

BOOK REVIEWS

P. Andrew Vella O.P.: *An Elizabethan - Ottoman Conspiracy*,
Printex Ltd., Malta, 1972. 168 pp., illus.

For over a year now, historians of the Elizabethan period and the Mediterranean area have been eagerly awaiting the results of Professor Andrew Vella's long and careful researches into the Anglo-Turkish plot to seize Malta in the years immediately preceding the Spanish Armada. On 20th December, 1970, an article in the *London Times* revealed that Professor Vella had discovered a number of documents pointing to the existence of a plot by Elizabeth I's government to seize Malta and thus embarrass her Spanish enemy — a pre-emptive move of considerable strategic vision. Professor Vella has produced his book as the third number of the *Royal University of Malta Historical Studies*, and Printex Ltd. of Malta have made a tasteful job of the actual publication. Due credit must be paid to Professor Vella for seven years of painstaking and often extremely difficult research, the results of which are now offered to scholars for the first time. And as a Maltese, a Dominican Father and a professor of History, who could be better qualified than Professor Vella to have brought this task to a successful conclusion? His researches have taken him from Malta to Rome, and even to documents from Trinity College library in Dublin, for the Inquisitorial point of view; and to the British Museum Library in London for the English standpoint.

The work is divided into two almost equal parts. The second half consists entirely of transcripts of the documents upon which Professor Vella's thesis is based, and the excellent photograph of a page of manuscript, torn, moth-eaten, and well-nigh illegible, gives some idea of the author's task. The first half tells the narrative which these documents reveal; it is in English, whereas the transcripts are in Latin, Italian, or Spanish — or even sometimes, as the author remarks, in "a sort of Spanish-Italian". Definitely a book for scholars by a scholar.

The English narrative presents a detailed picture of English maritime penetration of the Mediterranean in the 1580's. Professor Vella is careful not to overstate his case, and what emerges for the intelligent layman from this book is a strong impression of Walsingham making use of commercial enterprises in the Mediterranean to build up an intelligence blueprint for the possible English seizure of Malta in alliance with the Turks. What is in doubt is whether this planning for an eventuality ever developed into the actuality; certainly the Inquisition in Malta believed that it did, and reported accordingly. But they may have been predisposed

to believe the worst, and some of the testimony of Englishmen interrogated in Malta by the resident Inquisitor is manifestly of doubtful reliability. This is a fascinating book, for it contains the fascinating possibility — if not more — that England cast thoughtful eyes on Malta 220 years before the Island was ceded to her.

Richard T. Beck

ANONYMOUS: *L-Istorja tal-Partit Nazzjonalista*. Lux Press, Malta, 1972, 135 pp., illus.

It is the first time that a history of the Nationalist Party has been written and the author, who has chosen to remain anonymous, indicates that he just wanted to make an attempt to condense a sketch-history of the oldest Maltese political party.

The book, which is illustrated, is divided into fourteen chapters covering events between 1880 and 1962. It gives information about Nationalist congresses, electoral programmes and details about various nationalist newspapers and activities.

The history of the Party goes back to the last decades of the 19th century when a group of intellectuals took the initiative to lead the Maltese in their demand for constitutional reform. The first outstanding leader was undoubtedly Fortunato Mizzi who was very popular especially among the Gozitans and who soon became known as the 'Pater Patriae'. He started his campaign for a respectable constitution based on self-government by the publication of such papers as *Il Risorgimento* (1883). Another personality, Filippo Sceberras, led the *Comitato Nazionale Maltese*. These were followed by the setting up of two Nationalist groups: the *Associazione Politica Maltese* (1915) of Mizzi, which proposed the formation of a Popular Council to demand a responsible government, and the *Comitato Patriottico* (1910), later known as the *Unione Politica Maltese*, which was led by Mgr. Panzavecchia. The Mizzi group led to the formation of the *Partito Democratico Nazionalista* the statute of which was approved on 10th May, 1921. Its first electoral programme proposed, among other things, the establishment of district committees, social assistance, the development of tourism, industry, commerce and agriculture, reforms in the educational system and the setting up of arbitration councils for trade disputes. Mgr. Panzavecchia led the Nationalists to their early victories, but this is given only a slight importance by the author. The P.D.N. and the U.P.M. amalgamated in 1925 to form the Nationalist Party.

In 1915 Enrico Mizzi contested the election for the first time. From the earliest days of his political career, he made demands for Dominion

Status or full responsible government. He considered the 1921 Constitution as "inadequate". In 1917 he was imprisoned in Verdala Barracks, Cospicua, because of his political assertions. Another bold exponent of Nationalism to be imprisoned later for practically similar reasons, was Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici. The Strickland vs Church Crisis and the Language Question developed in the 1930s. In 1933 the Governor suspended the Constitution and prohibited political activity. The Party received a hard blow when, as the Second World War approached, Enrico Mizzi and others were illegally deported to Uganda. Their deportation was highly criticized by Sir Ugo Mifsud in his last speech in parliament. It was during this era that George Borg Olivier entered the political scene to steer the helm of Maltese Nationalism.

Back in Malta after the War, Enrico Mizzi entered once more into the political arena: he proposed the establishment of a unicameral assembly and requested complete autonomy for Malta. The Nationalist Party also made demands for Malta's rightful share in the Marshall Aid and other American Assistance to Europe. The Party gained a minority government in 1950. Enrico Mizzi was elected Prime Minister but was soon to die in office on 20th December, 1950. George Borg Olivier succeeded him as leader of the Party. He led the Nationalists to power in 1951 and in 1953 when they formed a Coalition Government with the Workers' Party of Dr Paul Boffa. In 1955 the Nationalists found themselves in the Opposition when the Malta Labour Party of Mr. Mintoff proposed the 'Integration Plan'. The discharges of Dockyard workers and the breakdown of the Integration Talks led to a political crisis and the British Governor declared a state of emergency. The Nationalists continued with their demand to have Malta a "full and free member within the Commonwealth" and, at the same time, expressed their views on the Labour Party vs Church crisis that had arisen. In 1962 constitutional government was restored and the Nationalists succeeded in gaining power: in August 1962 a formal demand for Independence was made.

Besides such information, the Author adds an *Addenda* in which he gives a list of Party Secretaries and Candidates who have contested the Elections between 1921 and 1962. Though there are many passages in quotes and some dated references, the book lacks an index and documentary references which one would expect in a scientific monograph. It would have been more rewarding had it also included information about the Party's district organization, its achievements while in office and its various memoranda. Nevertheless this publication could certainly serve as an incentive to encourage greater research in contemporary political history.

C.G.S.

ALFIE GUILLAUMIER: *Bliet u Rħula Maltin*. Progress Press, Malta, 1971, 265 pp., illus., biblio., introduction by J. Galea.

The history of the Maltese towns and villages is part of our national heritage. Different villages grew up as a result of gradual settlements in different parts of the island, at first mostly within the southern area nearer the Grand Harbour. Moreover the Maltese village or *raħal* has various characteristics which indicate that it was always considered to be the centre of civic and religious life especially for the peasants and lower classes. Some villages, such as Siġġiewi and Żebbuġ, grew up because of the rich fertile grounds around them while others because of traditional local trades. The development of ancient fortified places as Mdina and the origins of walled cities as Valletta and Senglea are also certainly worth studying.

In the history of each town or village, the author gives information about the growth of its population, the origin of its names, historical details about the parish church, smaller churches and chapels, public institutions including the building of schools and hospitals, towers and fortifications and archeological remains. The coat of arms and the motto of each place except Birzebbugia, Lija, Marsa, Mdina, Mgarr, Rabat, San Pawl il-Baħar, Santa Venera and Marsascalea, are given though their origin is not explained.

This book could be helpful to all those interested in local history and especially to teachers who may wish to deal with aspects connected with environmental studies.

C.G.S.

GUZE' GALEA: *Malta fl-Imġħoddi*, Vol. I. Klabb Kotba Maltin, Lux Press, Malta, 1972, 102 pp., illus.

This is a collection of short essays about particular episodes, curiosities, local traditions and historical buildings. The author simply wants to provide the reader with reminiscences of the past in order to help him build up the characteristics of bygone days.

Particular everyday events are brought back to life by references to the fishmonger and the Market, the reading of the *bandi*, the Maltese Regiments, the Maltese boat and the costumes of Maltese women. There are also brief descriptions of notable events such as the building of windmills, the Cottonera fortifications, the laying of the foundation stone of the Breakwater, the building of the Valletta New Market and the Duke of York's visit in 1901.

The essays are illustrated with reproductions of lithographs, paintings

and old photographs. But there are certain things which, one is sorry to state, should be corrected: the description of *Putirjal Minn Gewwa* does not tally with the picture reproduced on which it is based (p. 9), nor does the one referring to *Fuq l-Imtiehen* (p. 62).

The contention that there were no windmills in Malta before the coming of the Hospitallers because they could draw the attention of corsairs, raises an eyebrow and causes some surprise. The statement that the Cottonera gate leading to Zabbar is St. Helen's Gate (p. 52) gives the impression that the author has mixed up the name of one of the gates of the Firenzuola Bastions with that of one of the Cottonera fortifications. St. Helen's Gate pierces the Firenzuola and leads the way to Zejtun. The Latin inscription is dated 1736 and says that the work was completed during the days of Grand Master Vilhena. One should also note that the British did not introduce the beating of drums to announce the reading of public notices or *bandi*.

It is earnestly hoped that these flaws would be corrected in order to make the publication really worth reading to revive the reminiscences of the 'good old days'.

C.G.S.

HENRY FRENDO: *Birth Pangs of a Nation — Manuel Dimech's Malta*. Mediterranean Publications Ltd., Lux Press, Malta, 1972, 188 pp., illus.

Interest in the life and political activity of *Profs.* Emmanuel Dimech has been revived lately. This is partly due to Mr. Frendo whose earlier work, *Lejn Tniissil ta' Nazzjon*, was published in 1971. Frendo states that he intended to present "the genuine, objective expression and record of past events" so that by means of an objective exposition of the man and his works, he would be able to ensure the rehabilitation of Dimech. Frendo has sought to concentrate on Dimech's original contribution as a thinker and an activist. In fact the book lacks some factual precision in that there are certain aspects of Dimech's life, such as his criminal court cases, his imprisonment period, his years in exile and his family life, which have been quasi-completely ignored.

Nevertheless one cannot fail to realize that Dimech created a stir in his own days. Born in Valletta in 1860, Dimech was orphaned when still a very young child. He grew up in poverty. In 1878 he was found an accomplice in a murder and was condemned for twenty years imprisonment. He left prison in 1890 and emigrated to Tunis. Returning to Malta a few months later, he was re-imprisoned in 1891 for uttering counterfeit money. He was freed in 1898.

Prison was for Dimech a beneficial thing as it served to mould

his character and provide him with a unique education which later helped him to pose as a *professur*, a journalist and outstanding leader of the proletariat. In prison he was influenced by the chaplains who allowed him the free perusal of their library.

Once out of prison, Dimech plunged into activity. Having mastered six languages, including German and Russian, he founded a private school which became known as *Istitut Dimech*. To help him in his teaching career, he published various teach-yourself books. He also wrote satirical poems criticising the Establishment, a short satirical story called *Majsi Cutajar* and a voluminous romance with a Russian background, *Ivan u Pascovia*. He started his journalistic career by publishing the weekly *Il-Bandiera tal-Maltin*, a newspaper which directed its criticism against the civil and ecclesiastical establishment. He also wrote articles in other papers. In 1911 he founded a society which became known as *Ix-Xirka ta' l-Imdawlin* (Society of the Enlightened) in order to promote popular agitation and political activity. The principles of this society were expounded in an important manifesto known as *Is-Sisien tax-Xirka Maltija* (1914). His followers soon became known as Dimechjani.

In 1905 Dimech proceeded to Genoa "to accomplish certain matters". While there he was influenced by Mazzinian activities and probably he took the opportunity to visit central Europe. Frendo also adds that in 1907 Dimech was probably in Northern Europe (p. 67). He was back in Malta in 1911 when because of his attacks against superstition, certain forms of religious practices and beliefs, the activity of certain members of the clergy and parochial antagonism, a pastoral letter was issued admonishing his papers to speak of ecclesiastical authority with reverence. Two pastoral letters condemned his liberal teaching and excommunicated him and his society for showing contempt for ecclesiastical authority.

Dimech's political activity attracted the attention of the working class and aroused the suspicion of the Establishment. He called the lower classes to unite in his *Xirka* the members of which were expected to be prepared to fight for their rights. Dimech spoke for social justice and the protection of workers, the setting up of craft-guilds, the emancipation of women, revolutionary education of youth, the reform of the courts and the prisons. He hoped to instil patriotism by encouraging his followers to appreciate Malta's national heritage, the Maltese flag and the Maltese language — he expected the Maltese to have their own national anthem and a standard orthography for their language.

The Dimechjani propagated Dimech's teaching even by holding corner meetings. They wanted Malta to be economically and politically autonomous. For this purpose they proposed to encourage local trade, to increase employment in the private industry and to diversify the economy

of Malta by boosting tourism. Dimech even thought of reviving the 'Maltese Navy'. He argued that Malta belonged to the Maltese and that the British had used it only for their own interest. He felt that the Maltese should even revolt to oust the British and that France should serve as a model for a Maltese Republic.

Such radical activity could not go unheeded by the British Colonial Government. During a protest march organized by the Dimechjani on the 23rd August, 1914, Dimech was arrested by the Police. He was soon shipped to Egypt where he spent the rest of his life in exile. In Egypt he made contacts with the Maltese novelist Juan Mamo and many Young Turks. He died in Alexandria on the 18th March, 1921.

Mr. Frendo took some pains to compile his book which also contains a review of the socio-political transition in Europe and the general situation in Malta during the 19th century. His research is based on interviews, Dimechian publications including newspapers and leaflets, recent articles in Labourite papers, Government reports and published works. Some unpublished departmental studies of the Department of History, R.U.M., were also found useful.

An objective historian, however, cannot fail to raise some points with regard to Frendo's work. Besides an abundance of mixed metaphors and a good many solecisms there are other failings which one hopes that Frendo would correct. Thus there is no exact information about Dimech's arrest and exile (p. 158). The footnote on p. 58 seems to be misplaced: it is rather an explanatory note related with the assertion rightly made by Frendo in p. 59, that Dimech was out of prison by 1898. Moreover the statement that the sculptor Vincenzo Dimech was probably Dimech's relative is only a plausible hypothetical conclusion (p. 56). So is the explanatory note on the Cover Picture (Cover 2). The reproduction of the stirring music of the *Xirka's* anthem is rather weak (p. 179).

It is earnestly hoped that research in official correspondence, Malta Government Records, Police Records and documents found in the P.R.O. London, will help to throw more light on *Profs.* Dimech and his *Xirka ta' l-Imdawlin* as well as their influence on the Maltese society.

C.G.S.

INEZ SOLER: *Mis-Smewwiet Feġġet Kewkba*, Valletta, Guido Saliba, 1972, pp. vi, 42 pp. Printed at the Veritas Press, Malta.

Catholic Literature is often charged with the boring desire of edifying at all times, even at the cost of causing a rupture between thought and art. Nobody is expected to be as meek and mild as the authors who are guilty of writing such sugared and honeyed books, although that is what

such works seem to imply. Their aim is noble enough but the medium they use is feeble, maybe insincere. Inez Soler avoids all glossy and syrupy language. Her manner is direct and simple, guided by her taste of vivid imagery, and her balanced sense of poetical invention.

Her dialogue is as real a conversation as human beings hold among themselves. It opens out with vital ideas and glitters with sharp and bright words. Her characters are human: they are interested in their surroundings: they are inquisitive and enthusiastic.

In this drama St Dominic is shown as a saint and as man for in him runs the fire of many human passions and troubles. He was of medium stature, his health was delicate, his life was short but he enriched the world with the immortal Order of Preachers. Around him whirl a golden cycle of legend, stories, and actions — natural and miraculous — which impress man's imagination as did the light which dawned over Bethlehem twenty centuries ago. Despite his poverty the fulness of life blossomed in this humble man. I suppose Inez Soler was aware of this Dominican miracle when she wrote her drama.

By this slight glance of her play one can see how old stories are renewed. From an antiquated theme the author draws a fitting answer to those who judge catholic drama as lacking of the form of beauty that appeals to the modern stage.

F.D.M.

MICHAEL GALEA, *Malta: More Historical Sketches*, Veritas Press 1971, pp. 90.

In this anthology Mr. Michael Galea gives us an account of some important events such as W. Thackeray's and Garibaldi's visits to Malta, the first Train Journey in Malta, the Jubilee celebrations of Queen Victoria in Malta, the removal of G.M. De Vilhena's statue from Valletta, etc., which all took place during the 19th century.

The author has inserted the word "More" in the sub-title since this is the second volume of the series. Having the writer met an encouraging response to his first collection of essays, continued his research and published this second collection which, in my opinion, are superior to the previous ones.

We confidently recommend this anthology to all lovers of Maltese History. Erin Serracino Inglott contributes an introduction.

A. V.

ALESSANDRO BONNICI O.F.M. Conv.. *Evoluzione storico-giuridica dei poteri dell'Inquisitore nei processi in materia di Fede contro i Cava-*

lieri del Sovrano Ordine di Malta. Roma, 1970. 51 pp.

Fr. Bonnici's scholarly interest and serious research in matters touching the Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta require no introduction.

In this monograph — an extract from the *Annales de l'O.S.M. de Malte*, — Fr. Bonnici presents us with the results of his research in a clearly delimited area of activity of the Inquisitors in Malta, namely their jurisdiction over members of the Order in matters of Faith and, by extension, in matters somehow or other, however remotely, connected with the Faith. He traces the vicissitudes of this authority over the whole period during which the delegated Tribunal of the Inquisition was active in Malta, a period covering almost two and a half centuries (1561-1798), which he wisely divides into three sub-periods constituting as many distinct stages of development. A fourth section of the monograph is devoted to the attention Inquisitors gave to freemasonry in Malta, particularly among the members of the Order, from about the middle of the eighteenth century, when this phenomenon first appeared in Malta, onwards.

Since the author examines this problem over such a long period and at considerable depth, gathering information from a wide variety of sources, mostly unpublished, to ensure not only historical accuracy but also a balanced view of how matters stood, he prudently and correctly concentrates on a very precise point of relations between the Order and the Inquisitor. It is true that the number of cases strictly concerning the Faith and involving members of the Order was extremely small, as the author repeatedly admits, with the result that it would seem that the subject of this monograph may have had little practical effect on relations between the Order and the Inquisitor. Yet the principles of jurisdiction involved and their 'political' consequences were such, given the socio-religious atmosphere of those times, that this matter led to an antagonism of the Order towards the Inquisition that would appear to the unwary to be out of all proportion to the material number of cases involved. The author substantiates this importance by a judicious use of anecdotes. While making the monograph more readable, these anecdotes not only detract nothing from scientific value of the work but clearly enhance it.

We should be grateful to Fr. Bonnici for yet another contribution to our knowledge of the Inquisition in Malta and of the history of the Order in Malta. While one may beg to differ from his apparently apologetic appraisal of the Order and its members among his concluding remarks, one cannot but agree with him on the need of hard work, diligence and accurate examination and distinction of sources for successful research in this field.

Annetto Depasquale