

MEDIEVAL MALTA: THE NON-WRITTEN AND THE WRITTEN EVIDENCE

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Some fifteen years after the publication in 1975 of the studies collected under the title of *Medieval Malta* it seems worth noting some of that work's deficiencies and the extent to which they have been or could yet be remedied; the introduction to the volume was entitled "Approaches to Medieval Malta" and it is tempting here to adopt the title "Medieval Malta: Approaches and Reproaches." That introduction surveyed versions of Malta's medieval past which ran from the old clerical tradition stemming from Gian Francesco Abela to the modern politically-inspired perversions of the *italianisti*, and it recognized that the achievement of independence in 1964 made more modern interpretations politically as well as scientifically desirable. In presenting certain new methods and suggesting others, the 1975 volume included various proposals for the exploitation of non-written sources some of which have subsequently been attempted.¹ Meanwhile, painstaking researches on the written sources, above all those of Godfrey Wettinger, have continued to change perceptions of earlier Maltese history.²

The utilization of non-written evidence involves something loosely classifiable as "archaeology", which for the historian should not constitute a separate or alternative activity but rather a valuable auxiliary discipline comparable to other specializations such as palaeography or statistics. There are enthusiasts who study pots exclusively for their aesthetic attractions careless of their date or provenance and there are those who excavate because they enjoy digging, but the real importance to the historian of the non-written materials is that

1 A. Luttrell, "Approaches to Medieval Malta", *MM*.

2 Interesting comment on the historiographical process in Malta appears in "Meeting People: Professor Godfrey Wettinger, Ph.D.(Lond.)", *The Sunday Times* [Malta] (24 Sept. 1989), 20-21.

they provide evidence which is not available from written sources and which can be especially useful if combined with the available written documents. In the case of medieval Malta there is a period of many centuries for which the overwhelming historiographical problem is the scarcity, or at times the virtual absence, of written sources of any kind. Some answers to this difficulty lie precisely in the combination of the written and the non-written materials in such a way as to create a coherent if inevitably somewhat hypothetical story, always remembering that the non-written evidence includes not only the results of archaeology but also coins, inscriptions, buildings, frescoes, place names and even oral traditions. In late-medieval Malta the language itself was non-written.

There is unfortunately a further category of medieval "Melitensia" which is constituted by the considerable number of "forthcoming" studies which spend so long in the press. Major delays in publication often cause serious blockages which inhibit further progress, while confusion may result when works are published which are based in part on premises already known to be incorrect. The report on the 1977 excavations at Hal Millieri and its various appendices, ready since 1981, will appear during 1990. The long-announced volume by John Barnard on *Mustim Malta* is also in final proof after nearly a decade; its appendices include details concerning Maltese Muslims in Sicily and Italy, and studies of Muslim coins on Malta.³ There are other examples of disadvantageous delays. Materials which will probably never be published include the records of archaeological activity which lapsed when publication of the annual Museum Report was discontinued in the year 1970, a serious and deeply regrettable loss, and the final report of the Italian archaeological *Missione*. The failure to publish archaeological activities is especially grave since valuable data are almost always lost in consequence.

It is excellent that university instruction in Latin and possibly palaeography is being introduced, since that should help to ensure the future of medieval studies and eventually to create a wider public prepared to reject myths and distortions. Just one example of the persistence of error is provided by claims still being advanced in certain works concerned with the nobility, though it has been pointed out in a detailed analysis that the royal document of 1351 granting the *viridarium* of Djar-il-Bniet did not refer to a fief, to military service, to nobility or to the Inguanez family, and that it has yet to be demonstrated that

³ It has mistakenly been announced that the editor of this volume is A. T. Luttrell who is in fact responsible merely for the organization of the appendices.

a barony of Djar-il-Bniet went back to 1351. It was decided in 1885 that precedence among the Maltese *titolati* was to be decided by the age of the title, and three years later the text of 1351 was published; across the centuries the contraction *not.* for *notarius* had already been changed to *nob.* for *nobilis*, and in 1888 *rationabiliter* appeared as *ratio nobiliter*!⁴

In emphasizing the dearth of written texts relating to medieval Malta, one major reservation must be made; from about 1400 onwards the archive sources are notably rich and include some precious notarial registers, various acts of the *università* at Mdina, miscellaneous items preserved in the episcopal archives and many documents in Palermo, Barcelona and elsewhere abroad. Much of this material is well known to Godfrey Wettinger⁵ as also to Henri Bresc, whose major study of late-medieval Sicily is important not so much for its frequent references to Malta and Gozo, and in particular to the maritime *corso* based there, as for its construction of a picture of a mid-Mediterranean milieu within which the context of many idiosyncratic Maltese developments must now be assessed or reassessed across a period of reflection and digestion.⁶ This wealth of material, already employed by Wettinger for numerous particular studies, opens up wide fields for inquiry and will eventually permit detailed analysis of the economic, social and religious structures of the post-1420 Malta. The emergence of so much information, and particularly of extensive prosopographical data, should lead to new interpretations of Maltese politics from 1400 to 1530. Despite Bresc's article of 1975,⁷ that topic has advanced only to a limited extent since Gian Francesco Abela created a "Medieval Malta" in 1647. Wettinger's forthcoming edition of the acts of the Mdina council from the National Library, MS. Università 11, will be particularly instructive, since these texts record who was present and who supported or opposed which interests.

⁴ A. Luttrell, "The Earliest Documents transcribed in the Cathedral Archives, Mdina: 1316-1372", in *Archives of the Cathedral of Malta Misc. 32A: 1319-1529*, ed. J. Azzopardi (Malta, 1977), 38-40, 47-50; it apparently remains impossible to inspect the original of 1351.

⁵ G. Wettinger, *The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Ages* (Malta, 1985), and numerous articles which deserve collection and indexing within a single volume.

⁶ H. Bresc, *Un monde méditerranéen: Economie et Société en Sicile 1300-1450*, 2 vols. (Palermo-Rome, 1986); see also *idem*, "La Course méditerranéenne: XIIe-XVe Siècles", in *L'Exploitation de la Mer: La Mer, Moyen d'Echange et de Communication* (Juan-les-Pins, 1986).

⁷ H. Bresc, "The 'Secrezia' and the Royal Patrimony in Malta: 1240-1450", *MM*.

Even for the periods before 1400 there are documents awaiting exploitation or discovery. For example, a manumission of Christian slaves made on Malta in 1271 recently came to light in Barcelona,⁸ where important information has also emerged concerning Maltese trade, especially in cotton, in mid-fourteenth-century Sardinia.⁹ The considerable published corpus of Angevin documents relating to Malta in the second half of the thirteenth century has never fully been analysed.¹⁰ The forthcoming new edition of the report made by the royal governor in about 1241 will be accompanied by new arguments on the religious composition of the population at that date which derive especially from the revised reading of the word *gisia*. The identification of the governor as Giliberto Abbate, a member of a Sicilian family from Trapani with important interests in Western Sicily, the Sicilian islands and North Africa, evidently throws new light on Malta's relations with Sicily.¹¹

One aspect of the *Medieval Malta* volume of 1975 which is deserving of some reproach lay in the failure to include a separate treatment of the prickly problem of the Muslim period. There were practical reasons for that, and the subject was in fact covered in several parts of the book. The consensus there reached, that Christianity completely or almost completely disappeared on Muslim Malta, has now become virtually an agreed interpretation.¹² The answer to those who continue to sustain the thesis of Christian continuity by arguing that it is proved by the survival of ancient traditions is that it can be shown that these traditions are actually early-modern inventions.¹³ Hence-

8 A. Luttrell, "Christian Slaves at Malta: 1271", *MH* ix, 4 (1987); this text had previously been published in F. Sevillano Colóm, "Un Nuevo Formulario medieval inédito (s.XIII)", *Anuario de Historia del Derecho Español*, xix (1948/9). Note that in 1301 a Florentine had purchased a Maltese girl named Raymunda: ASN, Registri Angioini 114, f. 110, now destroyed but calendared in R. Davidsohn, *Forschungen zur Geschichte von Florenz*, iii (Berlin, 1906), 76.

9 L. Galoppini, "Notizie su Maltesi e il Cotone di Malta a Cagliari nella seconda metà del Trecento", *MH* x, 1 (1988).

10 Details of sources, *MM*, 5.

11 See also L. Sciascia, "I Camelli e le Rose: gli Abbate di Trapani da Federico II a Martino il Vecchio", in *Medierraneo Medievale: Scritti in Onore di Francesco Giunta*, iii (Soveria Manelli, 1989).

12 G. Wettinger, "Did Christianity survive in Muslim Malta? - Further Thoughts", *The Sunday Times* [Malta] (19 Nov. 1989), 24 (but no church at San Pawl Milqi is datable circa 1200); further detail in *id.*, "The Arabs in Malta", *Malta: Studies of its Heritage and History*, ed. Mid-Med Bank (2nd ed: Malta, 1986).

13 A. Luttrell, "Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela: Tradition and Invention in Maltese Historiography", *MH* vii, 2 (1977).

forth discussion should turn on points of detail, some admittedly very important, rather than of doctrine. Inevitably, in the absence of any new written sources of information, the temptation is to speculate. What happened to Malta is simply not known. The tenth-century geographer Ibn Hauqal wrote that Malta was uninhabited, and he described a society in Sicily in which the men were raised as Muslims and the women as Christians.¹⁴ Malta could conceivably have been deserted at some point after the Muslim conquest of 870 and there could have been some arrangement which did not amount to total Muslimization; but proof is always lacking.

The intensity of the debate on Muslim Malta has resulted in a different, and important, matter being overlooked; indeed, as long as it was held that Christianity survived, the problem of its revival did not need to be raised. One theme to be explored, on the basis of very few sources, is that of the re-establishment in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries of a Christian presence in the islands. The Latin repopulation may have started in a small way early in the thirteenth century, since it is now known that there were at least a few Christians, who got into trouble when they killed a Muslim, on Malta during the rule of Roger II who died in 1154.¹⁵ Another theme is the puzzling one of how to explain the astonishingly vigorous advance of a Christian Latin faith among an Arab-speaking population during the fourteenth and, above all, the fifteenth centuries when the Maltese clergy clearly had a powerful corporate personality and the faithful founded, built and decorated numerous churches and chapels. These were slow developments. There is still no known mention of a parish on Malta before about 1402 and it was apparently not until that time that the religious orders began to establish themselves on the island.¹⁶

The making of Christian Malta was complicated in various ways. Henri Bresc suggests that there may have been a monastery following the Greek rite on Malta before 1300 and he classifies Malta as a "point of resistance by Greek culture".¹⁷ Godfrey Wettinger speaks of clergy of the Greek rite who served

14 A. Luttrell, "Ibn Hauqal and Tenth-Century Malta", *Hyphen* [Malta], v (1987).

15 *Constantiae Imperatricis et Reginae Siciliae Diplomata: 1195-1198*, ed. T. Kölzer (Vienna, 1983), 237-240.

16 A. Luttrell, "The Cappella of Birkirkara: 1402", *MH* viii, 3 (1982); *id.*, "Le Origini della Parrocchia a Malta", in *Pievi e Parrocchie in Italia nel Basso Medioevo: Secoli XIII-XV*, ii (Rome, 1984); see also S. Fiorini, *Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat, Malta: the Early Years to 1575* (Malta, 1989), 1-7.

17 Bresc, *Monde méditerranéenne*, i, 589, 593.

mainly immigrants from Sicily and Southern Italy and possibly Muslim converts as well; he alludes to the case of a Greek Sicilian in exile on Malta in 1133.¹⁸ There were certainly Greeks in Sicily where Muslims often preferred to become Greek rather than Latin Christians; these might have emigrated to Malta, while the conversion of indigenous Muslims to the Greek rite could have taken place on the island. Later, in the fifteenth century, there were a few place names and personal names on Malta which were apparently, but often debatably, of Greek origin¹⁹ and there are some liturgical terms of Greek origin in modern Maltese,²⁰ but it should be noted that there was a considerable Greek element on Malta after 1530.²¹ The existence of Byzantine frescoes proves little in this respect, since Byzantine elements are found throughout Western European medieval art. The words *Ego* and *matur*, for "I" and "witness", were written in Greek for a witness whose name was not eventually signed at the bottom of a Maltese act of 1274,²² while in 1299 *Amaten Pousale Pete* witnessed an act on Gozo by writing that name in Greek letters.²³ The existence on Malta of a significant Christian element belonging to the Greek rite in the thirteenth century seems possible if not securely proven.

Confusions of race, religion, residence and language seem inescapable. The story of those indigenous "Maltese" who became Christians, who remained on Malta and who continued to speak, if not normally to write, in Arabic is obscure. There is little sign of any survival of a nobility or leadership from the Muslim period, but Henri Bresc proposes, hypothetically, a resistance to Latinization which may have operated in part through the church and which may have been identified in some way with a "national" conscience. By 1420 half the names of those owing militia service appeared to indicate an indigenous origin, though the membership of the council at Mdina suggests a strong Sicilian or Hispano-Sicilian and Italian preponderance there. The Arabic element was stronger in the countryside among the independent peasantry

18 Wettinger, "Christianity", 24.

19 Eg. *id.*, *Arabs*, 95.

20 Luttrell, "Approaches", 23-25.

21 A. Luttrell, "The Rhodian Background of the Order on Malta", in *The Order's Early Legacy in Malta*, ed. J. Azzopardi (Malta, 1989), 5-8.

22 Text in V. Laurenza, "Malta nei Documenti angioini del R. Archivio di Napoli", *ASM* v (1934), 32-36.

23 Text in H. Bresc, "Malta dopo il Vespro Siciliano", *MH* vi, 3 (1974), 317-320.

which clung to its land and to the institutions of its local *casali* and its rural chapels. The leading ecclesiastics were often foreigners, but many priests were of local birth and they may have used the church to protect the indigenous population's ancient non-written Muslim customs and its "Arab" speech and culture, which also survived among legal men like Pietro Caxaro who wrote poetry in Arabic.²⁴ Such a hypothesis would find support in the various attempts made in the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth century to exclude foreigners from Maltese benefices and to insist that the clergy be able to speak Maltese.²⁵ It might be deduced that the old Maltese of Muslim origin defended their language and culture by accepting Christianity and then used their language to protect certain positions of power. This point demands a detailed analysis of the numerous sources to establish which administrative and ecclesiastical positions were held by persons or even groups descended from Muslim converts, some of them perhaps disguised by Latin names; who were the recently arrived foreigners or even absentee benefice-holders; and who were first-generation immigrants with Latin names but with Maltese mothers and Maltese speech who may have had some conscience of belonging to an island "nation" or have felt themselves culturally indigenous, or who perhaps merely sought to exclude newer immigrants appearing to threaten their positions.²⁶

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It is clear that much of the history of medieval Malta can be illuminated only from non-written sources, and the use of these unfortunately involves procedures, such as excavation, topographical study, conservation, environmental restraint and a range of practical dispositions, which provoke conflicts with private developers, bureaucrats, politicians and others whose concerns are not primarily academic. These often catastrophic dilemmas arise all over Europe; their solutions demand a widely educated public and the application of a

24 Bresc, *Monde méditerranéenne*, ii, 624-28.

25 Luttrell, "Approaches", 62, 63 fn. 345; A. Bonnici, *History of the Church in Malta*, i (Malta, 1967), 89, 91-92.

26 There is room for speculation on the relationship of the fact of the survival of the language to the fact that it was not written down; that a leading lawyer wrote poetry in Maltese and that the Jews and other townspeople spoke it does not mean that there was no element of resistance among certain classes who perhaps even used it as a secret speech which excluded foreigners.

sustained will to resist disadvantageous proposals. The situation in Malta is bedevilled dramatically by the special dimension of its smallness; many monuments are so rare that to lose or spoil just one or two examples of a category is disastrous. For many decades the resources and manpower essential to confront such problems have largely been lacking, though improvements are now in sight. Difficulties of conservation, restoration and excavation, and the lack of the technical expertise needed to solve them, all impinge on efforts to study and preserve medieval monuments and other non-written sources of information.

The first significant archaeological assault on the medieval historiography was that launched by the Italian *Missione* in 1963. Its director, Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo, was a notable scholar who did much for the development of medieval archaeology in Italy but who belonged to a generation which still sought primarily to uncover objects and to identify inscriptions and graffiti. Cagiano proved too anxious to document unreliable Marian and Pauline traditions and the *Missione* was careless about stratigraphy; it did publish eight detailed and well illustrated volumes of preliminary reports,²⁷ but they contain scarcely a single vertical sectional plan so that it is extraordinarily difficult to understand the descriptions published. On the medieval side the operations at Tas-Silġ and San Pawl Milqi, both of them sites where much of the stratigraphy was already seriously disturbed before digging began, consumed much of those areas in which excavation was likely to prove fruitful. Little effort was made to solve the very difficult problems of dating the post-classical pottery. It now seems likely that no final report interpreting the operations of the *Missione* will be issued, and it is to be hoped that the material finds, and in particular the pottery, will be generally available to scholars. To what extent it will in future be possible to recreate the course of the excavations, to establish a reliable medieval stratigraphy, to be sure which pottery came from which layer, and to assign dates to successive medieval levels must meanwhile remain uncertain. For example, some understanding of the development and destruction of Byzantine Malta might yet be gleaned from a more precise picture of the layers of "Byzantine" pottery covered with ash and burnt materials on the site of the Roman villa at San Pawl Milqi, where there may even be unexcavated areas in which a precise stratigraphy could still be established.²⁸

27 *Missione archeologica a Malta: Rapporto preliminare della Campagna 1963*, 8 vols. (Rome, 1964-1973); the most outspoken criticism came from the Italian Margherita Guarducci.

28 Cf. Luttrell, "Approaches", 20-23.

Cagiano de Azevedo contributed an article to the 1975 volume which was intended to emphasize the possibilities of medieval archaeology on Malta, but which has to some extent served to perpetuate a set of errors about a mosque and a post-Muslim church at Tas-Silġ and about an earlier medieval church at San Pawl Milqi.²⁹ The mosque must be regarded as non proven. The existence of a "Norman" church at Tas-Silġ is really derived from no more than one large stone mortared, at a comparatively late date, at an angle to a line of stones and from some undated glazed pottery; it must, in any case, be abandoned as too wide to roof. The earlier "Pauline" church at San Pawl Milqi, where no church is documented before 1448, was simply an invention.³⁰ It is, in any case, unlikely that Christian churches were built in twelfth-century Malta. The main church with a baptistery at Tas-Silġ remains, though it should probably be dated to the late-fifth or sixth century rather than, as Cagiano proposed, to the late-fourth century.³¹

The only other major medieval archaeological initiative has centred on the late-medieval churches at Hal Millieri. The volume issued in 1976 followed the cleaning of the fifteenth-century frescoes there and described the development of late-medieval Maltese church architecture and painting; it surveyed the immediate area of the church and it made use of the written materials, notably the notarial registers and the early-modern episcopal visitations, to document the churches and their settlement.³² As a point of procedure, these explorations and the identification in print of the problems involved formed an arguably essential preliminary to the excavation which was carried out in 1977 when an upper and a lower church and also a third church which once abutted the church still standing were investigated and light was shed on matters such as the churches' construction methods. The existence of frescoes in the earlier lower church was demonstrated, which tends to confirm earlier suggestions that the somewhat archaic programme of the surviving frescoes in the upper church was derived from or inspired by an earlier cycle. The coins, the pottery, the bones and so on all receive detailed study in the

29 M. Cagiano de Azevedo, "Medieval Buildings Excavated at Tas-Silġ and San Pawl Milqi in Malta", *MM*.

30 T. Blagg - A. Luttrell, "Notes on San Pawl Milqi" in T. Blagg - A. Bonanno - A. Luttrell, *Excavations at Hal Millieri* (Malta, 1990).

31 A. Luttrell, "Malta before 870: Some Libyan Connections", *Hyphen* [Malta], iv (1984), 128-129, 131.

32 *Hal Millieri: a Maltese Casale, its Churches and Paintings*, ed. A. Luttrell (Malta, 1976).

publication.³³ These excavations were undertaken by the Museums Department but the site and the building belong to the Church which faces serious responsibilities given the deeply disturbing state of the frescoes and building.

A major problem at Hal Millieri is, once again, the absence of datable pottery. It seems likely that much of the medieval material to be found on Malta was made on the island without the use of a wheel and that it followed local production habits, some of them in use for many centuries.³⁴ This will make it difficult to classify the local pottery through comparisons with materials from Africa, Sicily or elsewhere. Medieval Maltese archaeology is, therefore, still at a preliminary stage in which excavation must date the pottery rather than the other way around. A *terminus ante quem* was provided at Hal Millieri by a group of late-fifteenth-century coins, but otherwise the pottery found there is datable only within very broad limits; the published report concentrates therefore on creating a classification of the different types and forms in the hope that the sherds, which are carefully preserved in the National Museum, will be datable at some future time. There have been important advances in the study of African and Sicilian medieval pottery since the report was completed in 1980, and sooner or later stratified excavation on Malta or Gozo may provide better dates for the medieval pottery.

The extremely thorough catalogue of early-medieval catacombs, caves, churches and other rock-cut features recently published by Mario Buhagiar³⁵ was probably undertaken at the last moment at which it was possible to record many such items; it should stand beside John Evans' survey of the prehistoric remains. Archaeological field surveys are now much in vogue but they are not really suitable on Malta, despite the extraordinary luxury of an ordinance survey map of the islands at 1 in 2500. The problem is that the soil covering is seldom deep and that much of it has been disturbed or even moved from one place to another, while so much land has had buildings, roads and other developments imposed upon it. However wells, cisterns and field names are worth mapping. The Government Farm had a list of field names written in pencil in 1944, and a survey of a small area around Hal Millieri

33 Blagg, *passim*.

34 Henri Bresc, who kindly inspected the Hal Millieri pottery, recognized only a few sherds of types found in Sicily.

35 M. Buhagiar, *Late Roman and Byzantine Catacombs and Related Burial Places in the Maltese Islands* (Oxford, 1986); Mario Buhagiar has published much other important medieval materials.

showed that a number of microtoponyms recorded in the fifteenth century still survived in 1944, though fields there seem to be smaller now.³⁶ The preservation of the 1944 list and the marking of all its names, together with any further wells and cisterns, on the 1 in 2500 maps would be an important exercise in conservation, and could be accompanied by the placing of as many as possible of the pre-1550 microtoponyms on similar map sheets. Even if some are difficult to locate precisely, the early place names are being recorded systematically with full references by Godfrey Wettinger.³⁷ The language itself, for so long "non-written", is a source of information. Unfortunately those who study it seldom try to date the use of words, so that arguments concerning medieval topics which are based on the language are usually derived from modern forms.³⁸ To give just one example: *Milqi*, as in San Pawl Milqi, may well be an archaic form, but it is not documented there before 1673, the church previously having a different name.³⁹

The subject of built form is an awkward one. It is unlikely that the population of Muslim Malta lived exclusively in caves or in dwellings built of mud, wood or straw - the "African huts" of which Jean Quintin wrote in about 1533 - but it seems clear that there is no identifiable Muslim or immediately post-Muslim building on Malta or Gozo. Historians, abhorring vacuums and anxious to produce a continuous history of Maltese architecture, are naturally tempted to invent a Muslim chapter. Excavation in some site such as that of the ruined pre-1551 houses within the Gozo citadel might help them. There are some written details of late-fifteenth-century town houses,⁴⁰ a few grand palaces in Mdina datable to the late-fourteenth century,⁴¹ and several possibly older churches such as that at Tal-Baqqari.⁴² To go further than that is to assume that fifteenth-century houses were like those of the thirteenth century;

36 Possibilities discussed in detail in Luttrell, "Approaches", 9-13, 20-23; in *id.*, *Hal Millieri*, 25-27; and in *id.*, "L'Abitato medievale a Malta: un Approccio archeologico", in *Atti del Colloquio internazionale di Archeologia Medievale*, 2 vols. (Palermo, 1976).

37 G. Wettinger, "Early Maltese and Gozitan Placenames", *Civilization* [Malta], iv-xi (1982-1989); see also *id.*, "Some Maltese Place-names of Archaeological Interest", in *Atti del Colloquio* (1976).

38 For an exception, see J. Brincat, "L'Utilità di un Atlante linguistico siciliano per lo Studio del Maltese", *Atlanti regionali: Aspetti metodologici, linguistici e etnografici* (Pisa, 1989), and *id.*, *infra*.

39 Luttrell, "Girolamo Manduca", 125 n. 97.

40 Wettinger, "Arabs", 95-96.

41 Luttrell, "Approaches", 64.

42 *Id.*, *Hal Millieri*, 90-96.

that the latter were like those of earlier Muslim centuries; and that houses of the Muslim period were not like pre-Muslim houses. Talk of Muslim influences on Maltese architecture must therefore be almost wholly hypothetical. Courtyard houses, cul-de-sacs, winding streets and village street plans like those in Malta can be found in many parts of the non-Muslim world in a variety of periods,⁴³ as can features such as the interesting roundels on some older Maltese houses.⁴⁴ A more credible assumption, though one which also suffers from the absence of datable Muslim or post-Muslim buildings, is that the disruptions involved when numbers of Muslims left Malta and Christians settled on the island resulted in a serious decline of architectural and building standards.⁴⁵

Another theme provoked by "non-written" considerations is that of burial. The cemetery at Rabat is the one major material survival from the Muslim period and some of the funerary slabs there have twelfth-century dates.⁴⁶ At Hal Millieri there were at least fifteen, and probably more, burials in the Annunciation church, and others outside in the *zuntier* and cemetery. The bodies were all laid in earth, some on top of one another, in the traditional manner. The Visitation church had a burial situated centrally in front of the altar in which the body was interred before the original floor of the church was laid, which implies that the person buried there had some connection with the foundation or building of the church. Such points raise the questions of who was buried inside the churches and where, and of who could build a church and with whose permission. There were, of course, parish churches or their equivalent, the churches of religious orders and private churches which were held in *jus patronatus* and which had a *jus sepulturae*, but it is far from clear, for example, who founded the four churches in the small *casale* at Hal Millieri or who had burial privileges within them. No surviving written notarial act records an episcopal licence for any such medieval foundation as provided for

43 On more distinctively Muslim housing, *ibid.*, 27-28.

44 M. Schmitt, "Random Reliefs and Primitive Friezes: Re-used Sources of Romanesque Sculpture", *Viator*, xi (1980).

45 L. Mahoney, *A History of Maltese Architecture from Ancient Times up to 1800* (Malta, 1988), 45-70. This hypothesis rests on valuable intuitive insights. The discussion on the chronology of Maltese expulsions scarcely seems central to the argument, though the 1224 date, given by Luttrell, "Approaches", 36-40, and others, probably requires some revision. It seems somewhat strange to argue from modern Maltese terminology, to refer to the indigenous inhabitants as "Arabs" and to the immigrants as "Maltese", and to assume that most indigenous masons were expelled.

46 Cf. Luttrell, "Approaches", 21, Fig. 2, Plate 6b; the present author's study of the Rabat cemetery awaits publication.

by general ecclesiastical legislation designed to restrict burials in church. It may be that groups of families founded churches and acquired shared rights of burial within them. Where rural churches were managed by local procurators, the latter and their families perhaps achieved burial *ad sanctos* close to the altar. People who made pious legacies to a church or who paid for its repair or decoration may have done so in order to secure their own burial inside it. Perhaps there were four churches close to each other at Hal Millieri just because they were in effect burial chapels for the local population. That may have been one aspect of the impressive advance of the late-medieval Christianization of Malta.⁴⁷

47 Luttrell, in Blagg, 107-114.