

BOOK REVIEWS

AGOSTINO PERTUSI, *Martino Segonio di Novo Brdo Vescovo di Dulcigno: un umanista serbo-dalmato del tardo Quattrocento — Vita e opere*. Istituto Storico Italiano per il Medio Evo: Studi Storici, fasc. 128—130, Rome, 1981, pp. 421; 36 plates.

In this posthumous work Pertusi publishes a *Breve descrizione dell' Isola di Malta* (pp. 145-146) which he ascribes to Martino Segonio who died in about 1486 and for whom Pertusi posits an undocumented visit to Malta around 1475/82 (p. 20). Pertusi had already published this tract in his "Le isole maltesi dall'epoca bizantina al periodo normanno e svevo (sec. V-XIII)...," *Byzantische Forschungen*, v (1977), 294. Pertusi considers it to be the original behind Jean Quintin's work recently republished in *The Earliest Description of Malta* (Lyons, 1536) by Jean Quintin d'Autun, ed. and trans. H. Vella (Malta, 1980). Vella also publishes the same *Breve descrizione* (p. 101-102) and shows that in fact it was a late work derived from Quintin's account (pp. 6-7). Given the importance of Quintin's *Descriptio* and the scholarly distinction of Pertusi and the *Studi Storici*, it seems important to avoid the confusions which might derive from any mistaken acceptance of the idea that this tract was composed before 1486.

ANTHONY LUTTRELL

G. Wettinger & M. Fsadni, *L-Għanja ta' Pietru Caxaru, poezija bil-Malti*

Medjevali, Malta, Printwell, 1983, pp. 63.

In 1966, Dr Godfrey Wettinger and Fr. Michael Fsadni O.P. accidentally discovered a poem written in Maltese by Peter Caxaro in the 15th century. This discovery is very important because these two gentlemen thus pushed back by two centuries the earliest-known Maltese writing since, previously, it was thought that a poem by G.F. Bonamico in c. 1672-5 was the earliest known example. When the co-authors made their discovery, which was bound in a volume of notarial acts of Brandan Caxaro, no one had ever heard of Peter Caxaro or who he was.

However, the authors did not rest on their laurels and simply stopped there. After continuing a very meticulous research of the period, in 1968 they regaled the Maltese public with their publication entitled *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena, a poem in Medieval Maltese* in which they not only presented a detailed analysis of this poem, but also published copious notes and comments about the times when the lines were written. It was as a proper work of research should be presented and so they included information about the poem's discovery, the search for early examples of written Maltese, the authorship of the poem, the place of the Maltese language and Cultural life in Malta in those times, and the place of the *Cantilena* in Maltese Literature.

Now the two co-authors have presented to the Maltese public a Maltese version of their work. However, this book is not a simple translation of the 1968 publication. Real research is never-ending and both authors have continued their research over the past years to obtain more information about the times when the poem was written. Actually, they have discovered new material which is, quite naturally, included in this edition of their work. Therefore, this book is really an updated version of the 1968 publication. One must note the various additions and amendments in the text and notes together with notable changes in the Caxaro family tree.

One must congratulate the authors for publishing this edition in Maltese because, in this way, the public is allowed the chance to read in its own language about what is the first known writing in Maltese. Actually, there was a real need for a new edition of the *Cantilena*, not least because of the fact that copies of the 1968 edition are unavailable and the new generation ought to be allowed a chance to read and learn not only about medieval Maltese, but also the environment in which the Maltese population lived in those times. The authors are to be congratulated for their initiative even if it were only for this fact.

I think, however, that the authors were also willing to allow time to elapse to note what reactions, controversies, discussions and debates would arise out of their 1966 discovery and subsequent 1968 publication. Actually, no great debate really ensued but I think this was mostly due to the fact that the discovery and the publication were put to the public with such meticulous precision worthy of really professional researchers that it is very difficult to stray from their conclusions. One must here note that this publication includes references to all that has been written on the subject between 1968 and 1983.

I sincerely feel that this book ought to find an honourable place in the library of whoever loves his native island and really wishes to learn more about Malta, particularly those far-away times about which the little that is known is the result of continuous painstaking research in local and foreign archives by dedicated researchers like the two co-authors, Dr Wettinger and Fr Fsadni. The simple book cover, based on three colours, is attractive and the printing is clear and neat. Noteworthy also is the almost complete absence of printing errors, no doubt the result of painstaking proof-reading. Certainly, a book to be acquired and treasured.

JOSEPH F. GRIMA