

BOOK REVIEWS

A. SAMUT-TAGLIAFERRO, "*History of the Royal Malta Artillery, Vol. I (1800-1939)*". Malta, Lux Press, 1976; pp. 13 unnum., 496; ill. 37.

To the casual student of Maltese military history, the 19th Century has always given the impression of being a most unlikely period in which to go in search of glory or glamour. After the Napoleonic adventure, which included the brief but eventful French occupation of Malta, it appeared as if *Pax Britannica* would last for ever; in fact, while the rest of Europe was seething with war and revolution, Malta seemed completely becalmed.

Consequently, the first volume of Brigadier Samut-Tagliaferro's history of the R.M.A., besides being a mine of hitherto unobtainable information and reference, comes as something of a revelation, both from the military and the social point of view. The basic story of that long-suffering and hard-wearing body of men, the threads that link it to the volunteer companies formed during the Siege of Valletta of 1798, its periodical excursions overseas and its expansion and contraction from time to time to comply with the whims of a niggardly War Office, are sufficiently well-known even to the non-specialist. But the present publication goes far beyond that.

Particularly in the course of his staff work in Malta, the Author had the opportunity to sift through and study numerous official documents which were not easily accessible to the general public. The extent and depth of his research are shown not only in the wealth of material to be found in the text, but also in the abundant and meticulous documentation which supports even the simplest statement. It would be idle in the space of this short review to go into any detail: suffice it to say that, as far as all the Artillery units ever raised in Malta under British rule are concerned, there is just about everything. For the reader desiring a quick reference, there is an appendix which gives a concise but comprehensive summary of all the high'ights, and some of the lesser lights, in 140 years of Regimental life; while the reader with a military tradition in the family can spend hours browsing through the nominal rolls and service details of every officer who ever joined. Furthermore, there are no less than 370 notes at the end of the chapters, which provide a copious bibliography and an index to sources.

It may be, however, that when all is said and done, the book's greatest value will eventually be as a social document. Understandab'y, when compared with that of a Regiment of the line, the history of the

R.M.A. contains very little excitement. But in its unremitting struggle to improve its conditions of service and to achieve equality with comparable British Regiments, the R.M.A. was unique. All the social and economic problems which have bedevilled labour relations during the present Century, and particularly since the last war, such as basic pay, hours of work, pensions, health, housing, sanitation, education and a hundred others, have been known to the R.M.A. for many decades. Very often, conditions in the Regiment lagged far behind those in civil life; now and again they were in advance. Numerous quotations from the correspondence between the R.M.A., Malta Headquarters and the War Office show how difficult it was to extract even an extra farthing in pay or allowances or to obtain sufficient funds to enable an old and invalid gunner to go on pension. It is hard to believe, for instance, that, until 1907, officers' commissions were only "local and temporary"; that until 1885 good conduct pay for soldiers was one half-penny for every five years *exemplary* service; that fresh meat was included in soldiers' rations only since 1881, and that it was only in 1935 that the British Service scale of rations was approved for Maltese troops, although rates of pay and allowances were still below two-thirds. There is no doubt that, among those who fought through the years to improve the conditions of the Maltese workers, the Commanding Officers of the Royal Malta Artillery deserve a place of honour.

In many ways the book is a formidable undertaking, for which there is no doubt that the Author was highly qualified. Commissioned into the R.M.A. shortly before the outbreak of World War II, he served in Malta throughout the War, mainly in command of a Light Anti-Aircraft Battery and was awarded an M.B.E. He then had various regimental and staff appointments in Malta, England, Germany, the Middle and Far East, until he was promoted Brigadier and awarded a C.B.E. His last appointment was Commander of the Armed Forces of Malta which he relinquished last year. The second volume of "The History of the R.M.A.", covering the War and post-War periods, is now awaited with interest. It is to be hoped that the Printers will do it greater justice and will avoid the printing errors with which the first volume abounds.

Edward Sammut

NICOLA MALIZIA, *Inferno su Malta*, Biblioteca del Cielo, Mursia Editore, Milan, 1976, 298 pp. including Preface, Appendices and Index.

It is always interesting to read about what the other side thought,

did and how they acted in a war book. Nicola Malizia, the writer of *Inferno su Malta*, or, to translate it into English, "Hell over Malta", appears to have the right credentials to write about the long battle waged by the Axis to subdue Malta, without success, in the 1940-43 period of the Second World War. He is a member of the Italian Air Force and has three other books on aeroplanes and aerial warfare to his credit. He calls the Battle of Malta "the longest aerial battle of the Second World War".

Apart from a few topographical mistakes, the most glaring of which is the confusion in the writer's mind between the place-names Ta' Qali and Ta' Vnezia which are often depicted in the book as two different places and, hence, two different aerodromes, the narration is sound and often critical. Malizia describes the whole campaign in great detail, down to the names of the airmen and pilots who took part in each raid and each manouvre. From this point of view, the book tends to be a collection of facts in chronological order — an important contribution to a greater knowledge of the progress of the war, one must admit, but, in a number of places, somewhat tedious and colourless writing as well. In other instances, the writer does not hesitate to confront the often contradictory statements issued by the two sides during the war, and here Malizia provides us with a provocative criticism.

Both sides erred and exaggerated in their propaganda. Both sides underscored their losses, viewed the development of the struggle from two different points of view, and inflated their small victories. Malizia provides us with a detailed appendix of all the Italian and German squadrons who took part in the Malta war, and of all the pilots and airmen of both sides, i.e. Italian on the Axis side and British on the Allied side, who died in the Battle of Malta.

A number of episodes are vividly produced. At the same time, the writer does not hesitate to show how inane and unprepared the whole campaign was from the Italian side and the resentment which existed between the Italian and the German commands. Obviously, the book was written by one with preconceived ideas against the Fascist dictatorship, even though his patriotism every now and then exposes an endemic anti-British sentiment. The first chapter, which deals with a brief description of the island, among other things, suffers as a consequence from some inaccuracies.

These minor defects, however do not diminish from the importance of the book as a window upon the other side in the long struggle for the submission, or victory, depending on the side from which one wants to look at it, of Malta and the Maltese. Books about the Battle of Malta

written from enemy sources and documents are few and can be counted on one's hand. *Inferno su Malta* provides the historiographer with a great deal of useful information. It also provides those who have not experienced the war at all with the other side's aims and failures in the struggle. To those who, like me, have lived the war but may not always have had the occasion of eliminating the propaganda, the book has provided new insights into the struggles and the travails of our native country.

Joseph Zammit Mangion

VINCENT BORG, "Une île et ses hypogées de l'ère des premiers chrétiens: Malte" in *Catacombes juives et chrétiennes = Les Dossiers de l'Archéologie*, no. 19 (novembre-décembre 1976), pp. 52-67.

The investigation of Malta's paleochristian catacombs or hypogea must naturally begin with a careful inspection of the existing monuments and a thorough survey of the published data, notably in the important but unsatisfactory older works of A.A. Caruana and E. Becker. The typologies of the architecture and the decoration should then be worked out in detail; thereafter comparisons can be made with Carthage, Siracusa, Naples, Rome and elsewhere, a process complicated by iconographical problems and the difficulty of consulting the foreign literature. This is the correct methodological approach followed by Mgr Vincent Borg who is undoubtedly the person best equipped to embark on such a programme. In his profusely illustrated article, which appears alongside studies of numerous Italian catacombs and constitutes an excellent preliminary or interim report on his findings, he concentrates on the Christian rather than the Romano-Punic or Jewish monuments. Briefly, the thesis is that in Malta at least seven hypogea with a *mensa* or "agape table" are Christian because they have Christian inscriptions or symbols, and that no demonstrably Jewish hypogeum has a *mensa*; therefore all *mensa* hypogea, of which a good number are known, must have been Christian, as were certain Christian tombs which once had *mensae* but have since lost them. The virtue of this argument is that it is based on the observable Maltese evidence and takes account also of parallels outside the island, where there are in fact examples of non-Christian as well as many Christian *mensa* cemeteries. The article also studies the distribution of the hypogea; their rather scanty paintings, carvings and inscriptions; and the architectural types of their tombs — with window, with niche and vault, or with variations on the *baldacchino* form, one remarkable variety of which is found only in Malta.

The main point concerning the identification of the Christian hypogea

is generally convincing, though in strict logic there may be some room for further debate. The brevity and the somewhat awkward format of the publication do not allow the author to present all the data and plans on which such a thesis should ultimately be based. The vexed and vital problems of chronology are left for further discussion, and certain other matters, for example the archaeological indications of the existence of missing *mensae*, would benefit from a detailed exposition. Vincent Borg is properly doubtful whether trustworthy demographic conclusions can be drawn from the internal arrangements or from the topographical distribution of the paleochristian hypogea, but a significant increase in the number and therefore of the proportion of tombs which are demonstrably Christian must affect ancient disputes concerning the extent of the Christianization of Malta. At this point other evidence is also relevant, and Borg cites *en passant* the publications of the Italian Archaeological Mission for a probable fifth-century dating of the Christian basilica and baptistry at Tas-Silg, for a documentation of monastic life there, and for the claim that no other paleochristian basilica or baptistry exists in Malta; but this is not the place to advance possible reservations on those points.

In the tradition of his fellow-Maltese Antonio Bosio, the Father of Underground Archaeology, Vincent Borg is making the first major contribution to this difficult subject since E. Becker's *Malta Sotterranea* of 1913. The bibliography and documentation are most valuable, especially in view of continuing threats to the catacombs themselves.

Anthony Luttrell

V. F. DENARO, *The Goldsmiths of Malta and their Marks*, Leo S. Olschki, Florence 1972, 248 pp., 61 plates.

This is obviously a labour of love. Mr Denaro's effort in describing Malta's artistic heritage in silver (the word 'goldsmiths' in the title covers silversmiths as well) stems from a sense of patriotism. He has produced the first and only comprehensive work on Maltese silver, overcoming considerable odds such as the shyness of Maltese owners and painstaking historical research in a neglected field of study. The publication was financed by the Captain O. F. Gollcher Foundation and magnificently printed by Olschki, in the series *Arte e Archeologia — Studi e Documenti*.

A coffee pot by Lebrun was sold recently at Sotheby's. The art critic in *Country Life* wrote he first thought it was a French work, but then he found out with the help of Denaro's book that it was Maltese and that

Joseph Lebrun was Master of the Mint in Malta at the close of the 18th century. Still, his guess had been fairly good, he claimed. The history and artistic evaluation of Maltese silver, especially during the period of the Knights, cannot be treated in isolation, since many Maltese silversmiths were in all probability imported Italian and French artisans.

The great Maltese silversmiths like Troisi and Lebrun were also Masters of the Mint. There is obviously a close relationship between Maltese silverware and Maltese coinage, which reached its peak of artistic beauty at the time of Vienna. Denaro's book, however, does not try to explore this relationship.

The drawings in this book of maker's marks are often inadequate, perhaps due to the fact that Maltese silver is not all that accessible. Maker's marks could have been photographed, rather than drawn from memory. But then Mr Denaro worked all alone, with little encouragement or none at all from those who should have spurred him to undertake such research of national importance. We are all grateful to him for the excellent work he has bequeathed us.

John Azzopardi Vella

Q. HUGHES, *Malta*. Aus dem Englischen von Peter de Mendelssohn. 4 Farb-, 80 Fototafeln, 5 Pläne und 1 Übersichtskarte. 380 Seiten. München: Prestel 1972.

Der moderne Tourismus verdient nicht nur Kritik, denn er hat auch seine guten Seiten. Wenn man z. B. bedenkt: die kleine Insel Malta — wer hat sie früher schon besucht! Von Deutschland aus die Reise mit Eisenbahn und Schiff war viel zu umständlich. Ganz anders heute. In wenigen Flugstunden erreicht man bequem sein Ziel, und die Urlauber sind nicht enttäuscht. Malta lohnt sich. Man erzählt es weiter, und so wächst die Zahl der deutschen Besucher. Nur an Literatur über Malta fehlt es in Deutschland. Es gibt zwar auf dem Buchmarkt die üblichen Reiseführer wie Polygott, Grieben oder Schroeder. Ausserdem unterrichtet über Kunst und Kultur auf der Insel Eckart Peterich in einem Kapitel des dritten Bandes seines Italien-Buches. Dann aber hört es auch schon auf. Deshalb ist zu begrüßen, wenn unlängst der Prestel-Verlag in München in der Reihe seiner Landschaftsbücher in deutscher Übersetzung das Buch eines Engländers herausgebracht hat, das eine ausführliche Geschichte der Insel Malta bietet. Malta hat den Briten als Marinestützpunkt gedient. Es war ein Bollwerk ihres Empire; und so ist auch nicht verwunderlich.

wenn das Malta-Buch von Hughes auf englisch den Titel "Die Festung" trägt. Nach kurzer Einleitung, worin Hughes durchaus treffend bemerkt, dass auf Malta "alles ganz anders" sei, folgt ein knapper Abriss der Geschichte Maltas in Vorzeit und Altertum. Dann kommt der Verfasser zur Hauptsache: die Insel unter der Herrschaft des Johanniter-Ordens — vorab die Schilderung, wie die Türken 1565 Malta zu erobern versuchten, und anschliessend die Beschreibung, wie die Ritter Valletta als neue Hauptstadt gegründet und angelegt haben. Hughes hat es mit der Festungsbaukunst. Verständlich also, wenn Malta sein Herz höher schlagen lässt, stellt es doch heute gewissermassen ein Freilichtmuseum aller möglichen Befestigungsarten dar und zwar vom Mittelalter bis in die Moderne. Auch das Kapitel über Mdina, die alte maltesische Hauptstadt, fesselt den Leser. Wer noch nicht da war, sieht nach der Lektüre mit Spannung seinem ersten Besuch entgegen; und wer Mdina vom Urlaub her schon kennt, fühlt sich erinnert, denn diese Stadt ist wirklich ein Erlebnis. Dann folgt ein Kapitel über die Dörfer und ihre Kirchen. Es ist ja erstaunlich, welche Pracht auf Malta selbst kleine Dorfkirchen entfalten. Auch bei der Beschreibung der Kirchenbaukunst ist Hughes in seinem Element. Anschliessend macht er mit dem Leser einen Abstecher auf die Nebeninsel Gozo, Maltas kleinere Schwester, der Sage nach die Insel der Kalypso. Zum Schluss erzählt Hughes die Geschichte von Malta unter den Engländern. Reizvoll das Nachwort, welches der Übersetzer, Peter de Mendelssohn, beigesteuert hat. Vielleicht sollte man es vorneweg lesen. Auf jeden Fall ist es ein treffliches Fazit. Lobend muss ausserdem noch erwähnt werden, dass der Verlag das Buch sehr schön ausgestattet und bebildert hat. Allein die Illustrationen geben einen höchst interessanten Reiseführer ab.

Joachim Fischer (Frankfurt am Main)

J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, published by the University of Malta. Lux Press 1976, 279 pp., 23 illustrations in 12 plates.

This book is essentially a collection of papers on various aspects of Maltese folklore, and therefore not expected to cover the entire subject with all its complexities. Nine of the eleven papers have already been published, two of them after having been delivered as lectures. "Maltese Folklore Now", "Determining the Semitic Element in Maltese Folklore", "The Study of Maltese Folktales", "Social Aspects of Maltese Nicknames"

and "Notes for a History of Maltese Costume" are reproduced in their entirety, while "Fr Magri's Collection of Folktales", "Comparative Data on Some Maltese Riddles" and "Anima s in Maltese Folklore" are abridged from the original.

The two unpublished papers now appearing in this book are "Criteria of Physical Attraction and Sex Concepts" and "Beliefs and Practices Relating to Birth and Infancy". The first one centres around sayings, proverbs, idioms and expressions, supported by the extensive collection of J. Aquilina's *A Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs* (1972). The essay is exhaustive, and should be of interest not only to folklorists but also to researchers in other fields. It overlaps into the first sections of the next paper, where again women cannot be left out of the picture. This paper is in fact the longest in the book, as it covers over fifty pages, dealing with various aspects of the subject in an authoritative manner, at the same time revealing the wisdom and ignorance, weaknesses and feelings of humanity, which, after all, are the basis of the study of folklore, a necessary background to all types of documented history.

Such a collection of essays in English should reach a wider public. The use of Maltese is very welcome for the education of the local population, but in scientific research, as folklore has to be, it will be a mistake not to spread our knowledge beyond local boundaries. This book will promote contacts, and these should increase interest in local folklore. Mr Cassar Pullicino has dedicated his lifetime for the advancement of the study of local folklore, and it is hoped that his efforts will prove rewarding.

Guido Lanfranco

H A. CLEWS, *The Malta Year Book — 1976*, published by De La Salle Brothers, Giov. Muscat & Co. 1976, 530 pp., illus.

Brother Hilary Clews deserves all our praise for the veritable feat he has performed in editing the Malta Year Book for the past twenty years. The book is practically exhaustive of most that one needs to know about Malta. It is no mean task to condense so much useful information and so many reliable details in a single publication, and to do so single-handedly. The printing is good — except for the hazy illustrations, the proof-reading excellent, the lay-out quite satisfactory, and the selling price per copy (£1.15) more than reasonable. The items published here cover a variety of interests, but perhaps one or two articles (such as P C

Lewis' "What I shall remember about Malta") might have found a more suitable place in one of our dailies than in a reference book such as the one under review. The De La Salle Brothers deserve our commendation, I repeat, for filling a gap and publishing a book of national importance for no less than a quarter of a century. Yet perhaps the time is ripe for new ideas. A team of professionals — including the present editor — could undertake the task of editing a national information book. This could be published once every two years. Articles commissioned by the editor should be of high standard and 'permanent' interest. Government should contribute to make the new Malta Year Book a truly national publication, on a par with that of other countries.

G. Mangion

J. SULTANA, C. GAUCI, M. BEAMAN, *A Guide to the Birds of Malta*, Malta Ornithological Society, Lux Press 1975, 191 pp., illus.

D. A. BANNERMAN, J. A. VELLA-GAFFIERO, *Birds of the Maltese Archipelago*, Museums Department, Valletta, Interprint (Malta) Ltd. 1976, 550 pp., illus.

Segnalo volentieri agli studiosi e agli appassionati di ornitologia questi due bei libri, che si inseriscono in una annata particolarmente felice e prolifica di *Melitensia*. Si tratta di due pubblicazioni di carattere scientifico, che insieme costituiscono un punto di riferimento sicuro sulla storia e la condizione attuale della ornitologia maltese. Vi si trovano le notizie sugli uccelli che visitano Malta più o meno regolarmente, di passaggio per altre terre, e su quegli altri — non più di diciotto specie — che rimangono in quest'Isola anche nella calda stagione, e che ci sono quindi abbastanza familiari.

Carattere spiccatamente scientifico, di ricerca originale, ha *La Guida agli Uccelli di Malta*, di Sultana, Gauci e Beaman. Contiene un elenco completo e sistematico di tutti gli uccelli connessi col gruppo insulare di Malta, con le notizie che interessano gli studiosi di quella meraviglia e di quel mistero che è tuttora la migrazione degli uccelli. Stringato, essenziale, chiaramente scientifico è lo stile dell'opera, la quale abbonda di riferimenti bibliografici nel testo, ed è corredata delle necessarie illustrazioni. L'opera include un'ottima (anche se breve) introduzione, un'appendice sulle specie 'maltesi' non riconosciute, un'altra appendice sui recuperi di uccelli inanellati, un'esauriente bibliografia fino al 1974, un indice dei nomi scientifici, inglesi e maltesi degli uccelli. Gli autori di

questo libro — con altri colleghi come J. Attard e S. Borg — sono fra le 'colonne' della Società Ornitologica Maltese, sorta nel 1962 e divenuta man mano sempre più attiva, tra lo stupore e l'ammirazione di molti di noi, profani amatori degli augelli u smalzati osservatori della scena locale. La Società pubblica la sua rivista, *Il-Merill* (passero solitario), dove i soci pubblicano le loro osservazioni scientifiche, continuando la tradizione iniziata da Antonio Schembri autore del *Catalogo Ornitologico del Gruppo di Malta*, del 1843, e proseguita dagli ottimi studiosi G. Despott (di cui si contano ben 31 pubblicazioni) e C De Lucca (ideatore fra l'altro della raccolta che oggi arricchisce la sezione ornitologica del Museo di Storia Naturale a Mdina). A parte l'attività scientifica, suggestata dalla presente pubblicazione, gli appassionati membri della Società Ornitologica non perdono occasione alcuna per convincere gli abitanti locali di quanto sarebbe più bella la loro Isola se i pochi (ma non tanto pochi!) avicoltori e cacciatori non usurpassero il diritto dei più di godere la vista e il richiamo e il canto degli uccelli lasciati liberi nel loro habitat maltese.

Analogo, in fondo, è l'intento degli autori del secondo, bellissimo libro: *Gli Uccelli dell'Arcipelago Maltese*, come risulta chiaramente dall'autorevole e interessante prefazione di Dom Mintoff. Il quale mette a fuoco il problema ecologico della sopravvivenza degli uccelli migratori in quest'Isola, e afferma che l'appoggio del Governo alla presente pubblicazione vuol essere un primo passo verso quella educazione popolare che deve precedere la legislazione necessaria in questo settore. Il volume è lautamente ricco di illustrazioni a colori e di bellissimi disegni a matita, ed è perfettamente stampato dalla Interprint (per cui il prezzo di vendita di £3.75 per copia è ovviamente sovvenzionato). Il 'tandem' Bannerman — Vella Gaffiero funziona abbastanza bene, in quanto non nuoce all' lettura (ma non sempre c'è perfetta intesa fra i due, vedi per es. pp. 322-4). Dr Bannerman è un noto studioso inglese e autore di numerose opere di ornitologia; Vella Gaffiero è un promettente studioso maltese, ancora alle prime armi. Il libro risente, ovviamente, della vastità di esperienze e delle doti di scrittore del primo dei due autori, avvalendosi anche delle ricerche della rivista *Il-Merill* e di altre osservazioni locali. Nel complesso, questo libro rientra fra i classici della nostra *Melitensia*.

G. Mangion

The St. Luke's Hospital Gazette, Vol. XI, 1-2, 1976, 155 pp.

Questa è la rivista della Facoltà di Medicina, che ha la fama di essere la facoltà più seria della locale Università. La rivista è probabilmente la più scientifica fra quelle che si pubblica a Malta con una

certa regolarità. Ne è direttore Dr R Ellul-Micallef. La rivista dedica ampio spazio ad articoli di carattere storico, anche perchè conta fra i collaboratori i dottori Paul Cassar e George Zammit Maempel, autorevoli storici della medicina stimati anche all'estero. Nell'annata corrente della *Gazette* figurano tre articoli di Paul Cassar: sull'inventario di una farmacia maltese del Cinquecento, su alcune figure di preti medici a Malta, e sulla pratica della stregoneria e della magia per fini terapeutici a Malta nei secoli diciassettesimo e diciottesimo. Vi si annovera anche un nobile articolo, per giunta di piacevolissima lettura, da parte del prof. V G Griffiths, intitolato *The Attributes of a Master Surgeon*, in cui viene delineata la figura e l'opera di un chirurgo di classe, il prof. P P Debono.

G. Mangion

G. WETTINGER, "Some Maltese Medieval Place-Names of Archaeological Interest", *Atti del Colloquio Internazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, Palermo 1976, 36 pp.

The social history and topography of Medieval Malta is less of a *terra incognita* today than it was ten years ago, when Godfrey Wettinger started publishing a series of articles based on years of meticulous research and card-indexing from original sources, culminating in contributions such as the present one and "The Lost Villages and Hamlets of Malta" (*Medieval Malta*, A T Luttrell ed., London 1975, 181-216). Wettinger is not only one of the most hard-working, prolific and brainy local historians, but also a foremost authority on Malta's medieval past, thanks to his unequalled familiarity with the sources and the scientific, if necessarily wary, interpretation and reconstruction of the evidence gleaned from them. In the present essay he collects and examines toponyms with the words *ħaġar*, *blata*, *ġebel*, *dura*, *għar*, *demus* (cave-tomb), *dikkiena* (stone bench), *torba* (cemetery, probably Muslim), *dejr* (convent, probably pre-Muslim) and others, of direct interest to the archaeologist. Such a long and documented collection of place-names is of paramount importance to the linguist as well. Until Wettinger's studies were published, starting with "The Distribution of Surnames in Malta in 1419 and the 1480s" (1968), the earliest extant word-lists in Maltese were those by Megiser (1611) and Abela (1647), for whatever they were worth. In the case of languages like Maltese devoid of an old written tradition, onomastics has to come to the rescue providing clues on the development of the language throughout the centuries. Articles such as this one, therefore, are of considerable linguistic value.

G. Mangion