

BOOK REVIEWS

G. WETTINGER — M. FSADNI O.P., *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena, a poem in medieval Maltese, Malta, 1968, 52 p.*

The poem dedicated to Grand Master *Nicholas Cotoner* (1663-1680) by *G.F. Bonamico* (1639-1680) has constantly been pointed out by scholars of Maltese Literature as being the earliest evidence of written Maltese. The search for earlier examples of written Maltese had always proved fruitless. *G. Wettinger* and *M. Fsadni*, however, have succeeded in unearthing an earlier document in Maltese: *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena*, which they discovered in the Notarial Archives in Valletta in a register containing the deeds of *Brandano de Caxario*. It is to their credit that this unique example of written Maltese dating from the latter half of the fifteenth Century has come to light.

This book presenting the discovery of these two gentlemen is a synthesis of the conclusions arrived at, after long research work in the Notarial Archives and the Archives of the Royal Malta Library — a scholarly work in which assertions are supported by documentary evidence.

In Part One of this publication, after some brief notes concerning the actual discovery of the *Cantilena*, the authors give a survey of the studies made by other scholars in their search of early examples of written Maltese. The question of the authorship of the *Cantilena* is then treated at full length. The interesting biographical details about *Brandano de Caxario* and his ancestor Peter make the reader familiar with the prominent Caxaro family that flourished in Malta in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

In dealing with the cultural life of the Island at the time, the authors do not hesitate to tackle the question of the place of the Maltese Language in fifteenth and sixteenth century Malta. These paragraphs help the reader in placing the *Cantilena* in the Literature of Malta. The authors rightly assert that "it forms an invaluable . . . link between the Arabic and later literary Traditions of Malta. Its archaic language conveniently bridges much of the gap that lies between Modern Maltese and Arabic." This statement indicates appropriately the place of the *Cantilena* in Maltese Literature: since, in the absence of earlier evidence of Maltese, one might well refrain from describing the language of the *Cantilena*, written at a time when the Middle Ages had come to an end in Europe, as Medieval Maltese.

In the second part of their publication, the authors give a transcription of the *Cantilena*. This is followed by a transliteration of the poem into the modern Maltese alphabet — an attempt that might well have baffled the two authors had they not passed long hours in deciphering the handwriting of *Brandano de Caxario* and in studying the system which he followed in writing Maltese words, at a time when there existed no agreed system of Maltese orthography. It is consequently, understandable that a correct and complete analysis of the text of the *Cantilena* would indeed be difficult.

With the help of the earlier Maltese lexicographers and a comparative study of the language used in the Cantilena with Arabic words, that might illustrate the meaning of its text, the authors made a successful attempt in giving a textual analysis of the poem.

A genealogical table of the Caxaro Family, a facsimile of the Cantilena, and the photo-reproductions illustrating the handwriting of Brandano and Peter Caxaro render this publication still more interesting to the learned reader for whom it is meant.

Anthony Zammit Gabarretta

BONNICI Arthur, *History of the Church in Malta*, Vol. II, Period III (1530-1800), Malta, Empire Press, 1968, pp. VI-154.

Mi sia consentito di esternare a Monsignor Bonnici, attraverso questa rassegna, la profonda gratitudine dei cultori della storia per la comparsa del secondo volume della "*History of the Church in Malta*", di cui mi appresto a discorrere, giacchè costituisce, a mio modesto avviso, un avvenimento interessante nel campo della divulgazione su basi scientifiche.

L'Autore è una voce autorevole nel campo della storia ecclesiastica. Sullo sfondo di una vasta trama di ricerche e di dati, tratti da fonti edite e inedite, Mons. Bonnici ha disegnato la sua chiara esposizione, mostrando di aver maturato un vasto panorama. Nulla è sfuggito al chiarissimo Autore; ne ha tascurati i rilievi caratteristici della Chiesa di Malta.

Senza indulgere alla retorica, con il presente volume, l'Autore traccia un profilo del grande arco di tempo entro cui si svolge la vita ecclesiastica di Malta: profilo che potrà essere largamente ampliato in una successiva ristampa del lavoro.

Secondo l'ordine mantenuto, il volume delinea in 18 capitoli quattro secoli di storia, dall'avvento dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano fino all'occupazione di Malta da parte dei Francesi (1530-1800), mettendo bene in risalto l'evolversi della vita ecclesiastica e religiosa dell'Isola e le opere svolte dalla Chiesa a beneficio del popolo maltese.

Quale sia l'apporto e il valore di questo lavoro lo dimostrano la documentazione e l'indice analitico dei nomi dei personaggi e dei concetti ivi contenuti.

L'opera di Mons. Bonnici ha già avuto numerosi autorevoli consensi, conquistando così un'altra particolare benemeranza. Ritengo che gli studiosi trarranno vantaggio da questo studio.

Bonaventura Fiorini O.F.M.Conv.

G. ZAMMIT - MAEMPEL, *The evil eye and protective cattle horns in Malta* offrint from *Folklore*, v. 79, spring 1968, 16 p.

G. Zammit-Maempel, briefly but clearly, gives a very interesting account about the evil eye and protective cattle horns in Malta. It is rather a description of the actual state of the Maltese Islands because everything appears based on personal interviews and observations.

The author states that, though Christianity assumed an outstanding influence on the local population's daily habits, some pagan customs substantially unchanged were adapted to the new faith (p. 2). For instance, cattle horns are still used in Malta as a protection against the evil eye (pp. 3-4). Some Maltese, however, who are tenaciously attached to their cattle horns admit that these instruments have no relation to the evil eye (p. 4); they are just dearly preserving what had been set up by their ancestors (p.8). Others acknowledge that they mean to attract the attention about the horns especially to a person who happens to be an "eye-undesirable" (pp. 5-6); in fact, they believe that the chief function of the horns is to neutralize the evil powers (p. 6).

The evil eye is considered to have a most devastating effect on piglets and young rabbits (p. 6). It is also commonly believed that malevolent persons can be detected from the movement of their pupils (p. 8). The gesture most commonly used at the present day is the horned hand directed towards the speaker's eye quite often accompanied also with an appropriate expression whenever the latter has praised the beauty of some person, animal, or object (p. 10).

The origin of the custom of fixing horns for a magical protection is hidden in an unknown past. If this superstition was known to the Maltese of centuries ago, it must have been practised secretly on account of the restrictions imposed by the Malta Inquisition. Undoubtedly, the Maltese, in most of their customs, have intimate connections to all the nations of the Mediterranean area (pp. 11-14).

Our judgement about the booklet cannot be other than positive. It is an important contribution to the ever-interesting topic of superstitions. Many facts gathered from personal contacts would have gone lost. Notwithstanding this, we would like to put an observation about the introduction of this study. It is true that some Maltese magic customs go back even to the pre-christian era; but many of our superstitions are the result of the frequent relations that the Maltese kept with those that belonged to other religious confessions. A harmful influence on our faith was essentially produced by the Moslems who dwelled as slaves in Malta during the period of the Knights of St. John (1530-1798). At that time, Malta overflowed with magic scripts, mixtures, and filters of eastern origin. The Maltese themselves used to seek the slaves to know whether a spell had been cast on them on account of an evil eye. Very often, "experienced" slaves were recompensated for having given counsels or procured remedies of no rational basis.

Alexander Bonnici O.F.M. Conv.

VICTOR E. DENARO, *Maltese Numismatics: A Bibliography*, Malta, Progress Press, 1968, 35 p. with Addendum.

Chev. Denaro is no novice to writings on Maltese Coinage or, indeed, on other aspects of Maltese history. His articles on coinage include "The Mint of Malta", "Dutch Coins and Maltese Countermarks", "The Maltese

Obsidional Coins of 1800", all appearing in "*The Numismatic Chronicle*" and "*The Malta Siege Ingots of 1799*" printed in *The Numismatic Circular*. His latest work, a reprint from *Scientia*, Vol. XXXI, 1965, only proves, if any proof is needed, his uninterrupted interest in the subject.

The object of Chev. Denaro's bibliography, as he himself asserts, "is to facilitate, as far as possible, the work of the average student in the study of Maltese Numismatics and the currency of Malta." He divides his study into four periods viz: (a) Ancient Times, (b) The Sovereignty of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, (c) The French Occupation, (d) The British Domination and introduces each part by some rather scanty but nonetheless useful information. *Chev. Denaro* includes bibliographical material that deals with the technical artistic and historical aspects of Maltese coins. Though there is no attempt at some separation of these aspects or of printed from manuscript material, the author is to be commended for his impressive coverage of relevant "books, articles, documents and other publications". The Bibliography makes no pretence to being complete — The Author himself admits that — yet one would have appreciated the inclusion of pertinent documents in the *Malta Cathedral Archives* (28, 39, 117, 118 and others), and the fuller enumeration of documents in the *Royal Malta Library* and the *Archives of the Inquisitor of Malta*. Moreover, mention could have been made of the reviewer's M.A. thesis, *Coinage Problems facing the Order of St. John in Malta* (1967) preserved in the R.U.M. Library. Otherwise there is indeed little that can be faulted in Chev. Denaro's praiseworthy effort.

Though there is so much we can never hope to know, regarding especially the Order's coinage in Malta, (since over most of the period, the mint records, and in particular the mint accounts do not seem to have survived), *Chev. Denaro's* work will be simply invaluable if and when the Monetary History of Malta will be tackled by some enterprising historian. Meanwhile his well-presented Bibliography will remain of special interest to all lovers of numismatics and Maltese history. It should certainly not fail to find a niche in our libraries.

Michael A. Sant

Annales de l'Ordre Souverain de Malte, V. XXVI (1968), n. 4 pp. 89-126.

The *Annales de l'Ordre Souverain Militaire de Malte* is a quarterly publication edited by the Chancery of the Order of Malta in Rome. The contents of this last issue ought to be given for convenience of information: They are: Luis Alberto ACUNA: "*Un caballero de Malta en la antigua historia de Colombia*"; Alessandro BONNICI, O.F.M.Conv.: "*Evoluzione storico-giuridica dei poteri dell'Inquisitore nei processi in materia di Fede contro i Cavalieri del Sovrano Ordine di Malta — Parte Prima (1561-1614)*"; "*What a Pilgrim saw at Rhodes*" (texts selected and translated by Prince CHARLES OF SCHWARZENBERG); EDMOND GANTER: "*L'Icône de Notre-*

Dame de Philermme dans l'iconographie orientale"; and G.E. CALAPAJ: "La Chiesa di San Giovanni Battista, detta di Malta, in Messina."

L.A. Acuña (pp. 89-91) deals with that knightly figure "don Pedro Brado de Acuña" who served the Order of St. John between 1560 and 1606 not only in his country Spain, but also in the Mediterranean where he took part in several skirmishes but especially in the naval battle of Lepanto where he fought side by side with his intimate friend Cervantes Saavedra. Don Pedro Brado distinguished himself against Sir Francis Drake's incursions on Cadiz and Columbia (Venezuela) which latter country as Governor he strongly fortified and projected a sea passage joining the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean, a dream which preceded centuries the opening of the Panama isthmus.

A. Bonnici (pp. 92-102) contributes an article on the historical-legal development of the Inquisitor's powers in the proceedings on matters of faith against the Knights of St. John in Malta. Obviously this work is the fruit of careful research. It is clear that it was prepared when the author was away from Malta, and then completed by consulting the rich Archives extant in Malta on the subject. For the first fifty years of the Malta Inquisition, local Archives are far from satisfactory. As a result of this, the Author had to make an abundant use of many Archives scattered across the city of Rome. The argument dealt is really important. Infact the official historians of the Order are not always objective when they write about the relations of the Knights with the Inquisitors of Malta.

Ch. of Schwarzenberg (pp. 103-106) translated in to English a description of the voyage made by Lord John of Lobkowitz in 1505 to the Holy Land. He remained very edified with the works which the Knights of St. John were carrying out in the island of Rhodes and remained impressed with the figure of Grand Master d'Aubusson.

E. Ganter's notes (pp. 107-111) on the icon of our Lady of Philermos complement the article of Joseph Camilleri in the present issue.

G. Calapai (pp. 112-121) gives a historical account, accompanied with prints of original illustrations, of the Knights of St. John Church in Messina which was dedicated to the Patron Saint of the Order. The author believes that the Church was the first Priory of the Order in Europe. Throughout the centuries this Church and Priory became the centre of many activities performed by the Knights. In 1591 Grand Master Verdala contributed large sums of money for its rebuilding. It was very badly damaged during the 1908 earthquake and what remains today is the facade and parts of the internal structure.

Anarew Vella.