

All letters should be addressed to the Editor, The Sunday Times, PO Box 328, Valletta VLT 1000
Fax: 2559 4510
or e-mail: sunday@timesofmalta.com

Letters intended for publication in *The Sunday Times* should be as brief as possible and include the writer's full name, address and telephone or mobile number. They are also subject to editing. Those sending letters by e-mail should still include their particulars. The same letters should not be sent to any other newspaper. Letters carrying a nom-de-plume will not be published.

Gozo, Malta, and Christian continuity

■ In his patronising letter (*The Sunday Times*, April 18) Godfrey Wettinger makes a string of gratuitous assertions.

Firstly, he continues to uphold Al-Himyari's total depopulation theory when he states that "there would have been plenty of archaeological evidence". Is he still oblivious to recent archaeological discoveries beneath Palazzo Xara, Mdina, which show that 'la frequentazione dell'area tra fine X e XI sec. è assicurata'? (Bruno and Cutajar, 2002). Is he unaware that our Museum of Archaeology holds a copper stamp [Obj. No. 23,000], found at Gherixem, carrying the date 311 A.H. = c. 933 AD? Has not Al-Himyari now been superseded?

Secondly, he categorically asserts that the 'Pact of Old' must be the one of 1048, by which he means that the Christians surrounding their bishop found in 1127 were the great-grandchildren of their emancipated forefathers who, after 1091, had converted to Christianity.

Why should these descendants of ex-Muslim slaves have been better motivated to convert to Christianity than the other Muslims, descended from the former

masters? The deal of 1048 was not about religion but about freedom and women!

The only motivation, common to both Muslim categories, would have been financial gain. But Muslims are not known to sway that easily from their religion and within such a short time. They were certainly not pressured by Count Roger, who actually defended them against their Maltese and Gozitan Christian neighbours and who actually employed them as soldiers in his armies.

Jeremy Johns, who studied the analogous situation in Sicily, finds no trace of proselytism among Muslims, and the only 'converts' were the former Greeks who had strayed from their religion and had begun to come back into the fold. But of course, I have already said all this in the book, and, as G.K. Chesterton comments in his *The Everlasting Man*, "Iconoclasts are not renowned for their impartiality".

Thirdly, he continues to insist on identifying Malta with Gozo as if they were one island. I can understand that. To admit that the two islands' vicissitudes were different after 870 AD is too hard to swallow. But is not Malaterra's

account sufficient evidence that for Count Roger in 1091 they were not the same?

Of course, the hard evidence of a century later that Gozo and Malta were very different in the composition of their religious allegiances is simply ignored. Wettinger prefers to brush this very relevant information aside, at the stroke of a pen, scrapping it under what he chooses to refer to as 'frills'.

Among such 'frills' one finds the treatment of Gliberto Abate's report of c. 1241 which shows that by that year, the Christian population of Gozo constituted a staggering 56 per cent of the total, in contrast to the paltry corresponding figure of 16 per cent for Malta.

Another 'frill' is the solid evidence for a Greek church in these islands prior to its Latinisation. These raise questions that demand honest, professional answers.

The thesis of *Tristia ex Melitogauda* does not stand or fall with a treatment of the *dhimma*-pact. It is the very logical conclusion from the convergence of all data, old and new, available to date.

Stanley Fiorini
University of Malta, Msida

■ I refer to Godfrey-Wettinger's letters in reply to the historical introduction to the publication entitled *Tristia ex Melitogauda* (*The Sunday Times*, March 21 and April 18).

I cannot understand how Prof. Wettinger is basing his historical conclusions on fallacious arguments. He gives us the impression that what happened in Malta had also happened in Gozo. This is not true.

Let us take some simple examples: in 1551, Gozo succumbed to the Turkish invaders while Malta in comparison suffered few losses, if any. In 1565, Malta suffered a great siege while Gozo was not attacked. Again, in 1798, Gozo ousted the French invaders in just 30 days, while Malta had to wage a two-year siege to force the French to surrender. During World War II (1940-43), Malta

suffered heavy bombardments and acute food shortages, but Gozo's war casualties were minimal and Gozo's farmers even sent grain to Malta to mitigate the food shortage.

There are many other minor historical instances that exhibit such glaring differences between the two islands. So how can Professor Wettinger state that Malta of *Al Himyari* "must (sic) have included Gozo"? The further back we go in history, the greater must have been the differences. Another erroneous statement is: "Bishop Burchard... was himself no doubt talking comprehensively of the whole Maltese archipelago..."

Is Prof. Wettinger unaware that Gozo is often ignored even today? How can he be so sure about Bishop Burchard's times?

With regard to Count Roger's invasion of Gozo in 1091, can Prof. Wettinger assure us that the Count managed to overcome the town perched on the hill without the necessary siege engines? If he didn't, how can anyone say how the Gozitan population was composed at the time of that invasion? In my opinion, laying waste to unfortified Victoria and pillaging the countryside was not enough for a complete victory by the Normans of Count Roger.

Gozo's history runs parallel to that of Malta, but surely whatever happened in Gozo at any point in time cannot be deemed to be a copy of what took place on the larger island.

Anton Attard
Victoria

Christianity in Britain under siege

■ According to Taj Hargey, president of educational Islamic Centre in Oxford, "Christianity in Britain is under siege".

Dr Hargey has written to the press about his preoccupation regarding a Devon hospital's decision forbidding 54-year-old nurse Shirley Chaplin wearing a cross.

This prominent Muslim said: "The national religion in Britain has never been opposed and mocked as this time by institutions

who must protect it. I am a Muslim, but as a non-Christian I can see clearly the shameful way in which the national faith is being treated.

"To take off the crucifix is mocking our precious right to religious freedom. It means a true and proper attack to our religious freedom of expression," he continued, "that freedom which once represented a milestone of our democracy. I feel that I am not exaggerating when I say that

a virulent wave of secularism is engulfing our society and the target of this wave is Christianity."

Dr Hargey wrote after Ms Chaplin lost her battle in the courts because she wore a crucifix. She decided to appeal. In the same hospital, some Muslim doctors are permitted to use the veil.

Similarly, a nurse was prohibited from praying for the patients of the ward.

Fr Mark Cauchi, OSA
Valletta

Risible and costly campaign

■ The government has, once again, embarked on a very costly media campaign to downplay as much as possible the harsh criticism of its decision to go for BWSC's heavy fuel oil power plant at Delimara.

What is so glaringly risible in this campaign is that comparison is

being made between BWSC's new power plant at Delimara and the decades-old power station at Marsa.

Would anyone in their right mind be impressed if, say, a car dealer tries to sell them a new car by comparing its performance to a

very old car bought ages ago? And when one of the new car's vital components has never been tested?

Do they really believe we are all that stupid?
Eddy Privitera
Mosta

Ghajn Żnuber structure not Knights era tower

■ Cynthia Busuttill's article 'Crumbling unique tower dates back to the Knights' (*The Sunday Times*, April 18) fails to explain on what basis the tower-like structure at Ghajn Żnuber near Manikata is being labelled by *Fondazzjoni Wirt Artna* as a Knights-period militia coastal turret. If anything, the historical and architectural evidence indicates otherwise.

To begin with, Prof. Stanley Fiorini's study of the *Mahares* watchtowers between the years 1417 and 1647 (in *Sacra Militia*, 2, 2003) does not list Ghajn Żnuber near Ghajn Tuffieħa as one of the Università's militia coastal watch positions.

Indeed, there were only three militia stations along this north-western stretch of the island's coastline, located at Blat Mogħża, Lippija, and Ghajn Tuffieħa, and all were fortified with towers by Grand Master Lascaris. Blat Mogħża tower (*Torre Capra*), fell in the early 1700s and was never rebuilt by the Knights.

The only recorded Żnuber position, as mentioned by both Prof. Fiorini and earlier, by Mgr. A. Mifsud in his *La Milizia e Le Torre Antiche in Malta*, published in 1920, was actually situated on the other, southeastern side of the island at Hal Far - the *torricella* of Wied Żnuber.

In other words Ghajn Żnuber, near Manikata, was not a designated militia watchtower. But there are other factors which should question the newspaper's claim as to the 'uniqueness' and dating of this structure.

Firstly, there is the manner of its construction. The structure's thin walls, especially on the south face, large ground-floor openings, irregular stone courses, and internal iron beams all imply a relatively late rural building, possibly dating from the early 1800s.

The structure also shows clear signs of having been very heavily rebuilt before 1902, when it first features in cartographic records, acquiring in the process an external staircase.

Secondly, there is the matter of its positioning. The structure is located too far inland to have been of any use as a coastal watchtower. All the watchtowers and militia open-air look-out posts on this side of the island's coastline were perched at the very edge of the cliff-face for maximum visual command over the seaward approaches.

The inland positions of Mandra, Ghajn Targa, Gnien il-Borg and Ghajn Rażul, on the other hand, were located much further south on the strategic towering heights of the Ras il-Gebel to Wardija ridge.

The one thing mentioned in the article over which there is no argument is the fact that the Ghajn Żnuber structure, whatever its origins, needs to be repaired. It would make an ideal warden post for Park Majjistral.

For more information readers are invited to visit www.militaryarchitecture.com.

John Spiteri Gingell
Editor, *Militaryarchitecture.com*
Manikata

Well done for bell-ringing during Pontifical Mass

■ Something that had been seemingly overlooked by the media during the impeccable running of the Pontifical Mass on the granaries during the recent visit of Pope Benedict XVI is the quality of the bell-ringing from St Publius church in Floriana.

Particularly exceptional was the marking of the solemn *Sancus* moment; one of the most delicate and difficult parts to execute in the ringing profession.

The same can be said for other bell-ringing sites visited by the Pontiff, namely St Paul's collegiate church in Rabat and the Monumental Siege Bell, which was swung manually for the occasion.

Congratulations to the ringers involved and indeed to the organisers, both from the ecclesiastical and civil authorities, who took the initiative to engage such professionals.

Marija Aquilina
Qrendi

Maltese nuns in Tunis

■ I wish to thank the Mission Fund for its generous donation which we received for our mission in Tunis.

The donation will help pay for the rebuilding of our kindergarten in Ain Draham, which had become dangerously dilapidated. Most of the children are very poor and cannot pay the very modest fees. Our congregation, the Franciscan Missionaries of

Mary, has been in this part of Tunisia for over 60 years, working among the poor.

I appeal to the generosity of your readers to help the Mission Fund of Mosta by sending donations, used stamps, telecards, etc., to enable it to continue to help Maltese missionaries in Third World countries.

Sr Concetta Dimech
Tunis