

## ABSTRACTS OF HISTORY-RELATED THESIS

**Vanessa Bezzina, 'The Administration of the Maltese Islands, 1450-1499: A Study of the *Acta Iuratorum et Consilii Civitatis et Insulae Maltae*.' B.A. Hons. History, 1999.**

This dissertation looks at the administration, the importation of wheat and tax collection in late medieval Malta, as evident in the acts of the jurats and the town-council of Mdina between 1450 to 1499. The records of the town-council meetings, themselves a product of a privileged group, namely the Mdina élite are a clear illustration of the distribution of power and the resources of the island in fifteenth century Malta. The introduction gives an insight on the historiography of medieval Malta, looking at several historians who have used the *NLM MS Università II* in their studies of Maltese medieval history. The second chapter looks at the administration of the Maltese islands under the jurisdiction of the Mdina town-council as part of the *Universitas*. The town-council is seen as a body within the Sicilian *Regno* in terms of its work and political structure. Since the municipal government was responsible for the application of authority in different sectors of society, the council had to have good communication with the Viceroy and other royal officials in the *Regno* by appointing representatives and consuls to go abroad. This leads to the study of the existing relationship between the Mdina élite and other royal officials such as the Viceroy and the royal commissioner. It also focuses on the interaction within the Maltese upper strata against the background of the local administrative set-up as well as the clashes with the ecclesiastical hierarchy and the authorities of the Castle-by-the-Sea. As a town-council, the municipal government was responsible for the issuing of regulations and appointing offices, the keeping of law and order. Above all, they saw to the defence of the islands and maintenance of the fortifications. The coastal-guards and the *Militia* saw to safety. It is clear that the position of power enjoyed by the municipal élite was considerable. Wheat is the subject of the third chapter, which is analysed in terms of the wealthy few who had the necessary resources to get wheat from Sicily. Thus the chapter looks at price fluctuations, as well as patterns of importing wheat since the main pre-

occupation of the paternalistic town-council was the importation and storing of the islands' annual supply of wheat from the Sicilian Kingdom. Thus, a complete annual organisation for the importation of wheat was necessary. Every now and then, the town-council met to discuss the amounts and prices of wheat needed. The availability of wheat under storage relieved the town-council from the threat of famine and scarcity. To undertake all these responsibilities the local authorities needed considerable amounts of money and thus had to levy taxes. Chapter four deals with the collection of taxes as the major source of income of the Mdina municipal government and the clashes of the latter with the hated royal commissioners. This chapter looks at the different taxes and fines imposed on the Maltese as well as the role played by various *gabellotti* in collecting the taxes on behalf of the *Universitas*. The privilege of the imposition of taxes was one of the many jealously guarded privileges and concessions enjoyed by the selected few. As it was clearly depicted various sections of society enjoyed exemption from this tax, but from the source under study only the participation of the élite resulted in the collection of taxation, since the rest of the population is not mentioned. In the general conclusion these different aspects are linked together to provide a picture of Maltese administration in the late middle ages. While the era of municipal government of the Maltese population made the upper social; stratum as indispensable for the daily needs and sources of income it acted as a mediator between the local inhabitants and the Crown. However, the Mdina *Universitas* saw a decline rivalled by a new regime, after 1530. Although it lost its power, the fifteenth century remained embedded in the town-council identity, an identity of a socially privileged group that dominated public and political life and was concerned with the well-being of the remaining part of the Maltese population.

**Stefan Cachia, 'The Family and the Land in Late Medieval Malta: A Study of the Acts of Notary J. Zabbara, 1486-1488.'** B.A. Hons. History, 1999.

This dissertation looks at family structures and land ownership in late medieval Malta as well as the relationship between the two, as these can be inferred from the acts of notary Zabbara for the years 1486 to 1488. The introduction looks at their role in Maltese historiography, as well as the use historians have made of notarial archives in studying Maltese medieval history. Chapter 1 contains an analysis of family life. There such concepts as the male-female theoretical equality vis-à-vis the property owned, the husband's predominance in the household, the age of marriage and the nuclear dimension of the family are discussed. It also studies the relationship between the parents and the children: the importance of begetting children for strengthening marital relations, filial help to the parents and the age when children emerged from their parent's tutelage.

Chapter 3 analyses patterns of land ownership, looking in turn at co-ownership, especially on a family level, and the relationship between land ownership and the different strata of society. The latter is analysed both in terms of the number of holdings owned per stratum as well as in terms of the average holding size. The strong attachment to the land, which was characteristic of late medieval Maltese society is also discussed. The analysis of the sales of lands with the right of redemption leads to Chapter 4, a study of the ties between the family and the land. The relationship between the lineage and the land is analysed through such concepts as the rights of repurchase, the conjugal fund, and land fragmentation. The focus is on the land as part of dotal endowments and the husband-wife relationship vis-à-vis the land. Finally, the same chapter traces the role played by men, women and children as individuals who own land within the family context.

**Shirley Mifsud, 'The Commandery of Sacile and Pordenone.' B.A.Hons. History, 1999.**

The purpose of this dissertation is to study, in as much detail as the surviving documentation in Malta allowed, one of the Order of St. John's commanderies. This is the Hospitaller commandery of Sacile and Pordenone, which was part of the Grand Priory of Venice.

The introductory chapter deals with the way in which the Order was divided into Langues, Priors and Commanderies. Special attention is given to the way in which this division allowed the Order to extract the greater part of its finances from its lands in Europe, thus showing the importance which the commanderies had for this institution.

The society and administration within the commandery of Sacile and Pordenone was also discussed. Whenever it was possible, a description of the lands and buildings within the commandery was given. A study of the tenants who rented out land within the commandery was also attempted. This yielded some very interesting information which had to do with these people, including information about their wealth and status when compared to that of other members of their own family or within the local community in general. A study was also made of the rents paid by these tenants, particularly those paid in kind, which were the large majority. In order to understand better the relationship between the income and the expenses within the commandery, the year 1733 was taken as a case-study.

The documents consulted show that the one of the main aspects within the commandery of Sacile and Pordenone was the Church, thus a chapter was dedicated to this subject. A detailed description is given of both the parish church and the three country chapels which were found within the commandery, together with as much information as possible about the items found in them. Importance was also given to the clergy, particularly to Reverend Giovanni de Pol who in 1685, was the parish priest of the commandery. Special attention was given to de Pol. This was because his parishioners had a lot of complaints about him, particularly about the way he administered the sacraments of confession and the extreme unction and about his neglect in the teaching of the Catholic doctrine. He was also formally accused of embez-

zling the church's funds. The information given by de Pol's accusers also gives some indirect information about the extent to which the Council of Trent influenced small communities such as that of Sacile and Pordenone.

**William Zammit, 'Printing and its Cultural Role in Malta during the Rule of the Order of St. John.' M.A. History, 1995.**

This thesis attempts to identify and analyse the characteristics of printing in Malta at its inception during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. An examination of the two printing presses in existence during both centuries respectively is undertaken. This is a necessary pre-requisite for the subsequent discussion of their printed product and of the latter's role within local contemporary society.

The fundamental features of the two Maltese presses consisted primarily of their limited production, monopolistic nature and of the rigid system of control exercised over them by the secular and ecclesiastical power structure which also controlled most other aspects of life on the Island.

Following a study of the presses and of the social context in which they functioned, an analysis of their printed product is undertaken. The type and subject-matter of the locally printed product were determined by the requirements of the institutions and of the social classes making use of the press, by the demands of the reading and non-reading public as well as by the prevailing social and institutional controls.

**David Borg-Muscat, 'Absolutism and the Power of Social Control in Malta: 1775-1825.' M.A. History, 1999.**

In early modern Europe the punishment of crime, and of social disorder, incorporated within it the ability to inflict a degree of suffering on the condemned criminal. In itself, this served as a defining element of sovereign power, of absolutism. This dissertation sets out to study absolutism, vis-à-vis social control, in Malta during a period which, on a European level was marked by rapid changes in the methodology of punishment. Through such changes physical modes of punishment were abandoned in favour of a non-

physical approach, which tended to operate on the soul and human will. But these affected the exercise of absolutist sovereign power and the manner in which this manifested itself over society.

Within Maltese history the period 1775-1825 provides an opportunity for comparing two equal time spans, fortuitously marked by a change in government. The British administration 'inherited' a highly developed administrative system from the Hospitaller government, including concomitant structures of social control. A sense of continuity can be detected in the ideology underlying government and social control. On these were imposed new concepts, specific to British rule. Thus, while the general trend of change in the exercise of sovereign power, social control and punishment, in Malta, was in line with other European countries, it had its own specific nuances brought about by political and social factors intrinsic to the Maltese archipelago.