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## CONTINUING WHERE WE LEFT OFF

### *STORJA* IS REBORN

The reappearance of *Storja* in 1996, as the organ of the Malta University History Society, is a story in itself.

It is as pleasant to recall the press conference launching the first edition of *Storja* in 1978 as it is painful, and almost incredible, to recall the closing down of the History Department and of the Arts Faculty and the stoppage of general and honours degrees in History soon afterwards. Our then Professor of History, the late Andrew Vella known affectionately as 'Patri Indri', suffered a stroke some time after a disturbing meeting with the then prime minister at Castille (at which this writer was present), and later on he relinquished his post in memorable but sad circumstances. The other historians at the time, except one or two, left the country. Of these, a knowledgeable Scotsman settled and retired in Oxford; another, our senior lecturer (Mr Roger Vella Bonavita) stayed in Australia; and another (this writer) was repatriated and reinstated when the Department and the Faculty were 'refounded' by the 1988 Education Act.

Sadly and harmfully in our view, that Act neither refounded the University of Malta's Chair of History (which had only been established after the Second World War), nor did it make any provision to retain or to protect any of the academic norms which vested in the professoriate (as continues to be the case even in universities where departmental chairpersons are by election or rotation). Given that the professoriate at Malta came to be recast largely, if not merely, as an honorary title in recognition of scholarly achievement, the late Professor Andrew Vella thus became, to date, the first and the last holder of the Chair of History at the University of Malta: the first and the last to have led the History Department by virtue of his elevation to full professorial rank and over a sustained period.

In recognition of Andrew Vella's long years of service in that now historic capacity, of a role marked by a quasi-pastoral contribution to Maltese studies, to the welfare of undergraduates; to original, often seminal undergraduate research undertakings in an open field, and even to the requirements of history teachers in the schools; the Malta University History Society, resuscitated in 1994/1995, decided to start an Annual Andrew Vella Memorial Lecture. The first in what we hope will be a long and distinguished series of such lectures, sponsored by Mr Pawlu Mizzi's *Klabb Kotba Maltin*, was delivered by Dr Carmel Cassar, a graduate of Cambridge University, in December 1995, at the Green Lounge of the Phoenicia Hotel.

The newly-elected MUHS committee and its Editorial Board also decided to resurrect *Storja*, which had made a first and - it was feared - a last appearance in 1978. It will be what it was meant to become: a history journal and digest intended mainly for undergraduate and graduate historians, and for others in closely related disciplines in the Humanities and the Social Sciences who care about man's plight in time. In the editorial of the first edition, we had set out a commitment to historical learning and understanding, a fresh, novel, stimulating undertaking that would make the past significant, instructive, intelligible and meaningful to the present generations; we had even hoped that a school of historiography might emerge as a result.

We bring forth this year a reborn *Storja* possessed of that same hope, torch in hand; matured rather than dampened by water fair and foul that has passed under the bridge; strengthened rather than weakened by our travail; vindicated rather than beaten by the still recent past that we ourselves, in one way or another, have lived through and survived.

A special field of professional expertise, the sense, record and comprehension of time and context are also - as indeed they ought and need to be - a public and a treasured concern in any civilized society.

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