Scientific and critical history is based on written contemporary documents and on other equivalent evidences when available. Unfortunately such evidences are not always available. We know with absolute certainty that in the course of time, many such evidences have perished either because of their antiquity or even through wanton destruction. The Emperor Diocletian and the heresy of Iconoclasm are cases in point. But such wanton destruction cannot always completely erase the memory of past events and the role of popular tradition in men’s historical knowledge is immensurable. We certainly admit that popular tradition is often mixed with legendary elements, invented and devoid of historical and critical foundation; but no one can deny that most of our knowledge is based not only on solid written historical truth but also on popular tradition. Hence it is incumbent on all historians to sift most carefully a historical tradition from a spurious and legendary tradition. The line of demarcation between history based on written and authentic documents and popular tradition founded on mere hearsay or popular repetition without solid and attendible credibility may not be easily established; in many cases the lack of written and equivalent evidence is not always a valid reason to reject a historical truth which has been admitted of old as authentic history. We must bear in mind that not all peoples of all ages have been so credulous as to admit everything without any serious proof or verisimilitude (1).

In our case we can distinguish between Maltese traditions and other more universal traditions which are found in the writings of other ecclesiastical writers quite foreign to Malta. These various traditions are supposed to refer to one and the same person and this is the knot of the problem in this particular case. We, therefore, intend to speak separately first of the local traditions about Publius in Malta; secondly, of other traditions referring presumably to the same person in the writings of other ecclesiastical writers.

LOCAL TRADITIONS ABOUT PUBLIUS, PROTOS OF MALTA

Achille Ferres in his book Descrizione storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo, published in Malta in 1866, resumes the local traditions about Publius, Protos of Malta, when the miraculous shipwreck of the Doctor of the Gentiles, St. Paul, and his companions took place on its shores in the year 60 A.D., in the following words: “The first bishop of Malta, as known from history and tradition, was St. Publius, who received with great hospitality the great apostle St. Paul, wrecked (58 A.D.) by the grace of divine Providence on our shores, where, for three months, he remained and converted to the new faith of Christ not only the inhabitants but also their governor Publius. He was probably born in Malta of a Roman family, established for a long time in Malta. He, like the others, was so moved as to be converted to Christianity because of Paul’s wonders, particularly the miraculous healing of his father, wrought by the same apostle. Publius, who appeared to be well gifted to govern, was appointed by the same apostle as bishop of the new church of Malta, which he governed until the year 67 of our era, that is the thirteenth of the Emperor Nero. The episcopal virtues, which Publius had shown in the government of the Church in Malta, were such that they induced the same apostle to transfer him to the government of another church, then very conspicuous, that of Athens, and thus he succeeded bishop Dionysius, about the year 123 A.D., and, as it is believed under the Emperor Elus Hadrianus, who then was in Athens, he received the glory of martyrdom, at the age of one hundred years. Publius died
after being thrown into a cave, and devoured by lions kept therein" (2).

The same writer Achille Ferres in 1877 published another important work *Storia Ecclesiastica di Malta* in which he speaks again, and even more extensively, of the local traditions about Publius. He begins his treatise with the journey of St. Paul as described in the *Acts of the Apostles* by St. Luke in his last

(2) ACHILLE FERRES, Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo, Malta 1886, p. 11: "Il primo vescovo di Malta, come per istoria e tradizione, fu san PUBLIO, il quale accece con molta ospitalità il grande apostolo san Paolo, spinto (58 D.C.) dalla divina Provvidenza nel nostro suolo, ove per tre mesi dimorando, convirti alla novella fede di Cristo non solo gli abitanti ma anche il loro reggente PUBLIO. Questo probabilmente nato era in Malta da famiglia romana, da tempo in questa isola stabilita. Egli, come altri, fu mosso a convertirsi al cristianesimo per via dei prodigi da Paolo operati, massime dalla prodigiosa guarigione, operata dal medesimo apostolo nella persona del di lui genitore, PUBLIO. essendo dotato di ottima qualità per governare, fu dal detto apostolo costituito vescovo della nuova chiesa di Malta, che governò sino l'anno 67 dell'era volgare, ossia il decimosesto dell'impero Neroniano. Le virtù poi episcopali, eseguate da PUBLIO nel governo della chiesa di Malta, furon tali da indurre lo stesso apostolo a trasferirlo al regime di un'altra chiesa, allora molto cospica, quale era quella di Atene, facendolo succedere al vescovo Dionigi, ove verso l'anno 123 D.C., e, come si vuole, sotto l'imperatore Elio Adriano, il quale allora trovavasi in Atene, fu coronato alla gloria del martirio, alla età di 100 anni. PUBLIO morì gettato in una fossa, e divorato dai leoni, che in essa tenevansi chiusi". — In another work *Storia Ecclesiastica di Malta*, Malta 1877, pp. 39-40, FERRES corrected some of his previous affirmations. He says: "Pubblico governò la Chiesa di Malta per un periodo di 31 anni. . . . Dall'anno 59 all'anno 90 egli apparisce di aver tenuto le redini di questa chiesa . . . Pubblico non ebbe a compiere i suoi giorni a Malta. Verso l'anno 90 fu trasferito al vescovato di Atene, dato per successore al vescovo san Dionigi . . . Pubblico rese la chiesa di Atene per anni 35. A temps de l'inperatore Adriano, in una persecuzione contro i Cristiani, nell'anno di Cristo 125, venne gettato in un anfiteatro, ove dai leoni divorato, chiuso la sua vita con un doloroso e ben meraviglioso martirio, all'età di 92 anni." Therefore Publius was not transferred to Athens by St. Paul who was already martyred in the year 67 under Emperor Nero. The chronology of St. Publius should read as follows: In the year 60, the year St. Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Malta, St. Publius was converted to the Faith. In 61 he was ordained by St. Paul first bishop of Malta which he held up to the year 90 or thereabouts. He was then transferred to the Church of Athens, succeeding Dionysius, the Archpriest, first bishop of Athens; which Church he governed for over 35 years. He was martyred in Athens about 92 years old, about the year 125.

PUBLIUS THE PROTOS OF MALTA

chapters and gives all the details of St. Paul's shipwreck on the island of Malta.

The most relevant parts of this description are the following:

1) St. Luke's description of the journey and the shipwreck of St. Paul is perfectly fitting with the topography of what afterwards was called *St. Paul's Bay*, even if the exact spot of the shipwreck is not absolutely certain.

2) The chronology of the shipwreck and of the departure of St. Paul to Italy which are given as the 10th February and the 27th May respectively, though certainly erroneous (3), pre-

(3) We read in Acts xxvii, 9: "A great deal of time had been lost, and navigation was already hazardous since it was now well after the time of the Fast, so Paul gave them this warning, "Friends, I can see this voyage will be dangerous and that we run the risk of losing not only the cargo and the ship but also our lives as well". But the centurion took more notice of the captain and the ship's officer than of what Paul was saying". Scholars convene that the Fast here stands for the *Feast of Atonement*, the only fast-day prescribed by the Law Lev, xvi, 27. This feast is celebrated about the time of the autumn equinox. E. JACOUBL, *Les Actes des Apôtres* Ed. 2. Paris 1926, p. 726f., writes: "Le jeûne, dont il est parlé ici, est le jeûne de Kippour, le jour de l'Expiation, qui tombait le dixième jour du mois de Tisri, le septième mois de l'année, peu après l'équinoxe d'automne, vers le 24 septembre. Lev. xvi, 29 . . . En l'an 38, d'après Turner, *Chronology, Dictionary of the Bible* HASTINGS, 1 le jeûne tomba le 10 septembre; en 59, d'après Renan, le jeûne aurait été le 5 octobre; quelle que soit la date adoptée, la saison n'aurait donc plus propice pour la navigation . . . La saison dangereuse pour la navigation allait du 14 septembre au 11 novembre. Du 11 novembre au 5 mars toute navigation cessait; ce n'aurait pas précisément à cause des tempêtes que les marins craignaient le voyage en hiver, mais c'était parce que les pluies persistentes et les mers montaient la lune et les eaux, lesquelles étaient leur seul moyen de direction, n'ayant pas encore de boussole à leur disposition". In fifteen days in Malta the chronology of St. Paul's journey and his stay in Malta was dated differently. This is what FERRES, *Storia Ecclesiastica di Malta*, Malta 1877, p 12f., says: "Che il naufragio di san Paolo nella nostra Isola sia seguito nel mese di agosto, e dedotto dal suddetto testo, ove descrivendosi la già nominata navigazione, si legge non essere stata sicura, perché era già passato il digiuno, Ecome le parole; Et cum iam non esset tua nutritio, eo quod iulium iam priaterisset, dovendosi intendere per questo digiuno quello che i medecini ancora osservavano ne' mesi di settembre e di ottobre. Difatti, arrivata la nave al porto, e sbarchati tutti i naufraghi vi furono accolti nel luogo del freno. Ad divulgationem, nec ordinem proprio, similiter amnubatur et frigore: il che corrisponde esattamente al tempo della inver nale stagnone. In conferma di ciò, il card. Baronio ci dice che san Paolo..."
serves an important tradition of the event and gives a special importance to the Church of St. Paul which was built as a memory of the shipwreck on our shores (4).

3) With regard to the exact spot of the shipwreck St. Luke says: “Et cum incidissemus in locum dithalassum impergereunt navem = But the cross-currents carried them into a shoal and the vessel ran aground” (v. 41). It is commonly believed that this topographical description corresponds to the islets known as Selinun or il-Gżegżir on which in 1845 a colossal statue of St. Paul was erected, representing St. Paul preaching to the Maltese. An appropriate Latin inscription by Dr. Giuseppe Zammit recalls the event related in the Acts of the Apostles. Indeed, besides other minor topographical names, one must mention that on the same place we find that the inner part of the bay is called Pudles, probably because of some special event connected with partito da Malta post ortum Pleiadum, cioè, in maggio, quando allora il tempo comincia a rasserenare, ed essere atto alla navigazione. Or ciò emesso, e, considerando i tre mesi di dimora di san Paolo in Malta, possem esse tres, navigramus, ec. ne sequo per conseguenze, che il naufragio fosse avvenuto nel mese di febbraio. Servono inoltre a ciò corroborare le due commemorazioni che si celebrano annualmente a Malta: l’una il 10 febbraio il giorno dedicato alla memoria del naufragio di san Paolo nella nostra Isola (che è d’intiero precetto per la Valetta e pel suo sobborgo), l’altra il 27 maggio, nel quale giorno, si fa commemorazione della partenza di san Paolo da Malta, recandosi i canonici collegiali della grotta del santo Apostolo alla Chiesa di san Paolo a mare, consacrata alla memoria del suo naufragio ne’ nostri li, nella quale celebrasi messa cantata; ed è quella stessa prescritta nel 10 febbraio”.

4) The Church of St. Paul is not built on the spot of the shipwreck but on the opposite side which is of easy reach. Ferres op. cit., p. 16, writes: “In uno de’ due di questo porto esiste una chiesa devotissima, fabbricata da tempi antichissimi in onore del Naufragio dell’Apostolo, fabbricata più volte, e ultimamente dalla Pietà del gran-maestro Wignaurnurt, nel secolo XVII. Se era erroneamente creduto dal volgo essere accaduto il naufragio nella parte ove s’innalza questa chiesa; poiché è certo che la nave andò a rompersi nel luogo opposto, non avendo potuto col vento greco-levante ciò succedere nella parte, ove è la chiesa susseduta, che è volta a ponente. In questo porto ancora il detto gran-maestro fece fabbricare una torre, invocandola, come assai bene conveniva, sotto il titolo di San Paolo, la cui prima pietra vi fu posata il 10 febbraio 1610 dal medesimo principe, assistito dal clero della città Notabile.”

St. Paul, and a little further round the bay there is a fountain called Għajn Razzuż, that is the Fountain of the Apostle (5).

4) St. Luke says: “In the neighbourhood there were estates belonging to the prefect of the island, whose name was Publius” (v. 8). Indeed, up to the XVII century one could still see ancient remains which could well be the ruins of buildings pertaining to the family of Publius. Recently there have been excavations which discovered a Roman villa and these last years systematic archaeological excavations were undertaken by the University of Rome which confirmed and extended further the discovery of Roman buildings at Wardija which may well have

5) Ferres, op. cit., p. 17, says: “A poca distanza dal luogo del naufragio esiste una fontana etnizzata Għajn Razzuż, che in lingua nostrale suonava Fontana dell’Apostolo, e si ha per tradizione che l’Apostolo, abbia fatto scaturire quell’ottima acqua, per dissetare i suoi compagni naufraghi. Sulla detta fontana si leggevano i seguenti versi, che brameremmo vedere rinuovati a perpetua memoria del tradizionale avvenimento:

Hac sub rupe cava, quam cernis ad aqua sub undis,
Est hic exiguis fonts salientes aquae;
Religione sacra fontem hunc venerare, viator,
Naufruagas has dederit cum tibi Paulus aquas.”

J. Cassar Pullicino, Pauline Traditions in Malta, published in Scientia, X (1944), pp. 19-31, a very interesting article in which he passed in survey many popular traditions about the shipwreck of St. Paul in Malta and obviously mentions some traditions which together with St. Paul include St. Publius. We can make use of this important study. Thus about this particular fountain he says: “It may be safe to conjecture that the Maltese clergy themselves help to perpetuate some of them (traditions attached to churches, statues and places visited by the Apostle when he was in Malta), as in the case of St. Paul’s Fountain (Għajn Razzuż) being as it is an exact parallel of the spring caused to gush forth by Moses’s rod when the Israelites were in the wilderness, as well as of the three springs at Rome, on the spots touched by St. Paul’s head when he was beheaded”. And a little further under Folk-Etymology, he again writes: “Għajn Razzuż, or The Apostle’s Fountain, is the name given to a spring situated near St. Paul’s Bay. It is said that St. Paul first caused the water to gush forth from the rock and then baptised the people with its waters. Another version tells us that the Apostle made the water issue forth in order to give to his men to drink, as they were thirsty after the shipwreck and the storm. The water from the spring used to be devoutly drunk by the people until a few years ago, when the water was examined and it was found that it had been contaminated and rendered unfit for drinking purposes” (p.21).
been a part of Publius's estates (6).

5) *The Church of St. Paul milgihi*: The news of the shipwreck of a boat with on board a centurion and prisoners must have been notified to the governor of the island without delay. In fact, Publius set out to meet the shipwrecked. Later tradition holds that in order to commemorate the meeting of Publius and the Apostle St. Paul a small church was erected which became known as *St. Paul milgihi* which means St. Paul welcomed, of course first and foremost by Publius (7).

6) *Publius's Estates*. In the neighbourhood of St. Paul's Bay a special place is called by a very controversial name either *Buarrat*, or *Bir marrad*, or finally *Bin verriet*. *Buarrat* is derived (6) Ferres, op. cit., p. 19, says: *E' costante tradizione essere il palazzo di dipinto di Publio nella Uardia, cioè, Vedetta o Exploro. Così detta perché serviva da guardia per esplorare l'adiacente porto di san Paolo e la riviera da ponente-maestro al greco-levante. Di questo palazzo fino alla meta del secolo XVII si conservavano notabili ruder, noti dal Manduca, testimonio ocular; ove i nostri padri, per conservarne la memoria, aveano innalzato la chiesa di San Giovanni Battista, la quale, unitamente a quei contorni, si appella fin oggi ad Hereb, cioè delle *Rovine*. The name Wardja stands for Guardia (distr. Udienza for Gwardia) that is Gwardia of Exploration.

7) Ibidem, p. 14.: "Sparsi poi la notizia del naufragio, e divulgata per l'isola una fama di un si portentoso miracolo, il principe della stessa Publio, mosse per osservarne da quello che gli era stato da nativi annuntiato sul conto del grande Apostolo, col quale s'incontrò poche in una contrada distante circa un miglio dal luogo del Naufragio, ove sin oggi vede si erette una piccola chiesa dedicata in onore del Santo, la quale, in memoria di tale fortunato incontro, è denominata San Paul il Milki, che in lingua nostrale suona San Paolo accolto. L'ottom principe accolse benignamente Paolo e tutti i suoi compagni nel naufragio, conducendoli nelle sue possesioni, non molto distante da quel luogo, ove per lo spazio di tre giorni diede loro alloggio con una liberalità pari alla sua pietà, di cui fa menzione il sacro testo: *In locis autem illic cent praebuit Principis insulae nomine Publi, qui nos suscipiens reddid benigni exhibebit". G. Cassar Pullicino, op. cit., p. 21 mentions this same tradition briefly: "San Paul milgi. As tradition says this is the place where the Apostle was met and received (tadghin) by Publius the chief man of the Island, whose father "lay sick of a fever and a bloody flux", and a little further down, p. 23, he repeats: "The Church At Sun Paul Milghi. This church is situated at the foot of Wardja Hill and is believed to have been erected to indicate the spot where St. Paul healed the father of Publius after "having his hands" upon him. To add strength to this tradition, it is told that Publius' father at the time of his illness, was living at his country house in this locality, where St. Paul was courteously received and entertained.

from either of the other two names and does not convey a special meaning. *Bir marrad* would mean that a well of contaminated water conveying malaria and other sickness gave the name to the place; *Bin verriet* would mean the hereditary possessions of Publius, the chief man's estates, which he inherited by right of succession.

Mr. Guzè Cassar Pullicino resumes the controversy in these few lines: "Ben Warrat or Bir marrad. Much has been said by competent authorities as to how this place-name should be written. Modern philologists are strongly in favour of "Bur Marrad". Abela-Ciantar in "Malta Illustrata" gives the name as Ben Warrat and mentions the tradition attached to it that it marks the locality where Publius, the chief man of the place, "held his possessions". This explanation is based on the meaning of "warrat" or "verriet" (heir) added to the prefix "Ben" (son) meaning "the place of the son and heir". As Publius' father was still living, we may take this as the reason why the traditional explanation may have arisen. It is mentioned in the Acts that "in these places were the possessions of the chief man of the Island, named Publius, who, receiving us, for three days, entertained us courteously" (8).

M. Ellul, *Heritage of an Island: Malta, D.O.I*., Malta 1975, pp. 18-21, writes about the Roman period of the Maltese History: "In the year 216 B.C., in the first years of the Second Punic War, Malta was permanently lost to Carthage. It thus became a Roman province, and Consul Titus Sempronius transferred his seat from Sicily to Malta. It seems that the Roman fleet had come to Malta in search of Carthaginian ships which were known to be in the vicinity. The Carthaginian praesidium in Malta, in the absence of their strong fleet which was out at sea, surrendered to Titus Sempronius, and their leader Hamilcar Gisonis, along with his 2,000 troops, was taken prisoner. Malta for a number of years formed part of the larger Sicilian province, and the Maltese continued to prosper in trade and industries"

(8) Ibidem, p. 22.
which they had learned with great profit from the Phoenicians. Diodorus has the following interesting description of Malta and the Maltese, written during the time of Augustus: "There exist three islands to the South of Sicily, each of which has cities, and safe harbours for seamen and for those who are buffeted by storms. The first is called Melita: it lies eighty stadia away from Syracuse, and has many useful inlets. The inhabitants are very wealthy, they practise diverse crafts, and have a prosperous trade in cotton, which is particularly famous for its fineness and softness. The houses are beautiful and are rendered with stucco. This has been a colony of the Phoenicians, who, in extending their commerce to the Western Seas, made of it a shelter for their seamen, because of its excellent ports, and its situation in the middle of the Sea. The inhabitants, receiving into their midst traders almost daily, have become rich and famous in a short time". It is, therefore, rather unfortunate that the Maltese Islands, so prosperous and rich during the Roman period, have yielded so relatively little of an architecture which must have certainly echoed the glories of classical Rome. The surviving remains of Roman times, however few in number, are nonetheless interesting and conjure up images of a prosperous society and of its way of life. The Roman Villa at Rabat, actually a group of several buildings, contains a fine example of a typical Roman house, no doubt belonging to members of the wealthy or ruling classes. A number of lively and vividly coloured mosaics tend to confirm this theory. The thermae at Ghajn Tuffieha, probably once the largest Roman complex in Malta, clearly indicate that the Maltese Islands partook of the full social life of Rome and the Empire. Remains of other houses of importance of the same period exist in localities close to the inlets of the north coastline, at Bidnija, Bur Marrad and Wardija. — Recent excavations carried out since 1963 by an Italian Archaeological Mission in the two sites in Malta and one in Gozo, have brought to light extremely important relics of Roman Malta. At Tas-Silġ, on a hill overlooking the south-eastern harbour of Marsaxlokk, a Roman Sanctuary dedicated to the goddess Juno, identified with the Greek Hera, was found to have occupied the site of a former temple dedicated to Astarte and Tanit, and earlier still of a prehistoric religious building. The main interest of the complex lies in the fact that three eminently evolved cultures made consecutive use of the same site and of previous remains for buildings widely different in conception, but with a similar uniformity of purpose. After the Roman period the building was converted into a Christian church. Equally interesting historically but perhaps less spectacular from the archaeological point of view, is the large country villa excavated at San Pawl Milqi. Study of the excavations revealed that besides the villa itself there existed an industrial complex for the pressing of oil and wine, and other farming activities. The old tradition that the site had had strong connexions with St. Paul's stay in Malta after his shipwreck in 60 A.D., was strengthened as a result of certain conclusions drawn from the excavations". The results of the large scale excavations at Tas-Silġ and San Pawl Milqi in Malta, and Ras il-Wardija in Gozo, conducted in yearly campaigns by the Italian Archaeological Mission from the University of Rome since 1963 to 1970 were published by the Istituto di Studi del Vicino Oriente, Universita' di Roma, Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta, Rapporti Preliminari delle Campagne di Scavi 1963-1970.

7) The Cathedral Church at Mdina. Mr. Cassar Pullicino also writes: "This church is said to be the oldest one in Malta, having been founded by St. Paul himself. It has been handed down by tradition that it was erected on the site of the palace of Publius, which palace was converted into a temple of God by Paul and consecrated in honour of the Blessed Virgin's Assumption. "This tradition", says Ferres, "is borne out by a marble inscription in Latin within the church over the principal door". A tin chalice is jealously preserved in this church together with its "patena", believed to have been used by the Apostle during Holy Mass, and later by St. Publius. Quoting again from Ferres "this tradition is reproduced uninterrupted by all bishops in
the acts of their Apostolic visits" (9).

8) *The Church of St. Publius on the Cave of St. Paul.* Tradition holds that St. Paul during the three months he stayed in Malta lived in a Cave in Rabat which was afterwards named after him, St. Paul's Cave (Il-Grotta ta' San Pawl). In the course of time a Church was built over this cave which was dedicated to St. Publius. This cave seems to have been kept in great veneration and became a place to which pilgrims not only Maltese but also foreigners flocked. In the XVII century a certain pilgrim from Cordova (Spain) came to Malta and revived the great devotion to St. Paul the Apostle and to the Cave where he lived. John Beneduas took great care of the cave and obtained many favours from Pope Paul V in a journey he undertook to Rome. He renounced all his rights on the cave in favour of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (1610-1622). The Cave became separated from the Parish Church of St. Paul and Paul V by a special brief of 11 January, 1620 confirmed the erection of a Collegiate Church, built over the Cave and dedicated to St. Publius, as a regular Collegiate Church of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem which enjoys even a special liturgy. Grand Master Raymond Perellos y Roccaful (1697-1720) in virtue of an Ordinance of the General Chapter of the Order of 1631, confirmed by the Holy See, by a special Bull of 17 September, 1701, granted to the Chaplains of the Collegiate Church of St. Publius the use of the *maggia nera* with the eight pointed cross in white linen. After the capitulation of the Order of St. John to Napoleon when the Chaplains of the Order ceased to exist, the archdeacon Dr. S. Lanzon obtained in 1839 from the Governor Sir F. Bouvierie that the Chaplains of the Order of St. John be replaced by members of the diocesan clergy. In recent years the Canons became united to the Clergy of the Parish Church of St. Paul and thus the Collegiate Chapter of the Church of St. Publius became one and the same with that of the Parish Church retaining the privileges of the Collegiate Church of the Order of St. John with the mozzetta and the white octagonal cross of the Order (10).

9) *The cult of St. Publius in Malta.* The cult of St. Publius in Malta is not limited to the Church dedicated to St. Publius, built over the Cave of St. Paul in Rabat. The second most famous Church is the Archpriesty Parochial Church of St. Publius in the suburb of Valetta, named Floriana or Città Vilhenia, after the Grand Master Manoeil de Vilhenia (1722-1736), who built the suburb of Floriana. The church was started in 1733, but many think that before the building of the present monumental church there existed a small chapel dedicated to St. Publius. The foundation stone of the present temple was laid on the 2nd August, 1733 by Mgr. Alphonse de Bussan, the then Bishop of Malta. The church was enlarged on various occasions and was consecrated by Mgr. Vincenzo Labini, Bishop of Malta, on 25 May, 1792; it became the Parish Church of the suburb on 5th March, 1844 under Bishop Mgr. Caruana by a Bull of Pope Gregory XVI. The church was further enlarged by the building of the two lateral transepts in 1861 and was reconsecrated by Mgr. Pace Forno, on 24 April, 1862. During the Second World War the church was very badly damaged, but soon after the war the work of restoration was taken in hand and the church in its present form was soon completed.

The principal painting, representing the martyrdom of St. Publius, is the work of Favray, completed by his disciple Filippo Vincenzo Pace in 1773, whereas the Statue of St. Publius which serves for the annual solemn procession is the work of the Maltese sculptor Vincenzo Dimech (11).

10) The Cult of St. Publius in Gozo. In the village named Gharb there is a Church dedicated to St. Publius and was built at the expenses of a priest named Dun Giuseppe Cassar. This church replaced an older church which was dedicated to St. Leonard ta’ Ghanmar, or ta’ Wied il-Mielah, built about the year 1550 by George Teuma.

The foundation stone of the new church dedicated to St. Publius was laid by Canon Tommaso Pace on 26 July, 1850 and blessed by the Archpriest of the village, Don Salvatore Mizzi as delegate on 10 October, 1852 (12).

Though a survey of churches, may reveal other monuments as witnesses of the cult of St. Publius in Gozo we are not in a position to give other details on the subject.

Besides these Churches, the Collegiate Church of St. Publius, built over the Cave of St. Paul in Rabat, the Archpriestly Parish Church in Floriana, and the Church of Gharb in Gozo, the cult of St. Publius is most evident in the fact that St. Publius in the diocesan synod, held in 1610, was declared by Mons. Gargallo in a special decree as Protector of the diocese and his feast celebrated as a Feast of double rite of the second class. The same bishop introduced the office of the Saint which was recited for the first time on 21 January, 1611. The Sacred Congregation of Rites, on August 1666 approved by a decree the proper lessons of the Divine Office, and in another decree of 23rd September, 1852 the proper Office of St. Publius was approved. The proper Mass of St. Publius was obtained from the Holy See by Bishop Molina (1678-1681) by decree of 9 August, 1681 (13). Since 1854


(12) Ferres, op. cit., p. 584.

(13) All these details are given by Ferres, Storia Ecclesiastica di Malta, p. 42.

the feast of St. Publius was observed in Malta on the Second Sunday after Easter by a special concession of the Holy See but more recently the liturgical feast was restored to January 21st, whereas the external solemnity is still kept in Floriana on the Second Sunday after Easter (+).

Finally one must also mention that there are niches of St. Publius in street corners and some streets in towns and villages are named after him.

(14) We consider that a copy of this Indult may be useful to those more interested in the subject: "MELITEN. Altitudinem divinarum sapientiae et scientiae Dei admirantur adhuc et collaudiare non desinunt Fideles Insulae Melitensis, ex eo potissimum, quia et Doctorem Gentium Paulum sacrae iactatam tempore civitatem meruerunt ac Evangelicae Religionis audire praeconem, et Beatam Publini ab ipso Apostolo imprimis Christianae Veritatis iucu perfusum Episcopum suum habere, ac Martyrio coronatum ad Deum experiri Patrem, Siquidem quum Pub- linii ipse memoratae Insulae Princeps Virum tam eximium peramancer hospicio exsepere desideravit, aequum fuit ut prae civitati amplioria renovatationis inde gratiam recipieret. Itaque Christianae Legis jam praecipui eodius, et per Apostolum suum praeceptionis Dei voluntati obsequiatus Pastoralis dignitatis gloria auxutus refugiet. Melitae primo, denique Alienis opti. Pastoris munia singula expedit, donec forte dedit certamine sustinente, ac proprio sanguine effuso ad mortem usque gloriosissimam Christianae Religionis Doctrinam protunri non desistit. Eti vero tam imaginem Christi Pontificem Martyrem singulari pieetas affectu et obsequio sequi numquam Melitenses cessat, et de validissimo Ipsi ad Deum patrocinio juere merito gloriorunt; attamen quasi um quod adhuc supererat, nimium ut annua ipsius Sancti Solemnitas ampliori ritu instituatur, ac Ecclesiastico apparatur, id tandem propter ac commissi ubi gregis votus satisfacturum a Sancissimo Domino Nostro Pio IX, Pontifice Maximo, exquirere constitut Rimus Hodierius Archiepiscopus Episcopos Meliten. Itaque quum ab ipso exhibente humillimae preces requirunt Indulgentiam, ut in integra qua late pateat. Melitensi Diocessi deinceps Festum Sancti Publinii Episcopi Martyris individui valent Dominica Secunda post Pascha Resurrectionis sub ritu duplci secundae Classis, ac cum propositis pro opportuno ad probatione Officio et Missa integre proprie, Sanctissimae Suae vota huiusmodi peramancer excitens, attamen exspectis alisque circunstantiis animum suum movens, ac referente me subscripto Sacrorum Rituum Congregations Pro-Secretorio, de speciali erat bona quae huiusmodi utilitatis praevia requisita Officii cum Missae revisione; qua ad Sagratissimae Suae mentem opulenta, Officium ipsum cum Missa, uti superiori in Exempiari adnuntier admirabiliter conce simplex universo Cleri Melitensis Sacullari et Regulari Diocesano Kalendaris una cum ritu duplci secundae Classis quoniam persolvere Dominitia, quae Paschalis also secunda occurrat; dummodo Rubricae serventur. Quibusque in contrarium dispositionibus minime obstatibus.


Sig Don. Gigli, S.R.C. Pro Sec
One would certainly expect a greater devotion and a more widespread cult of the First Bishop of Malta. There may be various factors for this lack. In our opinion one reason is that St. Publius did not die in Malta: as we shall see later on he was transferred to another more important diocese. Thus the annual commemoration of his martyrdom was not observed in Malta until very recently, probably not before the beginning of the XVII century; another reason may be that the feast of St. Paul, the Apostle Father of the Maltese, absorbs somehow the memory of St. Publius.

We, therefore, conclude this survey about the history of St. Publius and his cult by saying that local tradition during the various centuries of the most chequered history of Malta is far from being ignored: on the contrary, topography, toponymy and archaeology preserved a vivid memory of the places where he lived. According to local tradition St. Paul not only preached to the Maltese the Christian Faith, but he really founded the Christian Church in Malta and converted many Maltese to the Faith of Christ among whom the chief man of the Island, Publius, to whom he entrusted the first Maltese Christian community, appointing him the First Bishop of Malta.

Though popular tradition is sufficiently eloquent on Publius, on his social position, both civil and ecclesiastical, there is a great silence about the same Publius’s deeds after the departure of St. Paul from the island. Had St. Publius terminated his life in Malta one would expect that popular tradition would not have been silent upon Publius’s last deeds, particularly if he ended his life as a martyr of Christ. This silent tradition is very eloquent! We must therefore look for the last deeds of St. Publius elsewhere and, indeed, we find, not in Malta, but in another country witnesses who claim that St. Publius died in fact end his life by shedding his blood as a martyr of Christ. We are quite aware that these other popular traditions are not exempt from serious difficulties; but the fact that these popular traditions did not originate in Malta is already a very important factor for their claim to be historical, unbiased, and really and truly objective.

**Other Traditions about Publius in Non-Maltese Writers**

It is certainly astonishing that after such an eloquent local tradition about Publius, Protos of Malta, in the various archaeological, toponymical and topographical monuments, we are absolutely short of information regarding the life and deeds of the same Publius after the departure of St. Paul and his companions from Malta. Can we explain this silence?

The answer is fortunately in the affirmative and, what is more interesting, is the fact that this silence is explained not by any Maltese writers but by foreigners.

In the Divine Office, proper to St. Publius, approved by the Sacred Congregation of Rites, and recited by the clergy, both secular as well as regular, on the feast-day of St. Publius, 21st. January, the fourth lesson is taken from the *Martyrology* of St. Bede who condenses in a few words many details that the ecclesiastical popular tradition has preserved for us in the writings of the Fathers and of other ecclesiastical writers. We deem it most important to give a translation of this text: "Birthday of St. Publius, bishop of Athens, who as the Prince of the island of Malta, entertained the Blessed Apostle Paul for three days during his journey to Rome as a prisoner, as the Blessed Luke tells us: moreover he healed the father of the same Publius who happened to be suffering from fevers and dysentery, after that the Blessed Paul had entered near him and laid his hands upon him and prayed. Afterwards the Blessed Paul ordained Publius as a Bishop who had adhered to him and sent Publius to preach, being conspicuous in his virtues and most brilliant in his doctrine, Publius was martyred gloriously for Christ: Indeed first Dionysius, then Publius ruled over the Church in Athens" (15).

In this most dense and comprehensive tract of the *Martyrology*...
ology of St. Bede we cannot miss the fact that he starts by saying that Publius was martyred in Athens. Therefore we are given to understand that Publius did not finish his days in Malta but he was transferred to Athens where he died as a martyr of Christ.

That this martyr is one and the same person with Publius who was ordained bishop of Malta by the Apostle Paul is most clear from the text itself where St. Bede explicitly quotes St. Luke and refers to the facts narrated in the Acts of the Apostles, chap. xxviii. We can therefore safely conclude that St. Bede in his Martyrology on the 21st day of January, the anniversary of the martyrdom of St. Publius, gives the following information about him:

1. It is most obvious that Publius, bishop of Athens, is one and the same person with Publius, Prótos of Malta, mentioned by St. Luke in the Acts of the Apostles, chap. xxviii. Indeed, what is said of Publius's father suffering from fevers and dysentery is explicitly known from the Acts.

2. We further learn, what is not affirmed in the Acts, that St. Paul, before leaving the islands of Malta, founded the Christian Church, and ordained Publius as the first bishop of Malta who ruled for some time over this church, but obviously he did not remain in Malta till the end of his life since he is said to have been transferred to Athens where he died crowned as a martyr of Christ.

3. Publius after being the first bishop of Malta was transferred to the Church of Athens where he remained until his death: indeed, he succeeded Dionysius as Bishop of Athens and like him he was martyred for Christ. There is no hint, however, about the kind of martyrdom he suffered.

4. Publius is praised for being conspicuous in his virtues and most brilliant in his doctrine. As a Roman citizen he must have been very well versed in the Greek culture and possibly this is the reason why he was transferred to Athens and followed Dionysius in the Greek capital, Athens being a centre of great learning and the seat of the Areopagus.

Let us try to expand upon these topics which are known not only from the Martyrology of St. Bede, but also, as we have already said, condense the ecclesiastical traditions about Publius, the Church of Malta and of Athens, and the kind of martyrdom of Publius.

1. St. Publius the first Bishop of Malta.

It is obvious that St. Bede in his Martyrology begins from the facts well known from the Acts of the Apostles which are also explicitly implied in the phrase "as the blessed Luke tells us". Indeed, St. Luke does not mention Publius except once in Acts xxviii, 7.

Now, many other things must have taken place which St. Luke does not mention but obviously implies. In fact, in chap. xxvii, 21-25, St. Paul in addressing the crew of the boat on which he was journeying: "Friends", he said, "if you had listened to me and not put out from Crete, you would have spared yourselves and all this damage and loss. But now I ask you not to give way to despair. There will be no loss of life at all, only of the ship. Last night there was standing beside me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I serve, and he said, "Do not be afraid, Paul. You are destined to appear before Caesar, and for this reason God grants you the safety of all who are sailing with you. So take courage, friends; I trust in God that things will turn out just as I told you: but we are to be stranded on some island".

St. Paul tells his hearers that an angel of God had revealed to him that the boat will be stranded on an island. This was a message from the God to whom he belongs and whom he is serving. What does all this mean? It only means that Divine Providence arranged all this so that Paul could be shipwrecked in Malta where he could preach His gospel and found the Christian Church; it means that Paul had to ordain Publius as Bishop of the new flock. Nothing is said by St. Luke but it is far from
Luke's mind to deny that this has really happened. Indeed, we know that when St. Paul founded a church where a suitable flock was available, he used to appoint one of the flock to take charge of and rule over the church he had already founded. Timothy, Titus, Carius and others are examples which could be easily recalled in such circumstances. Local popular traditions abundantly confirm that, this has really happened in Malta (16).

For lack of suitable documents we do not know what happened after Paul's departure from Malta. Following however, popular tradition we know that St. Paul introduced the Christian Faith into the Maltese islands and ordained Publius as the first bishop of Malta. There is nothing strange in admitting that Publius turned his Palace in the principal city of Malta into the first Church where the new Christians used to meet. A similar meeting place for the Christians may have been the Cave where tradition holds that St. Paul lived during the three months he stayed in Malta. Possibly other meeting places may have existed in other parts of the island as well as in Gozo: but nothing can be affirmed with certainty.

(16) That the shipwreck of St. Paul in Malta is held as a special act of Divine Providence is clearly mentioned in the Mass and the Divine Office, proper to St. Paul on the 10th of February. Here is the Latin text and its English version: “Deus, qui mirabili providentia beatum Paulum Apostolum naufragum nobis mittere, et Fidei praeconem esse voluitis, largire supplicibus tuis, ut memoras laboris et caritatis eius, quod ore simul et opere docuit, servare valeamus — O God, who with wonderful providence didst send to us shipwrecked the blessed Apostle Paul to be the preacher of the Faith, grant to those who pray Thee, that, in view of his labour and love, we may succeed to fulfill what he taught through words and deeds”.

(To be continued)