officer status.

After the normal time retirement of other senior civilian officers in the Section, he became the most senior civilian officer with the Royal Air Force in Malta.¹¹ He retired on 3 February 1978 on attaining the retirement age of 60 years, and a year before the British Services departed from Malta (31 March 1979).

Work on the compilation of death casualty records

On retirement in 1978, John started working on compiling lists of all war dead connected in any way with Malta, of Maltese, British, and Allied forces nationals, civilians and servicemen. He commenced with nothing in hand, other than his old wartime memories. Within eighteen days he had already drawn up a list of some 1,600 detailed cards for civilian casualties alone,¹² having taken on an intensive and extensive research exercise in conjunction with, and with some assistance from, the National War Museum Association (Malta) (of which he had become a founder member), and the Commonwealth War Graves Commission's published records. John Agius proceeded to produce the detailed and comprehensive collection of the hundreds of record cards of the *Agius Bequest*, which he carried on updating until the time of his death. He was known to be very meticulous and thorough in his research, which became his lifetime speciality and ultimate goal. People, especially from overseas, regularly inquired about the death of their relatives and their place

of burial. He took part on local radio, B.B.C. and Scottish Television interviews in relation to his wartime experiences.

In 1985 John compiled the fifty-eight page Roll of Honour in Philip Vella's book *Malta: Blitzed but not beaten*,¹³ a book which was considered, then, as one of the most technically comprehensive history book on Malta during World War Two. Although the Roll of Honour is very long and thorough, John did carry on adjusting and updating the List after its publication. Many authors who published books on Malta during WW II as, for example, Laddie Lucas' *Malta: A Thorn is Rommel's Side*, consulted John and acknowledged him for his assistance over the years.

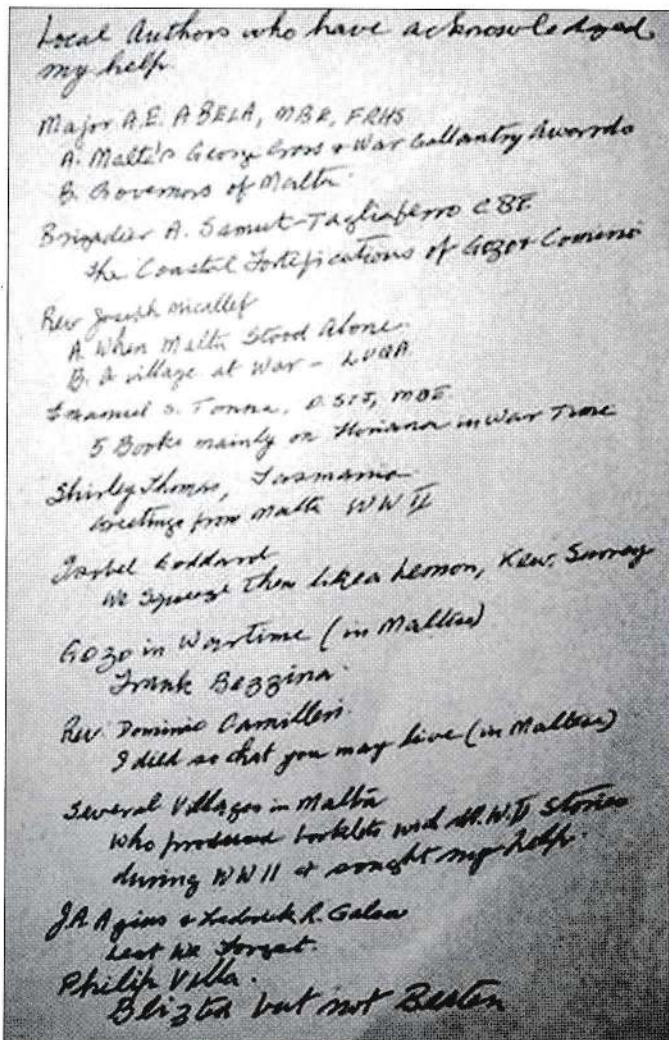
The George Cross Island Association (GCIA), which was established in 1988 as a society for service personnel who had served in Malta during the Siege of Malta, had the aim

of organising an annual reunion for all friends and colleagues who participated in the War. It raised funds for the construction of a suitable monument to commemorate the approximately 7,000 Maltese and allied servicemen who gave up their lives during the 1940-43 Siege. On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the award of the George Cross to Malta, which took place on 29 May 1992, a ceremony presided by the then President of Malta Dr Censu Tabone, Queen Elizabeth II, as Head of the Commonwealth, inaugurated the Siege Bell Memorial on the bastions of Valletta, and, at the same time, living members of the Association were officially presented with a commemorative medal. For the occasion, the GCIA approached John Agius to compile a book incorporating the approximately 7,000 names of all those civilians and military personnel who gave up their lives in the defence of Malta. The 'Book of Remembrance' became an integral part of the Siege Bell Memorial.

During the same year, the GCIA, with Captain E.A.S. Bailey as Chairman of the Editorial Board and Publisher,¹⁴ produced a more comprehensive, historical and technical book on the same theme entitled *Malta: Defiant and Triumphant - Rolls of Honour 1940-1943*; in the book, based on the 'Book of Remembrance', Captain Bailey acknowledged the great assistance of John Agius in the compilation of the names included in this commemorative book: "John Agius (who is associated with The National War Museum,), for his research, resource and industry in mustering over 90% of all names of casualties herein, without which compilation this Book would scarcely have been possible".¹⁴

In 1999, with Frederick Galea – both members of the Malta Aviation Museum – he published the book *Lest we Forget: Royal Air Force and Commonwealth Servicemen Lost in the Defence of Malta*,¹⁵ with a Second (Revised) Edition in 2005; the book lists British and Commonwealth Air Force casualties, both aircrew and ground personnel, separately by unit and by squadron, including a brief history of each unit and squadron.

On 21 February 1994, John Agius was made Honorary Member of the British Empire in recognition of his services to the GCIA and involvement in the inauguration of the Siege



Hand written list by John Agius of authors who acknowledged his assistance.

Bell Memorial in Valletta. John died tragically in a car accident on 22 December 2005, at the venerable age of almost eighty-eight years.

The following is a selection of newspaper articles on World War Two written by John A. Agius:

'The E-boat attack: an eye-witness account', *The Sunday Times* (28.vii.1991), 27.

'Maltese died in concentration a month before War Ended', *The Sunday Times* (23.viii.1992), 33.

'Maltese civilians' sterling contribution to war effort', *The Sunday Times* (20.ii.1994), 43.

'Polish RAF Officers killed in Malta air crash', *The Sunday Times* (22.xii.2002), 83.

'El Alamein to Tripoli with the Eighth Army', *The Sunday Times* (26.i.2003), 45.

'A war time anniversary', *The Sunday Times* (22.vi.2003), 51.

'We weep no more', *The Sunday Times* (16.v.2004), 49.

'King George VI's wartime visit to Malta', *The Sunday Times* (20.xi.2005), 51.

Some archival considerations

a. Archival description of the Agius Bequest

Repository Code - NAM

Reference Code - MRC

Title - Agius Bequest

Dates of creation -

1939-1945 (dates of accumulation of data of record cards: from the beginning to the end of WWII)

1940-1943 (Siege of Malta only: beginning of hostilities with Italy, to surrender date of Italy)

1978-2005 (dates during which time the data was created)

Level of Description - Fonds

Extent - One metal index card cabinet containing (approx.) 6,392 individual personal records.

Name of creator - John A. Agius



Ms May Agius presenting the Bequest to Mr Charles Farrugia (2nd from left) on 14 August 2007 – also in the picture Dr Mark Agius and Mr Henry Demarco (1st & 4th from left)

b. Administrative History of the Bequest

(To avoid repetition, the details given *supra* amply cover the essential elements of the Administrative History).

c. Immediate source of acquisition (Archival¹⁶ History)

Each of the hundreds of record cards within the Fonds was inserted independently into the *Bequest*. It is accepted that John Agius, the creator, recorded the data on each individual card himself: initially, through his direct experience and involvement during the War. And then as he came across information directly through relevant authoritative research during the period between 1978 and his death in 2005. Data in each record was corrected or further updated when new information turned up. The present arrangement of grouping of the record cards into four main groups were so organised by the creator himself.

On the death of Mr John Agius in December 2005, the Collection fell into the custody of Ms May Agius, his sister and next-of-kin. On 14 August 2007 Ms Agius officially presented the Collection to the National Archives of Malta.

d. Scope and content of the Bequest

The Fonds contains many hundreds of record cards each containing personal data on Maltese civilians, Allied military servicemen and sailors of the Merchant Marine who became war casualties, and who were connected in some way with Malta during World War Two. Maltese war casualties include all those which occurred anywhere throughout the World. The

Bequest was the first complete collection of its nature, compiled by a person who was very well versed, and highly interested, in the subject, having personally experienced the War, whilst having been employed in a military service record keeping capacity during his working life. He eventually achieved international renown in his field, excelling in information regarding RAF personnel.

The record cards contain some, or all, of the following data on the individual: his name and surname, rank, service number and unit (if a serviceman); the date of his death; his home address/details of his next-of-kin; the location of his grave, if known. The creator added further information on the history of the individual, if known, or if he came across it at a later time, such as the cause of death, newspaper cuttings related to the person, etc.

e. Appraisal, destruction and scheduling information

All units¹⁷ in this fonds are appraised as 'retain permanently', each unit possessing its individual identity. No part can be discarded or destroyed. Although it is envisaged that the odd record may contain errors and omissions, the fonds should continue to be respected in its present state. When errors surface it is recommended that rectifications and inclusions should only be noted on a new separate document attached to the *Bequest* specifically for this purpose.

f. System of arrangement of the cards

The record cards are divided into five main groups, namely: Maltese civilians, Royal Navy personnel, British Army personnel, Royal Air Force personnel, and Merchant Navy personnel. The Army, Navy and Merchant Navy groups are further sub-divided into Maltese Nationals and British or Commonwealth nationals. Individual groups are further subdivided alphabetically or chronologically, or may incorporate a combination of the two depending on the circumstance. The groups were fitted, unbroken, into the three drawers of the metal cabinet.

g. Conditions governing public access

As the fonds may contain data of a personal nature, and is being held in the custody of the National Archive, it is bound by the Data Protection Act (2003) – Article 8 (*Processing for*

historical purposes, etc.) and Article 9 (*Criteria for processing*). Information within some of the cards was previously only available to its private creator, and was not open to the public, and was not liable to any data laws of that time. However, data on cards include details of next-of-kin who may still be alive and may request data privacy, which should be respected. Access conditions are decided upon by the Archives of Malta after consultation.

h. Language of Bequest

English

i. Physical characteristics and technical requirements

Index cards measuring approximately 12.2 cm by 7.6 cm. Simple cards of a similar size are sometimes used, even scraps of paper of similar size, probably incorporated as a temporary measure at the time.

j. Related units of description

The National Archives of Malta holds the records¹⁸ of Maltese units of the British Army and consist of the personal records of individual soldiers, including those who were killed during the Second World War. The Repository also holds Royal Navy L/E Maltese personnel record index cards of Maltese sailors who served and were killed during the War. However, as these documents contain information of a personal nature, many of them come under the seventy year rule against public access and are only available for scrutiny by close relatives for administrative purposes. Also included in the Archives are the Air Raid Precaution Fonds, which include files which contain ARP reports which listed dead civilian casualties.

k. Publication note

The Commonwealth War Graves Commission (CWGC) regularly publishes various Memorial Registers which deal specifically with war casualties from the beginning of World War I, through World War II, and up to the present day. The Registers include personal information on each civilian, and each member of the Merchant Navy, the three British Armed Services, Commonwealth and Allied forces war dead. The Registers indicate the location of each grave, if known, in the many cemeteries (both those established by CWGC and the local ones) dotted round the world. The CWGC is

constantly in the process of correcting errors and updating its data on the casualties, and publishing updated memorial registers.

1. **Archival Appraisal of the *Agius Bequest***

This acquisition has essential values: its creator was a recognised authority in his field; he can be considered as a primary source of information himself in many instances. Although errors/ omissions occur among the cards, this is also the case among other authoritative publications. The creator researched his subject well, and can also be considered as a sound secondary source of information. It has been established that he gleaned his information from reliable official and authoritative entities involved in accumulating similar material; in fact John Agius had been asked, and offered, his personal advice to such entities.

The *Bequest* provides excellent reference material; however, it should never be considered of 100 per cent complete reference value because new evidence regarding casualties continues to emerge; this limitation is fully acceptable under the circumstances. For archival purposes the Collection can be utilised as a search instrument; it provides information which can be used as a basis for further investigation and wider research. As a collection it should be kept fully intact in its present layout. This fonds possesses unique intrinsic and historical value, and should be considered part of the National Heritage of Malta.

Physical analysis and general archival content of the collection, and individual card layout

The *Bequest* consists of hundreds of index cards housed inside a metal cabinet measuring 40.5cm wide by 50cm long by 33cm high. The cabinet consists of four similarly shaped, unlockable drawers, all equal in size, each with a brass handle. The drawers, also constructed of metal, and are the long, sliding type. The cabinet was obviously originally designed to hold index cards. Brass label holders form part of each handle.

Three of the drawers hold cards; the fourth drawer is empty. The drawers which contain



Index Card Cabinet

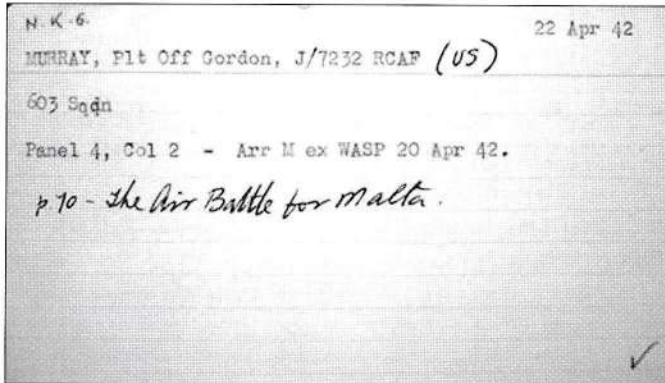
cards are: the top left hand drawer; the top right hand drawer; and the bottom left hand drawer. For ease of identification the drawers are designated: top, left to right – drawers No.1 and No.2; bottom, left to right – drawers No.3 and No.4, respectively. The cards in all three drawers fill each drawer almost from front to back. Some index cards are found stacked sideways on the left hand side of drawers No.1 and No.2. Typewritten and handwritten sheets of paper are also found placed on the side of drawer No. 2.

In all three drawers many of the index cards are found grouped, in varying numbers, bundled together. The individual groups indicate some common feature or element e.g. an army unit, crews on one specific ship or aircraft, or a location where they were killed. Cardboard flag markers are inserted between small and large groups of the collection which help denote different elements within each group, i.e., different units, or specific periods of time.

The index cards¹⁹

All the cards are of the same size; they appear to be the same type of standard index card which can be purchased from most stationery shops, though it is apparent that packs of these cards were purchased at differing times and places. The measurements of the cards are: 12.2cm long by 7.6cm wide (5 inches long by 3 inches wide).

There are also a substantial number of 'home-made cards', of similar measurements, cut out from odd pieces of thin cardboard, old invitations cards, etc., probably temporary stop-gaps until the creator found time to replace them with proper index cards. Small sheets of paper and scrap paper, containing names and information, are sometimes used *in lieu* of the cards, obviously inserted as a temporary measure till the data could be authenticated.



Sample Card – Original size

Each record card contains the personal data of one individual; it may contain as little data as a simple name and number; or carry as much information as its creator managed to glean about the person. In order to comply with the recently enacted Malta Data Protection Act, the cards being used as sample material contain data of a general nature, which data has been verified to have already been openly and publically found recorded in commemorative, historical or open archive material.

General distribution of the cards

The major groupings of the cards (according to the military service, civilian, merchant navy, groups, etc.) are found in the order indicated below, the first mentioned group being deposited close to the front end of each drawer. Some groups were further sub-divided into sub-groups. The way the record cards within the *Bequest* have been arranged is logical and easy to follow once it has been physically seen.

Drawer No. 1 contains record cards of:

- a. Royal Air Force personnel.
- b. Royal Navy personnel – mixed arrangement.

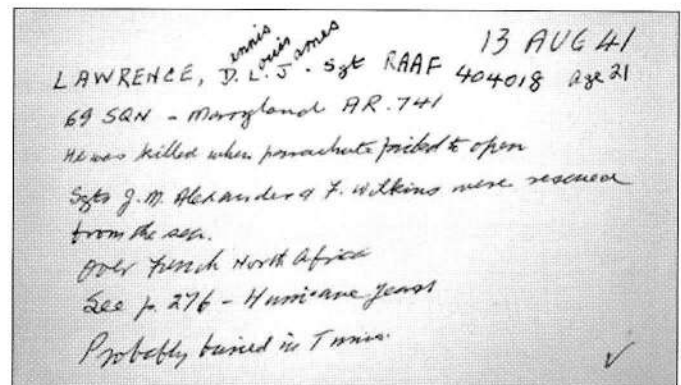
Drawer No. 2 contains record cards of civilians of Maltese Nationality only, and include policemen, etc. Included also are the odd civilian of British nationality; because there are Maltese who have English surname, the national origin may, at times, be uncertain.

Drawer No.3 contains record cards in the following order:

- a. soldiers of Maltese nationality who enlisted into regular and territorial Maltese units of the British Army
- b. soldiers of the British Army of British nationality, who were enlisted into purely British Army corps/regiments
- c. Merchant Navy personnel of British and Commonwealth nationality
- d. Merchant Navy personnel – Maltese nationals
- e. Royal Navy personnel – Maltese nationals

General observations regarding the record cards

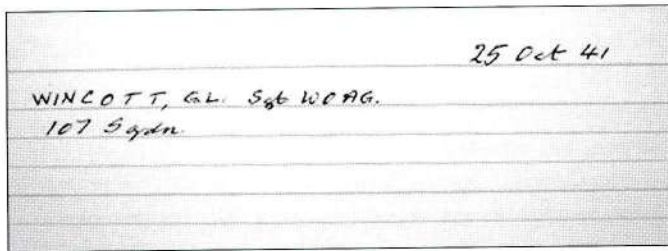
Data entered on the cards was either typewritten or handwritten.



a. Apart from the date of death of the individual, indicated on the top right hand side of the card, basic important data which may be found on each record card is as follows:

- Surname
- Name / initials
- Rank
- Service number
- Unit
- Subunit
- Name and address of next-of-kin.
- Cemetery where buried, and grave location.

b. Information on cards is sometimes scarce.

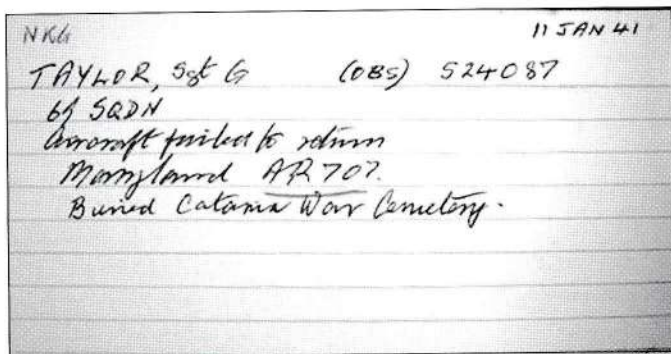


c. A small number of photos, depicting the individual, are found inserted among the cards.

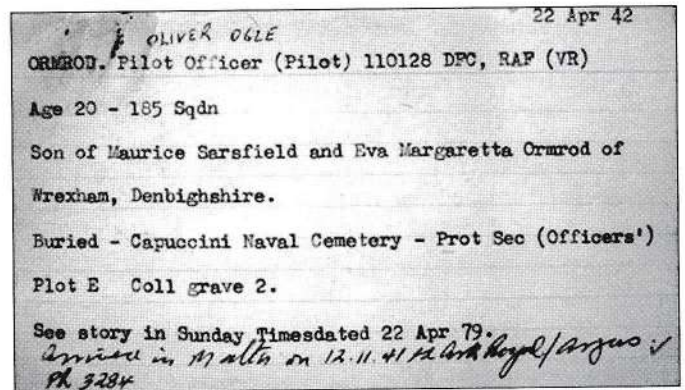
d. Newspaper *In memoriam* cuttings were found attached, or pasted directly onto some of the record cards.



e. Some cards indicate whether the individual has no known grave, in red inked letters 'NKG' printed at the top left hand corner of the card. In the case of RAF personnel the type of aircraft involved is also inserted, if known.

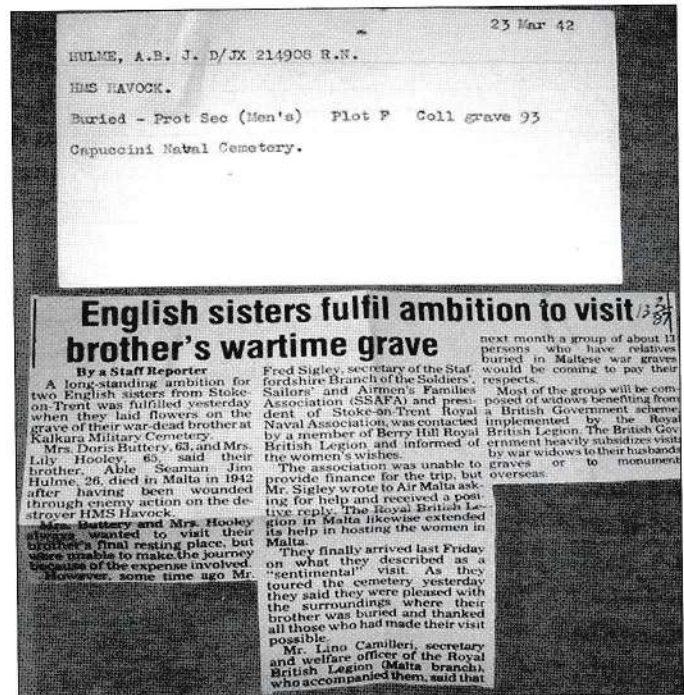


f. The National War Museum Association (NWMA) holds a collection of photos/negatives of many of the war victims, which are indicated in the Collection. The negative/photo number would be indicated in the bottom left corner. Data was updated from time to time, and this is inked in.

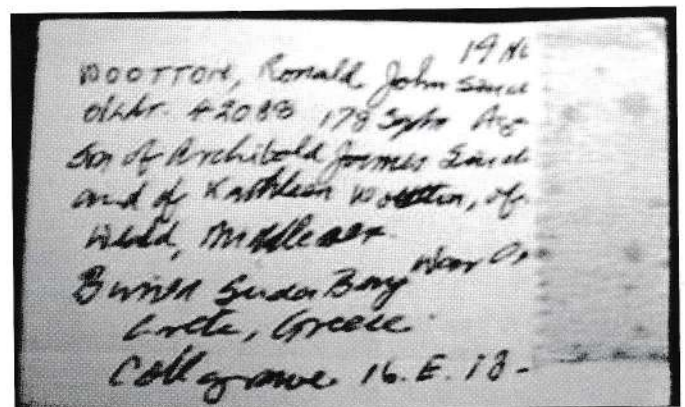


g. One typewritten sheet and one hand written sheet, located on the side of the cards in Drawer No. 2 contain tables indicating the record cards which have a corresponding negative/photograph held by the NWMA.

h. Related newspaper articles may be found included with some record cards.



i. Small sheets of ordinary paper are sometimes used instead of cards.



Data, data sources and links

i. The Index Card System

For almost twenty-seven years John Agius maintained the same identical system of data layout for each record card. One must consider that the *Bequest* was initiated before the personal computer had appeared on the local scene. John devised the index card record system for easy and speedy retrieval of the individual record; the *Bequest* is a search tool within itself.

When considering the vast number of casualty records which had to be identified, researched and recorded, it must have been found necessary to limit the amount of information inserted on each record card: data had perforce to be the most essential and minimal. The size of each card fits these criteria perfectly for the type and amount of information actually carried by the cards. Additional information, if necessary, and as sometimes was the case, was inserted on the back of the card. Long narratives/notes about specific incidents may have been printed in a separate exercise book; however, if this was the case no other documents have accompanied the *Bequest* when it was presented to the Malta Archive.

The index cards are capable of rough handling over a period of time. The system allows flexibility: the cards can be arranged, and rearranged, at will and in any order and at any time, although this should no longer be considered advisable. But if, in the remote circumstance in the future it is considered necessary and permissible, the *Bequest* could be further updated with the introduction of similar new record cards, without disrupting the present arrangement whatsoever; with the proviso that the newly introduced cards are significantly marked to distinguish them from the original ones. However, it would be more reasonable and appropriate to create a computer database and not meddle with the contents at all.

ii. Distribution of the record cards within each drawer

The 4,678 casualty records²⁰ are distributed as follows in the three drawers:

Drawer No. 1: Royal Air Force – 1,392; Royal

Navy – 292 (land based)²¹

Drawer No. 2: Civilians – 1,650

Drawer No. 3: British Army – 567; Merchant Navy – 564; Maltese Nationals RN – 205

There appear to be discrepancies between the above totals, and various other lists of records of death casualties quoted by other creators of similar records. Sometimes the differences are fully acceptable, the reasons being quite evident. However, at other times the reason for the differing numerical amounts is not so apparent. Factors which may have resulted in different results when quantifying numbers of death casualty records for identical groups by the various other creators, include the following:

a. Regarding the *Bequest* itself, there is no accompanying documentation which would verify, beyond reasonable doubt, that the *Bequest* was a complete document within itself, or the correctness of all the records therein. The creator died accidentally and unexpectedly, leaving no direct evidence regarding the way he carried out his research and some of the origins of the data. However, many of the referral methods adopted by the creator, his experience, thoroughness and firsthand knowledge, cannot be refuted – a military trained keeper of records, and a primary source of information himself, his professional expertise helps to minimise the lack of any quoted supporting documentation.

b. It is evident that even the Commonwealth War Graves Commission admits that it is consistently updating²² and correcting its records related to World War Two, even though its direct sources are the British Military Record Centres. The reasons for this may be human error, at best, or lack of knowledge of final outcomes after the heat of battle; remains of bodies were many times obliterated without trace, or permanently hidden beneath debris; or lost at sea.

c. Death casualty lists prepared by John Agius, and lists compiled by other entities, were drawn up during different periods of time, so correlations between them would differ due to constant updating.

d. If casualties were not officially registered,

some of the originators of lists may have discarded them; whilst others may have accepted these casualties at face value without documentary evidence. Taking into account simple eye-witness and word of mouth accounts were, at times, considered justifiable evidence. For example in his article 'Tragic Stories from 1942',²³ John Agius writes:

"Considering the density of the population, and the air attacks which took place at any time of the day or night... if it was night, the police and the ARP (Air Raid Precautions) teams had to work in a complete black out to rescue the wounded and recover the dead... Mounds of rubble would have to be removed by hand, and taken away in a cart drawn by a mule. On the whole, the authorities were more interested in recovering the wounded. The dead were dead. The war claimed 1,600 dead...."

e. The different periods of time between those of World War Two (1939-1945) and the Siege of Malta (1940-1943), are at times mixed with each other.

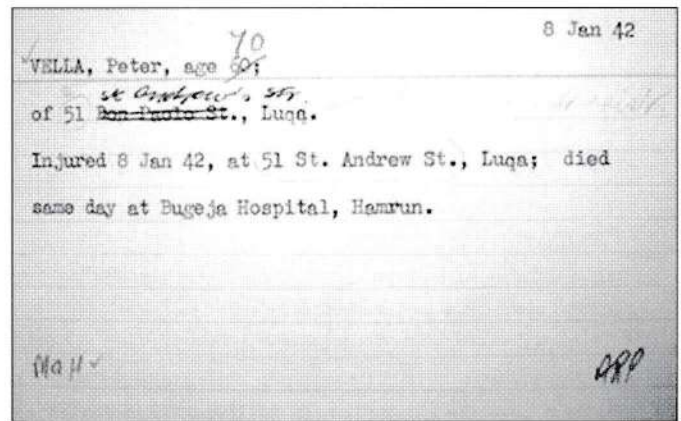
f. There are differences in opinion as to when the Second Great Siege commenced and ended, which would make a difference in the total casualties between the numerical amounts of the different creators.

g. Sources of Information: as indicated above the creator does not necessarily indicate the origin of the primary, or secondary sources of information consulted in the cards; however, clues are given which can lead to some sources:

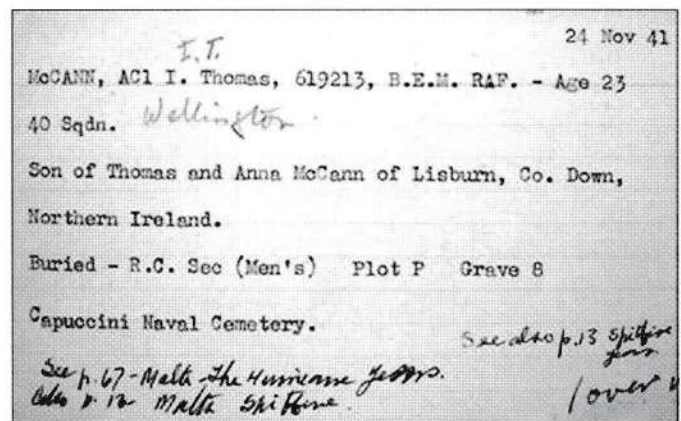
(i) The code letters **M & H**, on the bottom left hand side of the card, and the code letters **ARP** on the bottom right hand side of the card of some of the index cards: they indicate the government agency where the records are found registered. As police reports were also sometimes drawn up, they provide another source of primary information for the researcher. Cards of this nature normally appertain to civilians.

(ii) Some cards, especially those of Air Force and Naval personnel indicate a published book where the person is mentioned.

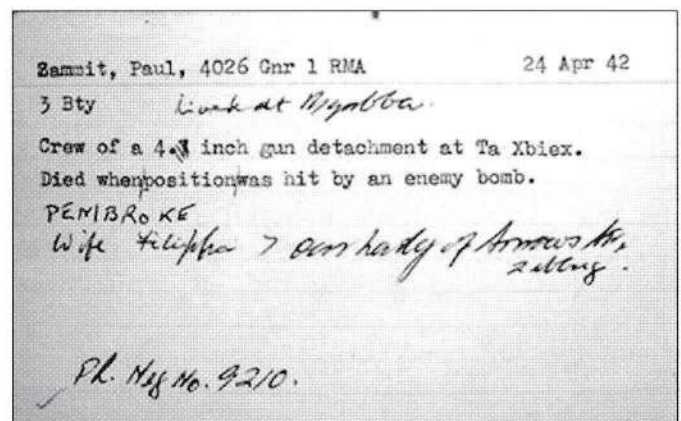
(iii) The cards sometimes included details of how the fatality took place.



(i)



(ii)



(iii)

More observations regarding the physical card layout within the drawers

The order in which the records have been organised are chronologically or alphabetically inserted after each other, and are so irrespective of rank. In a few instances the casualties are grouped alphabetically by event, ship or aircraft.

The record cards within each drawer of the metal cabinet are further subdivided as follows:

Drawer No. 1:

- a. Record cards of Royal Air Force personnel entered by the year: 1940, 1941, 1942, 1943 and 1944; followed by a group of 115 cards with mixed dates; reasons for the latter are not understood. Total number of names counted (approx.): 1,392.
- b. Record cards of those Maltese employed with NAAFI,²⁴ on board HM ships, who succumbed with the crew when the ship sank, worldwide. Total: 29.
- c. Military officials proceeding by air to Crimea (Yalta Conference). Total: 12.
- d. From the three Services, on board *HMS Illustrious*, when it sank. Total: 42.
- e. Royal Navy. Total: 209.

The RN personnel recorded in the *Bequest* died whilst land based at Malta and were not lost at sea. Captain E.A.S. Bailey mentions²⁵ 4,000 Royal and Merchant Naval casualties of the Siege, as compared with the 700 in the Army and the 700 in the Royal Air Force. Obviously, the war dead in various other Mediterranean campaigns in which the British Army participated, such as Crete, the North African Campaign and the Italian Campaigns are not all included in the book *Malta: Defiant and Triumphant*.

On the other hand The Commonwealth Air Forces Memorial in Floriana, Malta, commemorates the 2,301 members of the Air Forces of the British Empire and Commonwealth, and other nationalities who, whilst serving with, or attached to, the Royal Air Force, lost their lives with no known grave.

The airmen flew from many bases around and within the Mediterranean,²⁶ generally as far away as Austria and West Africa, and including North Africa, Gibraltar and Italy. A point regarding this article is that the area of military operations, as related directly to Malta, in the Mediterranean area, has been found difficult to define precisely. The casualties in the *Bequest* occurred throughout the War, and are a fraction, albeit a large one, of the total number of RAF personnel who lost their life.

Another subdivision would have to be created in order to establish how many airmen had actually succumbed during the Second Great Siege of Malta, through reference to the publications of Bailey's *Malta: Defiant and*

Triumphant: Rolls of Honour: 1949-1943; and Agius and Galea's *Lest We Forget: Royal Air Force and Commonwealth Air Forces Servicemen Lost in the Defence of Malta*. John Agius's notes in this case would be found helpful.

As already indicated and stressed there are differences in the number of death casualties between various publications, which also disagree as to when the Second Great Siege commenced and ended.

Drawer No. 2:

Civilian war casualties. Total: 1,650.

The record cards are entered first chronologically; if many occur on the same day, the names are then entered alphabetically. There is a difference in numbers of a few hundred between this figure and the amount indicated in the Roll of Honour of civilians, between civilian casualties found in the book *Malta: Blitzed but not Beaten*.

Drawer No. 3:

Record cards, placement is by unit; each unit has names inserted in chronological order:

- a. The record cards of Maltese nationals enlisted into the British Army, are grouped by unit and corps, as follows: RMA regiments, KOMR battalions, Royal Engineers, logistics corps (MTF), e.g., RASC, Pay Corps, Signals Corps, etc. Total: 183. Some names do not always match those in the book *Malta: Blitzed but not Beaten*. The book *Malta Defiant but Triumphant* lists 188 names.

- b. British Army personnel of purely British Nationality are inserted in chronological order, irrespective of rank; and in alphabetical order when casualties occurred on the same day. The regiments, battalions, corps are intermixed throughout. Total: 384. Troops lost at sea whilst proceeding to and from their units, on convoys or on battleships may account for their omission in the *Bequest*. Having no known graves in Malta, John Agius may have not come across their names.

- c. Record cards of Commonwealth Merchant Navy Seamen. Total: 290.

- d. A mixed group of British naval and army personnel. A reason for this arrangement could not be established. Total: 46.

- e. Record cards of Merchant Navy seamen of Maltese nationality: Total: 228.

The numbers quoted are close to those listed in the book *Malta: Blitzed but not Beaten*; there is a difference of fifteen names.

f. Record cards of RN sailors of Maltese nationality, serving worldwide. Total: 205. Where Maltese nationals are concerned one

must not forget that the best official sources for establishing the exact date (but not the details) of the death of a civilian would be Parish Registers and the Government Public Registry.

Notes and references

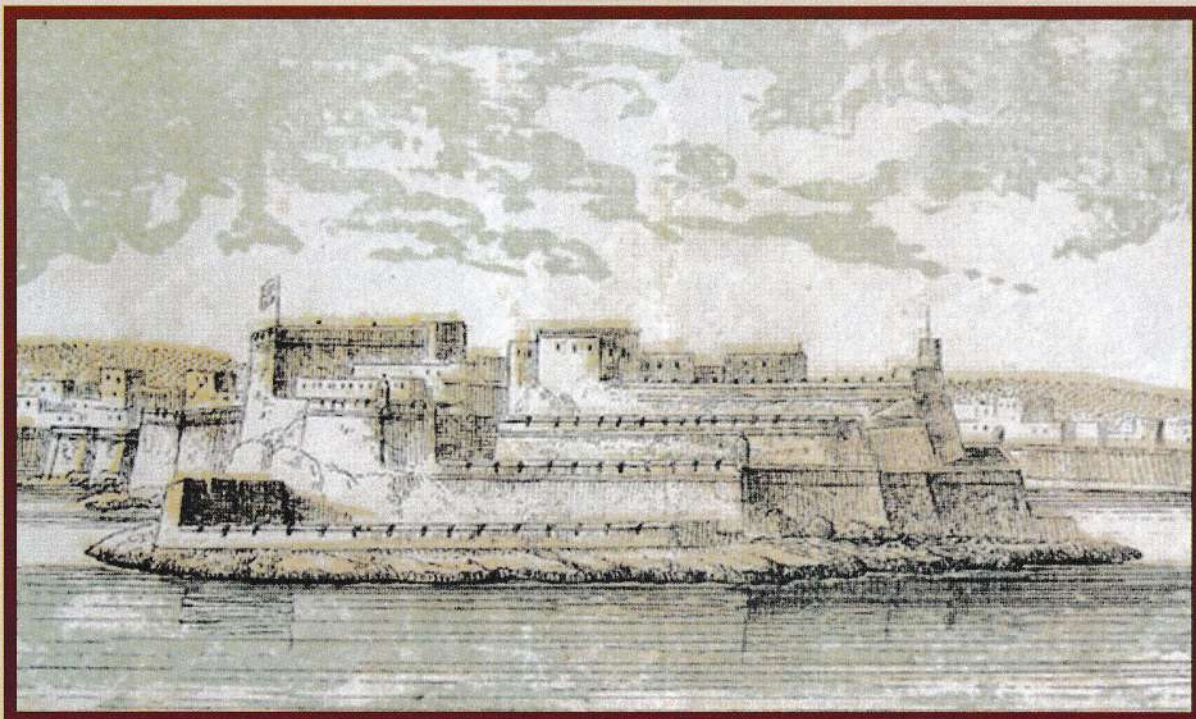
- 1 In order to cover all Maltese Nationals, some Maltese seamen who were killed outside the time parameters of this article were also included.
- 2 E.A.S. Bailey, *Malta: Defiant and Triumphant: Rolls of Honour 1940-1943* (Somerset, 1992), 13
- 3 According to the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936 the UK was responsible for the military defence of Egypt and also maintained a large military force to defend the Suez Canal.
- 4 Bailey, 15.
- 5 John Agius's personal collection of correspondence.
- 6 J. Holland, *Fortress Malta: An Island under Siege, 1940-1943* (New York, 2003), 11.
- 7 Miss Mabel Strickland, the daughter of Sir Gerald Strickland, was to become the leader of her father's pro-British Constitutional Party.
- 8 Holland.
- 9 Ibid.
- 10 J. Ripard, 'Tragic stories from April 1942', *The Sunday Times*, part 1 (31.iii.2002), 48-9 & *The Sunday Times*, part 2 (7.iv.2002), 36-7.
- 11 Taken from personal notes drawn up by John Agius himself, regarding his past life.
- 12 Ripard, (31.iii. 2002), 49.
- 13 P. Vella, *Malta: Blitzed but not Beaten* (Malta, 1985).
- 14 Bailey, 15.
- 15 J. Agius & F.R. Galea, *Lest we forget: Royal Air Force and Commonwealth Air Forces Servicemen Lost in the Defence of Malta*, 2nd ed. (Malta, 2005).
- 16 History of 'document'.
- 17 Record cards.
- 18 Fonds reference: MIL - Maltese Personnel in the British Forces: 1800-1970.
- 19 The term 'index card' may also be found as 'record card' or 'card' throughout the article.
- 20 The numbers indicated closely approximate and do not refer to the index cards only, but also to a small quantity of names simply included in lists of names on paper found among the cards.
- 21 Royal Navy personnel are not all included in the *Bequest*. The commemorative book *Malta: Defiant and Triumphant...* lists 4,000 Royal Navy and Merchant Navy casualties mostly lost at sea.
- 22 The CWGC has continued to update its holdings from the end of WW II up to the present day, so as to include all the deaths of servicemen which occurred during military operations since its inception.
- 23 J. Agius, *The Sunday Times* (31.iii.2002), 48.
- 24 NAAFI stands for 'Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes' – an institute which, amongst other amenities, ran canteens for servicemen.
- 25 Bailey, 14.
- 26 Agius & Galea, 74.

Frederick Cauchi Inglott B.LIAS was born in Rabat, Malta. Educated at the Lyceum and the Royal Military Academy, Sandhurst, he was commissioned into the Royal Malta Artillery and saw service in Malta and with the British Army of the Rhine; he also served as a regular officer in the Malta Land Force and the Armed Forces of Malta. Major Cauchi Inglott is co-founder and past chairman of the Sacra Militia Foundation. He was also co-founder and deputy chairman of the Hompesch Commemorative Committee. He is presently a committee member of the Friends of the National Archives of Malta. His special interest is military history.

From the National Archives of Malta...



Details of a seal from a Circular from the Secretary of State, no. 3, 14 June 1901



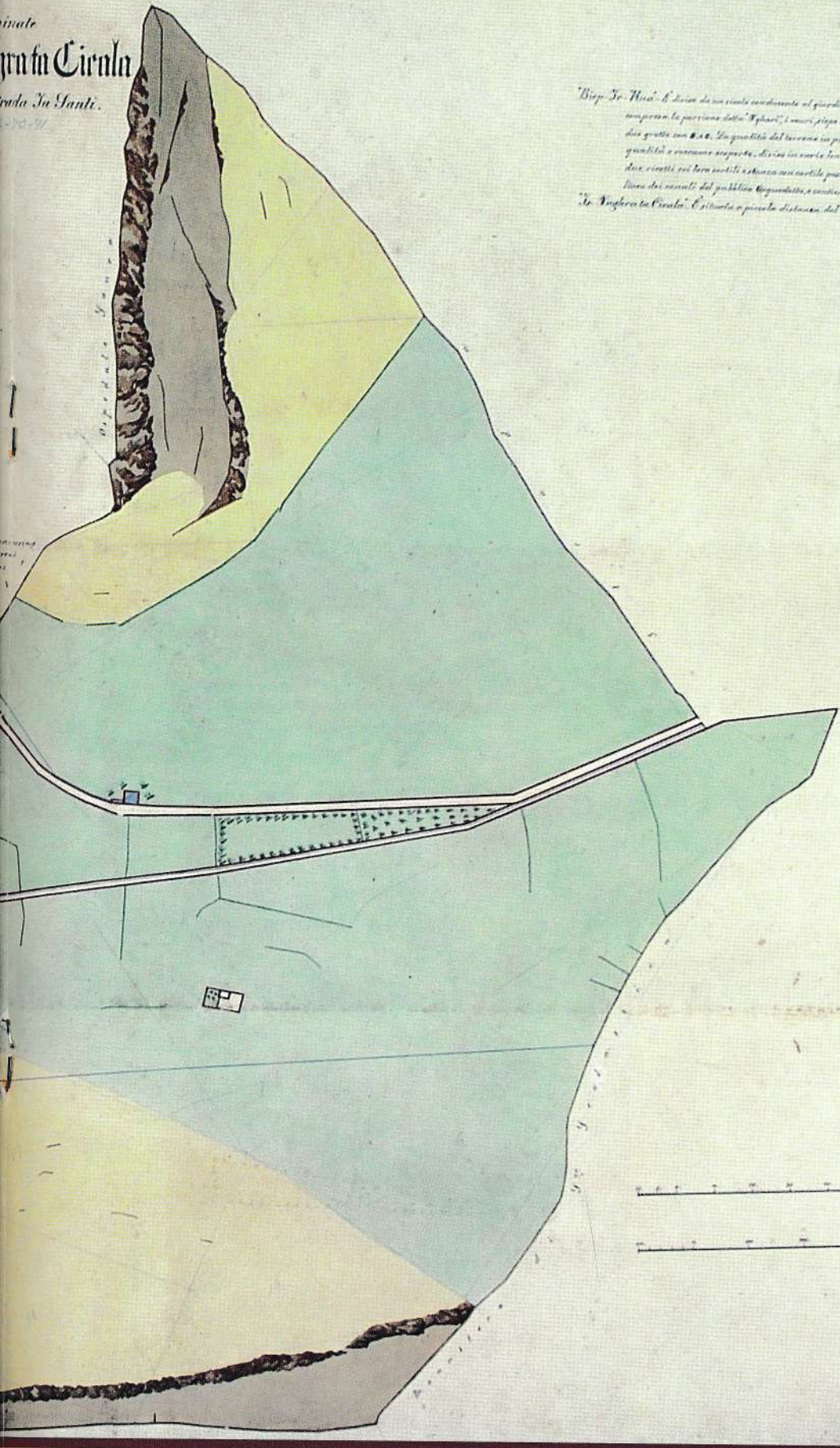
An illustration of Fort St Angelo included with one of the files of the Chief Secretary to Government (NAM, CSG01/11524/1857)

animale
 Circola
 Circola In Santi.

372.

mus 491
 1756 1754

"Bisp. In Noci" è dices da un vicolo condossente al giardino della "S. Agostini", contiene la capacità di beloni 24. -- In
 un pezzo la porzione della "S. Agostini", i muri, sopra d'altre, una non compaiono la gelia inavente nella lettera 4. e la
 due gratta con 4. e 8. In quantità del terreno in parte è di buona qualità, parte di mediocre, e parte di cattiva
 qualità e variano separate, di via in parte terra con alberi di latte, di India, grano, car-ruba, pradi 24.
 due vicelli, cui loro sottile e stanza non cartile posto nel centro del territorio della territorio è traversato dalla
 linea dei vicelli del pubblica riguardato, e contiene a piccolo gabatto per abitarne gli animali.
 "In Angloria Circola" è situata a piccola distanza dal detto territorio, della capacità di beloni 2. -- In



The Maltese teacher corps: from humble beginnings to unionisation – some observations

George Cassar

The teacher corps in Malta has originated from very humble beginnings. In fact one cannot speak of a corps before the British period and even then, it is only from the late 1830s that the semblance of a formal teacher body can somehow be discerned. Yet, as time elapsed and teachers became more and more aware of their particular position, the situation began to gradually evolve. This process finally resulted in the setting up of the Malta Union of Teachers (M.U.T.) in the early years of the twentieth century. Teachers in Malta could now speak of one unified body as the M.U.T. gave the teaching corps protection, identity and the necessary focus for the corps' consolidation and professionalisation.

In the early decades of British rule – that is the first quarter of the nineteenth century – there was little schooling to speak of. There functioned only a small number of mainly private individuals and religious bodies that ran fee-paying education establishments who performed the task of teaching children some form of academic content. These individuals were definitely not trained for the job; in fact some may be considered as having had quite a dubious academic grounding by today's standards. Yet even those who could be defined as teachers in a more realistic sense, possessed little academic and even less pedagogical and methodological baggage. The dearth of teachers and teaching can easily be discerned from the observation that "In none of the villages is a public school established, the children grow up like other animals, ie. they eat, drink, work and sleep."¹ Something definitely needed to be done as this was a situation which cried for a remedy and, with the passing of the years, the British authorities began to realise as much. The setting up of a good system of schooling could serve a double purpose. Firstly, it could help

the British coloniser to establish a more friendly relationship with the locals and secondly, the people could get a little more education if this was for free. The contemporary author, E. Blanquiere suggested something on these lines when he argued that, "...should the British Government, impressed with a due sense of its importance, give to a system of public instruction that encouragement it deserves..." there would be a gradual decrease in the "jealousy and distrust so evident between us and the natives at present..."² This plea which was published in 1813 had, however, to wait till the third decade of the nineteenth century when a Royal Commission was sent to Malta in 1836.

At the time the two Royal Commissioners, John Austin and George C. Lewis, were carrying out their investigations, education in Malta was at a very low ebb – arguably the situation could hardly be much worse. The Royal Commission actually confirmed this through the observation: "The elementary instruction in Malta is small in quantity and bad in quality. In our opinion, it will never be extended or improved to any considerable extent, unless its extension and improvement is aided by the Government."³ The same Commission sustained further its observations on the poor state of both schools and teachers when commenting on higher education in Malta. Austin and Lewis remarked that, "The difficulty of finding teachers properly qualified for the business is one of the principal obstacles to the efficiency of the University and Lyceum."⁴

Teachers were the kingpin to a good and efficient educational service. Naudi made the point when he argued that it was well to observe that whoever wanted to become a teacher needed to adopt "*sentimenti tutto paterni*



Bust of Canon Paolo Pullicino, Director of Elementary Schools, found in front of the Education Division Head Office, Floriana

verso i suoi Pupilli" (paternal sentiments towards his pupils). Naudi opined that the teacher needed to return to being a child himself so as to be understood by his class. These were valid words indeed; however in Malta of his time, these were next to impossible to achieve.⁵ Teachers – the few that existed – did not have any training in the carrying out of their duties. There were no training colleges; indeed there was no form of apprenticeship. No teacher body could be identified till teachers became aware of their potential, skills, and abilities. These qualities and the realisation of their existence could only emerge with time and training. The first schools set up as a result of the 1836 Royal Commissioners' suggestions, were to be the spark that set off the development of the teacher class and its build-up into a strong, unified body. This process took about eighty years and culminated in 1919, when teachers finally organised themselves into a trade union to seek and strive for a brighter future.

Recruitment, appointment and classification

For whatever reason individuals aspired to become teachers, from the 1840s these

experienced a gradual standardisation of the methods, requirements and procedure for recruitment. The Government of Malta was the sole authority that could set and regulate teacher intakes into the various educational institutions. However, initially the mode of recruitment was erratic and this did not help much to give status to the teacher corps. By the 1850s the regulations became more refined but the teachers' image in Maltese society still suffered due to reasons such as the suspicion of favouritism in appointments and promotions caused by political and social exigencies. This unfavourable disposition towards the teacher corps was compounded by the practice of engaging anyone who had even a negligible capability to teach, regardless of age and academic background. This latter situation came about especially with the expansion of schools in many localities especially under the Directorship of Can. Paolo Pullicino (1850–80), as this rapid development in the sector created the problem of demand and supply. There were now more posts to fill than teachers to fill them. Those willing to start a career in the sector were more than welcome. This meant that even those still in their tender years – that is in the early teens – had to be recruited. Thus staffs in schools were a mixed group of ages; abilities, attitudes and experiences, and this further projected a wary impression as to what a teacher corps should be made of.

In this early stage of school expansion, even before the 1850s, some seem to have regarded teaching posts as attractive opportunities for employment. In 1847 for example, a mastership for the primary school of Cospicua, attracted eleven candidates, three of whom possessed a doctorate!⁶ And this was no isolated instance. For the post of assistant teacher the following year, another four candidates applied.⁷ Once the candidate was selected, the appointment was provisional for one year, subject to confirmation. If the appointee satisfied the superiors' expectations, s/he would be placed on the permanent establishment. For instance a mistress for the school of the Gozitan village of Nadur was put on a year's probation, "her appointment not to be confirmed until the progress of her scholars shall have been ascertained."⁸ This probation period only applied to new appointees; a transfer to a different school did not entail a new probation

period or further proof of teaching proficiency.

By 1850 the Government ran 24 primary schools in Malta and another four in Gozo, besides a night school at Zabbar and the House of Industry for female orphans in Floriana. As testified by Can. Pullicino on his appointment as Director of Primary Schools, the male teachers in these schools had varying levels of academic ability, and possessed very few skills in the methods of teaching, as they had never been given any training to this effect. The females were found lacking in both method and management skills. For Pullicino this emanated from the backward state of education of those social classes from which women teachers were recruited.⁹ This gave rise to his idea that teachers should thus be subdivided into three 'Classes'. Each 'Class' would correspond to one of three orders of schools based on size and importance. This, Pullicino hoped, would spur teachers to improve their performance, enticed by the prospect of promotion.

Pullicino transformed this idea into a concrete process when he specified how this would be carried out. The Class system was for those already serving in the schools. For recruits, considering the low level of ability teachers possessed at the time, Pullicino wanted to introduce a comparatively demanding and ambitious standard. As the system was to be introduced in a gradual way, it started with the male candidates who now would need a diploma or certificate of ability corresponding to the post, besides the presentation of testimonials of good moral and civil conduct. The female candidates would then fall under the same regulations once the system was finalised.¹⁰

Thus, in Pullicino's plan, teachers would first be appointed to the Third Division of a Class grade and every two years the candidates would be examined by the director. This would result in either a promotion or demotion; otherwise the teacher would remain in the same Division for another period of time. Even entering into the lowest scale was to be done through a *concorso* – a selective process that would pick the best candidate.¹¹ Such requirements were meant to give status to primary school teachers as the vigorous requirements would reflect positively on the appointees and boost their

esteem within the occupational hierarchy.

Even the confirmation of teachers in their post after the probation period elapsed, with time became stricter and more stringent. Pullicino confirmed candidates only if they satisfied his set of criteria. He was adamant to close one eye; any eye for that matter. An example of this can be gleaned from the case of the mistress of the Siggiewi School who was found inefficient in her output. Her probation period was extended by three months – in no way a sign of benevolence from the director – as Pullicino stated that, "...I hope in the meantime to be able to recommend for such a place a more competent person."¹²

Teaching grades in the second half of the nineteenth century were divided into fixed and temporary posts. While the 'fixed' assistant (as the teachers were called at the time) could more easily get promoted to a full teachership (master or mistress of the school), the temporary assistant had a harder time. To get a promotion/appointment to school mistress for the Rabat (Malta) School, a call for applications was issued amongst the temporary assistants. Seventeen pupil-mistresses from different primary schools applied. After examinations (in History; Italian and English Reading, Writing and Grammar; Arithmetic; and the practice of teaching in class) spread over three days were held, one candidate was chosen. This was "a young girl of seventeen years of age, of excellent character, and trained from several years as Temporary Assistant."¹³

As time went by directors changed, and so did the procedure of appointment. During Sigismondo Savona's term as director (1880–87) the process to fill teacher posts became even more stringent. For example, in one instance, twelve assistant teachers sat for a two-day examination in the English and Italian languages (Reading, Dictation, Grammar and Composition), Arithmetic, Writing, the elements of Geography, and the History of England and Malta. The five selected appointees then had to abide by a Government Circular of 13 January 1885 and thus had to pass a medical examination. In this case Savona managed to obtain an exemption if these particular appointees presented a medical certificate of fitness from a Government Medical Officer.¹⁴ And standards continued to rise. Thus in the



*Director of Education and Rector of the University
Antonio Annetto Caruana*

following year (1886), School Management was added to the above-mentioned examinable subjects. Besides, teachers under whom the candidates had served were to provide a certificate of good conduct and ability. Therefore, for one particular post, the examination was set in two stages. Out of the original eighteen, six managed to obtain more than fifty per cent of the marks in the first part and thus pass to the second part. The assistant teacher who finally made it had five years experience behind him and was certified fit through the medical examination.¹⁵ Such instances suffice to indicate that where possible, appointments were given only after searching and serious examinations that testified to the candidates' abilities in class and their knowledge of subject content.

With the appointment of a new director to the headship of the Education Department, Antonio Annetto Caruana (1887-96), a re-classification of the teaching staff in the Government schools was launched. At the top of the teaching hierarchy there now was the 'Teacher'. Immediately following there was the 'Fixed Assistant Teacher' (two posts in all). Then came the 'Assistant Teacher' divided in three Classes. The hierarchy ended with the Monitorial Class. This classification did not include auxiliary teachers such as those of Drawing, Wood Carving and Modelling.¹⁶ Regarding the Monitorial Class, this was one

of those elements that created a most serious negative effect on the status and image of the teaching body. The monitors and monitresses were in reality grown-up children or young adolescents whose job was to help in the teaching of the younger pupils in the primary schools. These posts were the solution invented to mitigate the lack of proper teaching staff. Those joining or remaining within the Education Department were a perennial problem as supply never satisfied the demand; thus the Monitorial Grade was the compromise for the shortfall in qualified teaching personnel. Monitors and monitresses started at a tender age and their output was thus compromised by their lack of maturity. For example, in an 1895 list of appointments, one could identify a 15 year old and another two 12 years of age! The criterion for selection was based on the fact "that each has passed successfully the school examination, and is now first in Class." Even the Governor of Malta thought they were too young and solicited the director to try and find older boys and girls for the job. Yet A.A. Caruana pointed out that even with the best endeavour, in the villages it was difficult to find better candidates.¹⁷ With an intake of this quality – unqualified, without real training and, of such a tender age – teacher numbers were swelled by elements that were of negligible academic stature. This reality was of no real contribution to status, esteem and importance to the occupation. Though some were trained and qualified, a good percentage was not, and these tended to predominate on the school scene due to their sheer number.

During Napoleone Tagliaferro's term as director (1897-1904), the Monitorial Grade was kept, but it was now called the 'Apprentice' Class – just a cosmetic alteration. The differences between the teacher grade (head of school) and the monitorial class were so stark that the lack of homogeneity in abilities and competencies could not be missed. To become a head of school the candidate had to pass an examination made up of quite a handful of subjects. Thus, for example, six assistant teachers from the training school of Malta and eight from that of Gozo who competed for the post of head teacher for the school of Mosta in 1895, sat for English, Italian, Arithmetic, History of England and of Malta, Geography, Calligraphy, Sewing and School Management.¹⁸ This shows what pretensions there were for the highest posts,

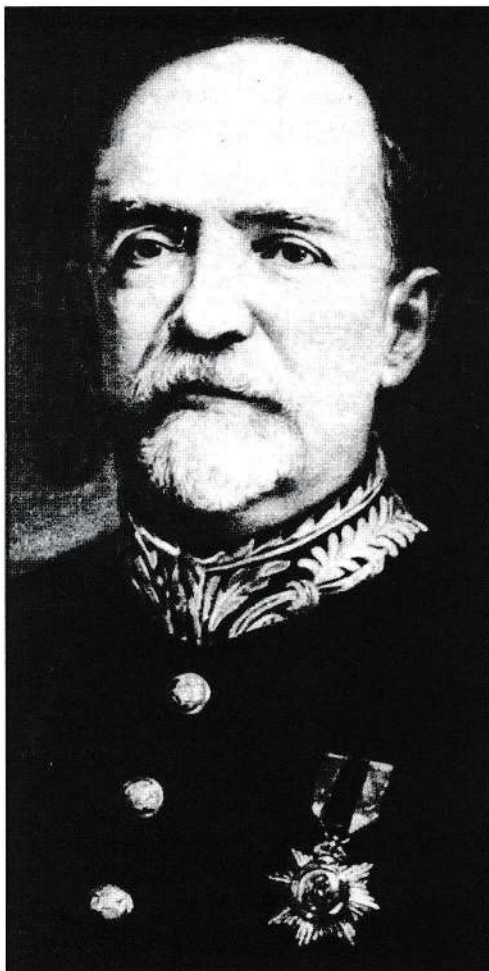
therefore denoting the competencies expected from assistant teachers who aspired to rise to such posts. On the other hand, what monitorial candidates needed was knowledge of the alphabet and the rudiments of reading. They would then have their weekly lessons under their superior teachers and also attended the training school once a week. To become assistant teachers, they needed to pass an examination on the subjects taught in the training school.¹⁹ All teaching grades would be found in the schools, but the distinction which the administrators were surely aware of, may not have been – and most probably was not – grasped and understood by the general public. Thus the association with professional competence may have been quite blurred with so many different levels of competence in the same school.

The teaching occupation suffered from a chronic shortage of good teachers, indeed, it suffered from a nearly total absence of recruits. This was the case in the first decades of the twentieth century. Francis Reynolds as Director of Government Elementary Schools (1913–

20) expressed the veracity and gravity of the situation when he revealed that in the period 1915–17 only three suitable candidates had been found for a teaching post! Conversely, between October 1916 and October 1917, twenty-three teachers had left the Department, and between 1914 and 1917 not even one male candidate was found in the town schools. Reynolds therefore had to admit that classes in town schools were thus entrusted to “raw country lads, frequently with misery to themselves and little advantage to their pupils.” Therefore the outcome of all this was that the female teachers – or more correctly monitresses – had to be assigned to the lower classes in boys’ schools. This also necessitated the re-classification of the salaries for the female staff.²⁰

Salaries

This lack of teachers comes as no surprise when one considers the paltry salary structure existing in the pre-unionisation period. If *Il Portafoglio Maltese* is to be taken as an indication of this, the paper in one issue of 1858 complained about the “*meschinissimo salario*” [highly miserable salary] of the teaching staff. The paper showed its disappointment for the insensitivity of the Government towards the hard-working teachers and their toil to educate children. A reference to the required patience was also stressed. The writer then argued that teachers could not be treated like porters, messengers, guards and police constables, who were all, in fact, paid better wages. The teachers’ salary was barely enough for them to buy a decent dress in which they could carry out their duties.²¹ It was of no wonder that teaching was unattractive and thus not many were found to carry it out. Yet, there was no way how teachers in the nineteenth century could demand better pay. There was no teacher organisation, only teachers. What *Il Portafoglio Maltese* wrote was just one example among a multitude of articles in local newspapers, all to the same effect. Teachers tried to help themselves by supplementing their meagre salaries whenever they could. The most typical extra work was of course private lessons. *L’Amor Patrio* in the mid-1800s underlined the plight of one teacher who was transferred from Valletta to Qormi. The paper remarked that this teacher was now literally ruined. He had a numerous family and



Director of Education Napoleone Tagliaferro

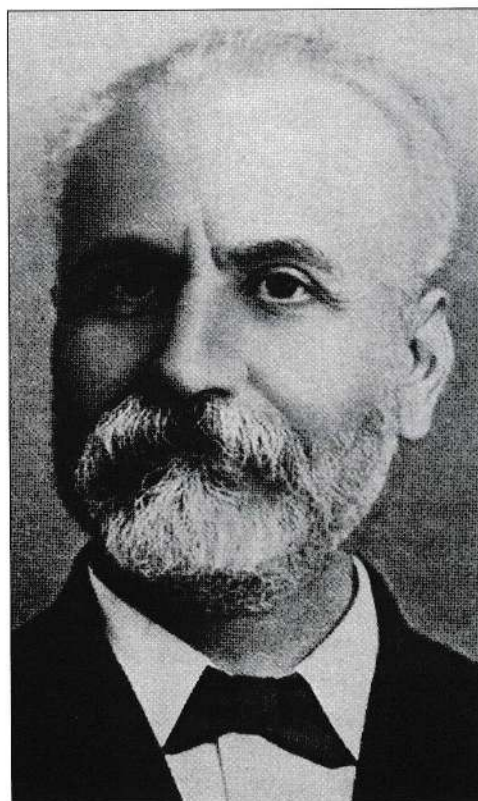
his fixed pay was not enough. However, "He did help himself in his free hours by giving private lessons. At Casal Curmi it is impossible to find scholars."²²

This was not merely criticism from outsiders. The official opinion was very much on the same lines. When Can. Pullicino proposed better pay for the teaching staff in the 1860s, he made clear the objectives for such a request. The Director felt it necessary "to more urgently recommend the increase to their salary, not only to better their condition, but also to have them not dissatisfied with their position considering themselves deluded in their expectations."²³ This was no novel situation; surely not for that period but neither for more recent times. As Pollard has aptly observed, "The rewards of teaching have never been financial."²⁴ Teachers' salaries have for a very long time been small, even meagre. Notwithstanding unionisation from 1919, the Maltese teaching corps has experienced this pecuniary condition not only along the nineteenth century but no less during a long stretch of the twentieth century.²⁵ This has affected their esteem for their own selves and their status *vis-à-vis* other occupations. In Malta in the 1800s, the lack of a decent salary was caused by the perennial problem of stringent public expenditure.²⁶ No wonder that there was a constant movement of young men from the teaching ranks to other jobs as soon as opportunities offered themselves. Just one instance will suffice to illustrate this reality. A certain Charles James Lowell in 1876 put forward a petition to request a transfer from the post of fixed assistant teacher to that of marshal in the courts of law. He had "faithfully served the Government" for 16 years. However, the annual £30 salary "not being sufficient to meet the daily expenses he is obliged to incur" constrained him to ask for the transfer.²⁷

Lowell was not exaggerating; he was not pretentious in his demands. He was realistic, factual and down to earth. None other than the Royal Commissioner Patrick J. Keenan was to confirm this. In his 1880 Report, Keenan was perplexed "how these poor teachers can thrive to clothe themselves as respectable as their official position demands of them, to find themselves with proper nourishment – bread being said to be dearer in Malta than in London."²⁸ On the basis of Keenan's observations and through

the hard work to adjust the salary structure entailed by Director of Education Savona, the situation improved slightly in the following years. As Apple put it, "many teachers ... work in conditions that would be laughable were they not so tragic."²⁹ And salaries were not only a means by which to live better. They signified much more. As the nineteenth century politician Salvatore Cachia Zammit argued, it was imperative to grant the teacher corps a respectable remuneration as it would have been beneficial to them, "whose importance and rank the public would necessarily estimate by the amount of their salary as being the stamp indicating the value of their services."³⁰

Maltese teachers could not remain much longer in a situation where, though those in power knew what they needed, yet no one seemed willing to do anything about it. The Government was the least likely to take the first step. As Bloomer, has observed in the British context, "the money required to finance a 1 per cent increase in salaries of teachers is sufficient to increase the pay of local authority manual workers by 1½ per cent or the pay of doctors by several times that amount." Thus "to Government intent on restricting public spending there can be few options which have as large an immediate effect as depressing the



Sigismondo Savona – politician and educator



The Maltese politician Salvatore Cachia Zammit

level of the teachers' salary awards."³¹ If no one was going to take the first step, some teachers realised that they had to do it themselves.

Towards unionisation

Teachers could not but react in the face of all these afflictions. At this point they sensed the urge to unite formally into one corps. They felt what Lortie terms the 'organisational imperative' and which Hoyle and John consider "crucial to the further emergence of teachers as an organised occupational group..."³² Unionisation and unity came through a process of sensitisation. By the turn of the twentieth century, the teacher corps in Malta, on its own steam, set the ball rolling towards the formation of a corporate body that could help them achieve what they considered to be their right, but which no one seemed prepared to grant them voluntarily.

It was in 1902 that the germ of unionisation took its first shape. The Inspector of Elementary Schools presented the Government with the Draft Regulations for what was being termed as the 'Malta Teachers' Guild'. This had the aim of helping distressed teachers and their families. The idea went further. A Circulating

Library was also to be attached to this Guild "to promote a spirit of mutual improvement and self culture." The Guild was meant to terminate a practice, which was "laudable...but humiliating to respectable persons..." as, when a teacher died, the colleagues collected from among themselves a sum of money to help the family of the deceased. Thus it would be the Guild's objective to promote the teachers' spirit of self-reliance, by encouraging them to put aside funds for any eventual misfortune, sickness or death.³³

This was not an organisation originating from the grass roots but it was a step taken by the educational authorities for the benefit of teachers. In fact, the managing committee was to be formed from all the different grades of the Elementary Schools Department³⁴ with the head of the Department as *ex officio* president. After two years nothing had been done. The answer to Enrico Magro's query showed that there seemed to be little real resolve on the part of the Government to do anything for teachers. Magro, as the official responsible for the primary schools, had pointed out that, "several teachers have anxiously enquired of late" about the formation of this Guild. The reply he got from the colonial authorities was that the Government was still working on a decision.³⁵

It took more than a decade before teachers were introduced to another initiative, this time in the form of a Teachers' Mutual Aid Society (T.M.H.S.) with objectives similar to the stillborn Guild of 1902. The management committee was also to be formed from staff members of the elementary schools but the head of the Department was now to be appointed honorary president.³⁶ This was a development of significance as the T.M.H.S. was to be run solely by teachers for the benefit of teachers. Its interests were the wellbeing of the teacher corps. The Department had given them this new role through which they could demonstrate and practise their administrative and coordinating abilities and by so doing they could get a first feeling of unity and cooperation. Of course, up till now this evolved only around the function of basic mutual help, as this Society was "entirely charitable, based on the principle that the richer should help the poorer."³⁷ This Society worked towards relieving the poverty experienced by a number of teachers especially during the

First World War years (1914-18). By 1918 the financial position of a large number of teachers was stretched to the limits. The Government granted a free ladle of soup to a maximum of 120 teachers and these were selected from those most deserving, that is, the more desperate cases. The teaching corps had to pass through the humiliating procedure of applying to the secretary of the T.M.H.S. for consideration.³⁸ Those persons who were selected were entitled to one portion of soup per day till the end of the month. Each portion cost 2d. (1.9 euro cents). The monthly bill was to be handed to the T.M.H.S. on payday to be paid out of its funds.³⁹

This was a situation that could not but show to what extremes teachers had been stretched. And if this was not enough, the Commission appointed to review salaries of Government workers recommended an increase for all employees except teachers. As Camilleri Flores aptly notes, "This strange omission might seem to suggest that in 1919 teachers constituted a relatively highly paid elite among Maltese workers."⁴⁰ But of course this could not be farther from the truth. Ellul Galea considers this anomaly the result of the absence of a teachers' union.⁴¹ No unified front could be presented and no one could speak to the authorities in the name of the teaching corps. This was an eye opener for whoever was keen enough to note and had the

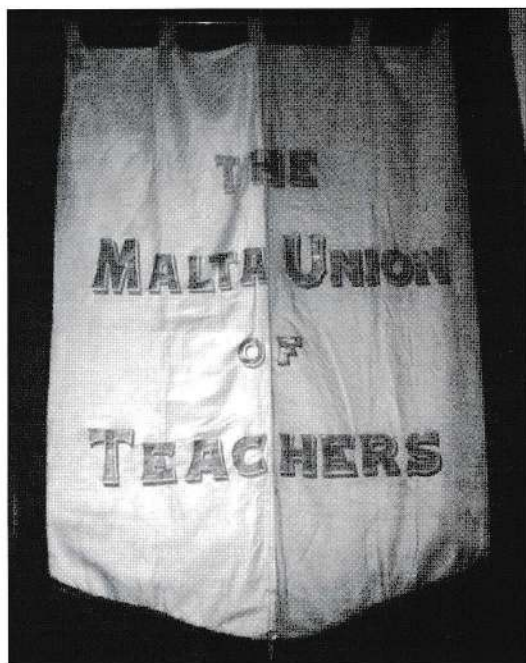


The young teacher Antonio Galea, founder of the Malta Union of Teachers

stamina to react. Though many may have taken note of the reality, there was one young teacher who seemed particularly keen on taking up the initiative; the step that would set the stage for the creation of a teachers' movement, which is still very much active to this day. This was Antonio Galea, an enterprising teacher who found the support of the two head teachers of the most important schools at the time – those of Valletta and Floriana. Together they initiated the spin to unionisation. Galea's initiative caused the General Meeting of 22 November 1919 with an agenda comprising two items: the formation of a teachers' union and the examination of a new Scheme of Salaries which was being proposed by the Government at the time.⁴²

From what was said during this meeting revealing facts about the Maltese teachers' situation came out loud and clear. As one of the speakers, the head teacher Rogantino Cachia, pointed out, teachers had been looked down upon by Maltese society "for no other reason than" the low salaries they received and thus, "they were considered of little worth." These Government employees were often called "*habba assistant*" and "*habba surmast*" (the term '*habba*' referred to the least-value coin in the Maltese currency – the third farthing). Cachia even claimed that one particular young man had not been accepted by the officers of the Malta Militia "for the great blot on his character" of having once been an elementary school teacher." The Government itself considered this class of workers "as low Employées" who were not deemed fit to attend official receptions.⁴³ Regarding their financial situation, Cachia made it clear that teachers were "entitled to receive living wages." The Governor himself had donated £50 from his own pocket in aid of the T.M.H.S. in its work among impoverished teachers. The speaker emphasised that, "it was indeed very humiliating Teachers obliged to stoop down so low as to receive portions of *minestra* [vegetable soup] like paupers."⁴⁴

This speech crystallised the teachers' double plight. Status was low, with social esteem even more so, and their salaries were a mockery. Not only were the people in authority usually unsympathetic, but more than that, they looked suspiciously on the teachers' new stance. Francis Reynolds, the Director of Government Elementary Schools, claimed that, after



The original banner of Malta's first teachers' union

Governor Methuen had commiserated their low wages, "many teachers had grown in self-importance, and dreamt solely of higher pay and better prospects but not of further efforts or greater efficiency." Therefore Reynolds argued that, "it would be a grave error to overlook indulgently the tone of the language used by Mr Cachia" in this November 22nd speech.⁴⁵

This date, 22 November 1919, is considered as the birth of the Malta Union of Teachers and from that moment, the Union's standpoint was clear as also were its objectives. Amongst the list

of first demands, salaries had to be raised for both head and assistant teachers; the increases were to be not less than £5 for the former and not less than £3 for the others. Besides, all acquired rights were not to be lost and night school duties were to be considered as distinct from those of the day school.⁴⁶

In one month, 630 out of the 721 teachers had already joined the Union. In Rogantino Cachia's words, "The Teachers of Malta have arisen from their deep sleep, they have shaken off their apathy, they have realised they are members of one body..."⁴⁷

Maltese teachers have come a long way, passed through much hardship and suffered bad sorts. Before 1919 they could never defend themselves, as they were not an organised body. Each one was on his/her own in their classes, in their schools. Yet, when the spark finally set the events in motion, they answered the call as they realised that unionisation and organisation were the answer to their plight. Borrowing from Karl Marx a phrase he very much linked with the emancipation of workers, from a class on their own, teachers had become a class for their own. Through their becoming a united corps, their sorts could change, as in fact they gradually improved along the twentieth century, not least achieving professional status in 1988, thus establishing themselves amongst the Maltese professional bodies.

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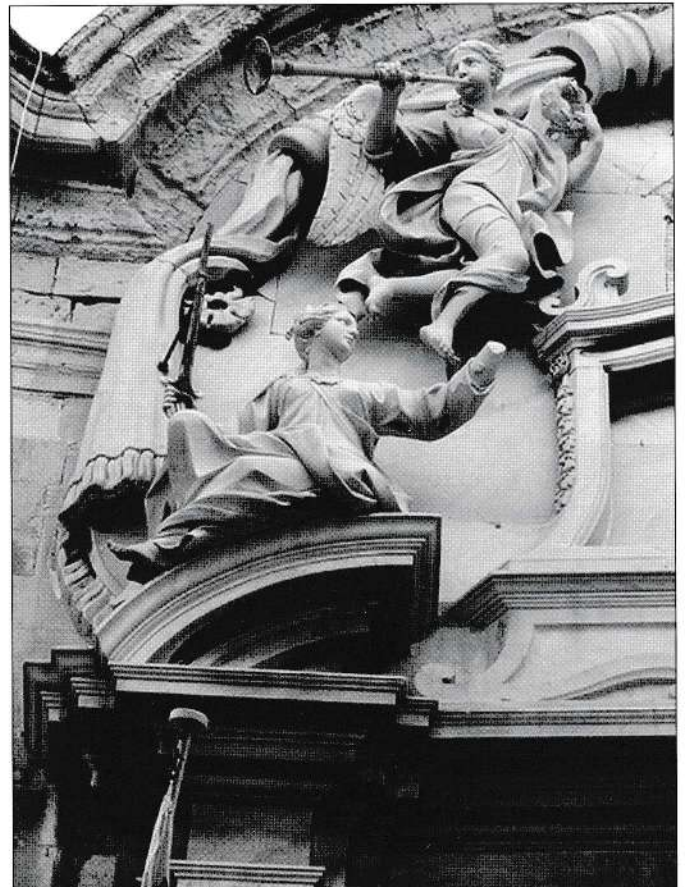
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Family life and neighbourliness in Malta (c.1640 – c.1760): Some preliminary observations based on evidence from the *Magna Curia Castellaniæ*¹

Emanuel Buttigieg

Between 1530 and 1798, the Maltese islands were governed by the Order of St John the Baptist of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta. This military-religious organisation was made up of knights from the noble families of Europe who took religious vows; their mission statement was to care for the sick and fight the enemies of Christendom. This theocratic regime established the *Magna Curia Castellaniæ* in September 1533 as a new tribunal, divided into two branches, a civil and a criminal one.² The evidence for this paper is drawn from the latter section and covers the period from about the middle of the seventeenth century to around the middle of the eighteenth century. It aims to present some preliminary observations on family and community life in Malta using a number of case-studies from the *Castellaniæ*. Throughout, there will be a particular emphasis on the roles and voices of children and adolescents within an urban setting and in relation to notions of family life and neighbourliness.



A detail from the highly artistic sculptural composition found above the main entrance of the former *Castellania* in Merchants Street, Valletta

History, historiography and sources

1676 was a particularly difficult year for the inhabitants of Malta: an outbreak of plague claimed 11,300 lives, one of the worst demographic disasters to hit early modern Malta.³ We can only imagine what a usually bustling city like Valletta must have felt like shrouded in death and collective mourning. Medical experts commissioned by the government were able to point out the moment when the plague started. During December 1675 and January 1676, the young children of the wealthy Valletta merchant Matteo Bonnici fell mysteriously ill and died. Doctors initially attributed the death of Bonnici's two-year-old boy to teething: "while in a paroxysm [or fit of disease] he died. This is very common in little

children while teething".⁴ There was nothing unusual in this; teething was an extremely common cause of death among young children. An old Maltese proverb plainly stated: '*Mannejbiet lesti l-kfejriet*', that is, 'When children begin to cut the eye-teeth, get the shrouds ready'.⁵ Bonnici's son may have died due to problems related to teething, or he may have succumbed to the plague, or it could have been a combination of both. What is certain is that the rate of mortality among children and young persons during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was extremely high. In the Valletta

parish of Porto Salvo, of 1,600 mortality cases during the 1640s, ninety-nine were children aged between one and four, and 774 were aged between five and nineteen.⁶ Newborn babies buried in the first month of life in a rural Maltese village between 1750 and 1789 amounted to approximately 163 per 1,000 registered baptisms, while infant deaths amounted to 281 per 1,000 baptisms.⁷ In the parish of Qrendi, between 1758 and 1779, 144 infants less than a year old died, leading to an infant mortality rate of 224 per thousand live-born children.⁸

The seemingly matter-of-fact manner in which the doctors dismissed the death of Bonnici's son as commonplace, and statistical information such as that quoted above, have left historians wandering about the nature of family and community life in pre-modern / pre-industrial societies. The idea that parents in the past were indifferent and resigned to their children's death as a way to shield themselves from pain has become an accepted 'fact' and is often taken for granted. Such a perspective became entrenched in historiography through the work of Philippe Ariès, Edward Shorter and Lawrence Stone.⁹ In their view, good parenting came about only in comparatively modern times. Maltese traditions and folklore would seem to concur with such a conclusion. Proverbs such as '*Aħsbilhom għall-magħmudija u wara għat-tmiddija*' ('Prepare the child for christening and then for burial') and '*M'isbaħ il-Ġenna għal dik it-tarbija li tmut fil-fisqija*' ('What can be better than Paradise for the child who dies when still in its swaddling clothes?') are seen as indicating parental acceptance of child death and rejoicing rather than mourning since the young, as yet untainted by sin, went straight to heaven. There is a continuously growing body of work by historians and archaeologists which disproves the idea of pre-modern parental and societal disinterest in the young, and yet the old stereotype proves to be incredibly resilient.¹⁰

The issue underlying the debate about feelings and mentalities is the nature of sources available and the way these are utilized.¹¹ What current investigators of the past adopt as their primary sources were seldom, if ever, created with the intention of satisfying the curiosity of future researches or to fit the analytical categories of the social sciences. Literary texts, diaries, advice books, paintings, objects, parish

registers, court records, and so on, can and do provide historians with insights into particular societies, which we interpret through modern analytical concepts. The important thing is to maintain an awareness of the specific nature and place of sources from the past. At any one point in time there is a range of experiences and a multiplicity of meanings attached to childhood and adolescence, depending on which children and adolescents are being looked at, in what settings and at which point in history.¹² To return to the case of Matteo Bonnici and his family, he brought in doctors to treat his children and other members of his household and he himself died through his continued contact with his offspring. Such a case study raises questions of familial and societal attitudes towards younger – and often more vulnerable – members of society. This paper will draw upon a number of cases from the *Castellania* to formulate some initial answers to these questions.

'Inhabiting' the urban landscape of Valletta

Trial records such as those of the *Castellania* are extremely rich in details about various socio-economic aspects. They contain depositions from across the social spectrum of early modern Maltese society but their particular value lies in the 'recorded voices' of those segments of society which left few traces in the historical record: the illiterate, the poor, small-scale artisans, peasants, women and even children. Naturally, like all primary sources, trial records have their limits; the court setting was far from their normal environment for most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century people and information given in court was coloured by the surroundings in which it was presented and by wider societal expectations. Even so, the vast quantity of court records that have survived and the variety of issues dealt with therein are a clear indication that recourse to legal arbitration was common throughout Maltese society.¹³ For instance, on 7 July 1760, thirteen-year old Josepho Sant from Birkirkara, who described himself as 'one of the carriers' ('*uno de bastasi*') of Valletta appeared in the *Castellania* to denounce a certain Giuseppe known as *Ta' Sich*. Josepho described how during the previous Friday he had been playing with other *bastasi* in Valletta when Giuseppe hit

him with a pipe on the right-hand side of his face, wounding him and causing Josepho to bleed. Therefore, in front of the court, Josepho declared " I accuse you [Giuseppe] and expect satisfaction for what I was suffering".¹⁴

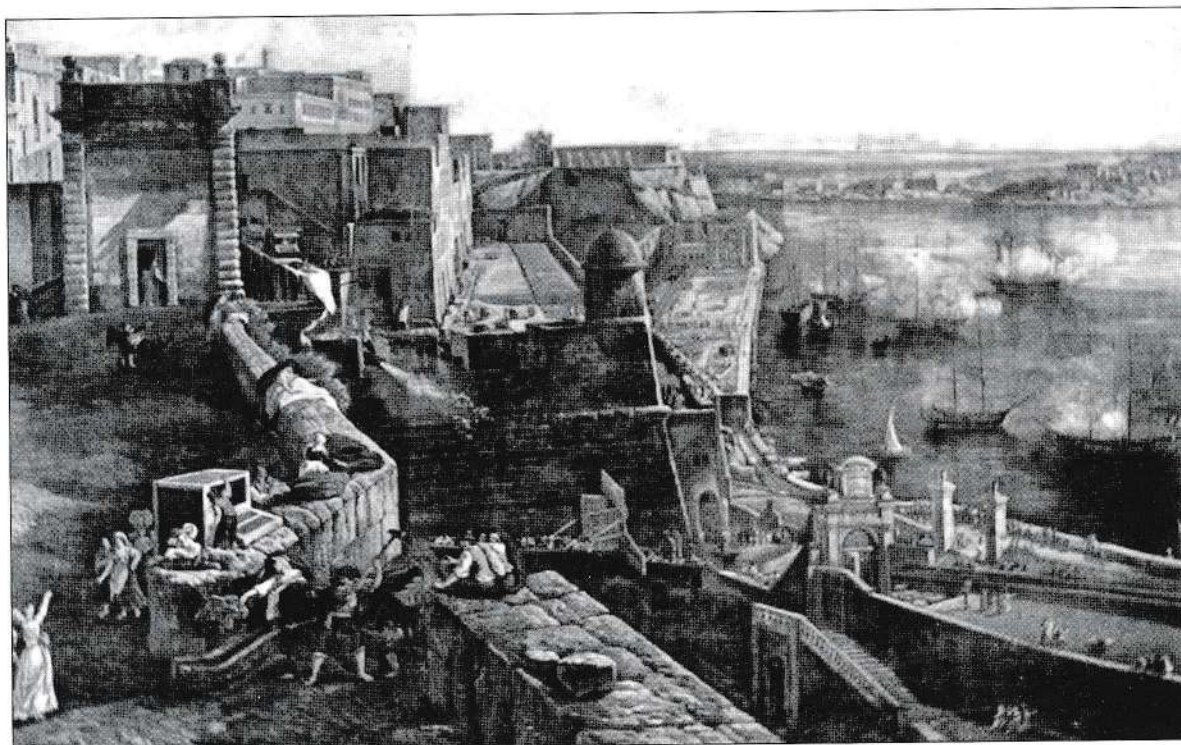
Through trial records it is possible to gain access to the world of contemporary mentalities and learn about the nature of slurs, issues of honour, family disputes, sexual intrigues and the spatial/architectural setting within which these unfolded. In this vein, information gathered from the trial records of the *Castellaniæ* can be used for the purpose of 'inhabiting' the urban landscape of Valletta. The term 'inhabiting' is used here to signify the need to move beyond a strictly architectural and cartographic history of Valletta and instead seek to understand the lives of those who over the years occupied its buildings and walked its streets. We are used to accounts of Valletta which focus on how the city looked; and truly Valletta was an incredible feat of engineering, combining war and art. There were detailed regulations about the construction of buildings, the decoration of façades and corners, and the need for drainage pipes and water reservoirs.¹⁵ Maps of Valletta – like maps of other cities – present a 'moralised geography': the streets were clean, neat, monumental and largely devoid of people. Early modern cartography had a practical purpose, as well as a political one, of emphasizing a vision of discipline and godliness.¹⁶ When viewing such maps it is easy to forget that such idealized representations were in fact a far cry from the messiness of daily life. The bell-ringing, sacred music and chanting of the many churches and religious houses had to compete with the noise and shouting of the daily market, workshops and various sellers and buyers. The scent of incense would have been mingled with a myriad smells, ranging from bread being baked in the Order's bakery to the sweat of the mass of souls going about their daily business. The neatness, order, discipline and godliness projected by the maps quickly dissolve into the chaos, activity and irreverence that emerge from the records of the *Castellaniæ*; through an analysis of these trials the past inhabitants of Valletta can once again reclaim the streets and spaces which were once theirs.

One of the first noticeable elements in the



The Auberge de Provence which today serves as the Museum of Archeology found in Republic Street, Valletta

records of the *Castellaniæ* is the way in which people identified landmarks which made sense to them in the urban spread of Valletta. The *auberges* of the Order of St John – buildings dedicated to the eight 'nations' represented within the Order – were regularly cited as clear points of reference. Thus, in June 1640, fourteen-year old Angelo Invam described a fight between galley soldiers which he witnessed "in the Spanish quarters of the city", presumably the area around the *Auberge* of Castille.¹⁷ More unequivocally, in August 1720, Caroli Ricard described how one Saturday while he was sitting on a stone bench outside his house "which is close to the Venerable *Auberge* of Provence" (today the National Museum of Archaeology), he was pelted with the peels of a melon by fourteen-year old Lorenzo Momal.¹⁸ In October 1720, thirteen-year old Bartholomea Gatt described how while she and her aunt stood with some merchandise in the space between the *Auberge* of Aragon and the *Auberge* of Germany (the area that is now Independence Square), she had seen a cloaked woman and a boy hanging around the door of the house of



A painting showing *Porta del Monte* (lower right corner) on the Grand Harbour side of Valletta

the Knight de Teler, but she could not recall whether the woman had actually gone into the said house.¹⁹ So the area between these two *auberges* may have been used for some kind of market or place of exchange. The *Castellaniae* records provide further insights into Valletta's economic life. There were tailors' workshops and tobacco merchants; the area around *Porta del Monte* (today's Victoria Gate) connecting Valletta to the Grand Harbour seems to have been a particularly busy commercial area.²⁰ While giving witness during July 1760, Josepho Tonna mentioned how snow was sold in the environs of *Porta del Monte*.²¹

In parallel with the situation across early modern Europe, violence was a pervasive element of life in Valletta (and throughout Malta), as is made clear by the *Castellaniae* records.²² The phrase *con gran effusione di sangue* (with copious shedding of blood) and its variants recur repeatedly.²³ According to Natalie Zemon Davis, violence is a form of drama that has its own meanings, rather than simple haphazard actions. When violence broke out it not only involved perpetrators and victims, but also those around them who became witnesses.²⁴ Children and adolescents on the streets of Valletta participated in the theatre of violence in all three of these roles. In August 1720, the Valletta tailor Andrea Scicluna and

Maria Muscat were summoned as witnesses to testify against Giorgio Grima, a crewmember of the Order's galley *Santa Caterina*. Scicluna and Muscat said that one day Grima, who was very drunk, approached a group of young boys who were sitting on the steps of the Palace of the Knight Commander Chais and asked these boys to go buy him some tobacco. When the boys said they did not want to, Grima got into a rage and kicked one of the boys called Melchiore Agius. A passer-by intervened to stop Grima from further hurting the boy. The boy's father, Andrea Agius, petitioned the Grand Master to punish Grima, for the kick he had given Melchiore had led the latter to be hospitalized; Andrea Agius emphasized the fact that Melchiore was a minor and that he performed service as a deacon within the Order's Conventual Church of St John. The Grand Master ordered the arrest and detention of Grima.²⁵ A number of reflections can be made based on this episode. In an age before institutionalized education and when work patterns fluctuated according to the seasons, children could have considerable time to while away and the steps of houses and palaces were popular places for them to congregate. Grima's demand that these boys run an errand for him reflects the fact that children were regularly asked and expected to perform such tasks.²⁶ The presence of unsupervised children on the

street and the violence shown by Grima against Melchior could be taken as evidence for the argument of societal negligence of the young; on the other hand, the unnamed passer-by who helped Melchior and the Grand Master's decision to apprehend Grima could be used to counter this argument. What is significant is that in his petition Andrea Agius emphasized the young age of Melchior and his upright character as a Conventual deacon to highlight even more the seriousness of the assault. Andrea Agius used the *Castellania* to appeal to the sense of justice of the Grand Master; this was an episode focusing on children as victims and the role of the state in punishing unlicensed violence.

Minors could also be perpetrators of violence and unlawful acts. Such was the case in August 1640 of the seventeen-year old Francesco Lia from Noto in Sicily. Lia and his accomplice Norando die Hiez de Samiglio were accused of having stolen a silver candlestick worth 15 *scudi* 10 *tari* from in front of the holy and venerated image of the Madonna of Philermos, which was located in an apposite chapel inside St John's Conventual Church. Lia was described as having laid his "cursed and hell-hound hand" on the candlestick. The news of the theft of this object spread like wild fire. Thomaso Lodovico de Sosa, a court official, was standing on the corner of the *Castellania*

building (today the Ministry of Health) across from the bell tower of St John's when he heard the news and immediately set about to discover who the thief was; Lia was apprehended and he helped de Sosa recover the candlestick which he (Lia) had buried outside the *Porta del Monte*. On being interrogated Lia explained that he was a shoemaker and had come to Malta to visit his brother Michele, but upon arrival learnt that Michele was in the Levant on a corsairing vessel. The *Castellania* pondered about what punishment should be meted out to Lia, particularly in the light of his "being a minor". Judge Joannes Caloritius condemned Lia to a public flogging and to row on the galleys for ten years with his feet bound in chains. Severe as this punishment was, Francesco was very likely spared an even worst treatment because of his young age and because he was a "silly youth of poor judgement, who was not able to discern good from bad".²⁷ Therefore, age and character were taken into consideration by the authorities when deciding on a punishment and its severity may have been somewhat muted by such factors.²⁸ At a time when corporal punishment as retribution for an offence was acceptable, physical violence was a prerogative of the state through which it disciplined a wrongdoer and tried to deter other possible offenders. In a city whose population by 1680 numbered at least 8,028 souls (compared to 6,309 in 2008) and where there was a constant coming and going of



The Conventual Church of St John in the seventeenth century by an unknown artist, found in the National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta

people both from within and outside Malta, the use of force was legitimated in order to create the 'moralised geography' depicted in maps.²⁹ Nonetheless, in the records of the *Castellania* we have a clear indication that underneath the gloss of officialdom, Valletta was a living, pulsating city of inhabitants (including children and adolescents) who refused to fit into this moralised mould.

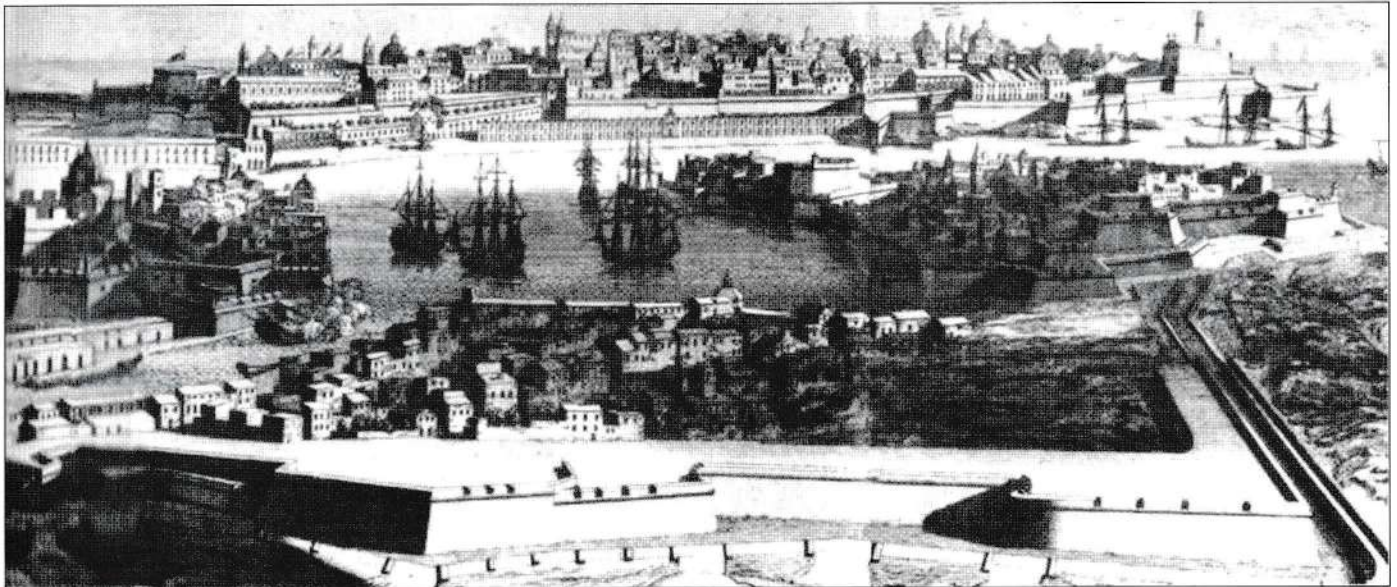
Family and community life

An exploration of the records of the *Castellania* can take one in many directions; there is enough quantity and quality to engage generations of scholars asking a whole array of questions and as digitisation transforms the archival and research world, new things can be done with even the oldest and most cited documents.³⁰ With the emergence of women's history in the late 1960s and its subsequent evolution into gender history, the search for both feminine and masculine norms and experiences in the past has become a key area of study.³¹ It becomes even more urgent to look at manhood and womanhood in the past when one realizes the highly matriarchal nature of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Maltese society.³² Particularly in Valletta and the harbour area where many men spent considerable time away at sea, women – and inevitably associated with them were children – played prominent roles within their communities. The records of the *Castellania* are a very rich, and as yet largely untapped, source through which it is possible to explore issues related to women's lives, including relations between the sexes, parent-child relations, and questions about community feeling and notions of neighbourliness. The debate about the 'decline of neighbourliness' in early modern England has been a source of major discussion in English historiography. The idea is that massive agrarian and religious changes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries reduced the scope for 'neighbourliness', taken to mean a sense of belonging to a particular place, personal knowledge of a place and its people, participation within that community, avoiding conflict and trying to live according to Christian precepts of charity.³³ In a study about the parish of Qrendi in the second half of the eighteenth century, Frans Ciappara has revealed that despite a population turnover rate

of 51 per cent and behaviour which disrupted village life, factors such as charity and kinship (both familial and spiritual) reinforced social cohesion and helped to maintain a strong sense of neighbourliness.³⁴ Such observations can be gauged against data from the *Castellania*.

Take for instance a fight which broke out in July 1740 between Gratiella Tabone, wife of Angelo the baker from Bormla and Maria Balzan known as *ta' Siriedech*. Gratiella Tabone had commissioned a certain Madalena di Lorenzo of Bormla to prepare some stockings for her and she sent Paulica "her daughter of seventeen years still a spinster" to fetch these stockings from Madalena. After a while Tabone was alerted by her neighbour Petruzzo that Paulica was being beaten up; Tabone rushed to the door to find a tearful and battered Paulica who said she was beaten up by Maria *ta' Siriedech* and her son, who were neighbours of Madalena. Tabone therefore sought out Maria to ask her why she had beaten Paulica, to which Maria replied that Paulica had offended her daughter. Tabone told Maria that she "had not behaved in the manner of honourable women", after which a fight ensued between the two women who had to be separated by onlookers. While Tabone was redressing herself, Maria hit her with a cross-bar on her head causing her to bleed; a neighbour intervened to restrain Maria. Tabone, who described herself as a baker, asked the *Castellania* to make Maria compensate her for the losses she was suffering because of her inability to work due to her injuries. Other witnesses were called in: Gratiella Darmanin known as *ta' Piziezen* said she was injured by Maria while trying to help Tabone, while Maria Micallef known as *ta li zeccaila* said she gave refuge to Tabone after the fight with Maria. Another witness was twelve-year old Petro Falzon. He said that one evening he was walking in Bormla along a road (known as *ta' Mact'rittin*) which led to the mill next to which lived the "almoner of Bormla", when he saw a woman called *ta' Siriedech* beating up Paulica "daughter of a baker who lived in Crucifix Street in Bormla". Petro told *ta' Siriedech* that she should not harm Paulica and he went and told Tabone what was happening. The court fined Maria *ta' Siriedech* 4 *uncie* for her violent behaviour.³⁵

So how does such a case-study compare to



A scene showing the Cottonera (Isla/Senglea, Birgu/Vittoriosa and Bormla/Cospicua) with Bormla in the lower picture

the notion of neighbourliness as outlined above? It is clear that these characters had a sense of belonging to their particular street/quarter in Bormla, knew their neighbours and were participants in the daily life of their community. The Tabone family were known by their occupation as bakers, which probably meant that they were a family with a good income, while other characters were acknowledged by their nicknames: 'ta' Siriedech' (the one who raised roosters?), 'ta' Piziezen', 'ta li zeccaila' and 'the almoner'. These characters also had a clear sense of place, identifying streets and landmarks (such as the mill) which constituted their everyday bearings. What was missing in this community was a desire to avoid conflict, with women abusing each other both physically and verbally, going to court and definitely not living in a Christian manner. Maria *ta' Siriedech* seems to have been poorer than Gratiella Tabone so that their fighting was likely underlined by a

wider socio-economic difference and conflict. The neighbours of these two women ensured a return to peace by separating and keeping them apart; however, informal neighbourly measures to ensure harmony were not enough and had to be backed up by formal court procedures which punished Maria.

Another insight into family and community relations can be obtained from the case of fourteen-year old Maria Falzon, commonly known as *Manzuna*, which case dragged out in front of the *Castellania* from January to September 1740.³⁶ Table 1 lists the main characters involved. They were all from Valletta and here again it is a predominantly female cast.

Madalena Vassallo had fallen ill and her niece *Manzuna* was staying with her; two neighbours, Margerita Dingli and Maria Bezzina also regularly frequented Vassallo's house while

Three sisters:		Neighbours of Clara Cumbo:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clara Cumbo, wife of Carlo • Madalena Vassallo • Another unnamed and deceased sister, mother of: 	<p>Maria Falzon, known as <i>Manzuna</i>, daughter of Angelo, niece of Clara Cumbo and Madalena Vassallo</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Margerita Dingli, wife of Martino known as <i>del macaronaro</i> • Maria Bezzina, wife of Ignazio

Table 1

she was ill. During this time, *Manzuna* stole some money and objects from her ill aunt and gave these objects to Dingli and Bezzina. The case began when Clara Curmi accused Bezzina and in particular Dingli of having 'seduced the said *Manzuna* to commit the said theft'. According to Curmi, the sum stolen amounted to some ten Magistral *zecchini* and among the objects taken was a skirt made of very fine material (described as *d'Indiana*, meaning printed cotton). According to Maria Bezzina, following the death of Madalena, Margerita took it upon herself to place *Manzuna* in the *Conservatorio delle Zitelle di Monsignor Priore*.³⁷ This institution had been established in 1606 and was originally intended to receive girls from morally unsound homes. Its first premises were provided by the Chaplain of the Order Frà Francesco Condulli (which probably explains its name – Conservatory of the Prior), although it later moved to another building.³⁸ This was one of a number of charitable institutions regularly mentioned in history books, but on which we have little information with regards to its work and residents. The case of *Manzuna* sheds some light on this institution. In her own account of events, *Manzuna* argued that Dingli had convinced her to take objects from her ill aunt and hand them over to Dingli herself for safekeeping. Following the death of Vassallo, *Manzuna* said she moved to the Conservatory where Dingli provided her with food or money, as well as gifts, including a silver medal, a pair of black shoes, a comb of ivory and a pair of gold earrings; however, after a while, Dingli stopped providing for *Manzuna*.

Dingli appeared before the *Castellanix* on 12 February 1740 and she described herself as a fifty-three-year old woman who occupied herself with 'female tasks'. Dingli said that *Manzuna* had taken the money and objects and given them to her out of her own free will. When, at one point, *Manzuna* fell sick and was being administered the last rites, Margerita asked for the opinion of *Manzuna's* confessor about this matter and he told her to keep everything until he told her otherwise. When *Manzuna* recovered and Vassallo died, Dingli placed *Manzuna* in the Conservatory and maintained her out of the money taken from Vassallo, as well as her own resources. According to Dingli, the total paid to the matron of the Conservatory for the upkeep of *Manzuna* amounted to 41 *scudi* 5 *tari*

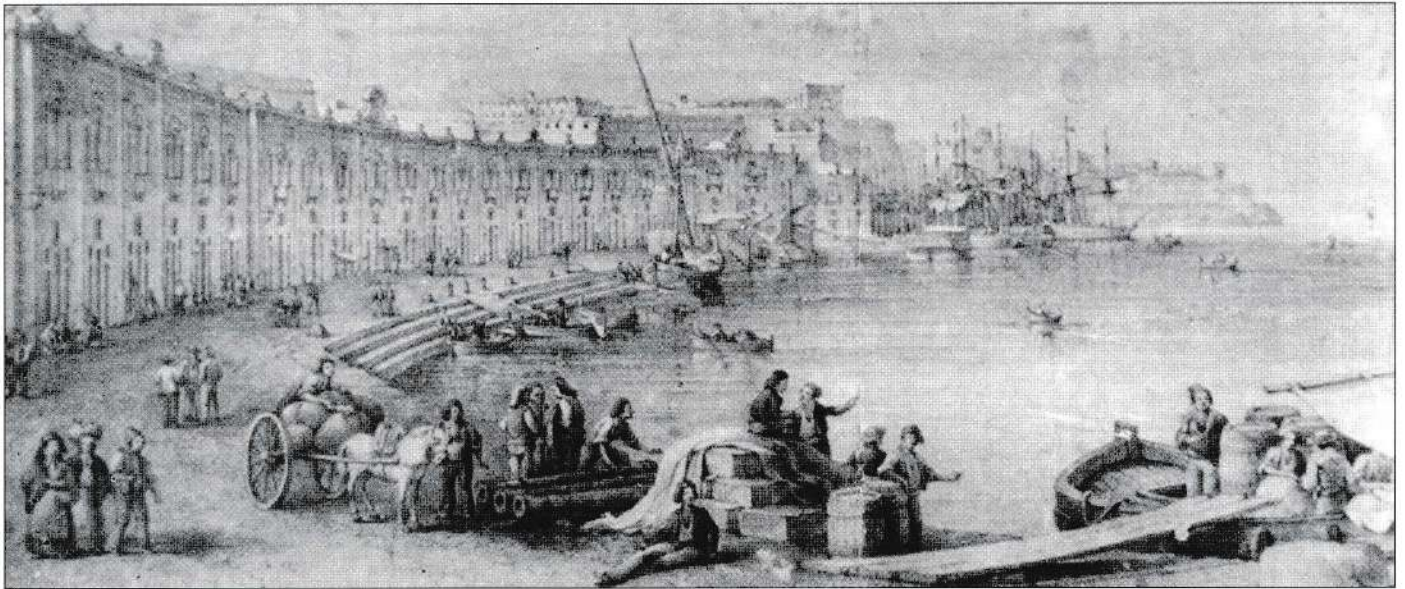
18 *grani*, a not inconsiderable sum.³⁹ A detailed breakdown was given and is reproduced here as Table 2.⁴¹

Underneath this bill is a note which stated that the total owed to the Conservatory was 47 *scudi* 4 *tari*, the total actually paid to the Conservatory was 41 *scudi* 5 *tari* 18 *grani*, which left the sum of 5 *scudi* 11 *grani* 18 *tari* outstanding. In the end, the Court decided that Dingli was in fact innocent of all charges and Cumbo was ordered to pay damages to Dingli, presumably including the expenses paid to the Conservatory.⁴² And so this case came to an end, leaving us wanting to know more about the fates of these women, a curiosity which may never be satisfied. What we can do is try to understand the workings of neighbourliness within this story.

The events described here unfolded within the quarter inhabited by these women and the Conservatory of the Prior. As neighbours, Cumbo, Dingli and Bezzina were well-informed about each other and actively involved in one another's life. It was this very closeness which brought about suspicion of foul play when it was discovered that *Manzuna* had taken items from her dying aunt. There is no explanation within the records as to why it was Dingli who took it upon herself to place *Manzuna* at the Conservatory, rather than *Manzuna's* aunt Cumbo. The expenses incurred by Dingli on behalf of *Manzuna* would seem to indicate a Christian sense of neighbourly duty to look out for a young girl without motherly supervision. In turn, *Manzuna's* case shows that the Conservatory, in its mission to cater for girls from broken homes, took in paying temporary lodgers who would have provided a welcome source of income. At least while living at the Conservatory, *Manzuna* was materially very well off, with plenty of food and luxury items of silver, ivory and gold. All these objects indicate that by the mid-eighteenth century Malta had a sophisticated market of supply and consumption for those that could afford it. What this case shows is that by looking at women's lives from a broad socio-cultural perspective, neighbourly relations in eighteenth-century Valletta emerge as flexible and versatile informal systems which operated alongside the formal structures of the state such as the *Castellanix* and the Conservatory.

	Scudi	Tari	Grani
<i>primieramente alla maestra del conservatorio tari otto per compire li giorni sin al primo del mese</i> firstly to the matron of the conservatory 8 tari to cover the days up to the first of the month		8	
<i>tre mesate pagate alla Maestra sudetta alla ragione di grani dieci al giorno</i> three payments made to the said Matron at the rate of ten grani a day	3	9	
<i>due materassetto filo di merletti</i> two small mattresses with lace	1	4	
<i>due onse filo di cordone merletti</i> two ounces of lace yarn		2	8
<i>un paio scarpe con sue fibbie d'ottane</i> a pair of shoes with their buckles in an octagonal shape		8	
<i>un paro papucci</i> a pair of slippers		2	20
<i>fatturo d'un gilecco e fodera</i> an invoice for a blazer and its lining		4	20
<i>ripezzatura d'un gilecco et un dubletto</i> relining of a blazer and a skirt		2	
<i>un fazzoletto di seta</i> a silk handkerchief		11	
<i>un paro bottoni d'oro per l'orechi</i> a pair of gold earrings	2	2	
<i>un vaso di creta</i> a vase of clay		1	
<i>un pettine d'avolio</i> a comb of ivory		4	
<i>un quarto cotone e sua filatura</i> a quarter of spun cotton		2	6
<i>una corona da Mario di cucu⁴⁰</i> (Unable to translate this)		5	
<i>un alora da collo</i> an object (a laurel?) to be worn around the neck		1	10
<i>una medaglia d'argento et un crocefisso d'argento</i> a silver medal and a silver crucifix		6	
<i>aggiungere nel mutar un circhetto d'oro</i> add a gold ring		8	
<i>spingole di merletti</i> lace pins			14
<i>vitto somministrato dalli 11 Giugno 1739 sin 10 Ottobre [...] di tari uno per giorno</i> board expenses for the period 11 June 1739 to 10 October [...] of one tari per day	16	1	
<i>pagati alla maestra</i> payed to the matron	3		
<i>alla medesima</i> to the same matron	1	5	
<i>una scatola d'argento dosata consegnata alla sudetta maestra comprata</i> a box made of silver given to the same matron	7		
<i>dati ai Maddalena sorella per ordine</i> given to Maddalena's sister as ordered	1	2	
	41	5	18

Table 2



Pinto Marina in the early nineteenth century showing the moralised geography as presented by the Schranz brothers in this lithograph

Conclusion

This paper has sought to examine family and community life in Malta from the mid-seventeenth century to the middle of the eighteenth through a sample of case studies from the criminal procedures records of the *Magna Curia Castellaniæ*; most of the material focused on Valletta and its environs. At the heart of this investigation was a concern with identifying children's and adolescents' roles and voices and understanding life in early modern Malta through their experiences. It is clear that violence, both physical and verbal, was an integral part of life, disrupting the moralised geography depicted in maps and testing notions of neighbourliness. Adults behaved in violent ways towards the young, but this cannot be used to argue for societal neglect of children. Rather, in a dynamic, mobile society with both high rates of mortality and population growth, children and adolescents constituted a substantial segment of the population and played a key role in their communities. The preparedness of parents, neighbours and even strangers to fight to protect the young from abusive adults indicates that care and love were far from absent in pre-modern Maltese society. Furthermore, what has emerged from these case studies is that the discourse about neighbourliness cannot be limited to the

question of whether this declined or not. It is probably the case that bonds of neighbourliness would have been more firmly anchored in a rural community like Qrendi (mentioned above) than in an urban environment like Valletta; yet even here a strong sense of belonging helped to bound people together. In analysing *Castellaniæ* records and discussing family and community life in early modern Malta, I have become aware that historians of this period (myself included) may take too much for granted the notion that religion pervaded every layer of society and sphere of life. Is it inconceivable that there were sectors of Maltese society which were so poor, so alienated, so transient, as to be largely unaffected, on a personal level, by the great religious shifts of this epoch? The evidence presented here would seem to suggest that this was at least a possibility. In these case studies from Valletta, it was the combination of informal neighbourly relations and formal state intervention through the law court which sustained community life, rather than religion. For the moment these are preliminary observations; however, a more systematic study of the *Castellaniæ* records, the testing of the idea of neighbourliness in different moments of Maltese history and on different communities, and a concern for children and adolescents within the historical record, all have the potential to yield exciting new perspectives on Maltese society in the past.

Notes and references

- 1 Archival abbreviations used in this paper: NLM., AOM = National Library of Malta, Archive of the Order of Malta; NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04 = National Archives of Malta, *Magna Curia Castellaniae, Processi Criminali* 92/04; n.p. = no pagination.
- 2 A.P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta*, ii (Malta, 1979), 339-40.
- 3 J. Micallef, *The Plague of 1676: 11,300 Death* (Malta, 1985).
- 4 NLM, AOM262, ff.46^{rv} (42^{rv}), 28.i.1676, "nell istesso parosismo cadde morto. Cosa molto ordinario alli figliolini nell'atto della dentitione."
- 5 J. Aquilina, *A comparative dictionary of Maltese proverbs* (Malta, 1972), 178; J. Cassar-Pullicino, *Beliefs and practices relating to birth and infancy*, (Malta, 1976), 253-4. On teething in England see, W. Coster, *Family and kinship in England, 1450-1800* (Harlow, 2001), 73.
- 6 A.P. Borg, 'Migration and mobility in early modern Malta: The harbour city of Valletta as a case study, 1575-1650', (unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Malta, 2003), 162-3.
- 7 C. Savona-Ventura, 'The influence of the Roman Catholic Church on midwifery practice in Malta', *Medical History*, 39 (1995), 22.
- 8 F. Ciappara, 'Religion, kinship and godparenthood as elements of social cohesion in Qrendi, a late-eighteenth-century Maltese parish', *Continuity and Change*, 25/1, (2010), 166.
- 9 P. Ariès, *Centuries of childhood: A social history of family life* (New York, 1962); E. Shorter, *The making of the modern family* (New York, 1975); L. Stone, *The family, sex and marriage in England, 1500-1800*, (New York, 1977). For a concise summary of these and other perspectives on attitudes to children see, N. Tucker, 'Boon or Burden? Baby Love in History', *History Today*, 43/9 (1993), 28-35.
- 10 A. Classen, 'Philippe Ariès and the consequences. History of childhood, family relations, and personal emotions. Where do we stand today?', in A. Classen (ed.), *Childhood in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance: The results of a paradigm shift in the history of mentality* (Berlin & New York, 2005), 3-6. See also F. Ciappara, *Marriage in Malta in the late eighteenth century, 1750-1800*, (Malta, 1988), Ch. 8.
- 11 E. Buttigieg, 'Growing up in Hospitaller Malta (1530-1798): Sources and methodologies for the history of childhood and adolescence', in J. Carvahlo (ed.), *Bridging the gaps: Sources, methodology and approaches to religion in Europe* (Pisa, 2008), 129-46.
- 12 M. Rhodes, 'Approaching the history of childhood: Frameworks for local research', *Family and Community History*, 3:2 (2000), 121.
- 13 On the uses of trial records by historians see, E. Muir & G. Ruggiero (eds.), *History from crime* (Baltimore & London, 1994); S. Peyronel Rambaldi (ed.), *I Tribunali della Fede: continuità e discontinuità dal medioevo all'età moderna* (Turin, 2007); M. Laven, 'Testifying to the self: nuns' narratives in the early modern Venice', in M. Mulholland and B. Pullan (eds.), *Judicial tribunals in England and Europe 1200-1700* (Manchester, 2003), 147-58.
- 14 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box471, Doc.42, n.p. (7.vii.1760), "l'accuso e pretendo l'interesse che stò patendo". The documentary material for this paper was originally consulted in 2002-2003. At the time this material was not catalogued and the reference 92/04 was an accession number, meaning that this was the fourth accession of 1992. The reference 'Doc.42' is a personal one which simply means that the document was the 42nd in a particular box. This order may have since changed and the date is the best indicator to be observed by anyone interested in following up this reference.
- 15 Vella, ii, 15-23; J.F. Grima, *Žmien il-Kavallieri f'Malta 1530-1798* (Malta, 2001), 58-61; T. Freller, *Malta. The Order of St John* (Malta, 2010), 248-57.
- 16 On early modern cartography see, D. Buisseret (ed.), *Monarchs, ministers and maps: The emergence of cartography as a tool of government in early modern Europe* (Chicago, 1992); R.L. Kagan, *Urban images of the Hispanic world 1493-1793* (New Haven & London 2000). On maps of Valletta see, A. Ganado, *Valletta città nuova: A map history (1566-1600)* (Malta, 2003); A. Ganado, *Miniature maps of Malta*, (Malta, 2009).
- 17 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box140, Doc.26, f.4^v (vi.1640), "nel quartier delli spagnoli di questa città".
- 18 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.48, f.1^r (19.viii.1720), "essendomi ritrovato a seder sopra un baco di pietra quale è vicino alla porta di nostra Habitatione quale viene ad essere puoco distante dalla Ven Albergia di Provenza".
- 19 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.7, f.1^r (6.x.1720).
- 20 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.9, n.p. (22.viii.1720). NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box141, Doc.26, f.2^{rv}, (11.viii.1640).
- 21 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box471, Doc.23, n.p., (18.vii.1760).
- 22 For an overview of early modern violence see, J.R. Ruff, *Violence in early modern Europe 1500-1800* (Cambridge, 2001).
- 23 *Inter alia*: NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.48, f.1^r (19.viii.1720).
- 24 N.Z. Davis, *Society and culture in early modern France: Eight essays* (London, 1975), in particular 'The rites

- of violence', 152-87. See also D. Riches, 'The phenomenon of violence', D. Riches (ed.), *The anthropology of violence* (Oxford, 1986), 1-27; F. Ciappara, *Society and the Inquisition in early modern Malta* (Malta, 2001), 33-4.
- 25 NAM, MCC, PC, 92/04, Box334, Doc.9, n.p. (22.viii.1720).
- 26 On children's work see E. Buttigieg, 'Childhood and adolescence in early modern Malta (1565-1632)', *Journal of Family History*, 33/22 (2008), 149-51.
- 27 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 141, Doc. 26, ff.1^r-3^v, 6^r, 10^r-12^r (9-11.viii.1640), "*mese la mano maledetta et scelerata*"; "*de minoris etate*"; "*un giovane balardo di poco giuditio, no discenne il bene dal male*".
- 28 N. Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven & London, 2003), 321-8, has an extensive and comparative discussion about children and the law.
- 29 For population figures see, Grima, 144-5; the website of the National Statistics Office of Malta www.nso.gov.mt (accessed on 5 Aug 2010).
- 30 On the impact of digitisation and technology on documents see for instance the project called 'The prosopography of Anglo-Saxon England', www.pase.ac.uk (accessed 6 on Aug 2010).
- 31 O.H. Hufton, *The prospect before her: A history of women in Western Europe. Vol.1, 1500-1800*, (London, 1997); C. Cassar, *Daughters of Eve: Women, gender roles and the impact of the Council of Trent in Catholic Malta* (Malta, 2002); Y. Vella, 'Fejnhom in-nisa fl-istorja ta' Malta?', in P. Mizzi (ed.), *Min kien Callus? Analizi storika taz-zminijiet li fihom għex Ġużeppi Mattew Callus* (Malta, 2003), 63-9.
- 32 Cassar, 66-7; Borg, 42-4.
- 33 K. Wrightson, 'The 'Decline of Neighbourliness' revisited', in N.L. Jones & D. Woolf (eds.), *Local identities in late medieval and early modern England* (London, 2007), 31, 35, 38-40.
- 34 Ciappara (2010), 161-84.
- 35 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 19, ff.1^r-6^r (13-28.vii.1740), "*mia figlia d'anni dieci sette ancor zitella*"; "*che non aveva fatto da donne d'onore in aver bastonato a detta mia figlia*"; "*che conduce al molino vicino a [?] elemosinario della Burmula, appellate ta' Mact'rittin*"; "*figlia d'un fornaro abitante nella Strada del Crocefisso della Burmula*".
- 36 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 12, ff.1^r-29^r (2.i.1740 - 11.ix.1740).
- 37 Ibid. ff.1^r-3^v (2-22.i.1740), "*l'accuso d'aver sedotto alla sudetta Manzuna di comettere detto furto*".
- 38 C. Savona-Ventura, *Knight Hospitaller medicine in Malta [1530-1798]* (Malta, 2004), 122.
- 39 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 12, ff.4^{rv}-8^r (22.i.1740 - 12.ii.1740), "*tengo l'età d'anni 53, e m'esercito in lavori donneschi*".
- 40 According to Bundi, *cucu* means a type of game with card - cf. G. Bundi, *Dizionario Siciliano-Italiano* (Palermo, 1857), 103. According to Giarizzo, *cuccu* is understood to mean a small piece of worked wood for use in a kitchen - cf. S. Giarizzo, *Dizionario Etimologico Siciliano* (Palermo, 1989), 133. Neither of these explanations fits the context.
- 41 NAM, MCC, PC 92/04, Box 404, Doc. 12, f.8^r (12.ii.1740).
- 42 Ibid., f.28^v-29^r (ix.1740).

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People of an urban night culture

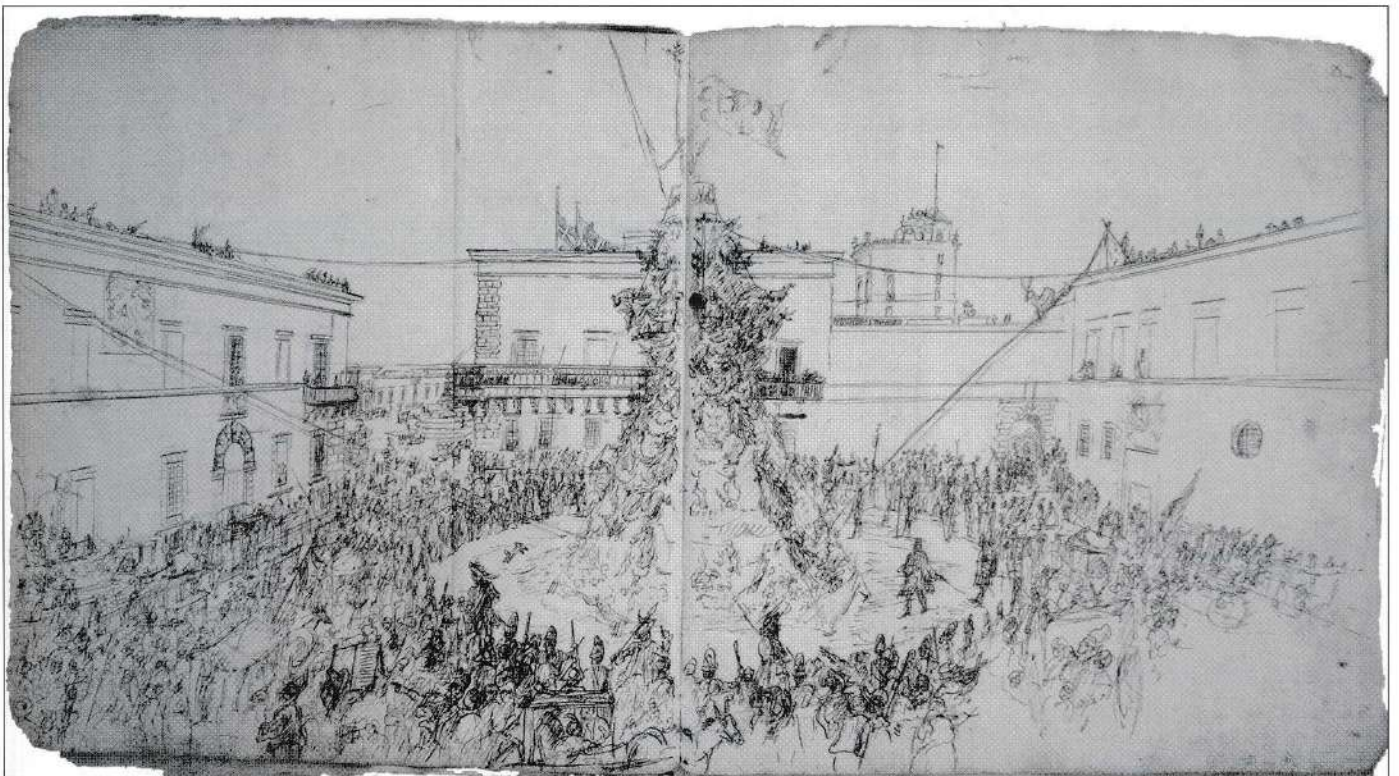
Noel Buttigieg

The *coccagna* stood there, situated in the Palace square, embraced in the moonlight waiting for the carnival celebrations planned for the following day. But in the eyes of three Valletta boys this event could not be postponed for such a long time. The Sicilian cheese hanging from one of the beams was too much of a temptation.¹ The moonlight played an important part in facilitating night travel. Catherina Cassar walked out of her house in the company of her friend when she commented, “*che bella notte, che bel chiar di luna, come risplende la luna*”.² Night is however associated with the need to rest, and hopefully undisturbed slumber. Andrea Ta’ Cuntentu and Francesco Zammit wished each other *buona notte* as their paths crossed,³ while Giovanni Saida preferred to retreat into

his humble abode and read a book before going to bed.⁴

The brief glimpse of the encounter of these people creates a snapshot of a nocturnal picture of their lives, limits and possibilities. Similarly, other urban inhabitants shaped their own nocturnal experiences in myriad ways.

Notwithstanding local studies on culture in early modern Malta, night, in its own right, has received very little attention, mainly due to the assumption that nothing happened when in the absence of electricity whole societies were engulfed in darkness. The absence of intense light reduced the use of urban public spaces and further conditioned the popular perception



A representation of the *coccagna*, a favourite amongst the Maltese, as represented in this sketch from the *Latoucheon Album*

of night time and its association with vice and disrepute. Any female present in a dark street without a male escort was almost certainly considered to be a prostitute or maybe a witch. Hence the Maltese saying “*Il-Musbieh ġewwa l-innara u l-ġharusa ġewwa darha*” – at night, home is the best place for women.⁵ Men were likely to be out for debauchery, if not crime and so “*Il-lejl għandu wliedu suwed*” – crime often happens at night.⁶ Negative social influence, argues Carmel Cassar, propelled a reactionary behaviour: “All roads were deserted after sunset as everywhere would be enveloped in darkness, a situation which favoured the spread of burglaries at night time. Towns-people and villagers were thus compelled to lock and bar their doors by sunset.”⁷

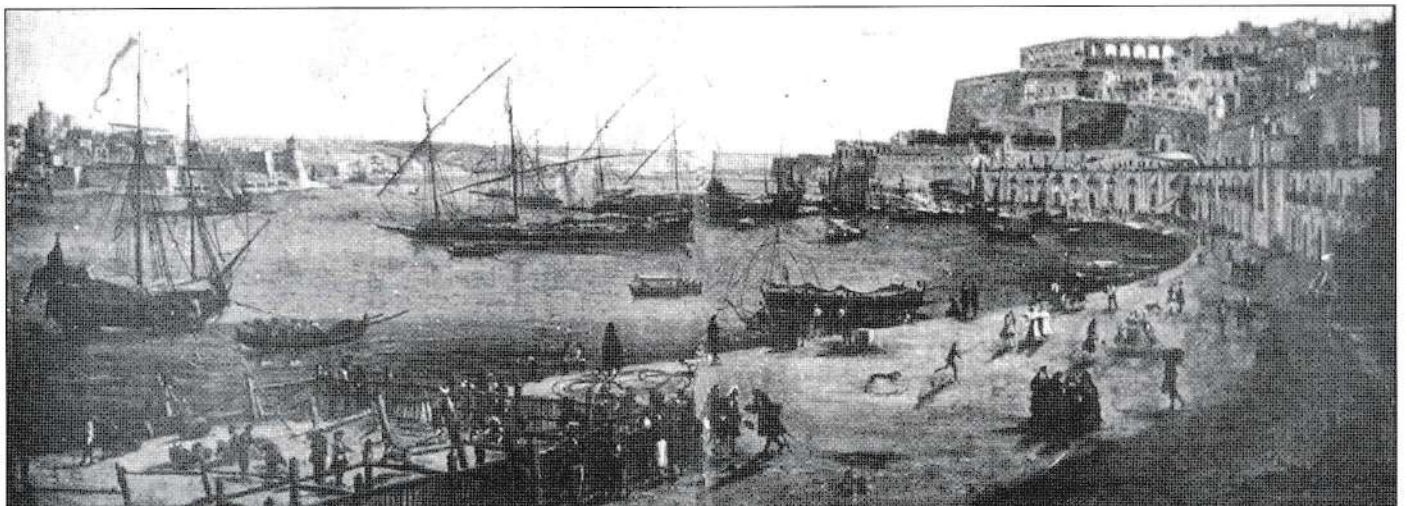
This study is about the lower ranks of an urban populace and their nocturnal experiences. Night time in early modern Malta, as elsewhere in Europe, developed its own culture, with particular habits, practices and modes of behaviour. Significant changes happened in aspects of social encounters, work rhythms, and popular customs, including attitudes toward popular magic and regulatory authoritative forces.⁸ Only then, could this study challenge the general assumptions about the past scale of nocturnal activity. An attempt is also made to revive a vibrant culture very different from its daily counterpart. Darkness is here seen as a conduit which empowered men and women with the necessary motivation to express innate impulses and realise repressed desires irrespective of how innocent or unorthodox they may be.

As night time is characterised by a considerable reduction of human activity, human life becomes almost entirely colonised by sleep. Once it gets dark, what else would one do if not sleep?

Because night time restricted human behaviour and conditioned the use of public spaces, then dwellings became shrines of privacy. As Philip Aries explains, within the privacy of the house developed also an inner privacy of the individual.⁹ Thus, the assumption here is that nocturnal wakefulness enhanced the concept of privacy as soon as people withdrew into their homes. Although intended for different purposes, the records of the Magna Curia Castellania [Civil Court of Justice] open a window on the secrets of private life.

But in the public-mind darkness was associated with fear as much as with freedom. Under the cover of darkness, the night marked an opposition of the day: a break from routines, duties or obligations. As the eighteenth century draws to a close, we encounter a vast canvas of characters who postponed sleep till late, preferring to extend their nocturnal activity. The night revolutionised the social landscape. Particular groups of people congregated in taverns, gambling rooms or in the house of a friend *per divertirsi* – to have fun.¹⁰ Is it possible that eighteenth century citizens also developed a sense of nocturnal freedom?

I cannot emphasise enough the exploratory tentative nature of this investigation. The evidence on which to base a study of night



An eighteenth century view of the port towns of Valletta (right) and Birgu (left) from a painting found in the National Museum of Fine Arts

experiences in early modern Malta is rather sparse and fragmentary. The primary sources used extensively here are themselves a result of an important transitional phase in Maltese history. The manuscripts are a product of a judicial system with conceived ambitions of further controlling and 'educating' to the full the life of citizens. The judges had to comprehend what went through people's minds, and extract out of them pertinent information. The documents introduce the fascinating accounts of urban inhabitants who came to experience moments of exclusion and challenge in their lives. At face value, the victim is just a representative of the general understanding of the unsocial experiences associated with dark hours, while the transgressor clashed with the policing regulatory forces of their times. In contrast, when the historian concentrates on why the people were still awake and active, the court cases become riddled with information showing how several extended their nocturnal activity amid – compared to modern standards – the limited availability of artificial light. The depositions 'illuminate' – those secluded places where darkness shrouded not only acts of brutality and fear but also moments of freedom, pleasure and comfort.

Night time

The synchronised sound of evening bells across the Maltese urban and rural landscape announced the approach of darkness. Auditory signals played an important role in the daily life of the local populace. Church bells dictated a communitarian timetable. Broadly speaking, the majority of city people switched from one activity to another with the pealing of church bells mainly signalling religious services or time to pray.¹¹ While some of the faithful paused momentarily to recite the *Ave Maria*, a prayer of thanks, others hurried home before massive wooden doors were swung shut by the gate keeper only to be opened again early in the morning. The bells and the gates were just some of the state's repressive measures designed, among other purposes, to control and curb nocturnal activity.¹²

Four prime auditory signals systematically divided night time into three unequal parts: the time between the first and the second *Ave*

Maria,¹³ the longer period between the latter and the *Castellania* bell, and finally between the *Castellania* bell and the *Pater Noster*.

The first and the second toll of the *Ave Maria* bell signalled the approach of darkness.¹⁴ Although sunset depended on seasonality, the case of Theresia Bonnici confirms how by the second *Ave Maria* the neighbourhood was already shrouded in darkness as she had to use artificial light, "*con lume in mano*", to inspect her neighbour's door.¹⁵ The local nocturnal streetscape remained predominantly in darkness. Artificial lighting was scarce, generated solely by candles placed before some sacred images adorning street corners.¹⁶ Out in the street, artificial hand-held lighting, such as the lantern, helped walkers find their way home, around visible hazards such as mud-puddles, rocks, and unrecognisable passers-by, human¹⁷ and especially animal waste¹⁸.

The absence of natural light immediately restricted several activities from being carried out. For numerous urban inhabitants, the *Ave Maria* bells marked the end of a day's work. But darkness did not detract people from completing other activities. The Sicilian Andrea Brunetti had to procure some bread and wine for supper.¹⁹ Giovanni Azzopard, his brother Antonio, and their friend Horatio Mercieca, all decided to go for a drink.²⁰ Such nocturnal traffic motivated the government to control and possibly eradicate any public nocturnal activity through a curfew.

Promulgations published by several magistracies specifically refer to the *Castellania* bell as the signal indicating the end of any nocturnal activity. Also known as '*la ruffiana*',²¹ it probably pealed between 9:00pm and 10:00pm. The curfew time could have changed depending on the season. References indicate how the tolling could not be missed as it apparently went on for a considerable time. In fact, denizens refer to the beginning and the end of the *Castellania* bell signal.²²

The *Castellania*²³ bell jump-started any legislative measures employed against nocturnal prohibitions. This was the time when the night urban patrolling party would intensify their surveillance. It also signalled the closing of city gates. Although this procedure was gradually

abandoned in several European cities, the local practise would persist until the forced departure of the Knights of St John (1530-1798).²⁴ This generated a sense of nocturnal parochialism. It brought to a sudden halt the socio-economic intercourse between the harbour towns and the immediate peripheral countryside. The inhabitants of the four harbour towns had to make sure that they were not standing on the wrong side of their town gate. Who knows what happened if someone was late? One can only imagine the sense of urgency for those who for some reason or another happened to be away from their home and within one of the four fortified harbour towns.

Evidence dating back to the seventeenth century indicates how night laws mandated the closure of particular services especially those associated with unorthodox behaviour.²⁵ Regulations prohibited any human presence in the streets. Only a valid explanation could save trespassers from paying a fine.²⁶ The government's night regulations prescribed prohibited clothes,²⁷ the carrying of weapons and the holding of parties without official approval.²⁸ Slaves, forced and voluntary rowers, had to retreat to their assigned sleeping quarters. Any vessel, irrespective of size or function, was bound by a series of regulatory measures including the prohibition of entering or leaving the harbour under the cover of darkness. The *Castellania* auditory signal announced the final call for individuals to retreat into their homes, indirectly, mandating sleep. Infringement, however, was not always intercepted and some took advantage from the challenges posed by the regulatory forces.²⁹

Throughout the early modern period government authorities strove to transform all open spaces into public property through night-watch patrols purposely to generate a safe environment for the 'night travel' of the respectable denizen. Nocturnal enforcement officers, with few exceptions, employed themselves thoroughly in upholding the *prammatiche* and *bandi* promulgated from time to time. Numerous urbanites followed state orders like the confectioner Aloisio Mariani who regularly brought his business to a close at nine o'clock.³⁰ There were also exceptions to the rule. Vagrants, vagabonds, slaves, thieves, robbers, prostitutes, concubines, drunkards

and gamblers regularly familiarised themselves with the squalid prison cells of the *Castellania* as a result of their infringements. Some failed to recognise the 'education' process following the prison experience. Repetitive transgressors were sometimes issued with orders depriving them from wondering about in the urban streets when it got dark. For example, Giovanni Borg was sentenced for a year of forced labour at the public works "*per esser recidivo e per aver contravento al precetto di non vagar di notte.*"³¹

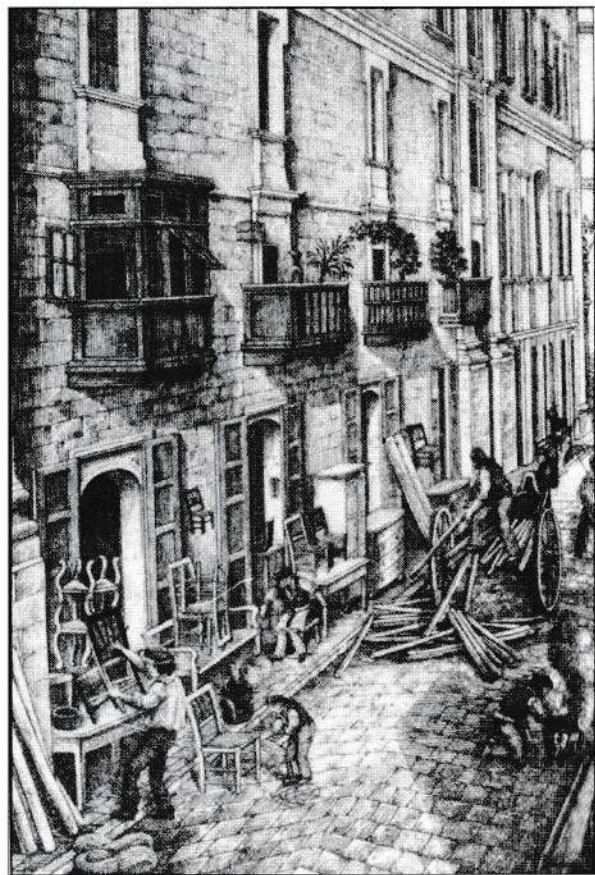
Amid pious convictions, regulating licentiousness and libertine behaviour and controlling human endeavour towards happiness, remained a challenge. Suppressing the magical function of laughter could never be entirely fulfilled.

The end of night time, at four o'clock in the morning, was announced by the tolling of the *Pater Noster* bell.³² Lending weight to the end of the curfew was the opening of city gates. This ritual happened every morning between 3:30am and 4:00am.³³ The official secular permission for diurnal activity to commence generated a sense of anxiety among some urban dwellers. The gatekeeper and the sergeant felt responsible to open the gates at the appropriate time. Any delay could cause inconvenience to anyone wanting to enter or leave town. Sometimes the gatekeeper was verbally attacked by those waiting for the gates to open.³⁴ In February 1794, Felice Galizia had to wait until the city gate was opened. Only then could Galizia walk down to a shop situated at the marina to prepare for a day's work.³⁵

Between the first *Ave Maria* bell and the *Pater Noster* a spectrum of nocturnal situations ensued. Individuals and whole families, out of their own initiative or otherwise, decided to postpone their sleep. Others just could not sleep.

To sleep or not to sleep?

Not all societies view the night with a similar revulsion. Since time immemorial the human psyche has always been troubled by darkness. Fears had been shaped because of a variety of reasons.³⁶ The aversion to darkness has diminished for industrial societies with the



During the day the streets in Valletta were bustling scenes with activity of all sorts – a carpenter's workshop busily producing chairs for domestic use

introduction of electricity, professional policing and the spread of scientific explanations to several human experiences.³⁷ Darkness for the early modern individual meant a concoction of temporal and especially spiritual obsessions.

The quality of sleep enjoyed by pre-industrial societies is often associated with the common belief of tranquil slumber. We like to think that the early modern combination of hard labour and pitch darkness contributed to peaceful repose. Evidence indicates how early modern slumber was less idyllic than popular perception. The sources employed here highlight the vulnerability of undisturbed sleep. Adjectives such as 'restless', 'troubled', and 'frightened' come to mind.³⁸

The cry of a patient at the Holy Infirmary, the laughter of people in the street, the banging against the door by a drunkard who has just been locked out by his wife, the playing of musical instruments, the cry of someone asking for help, or the untalented singing of two sailors in a street corner. These situations were not

regulated by time and could have happened in broad daylight. The nocturnal setting, however, transposes them into new levels and intensities.³⁹

These tropes come down to us as a result of individuals giving evidence about a night time incident they happened to witness. While for the judge of the *Magna Curia Castellania* any information related to sleep or wakefulness was just irrelevant, for the historian these depositions indicate how sleep was invariably disturbed. Sounds got individuals and entire families out of bed as fear remained a risky emotion.

Probably some of the best evidence related to this nocturnal state of mind comes down to us through the records of the Holy Office. Confessions highlight the deep anxiety and depressive mental state of some early modern men and women. Popular magic was one of the tools and a key element in trying to mitigate some of the challenges of everyday life. The witch represented an astral channel through which temporal objects were employed to commute with the remote vastness of the sky. The spirits were conjured in an attempt to control one's dreams, thoughts and behaviours. Orations catered specifically for nocturnal recitals where the moon and the stars were convoked to assist in the hope to achieve desired ends. Together with crafty imagination the magara was expected to miraculously bring forth a desired effect, impossible within the realm of human knowledge or logic. 'Panic', best describes the behaviour of Francesco Romano. Romano's relationship with his lascivious friend Gratiulla had gradually deteriorated. Gratiulla's mother, informed Francesco about her daughter's knowledge of how to turn people insane. Concerned about his well being, Francesco felt the urgency to postpone his sleep and to go and check on Gratiulla and her nocturnal domestic activity. Peeping through the *finestra della chiave della porta* (keyhole), Romano discovered how his lascivious friend was indoors practising a magical rite. Romano could not stop thinking that he was being *fatturato*.⁴⁰

Close encounters with angels, fairies and demons were not unheard of. These appear out of nowhere and sometimes would regularly visit the same person over a period of time.⁴¹

Popular belief was firmly rooted: locks and latches, barred windows and doors gave little protection against the spiritual world.⁴² How could the early modern dweller sleep if there was a firm conviction of such high risks? The best one could hope for is to generate a comfortable environment in order to facilitate slumber.

The bed and its linen were important in the lives of these people.⁴³ Relaxation and sleep demanded an adequate sleeping environment. A cursory look at dowry contracts sheds light on the customary inclusion of bed linen and blankets as part of a bride's *trousseau*.⁴⁴ When recording the dowry of the widow Catherina Corcop (Chircop), Notary Tommaso Agius included: "*quattro lenzoli di tela di letto, tre delli quali menati e l'altro nuovo, un altro lenzolo di lana menata, una coperta di lana menata, un letto di tavole et un materazzo pieno di lana.*"⁴⁵

Not every bride, however, could equal the long list of Catherina's *trousseau* and household items. Some lacked any form of bed linen and sleeping on the immediate hard surface of wooden planks was not unheard of. At least in such cases, the possibility of insect infested beds was significantly reduced in a time when lice, fleas and humans often shared a common bed. Regularly washed and repaired straw or woollen stuffed mattresses minimised infestations and possibly offered a more comfortable repose.

Temperature also had its toll on the quality of sleep. Several became familiar with the night skies during the summer period since sleeping in the open was a common practise.⁴⁶ Slumber was faced with a different challenge when temperatures dropped during the winter season. The introduction of a warm object in the sleeping quarters seemed to be a common practise. Unlike the rest of northern European households, local dwellings did not avail themselves of a hearth. Locals used their 'portable' stoves hewn out of soft globigerina limestone as an alternative heating source. Within its limitations, this society employed any resource possible to accommodate personal needs. As soon as cooking was over and the fire extinguished, the *kenur's* stone structure remained warm for some time. Placed within the vicinity or under the bed, the stove provided some warmth during a cold night. The duration

of heat emitted by the stone stove improved considerably for those who could afford coal or wood. The red-hot coal or the embers from burnt wood helped to alleviate from the cold the humid environments often hosting sleeping quarters. One could imagine the smell of smoke within an enclosed space. The smoke emitted acted as an insect repellent as much as a health hazard especially for those who died from asphyxiation.⁴⁷ A safer option allowed for a brick to be heated and then placed under the bed.⁴⁸

The intake of stimulants should not be ruled out. Some, like Felice known as *delli Biscottini*, Maeli Sartore and Joseph Grixti totally ignored the *Castellania* signal when entering a shop to drink some coffee.⁴⁹ Eighteenth-century urbanites were well acquainted with the drink and its stimulating effects on the human brain.⁵⁰ If planning on staying awake, then coffee's supremacy remained unchallenged. Conversely, the mixing of opium with several other exotic ingredients was employed both as a general painkiller and as a narcotic for those suffering from insomnia.⁵¹

A sense of privacy?

The early modern urban dweller struggled with the idea of privacy. Lack of space generated an atmosphere of claustrophobia especially in packed areas. The feeling of closeness could be picked up from some of the depositions recorded by the scribes of the Civil Court of Justice. Private life was easily made public, especially among the lower strata of urban society. Similar to other parts of Europe, the clustered neighbourhood induced a lifestyle where men and women spent most of their day time visiting, walking in streets, chatting with neighbours and contracting business arrangements hoping to earn a daily living.⁵²

Early modern society was given to gossip and even more to curiosity. Someone's business was everyone's business in no time at all. With eyes glued to keyholes and ears scanning every possible sound, society was obsessed with spying out whatever happens in other peoples' homes. Conversely, darkness generated a sense of insecurity. How far is ignorance of whatever is happening behind closed doors an immediate elevation of privacy? If society retreated

into their homes by night time, then to what extent can we claim that night time presented contemporaries with the closest experience of privacy?

The concept of privacy is believed to be a nineteenth century development associated with the establishment of a 'bourgeois' culture.⁵³ However, scholars like Emanuel Le Roy Ladurie,⁵⁴ George Duby,⁵⁵ Philip Aries,⁵⁶ Nicholas Castan⁵⁷ and Arlett Farge⁵⁸ have, albeit anachronistically, applied the concept to previous periods in history with success. Their work clarified the nature of power relations within a social system, in particular focusing on social relations which were not tempered with notions of class conflict. In this section an attempt is made to use the same approach applied to the local case study. The following observations are borne out of personal interest in safeguarding situations related to family life.

Prevailing fears induced a sense of responsibility among urban dwellers. Apart from relying on state sponsored night guards, they depended a lot on their ability of turning their dwelling into a water-tight fort. Any belongings which could have been taken out during the day were withdrawn into the house. Any washing hanging outside the balcony in the narrow back streets was folded back into their assigned places and any roaming chickens and pigs would share the same space as their dormant owners. Then one turned to the first line of defence. Special attention was given to locking any openings, especially those facing the street. Wooden and metal bars were used to secure any doors and windows as soon as all family members assembled in their dwelling. The lower classes also secured any personal belongings, especially valuables, locked in chests and boxes.⁵⁹

Some opted to use artificial light throughout the night. For those who could support this extra expense, artificial light helped to ward-off thieves and robbers. The unwelcome intruder could be recognised while the message of human activity might be communicated. Sadly enough for Michele Calleja and his wife, the flickering light of his oil lamp worked no wonders. On the contrary, it facilitated the robber's job. With ease, the intruder went through Calleja's belongings and picked anything of some value

on the market. Michele gave an entire list of goods stolen which the scrivener of the *Magna Curia Castellania* meticulously recorded for future reference.⁶⁰

These situations highlight a strong element of self-awareness. They also indicate how early modern urban dwellers transformed their house into a home. Even if their dwelling ranked of humble status, the attention given to the self and its necessities heralded unprecedented attention. Precautions were necessary to minimise any loss or harm. These rituals happened regularly as deemed necessary, some rehearsed every night. The loss of goods had both a material and sentimental value. The detailed description of missing things highlights a hidden notion of trespassing one's invisible borders. One should bear in mind that the society of this period had an extremely close personal association with belongings and was much less willing than modern society to dispose of any used, broken or outdated objects.⁶¹

Apart from candles and lanterns, prayers and rosaries were also employed to deter sinister forces and other dangers. Seldom was God's protection more valued than at night, comments Roger A. Ekirch.⁶² Several urban dwellers engaged in praying when church bells signalled moments of personal religious reflection, especially in the evening – and a rather gender oriented ritual; females were seen or heard reciting the rosary.⁶³ Special night prayers protected against less predictable dangers including the forces of the occult, beliefs and practices strongly condemned by the Church and hunted down by the Inquisitor.

Households benefited from the presence of the *pater familias*.⁶⁴ The judicial records indicate how males, rather than females, intervened during particular night situations. This social construct defined a clear behaviour, requiring men to jump into action and protect their family. Weapons, naturally, strengthen frail spirits. Two years lapsed since Salvatore Gatt had met with his lascivious friend Margarita. But one evening she appeared before him in the distance entering a house with bread in her hands. He parted away from his friends and decided to knock on her door, maybe hoping to catch-up on any lost time. Since then, Margarita had got married. On opening the door he found another



Musicians playing typical eighteenth century instruments provided a form of leisure activity much appreciated at the time

acquaintance of his – Gaetano, Margarita’s husband. Suddenly, Gaetano drew his knife, charged against Salvatore and flailed his body in different parts. “Do you want to come in,” claimed Gaetano, “to see what I have in my house?”⁶⁵ It is very difficult, in the absence of information, to confirm what sparked off this violent behaviour. Was Gaetano defending the honour of his family? Was he upholding the security of his domestic domain? Did he associate Salvatore with trouble? Gatt was ‘invited’ to consider whether he still wanted to explore his options. Probably he understood how at night some families were far from powerless.

In the absence of a male figure, wives opted to spend the night at their parents’ house or otherwise invite family or friends to sleep over. The banging and throwing of stones against the doors of women known to be residing on their own was often brought to the attention of local authorities. Although a person might fail to enter a house, the violent acts become a figurative violation of privacy. The more daring Maria Formosa and Anna Gatt slept alone when their husbands were away at work; one on nightwatch duty in Senglea, the other a baker and miller. All this changed abruptly

following the forced entry into their respective dwellings at night. Maria was lucky to escape unscratched.⁶⁶ Anna was sexually abused.⁶⁷

If early modern urban dwellers spent most of their day out of their homes, then night time constituted a different situation. Darkness compelled family members to congregate into a unit. Artificial light, irrespective of its intensity, expanded domestic activity and induced familial socialisation. The number of rooms in a house became irrelevant as family members congregated around that source of light and together passed the closing hours of the day before going to sleep. Conditioned by the small pool of light generated by flickering candles and oil lamps, home became a sanctuary of domestic life. These momentary family bonding situations could have been the closest to the notion of privacy. During these moments the family communicated their day’s experiences. Their discussions were loaded with hidden messages evaluating important social norms such as honour and shame. Here we have the origins of a *mentalité* which starts to equate family life with private life.⁶⁸ While during day time the urban inhabitant clearly felt the need to be actively part of the city crowd, night constituted a recognised understanding of generating a space for oneself. Safeguarding this space and anything contained within during dark hours possibly constituted the only moments which elevated a sense of privacy.

For those who could not afford their own lighting, evenings must have been terribly dull. Some must have opted to spend time at their door or perched in windows or balconies. Some decided to leave their home, visit friends or congregate in public spots such as taverns or gambling rooms. Some might have entertained themselves by just standing within the vicinity of some private gathering, listening to the music and singing emitted from inside.

A sense of freedom?

Night generated a sense of freedom; freedom from the diurnal hours of work and the constant watch by both superiors and peers. Night time evoked a sense of free choice: to stay with family or friends, to engage in an activity of your own choice; whether to complete unfinished

business or play cards with your friends.

Several scholars agree that early modern night time generated a social revolution. Bryan D. Palmer, in his study *Cultures of Darkness...*, aptly comments on these moments of sharp contrasts: "Night can be understood as lowering curtains on those domains of dominance, introducing theatres of ambiguity and transgression that can lead toward enactments of liberation. But night has also been a locale where estrangement and marginality found themselves a home. This domicile could be one of comfort and escape or, on occasion, a nursery of revolt."⁶⁹

Roger Ekirch concurs with this view and emphasises how darkness "takes on a richer significance if we consider night's ability to obscure vestiges of the visible world."⁷⁰ Institutional privilege and power instilled veneration, respect and fear of night time. Likewise, darkness engulfed those visual reminders of law and order which dominated the landscape during the day.

Night offered asylum to those whose identity and integrity were scorned by the general public. Victims of disease and physical or mental difficulties were the least welcome by society. Antonio Lopez, "*conosciuto da tutta la città Vittoriosa per pazzo*", often walked the streets of his home town at night in the company of his two brothers who dearly defended him when ridiculed.⁷¹ Anna Maria Sicardos was "*quasi pazza e non di sano cervello*". She also used to roam about at night and often got arrested until she was locked up in the *Ospizio delle Povere Invalide*.⁷² With Sicardos, one could also find Francesco Psaila and the dumb Gaetano Zerafa, both defined as senseless.⁷³

Night kindled the flame of several free spirited galley crew members found in the harbour towns. Drinking and gambling were popular pastimes among the numerous sailors involved in the Islands' maritime activities. Peter Burke and Peter Earl concur on the sailors' general quality of life. "They had their own rhythm of work and leisure," argues Burke, "with long periods of boredom and mounting frustration on board, alternating with short violent periods of relaxation on shore."⁷⁴ All this is best surmised by the eventful evening of Battista Seguna, a *cassate* seller from Valletta.

During a Sunday night of July 1760, Seguna happened to be trailing behind two sailors whom he only knew by sight. The two men were not interested in his business, but rather in the lady that was walking ahead of them. As soon as they caught up with her, they grabbed her skirt from behind and wrapped it on top of her head. Seguna advised the distraught lady to be patient commenting on the possible lack of clear thinking on the part of the sailors due to the alcohol in their metabolism. On reaching the church of St Dominic, he met the baker's son and together walked along the street. But again, they met another pair of sailors who physically abused two boys who were just standing in a corner. From a distance, Seguna and his friend witnessed the slapping of one boy and the punching in the face of the other. By the time the witnesses had reached the two crying boys, the two sailors dashed off singing along the way. Seguna and the baker's son also parted along their paths, yet they met each other once again in another street. Their second encounter, however, was not what they wished for. The baker's son was lying on the ground holding his abdomen. He had just been stabbed by one of the two sailors who had previously physically attacked the two young boys. The sailor felt that he had no obligation to explain to the baker's son his barbarous actions against the young boy. When Seguna approached to help, the sailors threatened to stab him too. Seguna had no other option but to leave his friend in a pool of blood.⁷⁵

This was not an isolated incident. A penchant for rough behaviour was a natural extension of a sailor's job; a service conducted at a high risk. Every sailor who sailed out of port was – given the hazards of weather, piratical attacks and accidents – gambling with life rather than working. Moreover, for those who spent most of their time at sea, the need to seek other pleasures such as getting drunk or indulging in carnal gratification was not unheard of. Under the ship captain's thumb by day, these young men defied any curfew and entertained themselves till the early hours of the morning when their vessel called into port. These self-styled 'masters of the night' became part of the nocturnal 'street decorations'. They regularly filled the space with noise and their energy and money was enough to induce several other urban inhabitants to join their partying. In the

poorly lit streets of the urban towns they were also a common nuisance to the civic members of the general neighbourhood.⁷⁶ They were seen as a challenge to authority as well as a measure of its efficacy.

The night became a possible option to build social networks away from the rigours of the day. Foreigners residing within the harbour towns took advantage of this situation by organising their own nocturnal social gatherings.⁷⁷

But social gatherings were also sometimes induced by the spur of the moment. Taverns were obvious convenient locations for holding the open-to-all type of gatherings.⁷⁸ Probably, while enjoying each other's company, guests were entertained with some food, drink, maybe music, some dancing, possibly singing perhaps verging on cacophony. When not attending a party, men opted to indulge in 'tavern hopping'.⁷⁹

The holding of private socials, apart from wedding parties, tend to further reinforce the notion of an innate desire to have fun and engage in leisure activities. It seems that such private celebrations were often held on particular days of the week, such as Sundays. The introductory sentence of a 1647 *Prammatica Magisteriale* states: "*Si vede giornalmente che dalli suoni e balli pubblici volgarmente dette nozze che si fanno dalli nostri vassalli nelle loro case nei giorni festive di Precetto li quali sono dedicati al culto Divino.....*"⁸⁰

To avert such inconveniences, party organisers required an official permission to hold a private gathering. There is no evidence indicating stipulations dictating the issue of such 'licenses'. Definitely, the social standing of an individual within society played a crucial part. The night guard justified the arrest of Antonia Pellegrin based on two infractions: Pellegrin was a lady of ill-repute – she was a prostitute – and she held a private party with music and dancing even though her original request for such a gathering had been turned down by the authorities. This infraction was not taken lightly by the judge. Pellegrin had to settle the fine of ten *oncie*. Failing to meet the payment meant exile from the four harbour towns for a period of three years.⁸¹

While the authorities laboriously tried to control nocturnal activities, individuals sought ways of how to entertain themselves. Such gatherings were held outside of working hours and participation exclusively depended on self-motivation. These behavioural traits preclude early notions of leisure – purely '*per divertirsi*'.⁸² It is difficult for the historian to measure the frequency of such social assemblies or else to quantify the number of nocturnal gatherings held every year. The historian only gets to know about those unfortunate few whose transgression was either reported by angry neighbours or intercepted by the authorities.

The culmination of nocturnal activity happened during public celebrations. These were the moments when the fall of darkness was accompanied by the temporary postponement of nocturnal fears and worries. Ceremonial festivities presented an opportunity for a considerable number of people to use those public spaces often deserted after sunset. In the absence of adequate street lighting, such gatherings remained unchallenged in style and magnitude. The festive mood reflected the early modern citizen's victory over darkness.

Organised by civil and ecclesiastical authorities, these singular events encouraged merry-making involving nocturnal activities such as bonfires and masquerade balls. In such cases, noisy and festive teams congregated in the streets and open spaces especially during the summer season. Clearly the Maltese took full advantage of secular and religious festivities, a trait which although largely transformed from its early modern mindset, still holds to this day.

Such merry-making activities were also enshrined in rituals merging the religious with the secular. The forces of popular festivals offered a challenge to the evangelistic stand of both the government and church. Both had to come to terms with the popular interpretation of such gatherings.

Some public celebrations turned night into day as soon as important buildings and main thoroughfares became artificially illuminated. Similar to other parts of Europe, the Grand Master organised spectacles of illuminations, including fireworks, in recognition of royal births, marriages and coronations of families



A Valletta street scene by Bellanti – Strada San Giorgio (today Republic Street)

connected with the Order of the Knights of St John,⁸³ the accession of a new Pontiff,⁸⁴ the election of a Grand Master,⁸⁵ commemorating special events such as the 1565 Siege of Malta, the feast of St John the Baptist, or *L-Imnarja* (Italian: *Luminaria*) on the feast of Saint Peter and Saint Paul.⁸⁶ During the eighteenth century several of these festivities were spread over a period of three days. Thus, for three evenings in a row, the main streets of the harbour towns were artificially illuminated giving the populace a reason to extend their merry-making in open public spaces till late into the night.⁸⁷

Such illuminations must have had a dazzling effect, especially since pre-industrial societies spent half of their existence in quasi-pitch darkness. The collective illumination from windows and balconies must have generated a glowing feeling. In synergy with bonfires and fireworks, as night turned to day, the early modern inhabitant must have been inspired by awe since the facades of the Grand Master's Palace, churches, auberges, and other important buildings were lit during festive days.⁸⁸ These extravagant exhibitions should not be overstated. Their splendour could also be derived mainly from their infrequency.

Emphasis here lies on the participative attitude of the people in such gatherings. It highlights another facet of the desire to express a sense of freedom. Whether in private dwellings, taverns or gambling rooms, urban nocturnal gatherings were contained within

restricted perimeters. All this social behaviour was allowed to breathe when public festivities were held. The public gathering became a collective social performance invariably rehearsed throughout the year by several urban inhabitants. The open-air festive atmosphere was the sum of all the private experiences, the result of a well established nocturnal culture.

Conclusion

No night was exactly like any other night. An attempt was made here to reconstruct a typical night. Inevitably this is a hazardous approach. Most of the surviving evidence concerns pockets of wakeful activity dispersed in isolated quarters, relatively small scale compared to daytime activity. But some interpretation allows for a better understanding of an urban nocturnal culture.

The majority of the urban daytime congregation retreated into their homes but did not necessarily go to sleep. Contrary to common belief, several early modern people not only did routinely remain awake beyond the ten o'clock mark, but personal curfews were relatively elastic with no particular check-in time. Bed time was less rigidly dictated by a set timetable and more by things to do.

When the historian is confronted by such preliminary data, it becomes clear how the eighteenth-century nocturnal life perpetuated

certain communal values. For instance, those opting to remain within their homes gave some serious thought about those active during the night especially since they might have not considered them as part of the 'orthodox' main community. This mental tug-of-war was challenged by a growing night culture induced by its host urban fabric – a port city.

In the harbour area, the sense of entertainment was practically present every day: singers, actors, musicians, performed all the time. The spilling of such forms of '*divertimento*' into the night hours was just a natural extension with a growing receptive audience provided with the necessary services. The notion of freedom seemed to be a constant preoccupation in the microcosmic life of an early modern individual whose temporal existence was also haunted by fears and challenges. This perception contrasted sharply with the basic tenants of the Catholic Church. The Kingdom of Heaven was out of reach for any participant in libertine nocturnal activities. In a community fascinated, yet haunted, by the fear of death, such teachings mainly influenced the older section of society. Night time was particularly colonised by a younger generation, more receptive to free spirited activities rather than traditional values.

The presence of people in the streets depended mainly on a number of natural variables such as seasonality or the availability of moonlight. Human traffic remained significantly active

between the Ave Maria bells and the Castellania signal. Streets were mainly vacated by this time and any nocturnal activity was bound to carry on in enclosed spaces. Those attending such private gatherings always returned home in groups, at least in pairs. Such concerns were occasionally alleviated with public celebrations. Apart from the participative numbers and the use of public space till very late, the festive gatherings encouraged more private parties to be organised. For several urban inhabitants similar parties were attended during the course of the year.

The need to rest meant that necessary precautions had to be taken to avoid any intrusions from unwanted visitors. This frame of mind surely indicates how darkness also induced an elevated notion of privacy. Individuals would congregate into a family unit, convert the house into a home, and protect that feeling until the first light breaks through the bedroom window.

Early modern society was a diurnal community bound by dusk and dawn. This behaviour would gradually change with the introduction of electricity. Darkness is here represented as a frontier which humans strove to conquer, a process still going on to this day. Thomas Edison's dictum suffices this study, "Put an undeveloped human being into an environment where there is artificial light and he will improve."⁸⁹

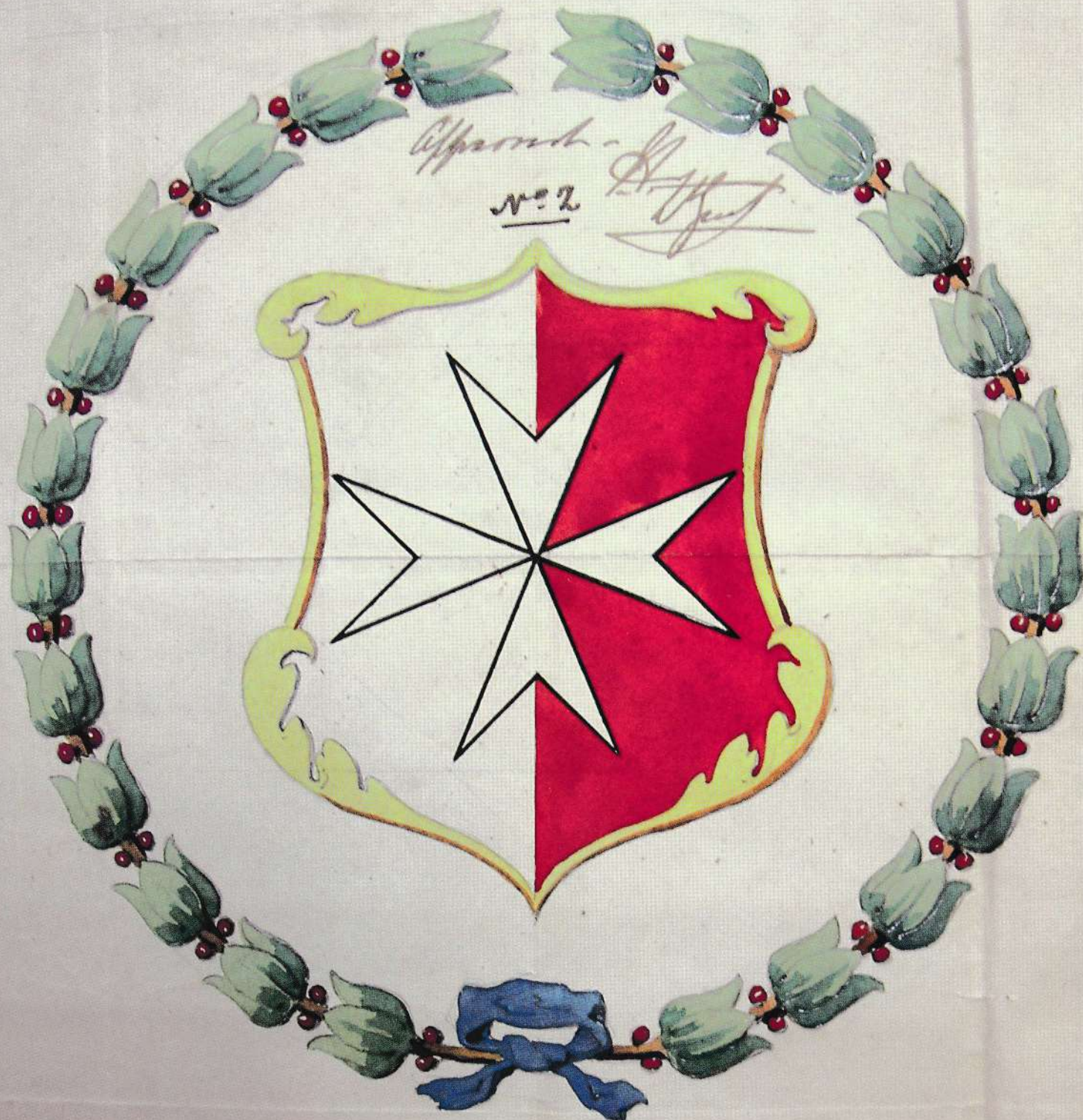
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