

# QUINTINUS (1536) AND ST. PAUL'S SHIPWRECK IN MALTA

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Johannes Quintinus Haeduus (or Jean Quintin, as otherwise known) was born on 20 January, 1500 at Autun in France. As a priest he joined the Order of St. John of Jerusalem and was in Malta with them from 1530 to 1536. During this period he was chaplain of the French Knights, "Uditore" of Grand Masters L'Isle Adam and Di Ponte, and wrote a description of Malta in Latin, entitled *Insulae Melitae descriptio*. This book, which he finished in Malta in 1533 and published at Lyon in 1536, was re-edited in 1540, 1541, 1566, 1600 and 1723-25, and translated incompletely into Italian in 1545 and 1566. (1) Apart from the geographical, archaeological and sociological aspects, this description includes also Classical references to Malta as well as the Pauline tradition relating to Malta. It is with the latter that we are concerned here, viz., St. Paul's shipwreck in Malta.

Quintinus deals with the Pauline tradition in folios Clv., C2 and C2v. With regard to the religious aspect of the Maltese people and their particular devotion to St. Paul, Quintinus was an eyewitness and a faithful reporter; regarding the episode of St. Paul's shipwreck Quintinus does not interpret here the Acts of the Apostles, but admittedly recounts the Maltese tradition. The Maltese were and are still proud to have been involved in the incident, and in the past they did all they could to defend their position as being the actual people and nation which St. Luke refers to. Until the 18th c. a theory was persistent placing the site of St. Paul's shipwreck in an island off Dalmatia by the name of Meleda. Such a theory, as exposed by, for example, Georgius, was challenged by Attardi and Ciantar, and pontifically later on by Pope Benedict XIV in the 18th c. (2) It is clear from Quintinus' book

1. I have already prepared an annotated edition, with introduction, and English translation and indexes, for publication at the Malta University Press. I have already worked on Quintinus in my B.A. (Hons.) dissertation, *The 1536 edition of Quintinus' Insulae Melitae descriptio*, Malta, 1976, and in my M.A. dissertation, *A commentary on Quintinus' Insulae Melitae descriptio*, Malta, 1977. Both dissertations can be consulted at the University library in Malta.
2. Cf. D.I. Georgius, *D. Paulus Apostolus in mari, quod nunc Venetus Sinus dicitur, naufragus et Melitae Dalmatensis insulae post naufragium hospes sive de genuino significato duorum locorum in Actibus Apostolicis. Cap. XXVII. 27-XXVIII. 1. Inspectationes anticriticae*, Venice, 1730; M.F.B. Attardi, *Bilancia della verità risposta al libro intitolato Paulus Apostolus in mari, quod nunc Venetus Sinus dicitur, naufragus, del P.D. Ignazio Giorgio Benedittino della congregazione Ragusina*, Palermo, 1738; J.A. Ciantur, *De B. Paolo Apostolo in Melitam Siculo-Adriatici Maris*

that the current opinion, except for the Maltese, was that St. Paul was shipwrecked in Meleda off Dalmatia. This explains why Quintinus does not interpret St. Luke's account (which he must have known very well) and apply it to Malta, but simply recounts the Maltese interpretation as referring St. Paul's shipwreck to their island: *Quam ab eis acceptam referam, ut potero (Clv.)*. Quintinus himself did not accept the Maltese theory, which explains the sense of humour and unbelief with which he recorded their view. Such expressions of humour and unbelief occur throughout his account. The following are some examples: *Lucae adducti, sicuti uolunt, annalibus ... quam sibi quoque persuasionem... sumpsisse uideri uolunt; Rem igitur sic extra controuersiam ponere conantur (Clv.); Rident illum nescio quem Euroaquilonem mari nostro (aiunt) et terris incognitum; quem admirantur quae noua orbis regio insufflarit illius sacrae historiae interpretibus. Hoc sibi modo Paulum astruunt nautae Melitenses (C2); ut haec insula non solum ab eo diligi, sed etiam pene incolae et custodiri uideatur (C2v.)*.

Since it has been scientifically discovered that the island of Malta was the one which St. Luke refers to, (3) the account in Quintinus still bears some points of historical and archaeological importance. Undoubtedly he remains a faithful testimony of the deep-rooted Maltese Pauline tradition in the 16th c., (4) Maltese marine interests, (5) their deep devotion to St. Paul, (6) the cures from St. Paul's Grotto at Rabat in Malta (7) and their miraculously harmless snakes; (8) he is however to be noted particularly for the following points.

Quintinus is apparently the first writer who points to the exact site of the shipwreck. Many writers in the past have given various interpretations, and Quintinus seems to have not been known to them, possibly because he wrote in Latin! That Quintinus is to be consulted here is important, for he

*insulam naufragio ejecto dissertationes apologeticae in inspectiones anticriticas R.P.D. Ignatii Georgii de Melitensi Apostoli naufragio, Venice, 1738.*

3. Cf. J. Smith, *The voyage and shipwreck of St. Paul*, London, 1848.
4. Clv.: *Nec enim ... tenacius certiusue credunt indigenae Petrum Romae fuisse quam Paulum Melitae.*
5. *Ibid.: quam sibi quoque persuasionem, nauigandi quadam ratione, cuius sunt apprimere periti, sumpsisse uideri uolunt.*
6. *Ibid.: Diuo Paulo consecrata est Melita, quem quondam natio illa Deum credidit, cuius mira quaedam tota insula priuatim ac publice religio est. Augustinus in ea templum, ubi nunc episcopi sedes, Paulo dicatum est. Et tota ea insula sacella.*
7. C2v.: *Ex eo, quod modo dixi, antro, nullo non die, per aduenas lapidum frusta efringuntur, quibus serpentum et scorpionum ictibus tota Africa et Italia, Romae etiam palam sese mederi affirmant. Plebs gratiam sancti Pauli nominat.*
8. *Ibid.: Praeterea (ut haec insula non solum ab eo diligi, sed etiam pene incolae et custodiri uideatur) Melitae nullum maleficum serpentis genus neque nascitur neque nocet aliunde inuectum.*

refers to the site of the shipwreck with the place-name of the region, still existing, that of St. Paul's Bay, and as being the same site (off the coast) on which a chapel was standing. *Visitur litus loci illius bi-/maris (Chersonesos Ptolemaeo dicitur, et uere est); nunc a Paulo hic uetustissime cognominatum, in quod nauem illisit. Ibi non ultimae uenerationis aedicula lapide extracta* (C2, C2v.).

Quintinus says that the site of the shipwreck has been named after St. Paul *uetustissime*, that is, from very ancient times, which means that the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, who came to Malta in 1530, could not have given the name to the locality themselves.<sup>(9)</sup> If we are to believe a very ancient tradition linking the site of the shipwreck with its place-name, then all suggestions of other sites must be rejected.<sup>(10)</sup> Quintinus not only refers the site to St. Paul's Bay, which is a beach in a Bay according to the account in the Acts,<sup>(11)</sup> but also to the very spot of the shipwreck. *Ibi*, he says, that is, *litus loci illius bimaris*, where the shore of that place is divided by a jut of land splitting it into two seas at Rdum l-Abjad, there was a chapel which, although Quintinus does not say it, was dedicated to St. Paul. He certainly says that it was *non ultimae uenerationis*, not the least venerated, as expected if it was dedicated to St. Paul. This chapel was built by the families Desquanez and Bordini, and was still there by 1610 A.D.<sup>(12)</sup> Further away from this chapel the foundation-stone of a tower (today still standing) was laid in 1601 A.D., and this event was witnessed by M.A. Axiaq who referred to the site of the tower as different and not too far from that of the chapel.<sup>(13)</sup> Hence the opinion held recently that the chapel here in consideration was transformed into the tower in the same bay by Grand Master de Wignacourt cannot be accepted as true.<sup>(14)</sup> The chapel was, after 1610 A.D., rebuilt completely by the same Grand Master, practically on the same

9. Such an opinion has been held by W. Burridge, *Seeking the site of St. Paul's shipwreck*, Malta, 1952, 21.
10. Cf. e.g. Smith, *op.cit.*, 102; A.A. Caruana, *Monografia critica della data e del luogo del naufragio dell'Apostolo San Paolo nell'isola di Malta*, Malta, 1902, 22; G. Faurè, *Li storia ta Malta u Ghaudex bil-gzejjer tahhom u il grajjet li saru fihom*, Malta, 1913, 1.186 n.1; Burridge, *op.cit.*, 39; L. Cutajar, *Fejn niżel Malta San Pawl*, Malta, 1953; P.P. Saydon, "The site of St. Paul's shipwreck", *Melita theologica* 14 (1962), 60; A.P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta*, Malta, 1974, 1.50 n.1. The jut of land referred to by Quintinus has been upheld as the most probable site of St. Paul's shipwrecks by M.M. Ballou, *The story of Malta*, Boston, 1893, 22-23.
11. Acts, 27.39:
12. Cf. G.F. Abela, *Della descrizione di Malta isola nel mare siciliano con le sue antichità... ed altre notizie, libri 4*, Malta, 1647, 26.
13. M.A. Axiaq, "Relatione della nuoua e grandissima deuotione introdotta nella S. Grotta di S. Paolo nell'isola di Malta", *Archives of the cathedral museum*, Mdina, Malta, f. 25v-26.
14. G. Galea, *Malta fl-imghoddi*, Malta, 1972, 15.

site, (15) but it received alterations in the original plan, with the addition of an arcade around three sides of it. These additions were again changed in a few minor ways, (16) but it was badly damaged in the last war. It was finally rebuilt in 1956 on the original plan as designed by Wignacourt. (17) The jut of land adjacent to the chapel is today occupied by a restaurant. Quintinus identifies this place with the *topos dithalassos* in the Acts by actually calling it *loci ... bimaris*. A *dithalassos* in Greek was a peninsula or an isthmus washed by the sea on both sides. St. Paul's ship, driven by a strong north-easterly wind, hit and got stuck in this jut of land (18) (not visible because of the rough sea), which Quintinus identifies with the *chersonesos* attributed to Malta by Ptolemy. (19) The first map of Malta which Quintinus produces in his book also illustrates the site of the shipwreck.

To conclude, Quintinus, although taking with a pinch of salt the Maltese tradition about St. Paul's shipwreck and his stay in Malta, reports for the first time what the Maltese had been handing down about this from generation to generation before the arrival of the Knights in Malta. Particularly of interest is the site of the shipwreck.

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15. Cf. Abela, *op.cit.*, *ibid.*

16. Cf. Q. Hughes, *The building of Malta during the period of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem 1530-1795*, London, 1967, 57-58.

17. Cf. *Report on the working of the Public Works Department for 1956-57*, Malta, 1957, 16.

18. Acts, 27.41.

19. Cf. PTOL. *Geog.* 4.3.13.