

QUINTINUS AND THE LOCATION OF THE TEMPLE OF HERCULES AT MARSAXLOKK*

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The Jesuit Girolamo Manduca (1573—1643) and the father of Maltese historiography, Fra Giovanni Francesco Abela (1582—1655) have been found to be the creators or propagators of a significant number of 'traditions' which have become deeply rooted in the history of these islands. Some of these 'traditions' now appear to be groundless, others founded on very flimsy, mostly extrapolated evidence or on dubious sources. A group of others owe their origin to the wrong reading or interpretation of ancient texts. (1)

Besides Manduca and Abela, however, another writer who wrote before them and was not Maltese is the source of a stream of similar historical traditions. This is the Frenchman Jean Quintin (1500—1561) who resided in Malta between the years 1530 and 1536 when he served the Order of the Knights of St. John as chaplain of the French Knights and auditor of the Grand Master. (2) He is better known by the latinized version of his name, Quintinus, due to the fact that his brief description of Malta was written in Latin. (3) The traditions to which he gave origin — so far no text is known before him dealing with the same material — are mostly concerned with the ancient history of Malta.

One of these traditions stems from Quintinus's unreserved acceptance, as

* With apologies to H.C.R. Vella whose article on "Quintinus (1536) and the temples of Juno and Hercules in Malta", *Athenaeum*, LX, fasc. I-II, 1982, reached me when this paper was already completed.

1. On this subject see A.T. Luttrell, "Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela: tradition and invention in Maltese historiography," *Melita Historica*, VII, no. 2, 1977, pp.105-132. This article discusses in detail some of these 'traditions', concerning mostly the Pauline cult and the Muslim period in Malta. For some biographical and bibliographical notes on Manduca and Abela and their connections with other historical personalities, both in Malta and abroad, see *Ibid.*, and V. Borg, "Girolamo Manduca: his life and works," *Melita Historica*, VII, no. 3, 1978, pp.237-257.
2. For his biography see E.R. Leopardi, "The first printed description of Malta, Lyons 1536," *Scientia* [Malta] XV, 1949, pp.52-63; H.C.R. Vella, *The Earliest Description of Malta* (Lyons 1536), Malta 1980, pp. 1-9.
3. J. Quintinus, *Insulae Melitae descriptio ex commentariis rerum quotidianarum*, Lyons 1536. Re-edited and translated in Vella, *Earliest Description*.

historically valid, of the legendary story recounted by the Latin poet Ovid (*Fasti*, 3. 567—578) concerning a certain Battus, king of Malta, who is reputed to have been linked by ties of friendship with Dido, the legendary foundress of Carthage, and later offered hospitality to her sister Anna. (4) Battus was, in actual fact, the leader of the Greeks from Thera who founded the colony of Cyrene in North Africa in 631 B.C. His real name was Aristoteles and he started to be called 'Battus' after becoming king of this newly founded colony. According to Herodotus (IV, 145—148) 'Battus' was the local, Libyan word for 'king'. Indeed several successors of Aristoteles as kings of Cyrene were in turn called 'Battus'. (5)

A similar tradition is that relating to the alleged ties of friendship between the Maltese and Phalaris, the tyrant of Agrigento (570—555 B.C.). The tradition rests on three of several apocryphal letters of Phalaris written by a rhetorician probably in the 2nd century A.D. (6) Quintinus (followed by Abela and the majority of writers on Maltese antiquities) accepted the letters as genuine when Erasmus and Politianus had already perceived that they were not by Phalaris. (7) Their falsity was decisively demonstrated by R. Bentley in 1699. (8)

Even the Pauline tradition with its several ramifications, can be traced down to Quintinus even though he professes to be only reporting the various beliefs and convictions of the local inhabitants regarding Saint Paul's shipwreck and stay on Malta, of which he shows himself somewhat incredulous, as he seems

4. Quintinus, ff. A3v-A4r; Vella, *Earliest Description*, pp. 18-21.
5. See Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie*, III 1, 1897, pp. 146-149, s.v. "Battos". Elsewhere in ancient legend, Battus of Cyrene is said to have given shelter to Anna in her flight from Carthage after her sister's death (*Sil. Ital.* 8, 50-68, 157-159). How a 7th century B.C. king came to be connected with a 12th century mythical figure is hard to explain. Much more so is the transfer of this connection to the island of Malta, unless we should follow up on Herodotus' interpretation of the name Battus and postulate the reign of an African (i.e. Carthaginian) king of Malta, sometime before its conquest by the Romans. Cfr. E. Coleiro, "Malta nelle letterature classiche", *Missione Archeologica a Malta, Rapporto Preliminare* 1963, Rome 1964, p. 34; and J. Busuttil, "Anna and Malta," *Melita Historica* V, no. 3, 1970, pp. 251-253.
6. For Phalaris and his apocryphal letters see Pauly-Wissowa, *Realencyclopädie*, XIX 2, 1938, pp. 1649-1652, s.v. "Phalaris"; J. Busuttil, "The letters of Phalaris to the Maltese", *Journal of the Faculty of Arts: Royal University of Malta*, III, no. 3, 1967, pp. 220-223.
7. The three letters are reproduced in G.F. Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta*. Malta 1647, pp. 183-185 as well as in his manuscript notebook, N[atational] L[ibrary of] M[aita] Biblioteca Ms. 140, ff. 13v-15r.
8. R. Bentley, *Dissertations upon the epistles of Phalaris*, London 1699, contains previous bibliography.

to support the identification of the Biblical Melita with the Dalmatian Meleda. (9) Relying thus on the beliefs of the locals he places the site of Paul's shipwreck on the spur of land jutting out of St Paul's Bay opposite St Paul's church. He also testifies to the veneration of the Maltese and foreigners alike for St Paul's Grotto where Paul was said to have spent his three months' custody in Malta healing the islanders from all sorts of diseases and preaching to them the Christian message. The stone cut from this grotto had already an international reputation (Quintinus cites Africa, Italy and Rome) for its healing virtues from bites of poisonous serpents and scorpions. In addition Quintin records the current belief that no poisonous serpents existed in Malta and that those brought from abroad also became harmless. (10)

No doubt Quintinus derived his knowledge of the literary allusions to Malta from the various early printed, perhaps even manuscript, editions of ancient classical authors as well as from some Maltese individuals who knew well the antiquities of the island. (11) The information he gives relating to the Maltese Pauline tradition is manifestly extracted direct from the mouth of the Maltese.

The next writer who certainly contributed exceedingly to rendering these traditions more permanent was the Sicilian Dominican Tommaso Fazello who included them in his widely read and repeatedly published work on Sicily. Fazello in his brief account on Malta undoubtedly leans heavily upon Quintinus. (12)

Both Manduca and Abela might have possibly known Quintinus' *Descriptio* in the original text of 1536 but it is more likely that they did so through the later editions of his work. Whatever the case these two Maltese scholars picked up these traditions from their two predecessors and further consolidated their permanence. The latter are, in fact, found repeated over and over again in the 17th and 18th century erudite dissertations preserved in manuscripts in our

9. Quintinus ff. Clv-C2v; Vella, *Earliest Description* pp.40-47 and, in particular, note 319; *Id.*, "Quintinus (1536) and St. Paul's shipwreck in Malta", *Melita Historica* VIII, no. 1, 1980, pp.61-64.
10. Even casual visitors to Malta record this tradition. Among many others A.P. Gonzales, *Hierusalemche Reyse*, Antwerp 1673, re-edited as *Le Voyage en Egypte du Père Antonius Gonzales* 1665-1666, Paris 1977, pp. 585 ff.
11. G. Bosio, *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione ed Illustrissima Militia di S. Giovanni Gierosolomitano*, Vol. III, Rome 1602, p.90, says that Quintinus profited from the long conversations held by Grand Master L'Isle Adam with some Maltese men of letters who were familiar with "le antichità di quell'Isola". See also G. Wettinger and M. Fsadni, *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena*, Malta 1968, pp.26-27.
12. T. Fazello, *De Rebus Siculis Decades Duae*, 1st ed: Palermo 1558, pp.10-12.

old libraries (13), as well as in the 19th century history writers. (14) Some historical accounts of a popular and religious nature and a certain category of tourist literature have prolonged the life of these traditions to the very present, and it will take the energies of several generations of disciplined, conscientious scholars to eradicate them from Maltese historiography.

Another important tradition started by Quintinus, which has had a great impact on archaeological research and which is the main concern of this paper, is the one locating the ancient temple of Hercules in the region of Marsaxlokk. After reporting what Cicero had to say on the highly esteemed temple of Juno on Malta, the 16th century writer goes on to describe the equally venerated temple of Hercules. The text runs as follows: (15)

Hercules etiam delubro hic omnibus ubique gentibus sanctissimo cultus; Melitensium laudis admiratio non postrema est. Iunonem Ptolemaeus in ea insulae parte posuit, quae Orientem spectat, Herculem ad Austrum: utriusque sacri fama est, parum tamen hactenus incolis audita. Herculani templi (si modo vera e Ptolemaeo divino) immensae adhuc reliquiae patent; circuitu in passus ter mille et ultra, in eo insulae angulo quem ab argumento loci, patria lingua *Euri Portum* nominant. Ima pars extat in plerisque, lapidum longitudinis crassitudinisque stupendae.

13. An important unpublished work, written in all likelihood in 1610 and dealing with, amongst other topics, several aspects of the cult of St. Paul in Malta, is the *Relazione della nova et grandissima devotione introdotta nella Santa grutta di Santo Paulo nella Isola di Malta con un breve racoglimento delle cose notande, et antiqità di detta Isola*. The work is known in several manuscript editions: see Luttrell, *Manduca and Abela*, pp.117-118, note 65. To these NLM Biblioteca Mss. 15 (ff. 78v-110v) and 465 (ff.39v-71v) should be added. The latter seems to be earlier than the ones quoted so far. It ends with a poem, written in the same hand, commemorating the victory "nuovamente havuta" of Don Giovanni D'Austria at Lepanto (f.71). The name of the author at the foot of the dedication is inked over but the words Marc Antonio Hax..... can still be deciphered. Other references to the Pauline tradition in J. Cassar Pullicino, "Pauline tradition in Malta", *Scientia* [Malta], X, 1944, pp.19-31; Luttrell, *Manduca and Abela*, pp.114-132; M. Cagiano de Azevedo, *Testimonianze Archeologiche della Tradizione Paolina a Malta*, Rome 1966.
14. For example: O. Bres, *Malta Antica Illustrata co' Monumenti, e coll'Istoria*, Rome 1816, especially pp.371-455; A.A. Caruana, *Monografia Critica della Grotta di San Paolo, nel Sobborgo di Malta, l'Antica Capitale di Malta*, Malta 1896; *Id.*, *Frammento Critico della storia Fenico-Cartaginese, Greco-Romana, Bisantina, Musulmana e Normanno-Aragonese delle Isole di Malta*, Malta 1899.
15. Quintinus f. A4v; Vella, *Earliest Description* pp.20-22.

A free translation of which would be the following:

Hercules was also worshipped in a very holy shrine by people from all places; the Maltese are not least in their praise and admiration. Ptolemy placed the sanctuary of Juno in that part of the island which faces East and that of Hercules in the part facing South; both enjoy a wide reputation which is, however, little known to the inhabitants. (16) If my interpretation of Ptolemy's bearings is correct, extensive remains of the temple of Hercules, three miles long or more in circumference, are still visible in that corner of the island which, because of its position, is called "the South-Eastern Harbour" in the mother tongue. The foundations survive in many places consisting of stones of stupendous height and thickness.

From the text it would seem that Quintinus' point of departure was his thorough knowledge of the classics in general and of the ancient references to Malta in particular. In this case Quintin is dealing with a very succinct piece of information given by Claudius Ptolemeus, the second century A.D. astronomer and geographer. (17) Ptolemaeus, besides giving the position of the Maltese islands, mentions three cities and two sanctuaries in them and gives their bearings. Of these two sanctuaries that of Juno is mentioned elsewhere in ancient literature, namely in Cicero, (18) whereas Ptolemy is our only source for that of Hercules.

During his relatively long stay on Malta Quintin must have been greatly impressed by the extraordinary megalithic remains scattered in different parts of the island. He shows his appreciation of the impressive size and beauty of these ruins in the description of two groups of remains which he identifies with Ptolemy's two sanctuaries, thus divining from the very start their religious significance. (19) Refraining from being too dogmatic in his approach, he identifies the group in the Grand Harbour, somewhere between Birgu and the 'Castellum' and extending out into the sea, with the temple of Juno. He appears to be more hesitant in identifying the temple of Hercules with the group at Marsaxlokk Harbour. (20)

16. The second part of this sentence contradicts, *prima facie*, what Quintinus says in the previous sentence and what is reported by Bosio, III, p.90 (see *supra* n.11)

17. Ptol. *Geogr.* 4.3.13.

18. Cic. *Verr* 4.103

19. Quintinus f.A4r-A4v: *immensae reliquiae; lapidum longitudinis crassitudinisque stupendae; Iunonis templum non solum inter magna sed etiam inter magnifica numerari potuisse arbitror ex his quae pauca durant."*

20. *Ibid.*: *ut auctor est Cicero; si modo vera a Ptolemaeo divino.*

From the description of the latter ruins it is not difficult to deduce that Quintinus was referring to the megalithic remains at Borg In-Nadur rather than the smaller ashlar stone blocks which predominate at Tas-Silġ. But by claiming that the remains of this religious edifice extended over such a vast area — 'three miles long or more in circumference' — he gives the strong impression that, besides the Borg In-Nadur Copper Age temple, (21) he incorporated in the same conjectural sanctuary other archaeological remains, such as those belonging to the fortifications of the Bronze Age village in the same locality (22) and, possibly, also those at Tas-Silġ about 2km. away. (23) There is very little doubt that for more than a century after the first edition of Quintin's *Descriptio* the ancient temple of Hercules kept on being identified with the megalithic ruins of Borg In-Nadur both in printed works and in those surviving only in manuscript. Fazello's text follows closely on that of Quintin without giving any further topographical or descriptive specifications, but omitting the exaggerated detail of the extent of the ruins. (24) Haxak's admiration for his country's 'meravigliosi vestigii de suoi nobilissimi edificii tanto de tempi sublimi et sumptuosissimi quanto di fondamenti di Reale habitatione et fortissimi muri di pietre di incredibil grandezza atti a resistere a qualunque fortissima expugnatione' was certainly inspired by its abundant relics of prehistoric temples. (25) His reference to the temple of Hercules, later on in the text, was most likely, therefore, directed to the prehistoric remains near Birzebbugia. (26)

The location of the temple is shifted to Tas-Silġ for the first time by Abela. Judging from the 'quality, location and shape of the building', as well as from minor discoveries of 'medaglie, pezze di statue d'idoletti, e d'altri cose' discovered at the place called Kasar (very close to Tas-Silġ church) Abela is convinced that the 'few courses of large, well-dressed stones' that he saw there belong to the temple of Hercules. (27) It is rather surprising, therefore, that Burchard Niderstedt, writing only a few years after Abela's publication, persists in the old identification and places the ancient temple near the Church of St George at Birzebbugia (28). In his manuscript dissertation about a statue of Hercules, written in 1769, the Gozitan Agius de Soldanis corrects Niderstedt's

21. J.D. Evans, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands: A Survey*, London 1971, pp.6-14.
22. *Ibid.* pp.14-16.
23. *Missione Archeologica a Malta*, 1963, Rome 1964, pp.41-111.
24. Fazello, pp.10-12.
25. NLM Biblioteca Ms. 465, f.42r.
26. *Ibid.* f.51r: "quel altro tempio di Hercole è nella altra parte del Isola verso il vento sirocho nel porto chiamato Euro comunemente detto Marsa Sirocho".
27. Abela, *Descrittione* p.108.

location stating that it should read 'near the church of Our Lady of the Snows' (i.e., Tas-Silġ) unless it is to be considered a misprint for S. Gregorio, the parish church of Zejtun. (29) Giannantonio Ciantar, a contemporary of De Soldanis, visited the Tas-Silġ site in 1749 and, in his description of what he saw there, gives further support to Abela's identification. (30) In 1787 the French traveller Jean Houel implies that by his time the accepted 'tradition' placed the temple of Hercules on the hill of Tas-Silġ. There, he describes in some detail, and illustrates by an engraving, a long and beautiful wall of several courses of which only modest traces survive today. He clearly distinguishes these remains from those behind the chapel of St George (Borġ In-Nadur) which he correctly compares to those of the Ġgantija Temples. (31) At the beginning of the following century Onorato Bres is still confusing the two sites. On the one hand he describes the 'smisurata grandezza' of the stones and cites Quintinus and Fazellus, and on the other refers to the wall illustrated in Houel and cites Abela and Ciantar with reference to Tas-Silġ. (32) A.A. Caruana, towards the end of the 19th century, reverts quite categorically to the original identification with Borġ In-Nadur, and declares Houel's opinion incorrect. (33) This identification is given the coup de grâce by the German Albert Mayr who, at the beginning of the 20th century, classifies the Borġ In-Nadur complex together with the other megalithic buildings on the two islands, as pre-historic. (34) He also describes the archaeological remains on the hill of Tas-Silġ where he noticed the presence of a small triglyph frieze and of Punic pottery and discovered a small marble statuette and, excluding that they could have belonged to a private house, suggests that they should rather have belonged to a temple, perhaps the temple of Hercules. (35)

It is thus seen that, apart from differences of opinion as to the exact site, the position of the writers of Maltese ancient history and antiquities regarding the location of the temple of Hercules somewhere in the Marsaxlokk harbour remained unchanged from Quintinus down to the present century. The

28. B. Niderstedt, *Malta Vetus et Nova*, Helmstedt 1660, p.17: *Hodie dicti templi monumenta admiratione dignissima adhuc supersunt apud portum (quem Marsasirocco vocant) ad Ecclesiam ibi vicinam S. Giorgio Sacram*. See also Bosio, III, p.92.
29. NLM Biblioteca Ms. 142, vol. II, f.10, note 35.
30. G.F. Abela-G.A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata*, Malta 1772-1780, vol. I, pp.460-462. Text also in NLM Biblioteca Ms. 142, vol. II, f.14, in Italian, and in note 40, in Latin.
31. J. Houel, *Voyage Pittoresque des Isles de Sicile, de Malte et de Lipari*, IV, Paris 1787, pp.92-93, pl.255.
32. O. Bres, pp.61-62, 143-144.
33. A.A. Caruana, *Report on the Phoenician and Roman Antiquities in the Group of the Islands of Malta*, Malta 1882, pp.17-18.
34. A. Mayr, *Die Vorgeschichtlichen Denkmäler von Malta*, Munich 1901, in particular pp.687-690.
35. *Id.* *Die Insel Malta im Altertum*, Munich 1909, pp.129-130.

further confirmation of the prehistoric identity of the Borg In-Nadur remains, resulting from the increasingly scientific approach of archaeological studies in the fifty years following Mayr's publications, already restricted the presumed identification of Hercules' shrine to the Tas-Silg site.

This identification, however, was seriously put into question when this site was excavated by an Italian archaeological mission from the University of Rome in the 1960s. Several scores of inscriptions were uncovered, mostly on clay vessels and sherds, all invoking a female divinity, Astarte and Tanit in the Punic language and script, and Hera in Greek characters. (36) The name of Hercules or his Punic counterpart Melqart did not occur once. Thus the universally accepted conclusion is that the temple of Juno referred to by Ptolemy and much praised by the Roman orator Cicero is to be identified with the remains at Tas-Silg, rather than that of Hercules, the remains of which, if still in existence, are to be sought elsewhere. (37) If we are to stick to Ptolemy's bearings we should seek them somewhere in the southern region of the island but no such remains survive there that can be classified as a religious building of the Punic or Roman period. (38) Indeed nor do such vestiges survive anywhere on the rest of the island unless they are still jealously protected from sight by the island's thin soil cover awaiting discovery.

Once the connection between Marsaxlokk and Hercules was firmly rooted in Maltese historical tradition other evidence was tentatively brought forward to further confirm it. This was done mainly by 'inventing' the provenance of three pieces of marble sculpture which appeared in Malta sometime in the 17th century when interest in Maltese antiquities started to flourish. These were the two identical candelabra, known also as 'cippi', each bearing a bilingual inscription of a dedication to the god Herakles-Melqart, and a statuette of the same god represented in the sculptural and iconographic tradition typical of the Greek Hellenistic period.

It should be remembered that the findspot of an archaeological object is one of the most important and treasured pieces of information that the archaeologist can get hold of, because once it is acquired it generates a whole series of interrelationships between the object itself (and the information provided

36. See *Missione Archeologica a Malta* 1963-70, sections on Tas-Silg; in particular 1963, p.83-107; 1964, p.79-101; 1965, pp.53-80; 1966, pp.43-48; 1967 pp.47-48.

37. *Missione* 1963 pp.111-115; Vella, *Earliest Description*, p.56, note 91.

38. The square Punic tower inside the garden of the parish priest's house at Zurrieq could possibly be part of a religious building, but its identity has not yet been established: see *Missione* 1963 pp.19-20; *Museum Annual Report* 1938-39, Malta 1939, pp.2-3.

by it) and the place of discovery (whether it is a tomb, a single edifice, a building complex, or a city). The findspot becomes even more important when the object contains an inscription bearing the name of a city or divinity, or represents the image of a city personification or divinity. For instance, several temples at Selinunte in Sicily are still designated by letters of the alphabet, instead of the names of the divinities to whom they were dedicated, due to the absence of such decisively indicative monuments from the sites. Similarly the identification of a number of excavated sites of ancient cities in the same island is still doubtful or undecided simply because inscriptions with the names of the cities have not been forthcoming (e.g. Himera).

Neither the 17th and 18th century manuscript documents in the National Library nor the printed literature of the period provide any precise information on the findspot and circumstances of the discovery of the statue of Hercules. The most plausible explanation for this is that it was probably never discovered, or rather never unearthed. Ever since I first examined the statue (way back in 1970) for eventual inclusion in a catalogue of Greek and Roman sculpture in Maltese collections, (39) my initial suspicion grew gradually into almost complete certainty that the statue was not ancient at all, but a modern 16th or 17th century creation. This opinion is shared by other archaeologists and art-historians (40) and the statue has a few years ago been transferred from the Rabat Museum of Roman Antiquities to the Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta.

Iconographically, that is, in its facial type, nudity and attributes, this image of Hercules fits quite comfortably into a vast series of representations of the god which were created in the Hellenistic period and which were most probably inspired by a masterpiece of the 4th century B.C. sculptor, Lysippos. (41) But the statue in its entirety, in particular the pose, does not conform with anyone of the known types in the Hellenistic series or with their Roman copies. In such cases it is normally wise to be cautious and avoid accepting the statue in question as the only known specimen of an ancient type, especially when the exact circumstances of its discovery are unknown. To this one must add that the style of the figure is much closer to Renaissance, or post-Renaissance, sculpture than to that of antiquity. (42) In consideration of all this the safest

39. A. Bonanno, *Sculture Greche e Romane dei Musei e delle Collezioni di Malta*, unpublished thesis compiled for the doctorate degree at the University of Palermo, 1970.
40. T. Ashby, "Roman Malta", *Journal of Roman Studies*, V, 1915, p.50, note 3; D. Trump, *Malta: an Archaeological Guide*, London 1972, p.109 considers it an 18th century Neapolitan work.
41. M. Bieber, *The Sculpture of the Hellenistic Age*, New York 1955, pp.36-37; S. Reinach, *Répertoire de la Statuaire Greque et Romaine*, II, Rome 1965, pp.209-227.
42. The present writer has so far not succeeded in tracing a 16th or 17th century sculptor to whom the statuette could be attributed with reasonable plausibility.

attitude is to class the statue as a pseudo-antique sculpture, even though one should not exclude completely the possibility of an eventual rehabilitation.

The statue is documented for the first time in Abela's *Descrittione* where it is described and illustrated by an engraving. (43) Abela does not give a clue as to its provenance but speculates that it could be the same idol brought to Malta by the Tyrian Phoenicians and worshipped by them in the temple which he and others had already located at Marsaxlokk. Abela's contemporary, Burchart Niderstedt, merely adds that the statue was kept in Abela's antiquarium, though he does so in the same sentence in which he mentions the relics of the temple at Marsaxlokk. (44)

A century later, however, in a *Dissertazione* (45) dedicated entirely to this statue and written a year after the Biblioteca had acquired it, Agius de Soldanis notes that Abela 'non dice quando, e come l'acquistò e in qual luogo fu scoperto'. (46) Further on in the text Agius also declares his hesitation in supporting Abela's theory that the statue was the one venerated in the Marsaxlokk temple even though it is commonly believed to be so. (47) Count Ciantar in his re-edition of Abela's *Descrittione* reproduces almost verbatim his predecessor's text. (48)

Though not strictly relevant to this paper a curious episode connected with Hercules' statue should be mentioned briefly. The episode is dealt with in full in Agius de Soldani's *Dissertazione*, (49) but is also referred to in a short paper on Maltese antiquities by Ciantar. (50) Canon Agius recounts how a 'galeotto' struck its head off and, thinking that it represented Saint Joseph, sold it for 18 tarf. It was later retrieved by the Jesuit Fathers, to whom Abela's Casino together with his collection of antiques had been bequeathed, and stuck back in place by Giuseppe Casha, a Maltese sculptor residing in Rome. The restoration was done so well that 'chi del caso non è inteso con fastidio s'avvede della ferita sofferta'. Even today the line of break in the neck is hardly perceptible.

43. Abela, *Descrittione*, pp.156-157.

44. Niderstedt, p.17.

45. F. Agius de Soldanis, *Dissertazione sopra la statua d'Ercole che si Ritrova nel Museo della Biblioteca di Malta* (1769), NLM Biblioteca Ms 142, vol. II, ff. 1-17.

46. *Ibid.* ff.3-4, note 3

47. *Ibid.* f.16

48. Abela-Ciantar, vol. I, pp.463-464.

49. NLM Ms 142, vol. II, ff.3-4.

50. G.A. Ciantar, *Dissertazione sopra alcune Anticaglie di Malta*, NLM Biblioteca Ms 166, f.26r.

Undoubtedly one of the most important monuments of Maltese antiquity is the well known 'cippus' or 'candelabrum', bearing a bilingual inscription, an identical twin of which was donated by Grand Master de Rohan to King Louis XVI of France in 1780. An undocumented provenance from Marsaxlokk has been inferred for them merely from the fact that the inscriptions on them refer to a votive offering to Hercules/Melkart.

Each of the two candelabra has the appearance of an architectural support. It consists of a square base with moulded horizontal edges surmounted by a fusiform shaft enclosed within four upright acanthus leaves and resting on two *tori*. The shaft is broken at the top in both specimens. (51) From comparisons made with other objects of the same type housed in various European collections of Greek and Roman art it can be established with a reasonable degree of certainty that the Malta specimens were candelabra of a Greek Hellenistic pedigree. These candelabra were often very elaborate with richly carved shafts and bases. (52) Some examples are found illustrated on Roman reliefs. (53) They usually support a wide, splayed receptacle which is often shown containing fire. At times they are topped by a round, flat shelf intended to hold a lamp. They could also have been used for incense burning. A fragmentary limestone candelabrum in the museum of Cherchell has already been likened to the Maltese examples but its base is octagonal instead of square. All three are erroneously called 'bétyles'. (54)

The candelabra are carved in white marble, a material that is not native to the Maltese islands and therefore had to be imported from elsewhere. Since, for this very reason, it is very unlikely that the craft of marble-carving was then practiced locally they were probably imported in their finished state. (55) The dedication, on the other hand, might have easily been, and most probably was, engraved in Malta on behalf of the two patrons, Abdosir and Osirxamar,

51. Only Houel, IV, pl. CCLVI, fig. 1, illustrates one of them complete with a two-handled basin on top. This is certainly the French traveller's own artistic integration which, however, appears to be very close to what the monument originally must have looked like.
52. A very close parallel, but much more richly decorated, is provided by a pair of identical candelabra preserved in the Galleria dei Candelabri II of the Vatican Museums: G. Lippold, *Die Skulpturen des Vaticanischen Museums*, II 2, Berlin 1956, pp. 188-191, nos. 44, 55, pls. 88, 90.
53. Such as the relief panels of the sepulchral monument of the Haterii.
54. P. Gauckler, *Musée de Cherchell*, Paris 1895, p.90, pl. II, 5. The similarity to the Maltese "célèbres bétyles" is used by the writer to suggest the religious nature, rather than an architectural one, of the object.
55. No ancient marble sculpture has, in fact, ever been found which reveals local characteristics

who, judging by their names on the main inscription, and the language of the latter, were certainly of Punic extraction. (56) But the addition of a synopsis of the dedication in the Greek language, in which the names of the dedicators and of the god are given in their Hellenized versions, strongly suggests that they were greatly influenced by the Hellenistic culture. (57)

The importance of the candelabra to Maltese archaeology is inestimable: their potential significance in relation to their historical background has been exploited only superficially. For instance, once they are firmly dated (58) they could throw much light on the prevalent culture, or cultures, in Malta at the time of their dedication. On the international level they already played a significant role in the decipherment and study of the Phoenician language in the 19th century. (59)

Since the publication of the Greek inscription in the third volume of the *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum* in 1853, (60) the candelabra were firmly believed to have been originally discovered in Marsaxlokk. (61) Before that the Marsaxlokk provenance had not been proposed by anyone, (62) and it was more than a century later that, in a contribution on the historical documentation concerning the Tas-Silġ archaeological site, the claim was discredited. (63) The attribution to Marsaxlokk in the *Corpus* was apparently reached by inference, because the candelabra were thought, with some plausibility, to have been dedicated and set up by Abdosir and Osirxamar inside the temple of Hercules (then universally located in that region) as suggested in the inscription.

56. They are even described as Tyrian in the Greek dedication.
57. This is a common enough feature in Punic centres like Motya, Solus (Sicily) and Carthage itself. The typology of the candelabra belongs to the Hellenistic sculptural tradition.
58. 2nd century B.C. according to the most recent studies. See M.G. Guzzo Amadasi, *Le Iscrizioni Fenicie e Puniche delle Colonie in Occidente*, Roma 1967, pp.15-17. E.g., G. Barthelemy, "Réflexions sur quelques monuments phéniciens et sur les alphabètes qu'en résultent," *Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres*, XXX, Paris 1764, pp.405 ff.; J. Swinton, *Philosophical Transactions*, LIV, 1764, pp.394-401, pl.22, 6. For an extensive account of the role of the Maltese inscriptions in the early study of the Phoenician language see Bres, pp.92-105.
60. C.I.G., III, 681, 5753.
61. For example, *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, I, 122, 122bis; C. Vassallo, *Guida al Museo ovvero i Monumenti di Antichità Maltesi Conservati nel Museo della Pubblica Biblioteca di Malta*, Malta 1871, p.6; A.A. Caruana, *Report*, p.34; G. Perrot — Ch. Chipiez, *History of Art in Phoenicia and its Dependencies*, London 1885, p.317, fig.28.
62. Bres, p.93, note 1, reports that the Principe di Biscari, *Viaggio per tutte le Antichità delle Sicilia*, Napoli 1781, claimed that they had been found in Gozo.
63. V. Borg, "Tradizioni e documenti storici", *Missione* 1963, pp. 41-51.

As observed by Bres, (64) the first clear reference to the inscriptions is in a letter addressed by Canon Ignazio Costanzo to Antonio Bulifon on 18 December 1694. (65) The 'due tavole di marmo, con iscrivitione scolpite con caratteri Greci e Fenici' could indeed have referred to some other marble slabs containing such inscriptions, but the translation of the Greek inscription contained in the letter leaves no trace of doubt that Costanzo's letter referred to our candelabra.

What made me doubt, in the first instance, the attribution of this initially misleading reference to them (especially the use of the word 'tavole', slabs, which ill fits the shape of these objects) is a statement which I recently came across in my examination of the Biblioteca manuscripts of our National Library, claiming that the candelabra were discovered in 1732. The claim is made by no lesser an authority than Count G.A. Ciantar in a manuscript 'dissertazione' dedicated to Grand Master Pinto. What is even more intriguing than the date is Ciantar's placing of the discovery in the Villa of his predecessor, G. F. Abela, at Marsa.

This is how Ciantar describes the discovery:

L'anno 1732 essendo Rettore di questo collegio de' Padri Gesuiti il P. Ignazio Bonanno si scavò parte d'un viale del Giardino, in cui è situato il sovraccennato casino, posseduto un tempo dall'Abela, che scriveva l'anno 1647, per fabbricarvi una scala; e quivi sotterrate si rinvennero le due Pietre co' Fenici, e Greci caratteri segnate; le quali dal P. Luigi Duquait Francese sovrastante all'opera furon collocate nello stesso viale per ornamento. Dopo qualche tempo un altro accorto Religioso temendo, che di là tolte fossero (come fu lor tolto il capo della bella statua d'Ercole, che fu venduto per testa di S. Giuseppe, e poi da essi ricuperato, e riunito al suo luogo) trasportolle alla stanza contigua al Gabinetto, o Museo dell'Abela. (66)

The contradiction in the dates of the discovery creates some serious problems, mainly as it tends to put in doubt Count Ciantar's authority. On the one hand Costanzo's letter establishes a firm *terminus ante quem* for 1694. On the other hand Ciantar appears to be unaware of the existence of the can-

64. Bres, p.96; followed by Caruana, *Report*, p.31; and Borg, *Tradizioni*, p.49.

65. A. Bulifon, *Lettere Memorabili, Istoriche, Politiche, ed Erudite*, Napoli 1697, pp.117-132.

66. Ciantar, *Dissertazione*, NLM Biblioteca Ms 166, ff. 25-26r. The episode is referred to briefly in Abela-Ciantar, vol. I, p.465, and in full on pp.527-528.

delabra in Abela's villa since the end of the previous century, and ignorant of the only reference to them before 1732, even though the letter in which the reference appears is quoted both by Ciantar's contemporary, Agius de Soldanis, (67) and by Ciantar himself, in connection with an inscribed gold lamina found in Malta. (68)

What, therefore, could have happened to the candelabra between 1694 and 1732? One possibility is that they could have ended up buried again in the garden of Abela's villa during one of the several structural changes which were conducted in it. This, however, appears somewhat unlikely in view of the great care with which the Jesuits, to whose custody Abela had bequeathed his Casino, guarded the collection of antiquities. (69) A wilful 'invention' by Ciantar of a second discovery seems unlikely. Without revealing his sources, he gives so many details of the circumstances of the 1732 discovery that it is hard to disbelieve him. We might be tempted to shift the responsibility of a hypothetical 'invention' on to either Padre Ignazio Bonanno, Rector of the Jesuit college in 1732, or Padre Luigi Diquait, supervisor of the digging operation during which the candelabra were reported to have been discovered, or to some other unknown person who had interest in conjuring up the story.

Whatever the solution to this quandary, it is beyond our reach and we still cannot tell where and when the inscriptions were discovered for the first time: not necessarily before Abela's death in 1655, as suggested by Borg, (70) but before 1687 when Giovanni Uvit Junior had them transcribed. (71)

Regrettably, in conclusion to this exposition on one of the many 'traditions', in which the historical account of Malta (especially the more ancient part of it) perhaps inevitably abound, we are faced by three negative realities; 1) we do not know where in Malta the temple of Hercules was sited; 2) we do not know where the two identical inscriptions referring to the same god were found; 3) we are almost certain that his statue did not come from Marsaxlokk. To some this might appear an altogether destructive approach in weighing historical matters, a pedantic exercise set on destroying beliefs

67. F. Agius de Soldanis, *Il Gozo Antico e Moderno*, NLM Biblioteca Ms 145, f.56.

68. Abela-Ciantar, vol. I, p.459. Ciantar's pl. X reproduces Bulifon's engraving of the gold lamina.

69. Cfr. Agius de Soldanis *Dissertazione*, NLM Biblioteca Ms 142, vol. 2, ff.3-4. This seems to be contradicted, somehow, by Ciantar (Abela-Ciantar, p.x-xi) who relates how Abela's museum had been burgled on several occasions. At one stage the Jesuits left the Casino and placed it under the care of a priest.

70. V. Borg, *Tradizioni*, p.49.

71. Bulifon, p.129.

rather than constructing the historical fabric albeit on unstable foundations. My answer to these is that the elimination of false beliefs, of unsupported theories and invented traditions is in itself the first step towards the achievement of truth, the ultimate end of historical research.