

MALTA POST-GARIBALDI
Istituto Italiano di Cultura, Valletta,
23 November 2007
GARIBALDI E IL RISORGIMENTO
Bicentenario della nascita di Giuseppe Garibaldi
(1807-2007)

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Like Mazzini, a kindred spirit and mentor, Garibaldi is not just a personality: he is a symbol, a movement, an inspiration, an identity tag.

In commemoration of the bicentenary of his birth, the *Istituto Italiano di Cultura* and the University of Malta jointly hosted a fitting conference (which I had the honour to chair and address) entitled *Garibaldi e il Risorgimento*.

Garibaldi's contribution to Italian unification has to be seen on an international no less than a 'national' canvas, especially in Europe from the Austrian borders to the Eastern Mediterranean and beyond, as Professor Sergio La Salvia showed.¹ There were also internal differences within the Risorgimento movement itself, moderates and democrats, monarchists and republicans, clericals and anticlericals, with Garibaldi falling in between two stools as he eventually 'converted', for pragmatic purposes, from republican to monarchist. There were countless variables in diplomacy and war, the onetime 'liberal' Pio Nono and the Papacy, the shifting role of France, Austria and Naples, the various states and principalities, and particularly Britain, a constitutional monarchy which supported the movement partly for its own ends, but which was also a country whose social and political institutions – parliament, suffrage, education – were much admired by the rebels.

Garibaldi, President Emeritus Guido de Marco emphasized, was a restless symbol (*simbolo irrequieto*) of Italy's unification, pointing to his militant liberationist and ultimately legendary exploits in the Americas – Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, even the U.S.A., and in various parts of Italy itself.² Thus this extraordinary figure, born into a farming family in Nice (hence a *Nizzardo*) who would return to his farm in Caprera, having stolen the heart and the imagination of liberal patriots and nationalist insurgents in many a fight for revolutionary causes – 'l'eroe dei due mondi'. And

1. 'Garibaldi e la lotta politica nella crisi degli anni 1859-1861'.

2. 'Garibaldi simbolo irrequieto dell'Unificazione dell'Italia'.

yet, as Dr Domenico Bellato underlined, Garibaldi, unlike Mazzini whom he much admired, was not an ideologue as such.³ A pre-Marxist, his socialism was of the diluted variety, owing most to the Saint-Simon school, mixed with the liberal nationalism of Mazzini, secular and anticlerical. With an irrepressible courage and charisma, he believed, idealistically, in honest governance and human brotherhood, striving to free the oppressed from their dominators.

Judge Joseph Filletti dwelt on Garibaldi's not so well known connections with the U.S.A., of which he became a citizen, visiting New York more than once; Professor Joseph Eynaud brought out the tendency in literature to idolize and iconize Garibaldi, citing some pertinent texts; while John Azzopardi Vella noted in particular a recurring Masonic strain, adding that the 'camicie rosse' starting out at Marsala for Naples were actually more than a "mille". Dr Tiziana Filletti spoke of the female presence in Garibaldi's life: a ladies' man, the uninhibited, free-spirited adventurer had several women admirers and casual partners in his life, who bore him some eight children. Two, however, were dearest to him, Anita and Francesca, especially the former, a kindred spirit and fellow traveller. The struggle for which he remained best known, with Mazzini and Cavour, was clearly Italy's unification, with Rome as its capital by 1870.

Many of the names who figure as anti-assimilationist pioneers of Maltese *italianità* in the last decades of the 19th century, at the time that a *Partito Nazionale* was founded by them and the likes of them, had been formed and moulded by what might be called the Garibaldi generation. In some important respects, the Risorgimento did not end in 1860. It started. The Risorgimento was a seed. It germinated in the soil. It was a vision that had attained its first goal, but not its ultimate one. Its ideals, cultural and political, had to be implemented. The Risorgimento was not solely and simply an Italian quest. Its attraction spread far beyond Italy's shores, as it acted and reacted with similar movements for liberation from a foreign domination, a secular unification and a national independence which to some extent preceded or followed it, all the way from Greece to Belgium, from Malta to Cyprus, from Ireland to India, and from Germany to Turkey, let alone the Americas.

In Malta above all, the Risorgimento – its Garibaldi generation - had a very special presence. It best represented and incapsulated, at close and intimate quarters, the very soul of the Romantic movement in popular politics after the Enlightenment throughout Europe and beyond it, and not least of all in the colonies, of which Malta was an odd European one.

If we look at some of the more pivotal personalities in Malta during the 1880s vibrating with an Italian-inspired anti-colonial nationalism, we would not know at first sight that in their younger days these had been very much children of the Garibaldi generation, immersed in the life-blood of what Garibaldi effectively

3. 'Garibaldi nel pensiero politico europeo'.

represented: the successful quest to turn a dream into a reality, to rid the neighbouring peninsula of its dominators from North to Centre to South. But Malta too was dominated by a foreign power and one which, to cap it all, sought to turn Malta away from its Latin Mediterranean roots, which were also eminently Roman Catholic, towards an identification instead with those of a Nordic, Anglo-Saxon Empire, which was also Protestant, and imbibed historically with an essentially anti-Catholic, anti-Popish tradition ever since the Reformation. It was at this point in time that a Maltese version 'risorgimento' came to the fore, drawing heavily on influences and contacts from the recent past, to seek to assert an autonomous self-identity, with Maltese 'italianità' as its 'cavallo di battaglia'.⁴

Let me take just three of the leading personalities which animated the resistance to colonialist assimilation and despotism, especially from 1880 onwards, and trace back their educational and intellectual formations. There were several others even earlier, such as Gian Carlo Grech Delicata, founder-president of the *Circolo Maltese* in 1848;⁵ or the Sciortinos, especially Paolo Sciortino, whose critical and liberal journalism in the 1840s not only had him sacked as Professor of Political Economy by the governor but it also had the Chair removed from the University of Malta thus to ensure that, without the Chair, he certainly could not hold it as the professor ever again thereby to express himself without fear or favour, although that had not intimidated him.⁶ There was Camillo Scceberras, who had spent years in Italy and came to prominence already in the 1830s, in the campaign for a free press and the right to vote; and his family and progeny, particularly his more militant son Emilio, who was in direct contact with Mazzini, among others.⁷ Let us not forget that, for example, it was from Malta that Attilio and Emilio Bandiera had left for their expedition in Calabria where, upon arrival, having been betrayed, they were caught and shot together with nine of their comrades, on 23 July 1844, an incident which Mazzini, in exile in London, blamed on British espionage in collusion with the Neapolitan regime. And it was only a few days afterwards that King Ferdinand II, to make the point, visited Malta surreptitiously, as befitted a 'Bomba'.⁸

Mazzini had preached unification; Garibaldi made it happen. What had not

4. For a complementary study see H. Frendo: 'I Doveri dell'Uomo: Mazzinian Influences on Maltese Nationalism under British Rule', in *Malta and Mazzini: Proceedings of History Week 2005*, Malta Historical Society, Malta 2007, 36-46 and *passim*.

5. On Grech Delicata see mainly G. Mangion, *Governo Inglese, Risorgimento Italiano ed Opinione Pubblica a Malta*, Malta 1970. See also H. Frendo, *Żmien l-Ingliżi: Is-Seklu Dsatax*, Malta 2004, 162-4.

6. H. Frendo, *Miċ-Ċensura għall-Pluraliżmu: Il-Ġurnaliżmu f'Malta 1798-2002*, Malta 2003, 26-9, 135.

7. See my chapters 'Ir-Risorgiment Taljan fil-Qrib' and 'L-Ewwel Elezzjoni Ġenerali', in *Żmien l-Ingliżi*, 143-65. On the exploits of Emilio Scceberras and other members of the Scceberras family, see R. Farrugia Randon, *Camillo Scceberras: His Life and Times*, Malta 1991, 62-6 and *passim*.

8. Frendo 2004, 150-3.

materialized in the former's Roman Republic in 1849 came to near fruition in the latter's victory march of 1860; but there was so much more to be accomplished. Like riding a wave, here was a *continuum* that carried forward in time. A new nation-state was coming into being. It had to function; and it had to look ahead at its future and its environs.

We find personalities like Ramiro Barbaro, Zaccaria Roncali and Fortunato Mizzi active after the formation of political parties in 1880, this last having himself been pivotal in founding what soon became the Partito Nazionale. Their pasts mattered dearly. Although in time their positions varied in emphasis or modality, opinions and alliances sometimes shifted, it is possible nevertheless to show certain common sinews in a continuously connecting broadly philosophical and attitudinal thread of fibre.

First, the Valletta-born Ramiro Barbaro (1840-1920), a uniquely cosmopolitan independent-minded figure and author, who knew his home town no less well than Naples or Berlin, and would have been equally at home with Terenzio Mamiani and Heinrich Heine. As late as 1912 we find him addressing a *Pro Lingua Italiana* meeting at the Manoel Theatre, warning against making of the Maltese dialect – 'otherwise very congenial' a stool for another language. The "snare", he said, was obvious.⁹ Now Barbaro was a learned man who had generally battled for a secularist autonomy predicated on education, naturally by means of what had been Malta's traditional language of instruction and culture for centuries, as it was his. He was altogether opposed to any forced Anglicization. So were they all. On returning to Malta in 1861, in addition to publishing a book supporting Italian unification, Barbaro had started a weekly, *Il Progressista*, cooperated with Malta's leading Risorgimento voice *Il Mediterraneo*, and become associated with the cultural review *L'Arte*.

When Garibaldi briefly but momentarily visited Malta in March 1864, staying at Valletta's Imperial Hotel in Strada Santa Lucia, Barbaro was there. According to Laurenza, in 1913 he would personally relate the event to Enrico Mizzi.¹⁰ One can only imagine with what proud emotion Nerik, just back from his studies in Rome and Urbino, would have registered such a first-hand account personalized through an inter-generational bond. Within months of Garibaldi's visit, Barbaro became editor and in 1872 owner-editor of the *Corriere Mercantile Maltese*, which in turn soon became and generally remained Malta's leading opposition newspaper. Decorously enough, in the year 1870 he was elected to the Council of Government, not exactly with any Episcopal or Jesuitical support. He was re-elected in 1875. In between, he had denied any irredentist wish and apologized for anticlerical outbursts but, as Portelli has noted, by 1874 he had reverted to his usual self opposing despotism, clericalism and corruption. Together with fellow councillor Cachia Zammit in 1875

he proposed the introduction of compulsory education;¹¹ Cachia Zammit himself opposed the death penalty.¹²

Second, Zaccaria Roncali (1839-1918), born in Malta and of partly Greek descent, graduated as a lawyer from the University of Malta in 1862 and formed part of the so-called Antiriformista grouping no soon than it had come to life in the late 1870s and early 1880s. In 1883 he was elected as one of its candidates and was one of the legislature's most forthright and fearless members. His speeches showed a deep familiarization with civil rights and liberal government principles as enunciated by Locke, Montesquieu, Mazzini, Stuart Mill, and other European leading lights bearing on the time. He told the army general governing his country that government was intended for the benefit of the governed not for that of those governing them, and that Malta had been a civilized country since ancient times and long before the inhabitants of another country, who now thought it had mastered civilization, were still savages. It was for the people concerned to decide what language they and their children had best use, as they deemed fit, not for foreigners to their land. His son, Demetrio Bruto, would become a surgeon and Professor of Pathology at the University of Rome, a prolific author of scholarly texts in Italian and French; he lived and died overseas. In the Garibaldi generation, Roncali senior had assumed a more central role than Barbaro in *Il Mediterraneo*; like him, he was involved in *L'Arte* and other publications, such as Ernesto Manara's fiery and intellectually-oriented *Il Diritto di Malta*, a platform in the genesis of Maltese nationalism.

Third, Fortunato Mizzi (1844-1905) himself. The son of a Gozitan magistrate who moved to Valletta, Mizzi was still a law student at the time of Garibaldi's visit in 1864 (he graduated in laws a year later). So, like Roncali and more so Barbaro, Mizzi lived through the Italian Risorgimento, especially its culminating sequences. He later married Sofia Folliero de Luna in Malta, where Giuseppe Folliero de Luna had returned after the fall of the Bourbon regime in 1861, although he had been in Malta previously. Any Bourbon connection through marriage was lost in the course of time, even if some aristocratic pedigree would have lingered on; but Ramiro Barbaro like Camillo Scerberras had served in the Neapolitan army, which obviously did not mean that they had sold their souls to tradition, legitimacy or repression. According to family sources, Fortunato's son Enrico, a future prime minister of Malta, was 'Henri' to his mother and 'Nerik' to his supporters. Barbaro was four years older than Fortunato and lived for 15 years longer than him; Roncali ceased being a politician and opinion former when he was raised to the bench in 1895, by

9. H.Frendo, *Party Politics in a Fortress Colony: The Maltese Experience*, Malta 1979, 2nd ed. (1991), 147-8.

10. V. Laurenza, 'Garibaldi a Malta', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, III, Rome 1932, 143-61.

11. See S. Portelli's unpublished doctoral thesis, *La pubblicistica periodica italiana a Malta 1798-1940*, University of Malta, 2000, 150-1; and his chapter 'La stampa maltese come strumento di lotta politica nel Risorgimento italiano', in *Malta and Mazzini*, 156-64.

12. On Cachia Zammit, see Frendo, 1991, *passim*

which time Malta, after a bitter Nationalist struggle, had obtained a representative government constitution (in 1887). More importantly, in the continuum with Malta 'post-Garibaldi', in the early 1880s Mizzi took over the *Corriere Mercantile Maltese*, which later changed names to, among others, *La Gazzetta di Malta*, and became and remained best known as *Malta*: 'Organo del Partito Nazionale'. *Malta* remained the most influential Maltese daily in Italian until 1940, when Nerik Mizzi was arrested again by the British and, this time, exiled.

I should add that the clerical-anticlerical sting had not gone out of Maltese colonial politics: secular competition to episcopal power was never easy. As had been the case with Barbaro, De Cesare and others, Mizzi's *Malta* too went through a difficult period when at one point in 1890 the Bishop excommunicated it, a charge met with due defiance; Nerik too had some trouble with the same bishop, who during a long reign, was bent on excommunicating anyone who criticized him, in this case because of his close association with the *Società Dante Alighieri*, which was deemed to be anticlerical and anti-Catholic.¹³ These symptoms all too clearly recall those of the Risorgimento as had been witnessed, too, in Malta itself, when the Jesuits and others had supported the Papa Re in a medly involving first refugees from one faction and then others from another, which had driven the onetime Catholic civilian governor, an Irishman, round the bend.

The resonance of the Risorgimento was not lost on the British either, even less so of course on the Italians. Let me highlight very briefly just two instances in the second half of the 19th century, although that is not where this story ended, if it ever did.

First, 1885. In a meeting on the Piazza San Giorgio, outside the door here, Mizzi declared the 'Otto Settembre' as Malta's 'National Day', marking the victory of European Christendom over the advance of Ottoman Islam in 1565, a further attempt at national self-definition. The next speaker was Roncali. 'Viva Malta!' he shouted. 'Malta e' dei Maltesi non degli Inglesi! Fuori lo straniero!' Reported immediately to the governor by a Maltese collaborator who was present, the British took a serious view of the matter as this was seen as a seditious, revolutionary 'Garibaldian cry'. Roncali however denied having uttered a 'Garibaldian cry, not as a 'grido', he held;¹⁴ presumably meaning he had only said it *sotto voce*, or not said it at all.

Second, 1899. In the person of that zealous imperialist Joe Chamberlain, Britain gave advance notice of a language substitution deadline: it now decreed that English would replace Italian in Malta within 15 years. This move provoked outrage inducing the highest personages in Italy from the King down to condemn it. One active opponent who wrote to the British ambassador in Rome and spoke up publicly was Ricciotti Garibaldi. He wished to prevent 'a hostile feeling to England

taking consistency in the Italian popular mind.'¹⁵ In response to these pressures, the decree was withdrawn. But is it not pertinent to remember too that Ricciotti and Menotti had visited Malta with their father in 1864?

Concluding his book *I Cento Giorni di Garibaldi in Sicilia nel Giornalismo Maltese*, Patti noted thus:

Comunque un tale avvenimento, celebre allora nel piccolo Arcipelago, non si lascio' ne' una lapide ne' alcun ricordo... Passarono le anni; nel 1886 lo scultore siciliano Giuseppe Valenti venne incaricato di compiere le statue di Mose' e di San Giovanni, come amboni prominenti nella cattedrale di Malta a Mdina: allora lo scultore, un filo-garibaldino, immortolo', a quanto si dice con qualche piccolo ritocco, nel massimo tempio di Malta, il volto di Garibaldi in quello di Mose', ed il volto di Anita Garibaldi in quello di San Giovanni.¹⁶

Fiorentini says that after 1849 '*la pubblicistica periodica maltese sciolse i suoi legami con il movimento rivoluzionario italiano e cesso' di essere uno strumento di propaganda e di sovversione mirato oltre i confini locali*'.¹⁷ This of course is true, for it was no longer as necessary; but unless memories are only recorded in marble, it is less true to suggest that 'no record' had been left of Malta's links with Garibaldi, the movement and the ideology he represented.

Under different but still recognizable guises, within the limits of the possible in the contexts of place and of time, Malta post-Garibaldi experienced an elite-driven linguistic, cultural, juridical, Catholic and popular autonomist movement of unprecedented militancy and perseverance. Conducted mainly in the same language as that of Mazzini and Garibaldi, it was inspired by the vision of a national, secular and civilian deliverance from a foreign domination in what was, essentially and ultimately, not only a military rule but also, to many who mattered, a disturbing and disruptive assimilationist one.

15. *Ibid.*, 116-7.

16. G. Patti, *I cento giorni di Garibaldi in Sicilia nel giornalismo maltese*, Messina 1972, 153.

17. B. Fiorentini, 'Il giornalismo a Malta durante il Risorgimento Italiano', in V. Bonello, B. Fiorentini & L. Schiavone eds., *Echi del Risorgimento a Malta*, Malta 1963, 24.

13. On both these incidents, and others including the threat to excommunicate the entire elected bench, and the excommunication of Manuel Dimech, see Frendo 1991, 72-3, 150-1, 159-60.

14. *Ibid.*, 31.