



Ramla Bay must live up to its name

As the largest sandy beach in Gozo, Ramla Bay should be given priority and due attention. It is now full of pebbles, rocks as well as seaweed. These are an eyesore and create great inconvenience to visitors. They should be removed as is being done in some bays in Malta.

Ramla Bay should be kept in its original and natural state, that is, as a sandy beach, because it is gradually being allowed to turn into a rocky beach. This will make it less popular with tourists, and thus affect tourism in Gozo. The entrance of Ramla Bay is surely not welcoming, since it is strewn with rocks rather than sand.

The pebbles in the shallow waters of this bay come from the

stones that were in the valley. Rain causes them to move towards the sea where the constant pounding by the waves reduces them to pebbles. This explains why most of the pebbles are found in the middle of Ramla Bay (in front of the valley).

Some of these are then dispersed to the sides of the bay by the waves and currents. The increase in the stones and pebbles on the beach is due to the fact that a wall was built surrounding the Xhajma valley, thus enabling stones to roll towards the sea more easily.

The pebbles and stones have occupied the space of the sand, which is being lost due to the wind. This lost sand ends up further up from the flora and can never return.

Because of the ongoing loss of sand, Ramla is turning into a rocky beach as can be seen now. Thus, apart from being an eyesore, the rocks are also leading to the loss of sand.

A possible solution is to use a crusher at Ramla Bay itself to crush all the stones into sand.

Apart from the bay's natural beauty, the services offered there are important to attract visitors. Ramla has a lot of these, including restaurants, ice cream shops, hiring of sunbeds and umbrellas and a range of water sports.

Ramla is a major tourist attraction; let us not allow it to lose its character. After all, Gozo depends on local and foreign tourism.

Alfred Cini
Nadur

Birdlife's work is promoting eco-tourism

I am neither a hunter nor a bird trapper; however, it is well known that hunters are highly interested in nature conservation - for their own benefit.

Moreover, bird trapping is currently considered an illegal activity in the EU. Then who, beyond the rules, can compare and put these two activities on the same level? They should know the difference, since one is allowed by the EU and the other is illegal, so they cannot be put on the same level.

As a Spaniard, I was astonished when reading the name of my country, Spain, referred to as a good example of bad environmental practices.

Moreover, I could not believe that some people wanted to

cast blame and criminalise an internationally recognised organisation, Birdlife, which works, as many other environmental NGOs, towards nature conservation.

Environmental NGOs are supported and work with volunteers (people who work for promoting good in an altruistic way; that is, not for economic benefits but for better world).

If Malta is an EU member, should it not comply with laws and directives as other EU members do? Why are some people only interested in damaging the environmental organisation's reputation?

In recent years, nature travel and eco-tourism has emerged as

one of the fastest-growing segments of this industry. Groups of travellers, young and old alike, look for peaceful eye-catching, idyllic lands. They enjoy observing some of the rarest plants and animals found on Earth.

It was this very reason that brought me to these beautiful islands of Malta. However, once here, I ask myself: where will the Maltese tourism sector end up?

I refuse to accept Paceville as the only place where young people like me can observe wildlife in Malta. Should nature and the environment not be an economic gain for Malta?

Jorge Gracia
Ta' Xbiex

Grandiose projects burden taxpayers

I wish the best of health to the President, who does us proud time and again, be it in his efforts for the disadvantaged in our society, by the year-round fundraising campaign for the Community Chest Fund, as well as with his splendid welcoming address during the Papal visit.

I see that his, at times, physical frailty helps him be more at one with the weaker members of our society.

While it is right and honorable to lend a shoulder to the weaker

elements, at the same time one is justifiably angry when administrative measures are undertaken which place unreasonable burdens on taxpayers.

For example, though so many Chinese live very poor lives, the Chinese communist leaders have spent more than \$4.2 billion for the six-month long Shanghai expo.

Another similar amount has been spent on ancillary infrastructure - yet the Chinese communists seem to be cap in hand

begging for international donations for the relief effort in Tibet.

I say this as the current Nationalist and previous Socialist administrations have been close friends of the Chinese communists and seem to emulate them in going for expensive grandiose projects while burdening the middle class, working class and thrifty pensioners with some savings with an ever-heavier taxation burden.

Louis Vella
Sliema

Christians and Muslims in Malta and Gozo

Godfrey Wettinger's latest defence of his position on the discontinuity of Christianity in Malta (*The Sunday Times*, May 2) shows clearly he is at the end of his tether with no other real arguments to put forward.

Clutching at straws, he resorts to adducing as proof of the ethnic discontinuity Ibn Hauqal's description of an uninhabited island abounding in wild donkeys and wild sheep.

Far be it from me to impute anything but integrity on his part. I cannot, nonetheless, help thinking he has quite forgotten what he himself wrote 20 years ago (*The Sunday Times*, September 30, 1990) about Ibn Hauqal.

Summarising his argument in Anthony Luttrell's succinct exposition: "The various descriptions of an abandoned island have been explained, quite convincingly - (and here Mr Luttrell cites precisely Wettinger's *ST* contribution) - as a result of textual confusion with another place with a similar name of Galita."

This interpretation has until now been held by all who wrote on the matter: Brincat, Buhagiar, Dalli, Redjala, besides Mr Luttrell and, of course, Prof. Wettinger himself.

Mr Luttrell continues to expand this point in the context of Al-Himyari's 14th-century description: "It may be that Al-Himyari, faced with evidence for a total abandonment before 1053 and of a community on Malta in that year, sought to resolve the apparent contradiction by inventing a slightly earlier repopulation."

Suddenly now, 20 years later, it has become very convenient to propose Ibn Hauqal as a *deus ex machina*, and so Prof. Wettinger changes tack and starts pontificating about how 'historians (have) tended to discount Ibn Hauqal...' and so on.

On one important point, Prof. Wettinger misinterprets me when he writes "Unaccountably, he believes I think, that..." Rephrasing what I

have already written, I mean that if the 'pact of old' is what Prof. Wettinger says it is - the pact between the *ghabida* and their masters in 1050 - then the "Christians surrounding their bishop in 1127", who abrogated this pact, would indeed have to be the great-grandchildren of their emancipated forefathers.

What I never said was that they converted to Christianity after 1091. Given that the former were Muslims on Malta and the latter were Christians on Gozo, it follows logically that the abrogated pact could not have been what Prof. Wettinger claims it was.

This, of course, hinges on the radical distinction between Malta's and Gozo's vicissitudes, which both the poem and Giliberto Abate's report (which Prof. Wettinger keeps shying away from) point towards. But that pill is too bitter to swallow.

Having now heard Prof. Wettinger's round-up of his position on the whole matter, by way of concluding this exchange of views, in spite of what I am supposed to have said, I reiterate that:

- The fates of Malta and of Gozo after 870 were very different;

- The 'pact of old' abrogated by the Christian community and their bishop on Gozo (and not on Malta) in 1127 was the *dhimma* pact, it being clear that the other 'pact' of 1050, suggested by Prof. Wettinger, was, as has been shown, totally irrelevant to the situation there in 1127.

Nothing that has been said by Prof. Wettinger in this correspondence dents in any way this thesis which is discussed fully in my joint publication *Tristia ex Melitogauda*, to which interested readers are referred for any further information about my views. This concludes my contributions to this correspondence.

Prof. Stanley Fiorini
San Gwann

Paris embassy's 5-star service

I would like to publicly thank Malta's Ambassador to France, Mark Miggiani, and all his colleagues at the embassy in Paris for their prompt, professional and extremely efficient service on April 20.

Having been stranded in London while on a business trip, I attempted to make my way through France in order to catch a flight from Charles De Gaulle airport to Rome or Malta.

I arrived in Paris Gare du Nord with the Eurostar train from London and while making my way on the RER train to the airport, a thief snatched a backpack out of my arms on the train and ran off with it, leaving me without a passport and money. Luckily I still had my mobile telephone and I called my

colleagues in Malta who got in touch with the embassy.

Within a few hours, the embassy provided me with an emergency passport and some money which the company I work for sent me through them, and they actually delivered everything to me in person at the airport.

Despite the odds, I actually managed to make my flight, and I owe this all to Dr Miggiani, Natasha Meli Daudey and the driver who drove all the way to the airport to deliver the documents and help me with the check-in.

Their help has made all the difference. Heartfelt thanks to all the embassy staff from me and my family.

Moira Heath
Mosta

Mepa's no to bastion lift but yes to stilted parliament

I read with interest an article about the lift proposed from the Customs House area. This would be vital if we were to have ferry services once again.

I remember how used it was in my time as a worker with the Admiralty when we used to cross over from Senglea to Valletta.

It is said Mepa could not accept any drawings submitted because

they clash with the Valletta bastions.

Does Parliament House on stilts in baroque Valletta not clash with the Cavaliers (St James and St John) or is Renzo Piano so lucky to have his plans accepted wherever he goes?

Maureen German
Sliema