

archaeology, seemed to have not only influenced Mayr's academic pursuits but also affected the way he argued his 'archaeological cases', as clearly expressed in his evidence-driven publications.

From 1889 to 1893, Albert Mayr studied at Munich's Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, where he was registered as a student of philology. In 1894, Mayr handed in his dissertation on *Die antiken Münzen der Inseln Malta, Gozo und Pantelleria*, in part-fulfilment for the attainment of a doctoral degree. His tutor, Oberhammer, had drawn Mayr's attention towards Malta and encouraged him to embark on a more thorough study to produce a 'historic-geographical monograph on Malta'. This encouragement materialised into a monograph published in 1909, *Die Insel Malta im Altertum*, that not only covered the Maltese megalithic culture but also included the Punic and Roman periods. Previously, in 1901, Mayr had published a monograph entitled *Die vorgeschichtlichen Denkmäler von Malta* in which he gave an account of the (then) known prehistoric buildings in Malta, realized that they were much older than the Phoenician period, and tried to assess their context and significance in Mediterranean prehistory.

Apart from these monographs dealing mainly with Maltese prehistory, an even earlier paper by Mayr was his seminal *Zur Geschichte der älteren christlichen kirche von Malta* published in 1896 in the historical journal *Historisches Jahrbuch*.<sup>2</sup> In this essay on Maltese historiography, Mayr argued for a scientific approach to the writing of the history of the early Christian Church in Malta and to discontinue basing its history on tradition in favour of written or archaeological evidence.

When still a university student, Mayr had his first appointment as a student teacher in 1891. His professional career, which lasted up to 1917, was that of a state-employed school teacher in secondary education. After extended sick leave, he was finally granted early retirement in 1920. Regrettably, Albert Mayr never acquired a position within the established academic circle of Munich, the university and the academy. He nonetheless remained committed to the archaeological research he had started with his doctoral thesis and persevered in his archaeological and historical studies throughout his life. His numerous publications and study tours suggest that, foremost, he was a scholar with a lifelong commitment to Mediterranean archaeology with a special focus on Malta. Albert Mayr's work has survived through the works of subsequent scholars such as Professor John D. Evans<sup>3</sup> and Dr David Trump.<sup>4</sup>

2 Vol. 17, 475-496. For comments on the importance of this essay, see the contribution of Prof. Godfrey Wettinger, *infra*, p. 19 sqq. For an English translation of this essay, the first-ever to be published, cf. H. Stoger's translation, *infra*, p. 23 sqq.

3 J.D. Evans, *Malta*, in the *Ancient Peoples and Places* Series, 2nd impression, London 1963; *Idem*, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands*, London 1971.

4 D.H. Trump, *Malta: An Archaeological Guide*, 2nd edition, Malta 1990; *Idem*, *Malta Prehistory and Temples*, Malta 2002.

## WHY AN 1896 PAPER IS BEING RE-PUBLISHED, A PERSONAL NOTE

Godfrey Wettinger\*

Albert Mayr's famous article on the history of Christianity in Malta is being re-printed here, more than a century after its first appearance in a top-notch German historical journal in 1896.<sup>1</sup> It might be thought that such an event is surprising and absolutely uncalled for because, in normal circumstances and in normal countries, historical writings, however scholarly, inevitably date and are not worth much re-reading let alone re-publishing after the lapse of more than a century owing to the discovery of new relevant material and to changes in mental attitudes, both of historians and of the general reading public. But Malta is a special case.

Although the University of Malta has existed for over two hundred years, it seems to have regarded its main task as that of providing the island with its professors and practitioners of Law, Medicine and Theology. Some languages and their literatures like Latin and Greek, English and Italian were also provided for. Even Maltese was introduced before the Second World War. Regular courses in History did not start before the mid-1950s and that in Medieval Maltese History was started by the present writer on the retirement of Professor Andrew Vella O.P. in the late nineteen-seventies.<sup>2</sup>

Inevitably, the serious writing of medieval and earlier history laboured under a heavy academic handicap. The models they followed included what was called 'tradition' as a source of 'history'. They were largely impervious to the new serious and increasingly academic type of history followed mainly by contemporary German, French and English historians.

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1 *Historisches Jahrbuch*, 1896, vol. 17, 475-496.

2 However, in October/ November 1962 Professor Lionel Butler, Leverhulme Lecturer in 1962-63 then serving a three month stint at the newly-opened Department of History, delivered an eight lecture public series at the Valletta premises of the University of Malta on 'The Maltese People and their Rulers 1090-1600', which was very well attended and highly appreciated. The omitted portions of the High Middle Ages, ie. post- 870 to 1090, were precisely the ones which relied almost completely for information on what was then regarded as reliable 'tradition' or by way of extrapolation from the history of other countries or the whole region.

In the present paper, Albert Mayr pointed out that there were two main problems in dealing with ancient and medieval Maltese history, namely, that for about 300 years after St. Paul's shipwreck there was no written or archaeological evidence of his stay on Malta. Similarly, there was a period of about 200 or 300 years in the High Middle Ages when Christianity on Malta (including Gozo) was not documented in any way.

Understandably, these conclusions of Albert Mayr did not meet with the approval of Maltese historians. The traditions concerning the Christianization of the island on the arrival of St. Paul continued to find practically universal favour. The idea of continuity of people and language throughout the medieval period from Byzantine times to the arrival of the Order in 1530 with the inevitable progressive development of Maltese under the influence of Arabic remained the standard picture. In such writers as A.A. Caruana, one notices a certain softening of attitude towards Arabs and Islam but his own work is spoiled by his acceptance of much of the fabrications of Giuseppe Vella in the eighteenth century.<sup>3</sup> Professor Andrew Vella rejected the reputed Rogerian origin of the Maltese national flag, but where religion was concerned he followed the normal trend,<sup>4</sup> as did Albert Laferla,<sup>5</sup> Temi Zammit<sup>6</sup> and numerous other popular writers and authors of school textbooks. On the other hand, Temi Zammit's own treatment of prehistory of course is unexceptional. Augustus Bartolo actually praised Mayr's interpretation of Maltese prehistory but followed A. A. Caruana for the rest, including some of the fabrications.<sup>7</sup> A. Bonnici's History of the Church in Malta in three volumes, intended to be an update of nineteenth century books by Ferris,<sup>8</sup> did not even include Albert Mayr in his bibliography and still gave prominence to outdated seventeenth and eighteenth century national historians. In general, Maltese historians have continued to avoid dealing with the problems posed by Albert Mayr. On palaeo-Christian studies, the ideas of Bellanti need updating.<sup>9</sup> Vincent Borg starts his gigantic survey of the Church in Malta around 800 AD.<sup>10</sup>

3 A. A. Caruana, *Frammento critico della storia Fenicio-Cartaginese, Greco-Romana e Bisantina delle isole di Malta*, Malta 1899.

4 E.g. A. P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta*, vol. I, Malta 1974.

5 A. V. Laferla, *The Story of Man in Malta*, Malta 1939.

6 T. Zammit, Malta. *The Maltese Islands and their History*, Malta 1926.

7 'History of the Maltese Islands', in *Malta and Gibraltar Illustrated*, ed. Allister Macmillan, London 1915, 10-172; references to Albert Mayr on pp. 11, 15, 17 ([who] 'published an invaluable little book, since translated into English by H.G.D.H. Princess Louis of Battenberg'), 18, etc.

8 *Storia ecclesiastica di Malta*, Malta 1877, and *Descrizione storica delle chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1866.

9 P. F. Bellanti, *Studies in Maltese History*, Malta 1924. Bellanti utilised a French translation of the present paper made 'for the late Monsignor [Alfredo] Mifsud by General Voënsky de Brézé'; p. 2.

10 *Melita Sacra*, Malta 2008-2009.

I had the advantage of being put on my guard in the early 1950s by no less a figure than Joseph Cassar Pullicino when I naively<sup>11</sup> blurted out that I had already written a long essay, or 'project' as it was called, at St. Michael's Teachers' Training College, dealing with the coming of Count Roger. At the time, I did not know that Cassar Pullicino had himself already written an important study of the traditions concerning the coming of Count Roger.<sup>12</sup> He immediately warned me that there was a German historian who had turned much of Maltese history upside down: '*Hemm professur Germaniż li qalbilna l-istorja ta' Malta ta' taht fuq.*' A critical glance at Malaterra's chronicle of the coming of Count Roger soon showed me that the German academic was correct, no Maltese Christians were involved. It changed my whole attitude. From then onwards, 'Tradition' was valueless for me as a source of history. My later studies merely confirmed and hardened this conviction.

Round about 1978, my colleague Dr. Dominic Fenech came across an Italian translation of Mayr's paper and handed it over to me because he was very much aware of my keen interest in the subject. By then, I had also irrevocably returned to my early preoccupation with Maltese medieval history. It was found among the papers of the Society of Maltese History (founded in 1950) as left by Professor Andrew Vella in the departmental library after the stroke which crippled him for the last years of his life. Subsequently, Cassar Pullicino (editor of *Melita Historica* in 1952-60), remarking: 'So it has surfaced again', informed me that it had been handed over to him by Dr. Giuseppe Mifsud Bonnici (later Chief Justice) who told him that the translation had been commissioned by his late father Dr. Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, one of the most prominent politicians and men-of-letters in Malta in the inter-war period. This was confirmed to me personally by Dr. Mifsud Bonnici himself.

Cassar Pullicino's own original paper on the traditions concerning the coming of Count Roger to Malta was re-issued under the editorship of A. T. Luttrell, apparently without any significant changes. In a seminal and hard-hitting paper that was read for him at an International Congress on Norman Sicily held in Palermo in 1972, Luttrell sharply criticised post-Mayr Maltese historians in general who still relied on the work of A. A. Caruana,<sup>13</sup> which he followed in 1975 by the lengthy introduction<sup>14</sup> to his own *Medieval Malta Studies on Malta before the Knights*<sup>15</sup>

11 A youthful effort of which I did not even retain a copy, the original having been purloined from the College perhaps on the departure of the Brothers in ca. 1975.

12 J. Cassar Pullicino, 'Norman Legends in Malta', *Scientia*, 1945, 152-165. Albert Mayr's article is not mentioned in this study.

13 A. Luttrell, 'Malta nel periodo normanno', *Atti del congresso internazionale di studi sulla Sicilia normanna*, Palermo 1972.

14 'Approaches to Medieval Malta'.

15 London 1975.

and a detailed study of the 'Invention of Tradition' mainly by a small group of late sixteenth century Maltese Jesuits, which came out in *Melita Historica* in 1977.<sup>16</sup>

In 1984, I at last tackled the Arab period of Maltese medieval history in a cautious paper in which I emphasised the significance of the events of 870 AD and bewailed the general lack of evidence on the topic.<sup>17</sup> In a revised and lengthened edition a couple of years later, I expressly acknowledged the influence of Albert Mayr's present paper, thus being the first Maltese to have done so publicly and favourably.<sup>18</sup> Of course, I had been spreading the same ideas through my lecturing at the University and elsewhere for thirty or forty years such that they had become almost commonplace except in the more extreme centres of conservatism. Back in 1965, I had already clearly shown my scepticism to the use of 'tradition' in local medieval history in a long and elaborate letter to the *Times of Malta*.<sup>19</sup>

Recently, Professor Stanley Fiorini has maintained in the Introduction to *Tristia ex Melitogaudio. Lament in Greek Verse of a XIIIth century Exile on Gozo*<sup>20</sup> that in 870 AD the Byzantine inhabitants of Gozo were granted the status of *dhimmi* while the whole of the island of Malta was devastated and depopulated. In this way, he was apparently trying to save the traditional picture of ethnic and religious continuity by limiting it to the smaller island of the Maltese archipelago. It was an idea that ran directly counter to all historical records such as they are, and cannot be entertained at all. I did my best to snuff it out, successfully, I believe.<sup>21</sup>

16 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela: Tradition and Invention in Maltese Historiography', *Melita Historica*, vii, 2, 1977, 107-132.

17 G. Wettinger, 'The Arabs in Malta', in *Report and Accounts, 1084, Mid-Med Bank Limited*, Malta 1984.

18 'The Arabs in Malta', in *Malta Studies of its Heritage and History*, Mid-Med Bank Limited, Malta 1986.

19 G. Wettinger, 'The Maltese Flag. Validity of Tradition', *The Times of Malta*, 3 September 1965.

20 J. Busuttill, S. Fiorini and H. C. R. Vella, *Tristia ex Melitogaudio. Lament in Greek Verse of a XIIIth-century Exile on Gozo*, Malta 2010.

21 See Review in *The Sunday Times* by Ugo Mifsud Bonnici on 14 March 2010, and consequent correspondence dated 21 March, 4 April, 18 April, 25 April, 2 May, 9 May and 16 May 2010.

## ON THE HISTORY OF THE OLDER CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF MALTA

Albert Mayr\*

translated by Hanna Stöger\*\*

[p. 475] The Arab conquest of Malta in 870 AD not only led to a turning point in the political history of the island, but also profoundly influenced the population and culture of the Maltese islands. This essay will trace the development of the Christian church of Malta up to this specific point in time. Until now it has been an open question whether Christianity continued under Arab rule. In order to discuss this issue it will be necessary to examine the situation of the church in Malta during the period that immediately followed the Norman conquest of the islands.

The first approaches to the earlier, and also the later history of the Church of Malta, have been provided by Pirro.<sup>1</sup> His work not only contains numerous errors but also suffers from an uncritical processing of information rooted in the realms of legends. Nevertheless, what is found in the works of Maltese historians like Abela, Ciantar,<sup>2</sup> Bres<sup>3</sup> and Ferres<sup>4</sup>, has been largely based on Pirro's writings.

\*A short biography of Albert Mayr is on page 17, *supra*.

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1 (M.p.475\_1) Sicilia sacra. Panormi 1638, lib. III. notit. VII (in the following the 3rd edition, published by Mongitore in 1733, will be quoted).

2 (M.p.475\_2) Abela, della descrizione di Malta. Malta 1647; reprinted and amended in Ciantar, Malta illustrata. Malta 1772 (in the following the edition of 1772 will be quoted).

3 (M.p.475\_3) Malta antica, Roma 1816, lib. VI.

4 (M.p.475\_4) Descrizione storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo, Malta, 1886.