

THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIARY OF A MALTESE COUNTRYSIDE SYNDIC

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A few years ago, while carrying out research in the National Archives at Mdina, I came across what perhaps till today may be described as a unique document: the administrative diary of a Maltese countryside syndic which covers a period of ten months, from 1st September 1890 till 13th July 1891.

Dated 13th July 1891, this unique diary was written by Dr Rocco Carbone LL.D., the then Syndic of the Sixth Country District, and submitted by him to the Chief Secretary to Government Sir Gerald Strickland. Dr Carbone was the syndic of the Sixth Country District from December 1866 right up till the abolition of this post in December 1896. For certain periods, he was simultaneously syndic of the Fifth and Seventh Country Districts.

Various forms of local government existed on the Maltese Islands from 1773 to 1896, when all forms of local government were abolished by the Colonial Government. In 1839, a reform of the then existent system of local government was carried out. The countryside in Malta was divided into seven districts. At the head of each there was to be an officer called Syndic (or Mayor), chosen by the Governor, who was always to be a lawyer. The Syndic had to perform judicial and administrative duties.¹

Dr Rocco Carbone

The author of this diary, Dr Rocco Carbone, was the son of Vincenzo Carbone and Maria neé Muscat. Dr Carbone was born in Valletta around 1821, and he married Elizabeth Camilleri.² On 2nd July 1842, Rocco Carbone graduated Doctor of Laws from the University of Malta and, on the 13th of the same month, he was granted the necessary warrant by Governor Sir Henry Bouverie to exercise his profession in the local courts.

In March 1851, Dr Carbone was appointed clerk in the Commissariat Department. In 1854 and in 1857, he was appointed one of the Election Commissioners to conduct the election of members to the Council of Government. In July 1859, Dr. Carbone was appointed one of the Supplementary Judges in the Supreme Court.³ He took

1. W.L. Zammit, 'Forom ta' Gvern Lokali fil-Gzejjer Maltin (1773-1993)', *Tas-Sliema, Lehen il-Kunsill Tieghek*, April-June 2004, 28-30.

2. Public Registry Valletta (PRV), Act of Death 1501/1898. I am indebted to Dr Ray Mangion LL.D. who kindly supplied this information.

3. National Archives Malta (NAM), CSG 101/Freemantle, Vol. 89 (1896), No. 13, 501.

the oath of allegiance and of office as prescribed by Law before the Governor on 27th July 1859.⁴ In 1865, Dr. Carbone made his debut in the local political scene when he unsuccessfully contested the elections for the Council of Government. He polled only 145 votes and was not returned.⁵

Syndic of the sixth district

On 26th December 1866, Dr Giuseppe Preziosi the incumbent Syndic of the Sixth Country District (Żurrieq, Safi, Kirkop, Qrendi, Mqabba), was appointed Syndic of the Second Country District (Żebbuġ, Siġġiewi).⁶ On the same day, the Governor Sir Henry Storks appointed Dr. Carbone Syndic of the Sixth Country District,⁷ a post which he held, with the exception of a few brief intervals, until it was abolished in December 1896.

Dr. Carbone took up his new post, residing at Żurrieq, and set to work with great enthusiasm for the benefit of the inhabitants of his district as is attested by the following report, which was published in a local newspaper in November 1867:

Sentiamo con piacere che il Sindaco Dr. Carbone non tralasci un momento per impiegarsi con zelo ed attivita` a beneficio degli abitanti del suo distretto e che abbia pure tenuto delle conferenze col Governo per procurarsi dei mezzi a quelli abitanti alla sua cura affidati. Per tale atti di zelo, di attivita` e nel medesimo tempo di vera cristiana filantropia non tralasciamo di sinceramento lodarlo ed encomiarlo.⁸

Apart from his many duties as syndic, between 1867 and 1873, Dr Carbone like all the other countryside syndics, was *ex officio* President of the partly-elected District Committee, established by a legal notice in February 1867.⁹ In 1883, following the establishment of a school committee in which there was a government primary school, Dr Carbone was appointed *ex officio* member of the school committees of the villages of Kirkop, Mqabba and Qrendi, together with the parish priest of each respective village.¹⁰

4. Ibid., CSG/01/Le Marchant, Vol. 19 (1859), No. 2897.

5. *Malta Times*, 19.i.1865; *L'Ordine*, 21.i.1865.

6. NAM, CGS/04/38, No. 4764, 26.xii.1866.

7. Ibid., No. 4763, 26.xii.1866.

8. *Il Portafoglio Maltese*, 12.xi. 1867.

9. Zammit 2004, 30-1. For the minutes of the meetings of the District Committee of the Sixth Country District, presided by Dr Rocco Carbone, cf. NAM, CSG/01/Grant: Vol. 19 (1868), No. 2737; Vol. 22 (1868), N. 3155; Vol. 66 (1871), No. 9875.

10. NAM, CSG/04/59, Nos. 9021,9023,9032, 16.ii.1883. The duties of these committees were as follows: to visit the school weekly and to submit to the Director of Education quarterly reports on the conduct and efficiency of the teachers, the observance of the rules of the Department and the attendance of pupils and any other matters to which the Committee may wish to call the attention of the Head of the Education Department; to see that the regulations for the Religious Instruction of pupils were strictly adhered to.

In November 1869, following the retirement of Mr. Hector Zimelli from the post of Superintendent of Police, Dr Rocco Carbone presented a memorial to the Governor requesting to be appointed in his stead.¹¹ However his request was not accepted.

In December 1883, Dr Carbone was appointed to act as Magistrate of Judicial Police for the Island of Malta during the temporary absence on leave of Dr Francesco Mizzi.¹² As a result, Dr Carbone left his residence at Żurrieq and took up his duties in Valletta¹³ on 26th January 1884; on 4th July 1884, Dr Carbone was appointed Acting Magistrate for Malta and all English cases, including those of collision under the Merchant Shipping Act, were heard by him.¹⁴

In June 1885, Dr Giuseppe Falzon, Syndic of the First and Second Country Districts, was appointed one of the Magistrates of Judicial police in Valletta. Following this appointment, Dr Carbone was asked whether he would like to be appointed Syndic of both districts, or to remain Syndic of the Sixth District.¹⁵ He opted to retain the latter post.

Following a reform of local government carried out in 1880, the Governor was empowered to entrust the syndics with the administration of more than one Country District. As a result, between 1886 and 1895 Dr Carbone was surrogated and authorised to perform the duties of syndic in several other districts, which included the Fifth and Seventh Country Districts, while retaining the post of Syndic of the Sixth Country District.¹⁶

In 1895, Dr Carbone sent a memorial to the Governor, dated 3rd August 1895, requesting to be appointed as one of Her Majesty's Judges 'in consideration of my seniority, my long services, my uninterrupted loyalty to Government and the

11. NAM, CSG/01/Grant, Vol. 45, No. 6668.

12. NAM, CSG/04, Vol. 61, No. 11,114, 3.xii.1883. Dr G.B. Mifsud LL.D. was authorised to act as Syndic of the Sixth Country District during the absence of Dr. Carbone. Cf. NAM, CSG/04, Vol. 61, No. 11,132, 6.xii.1883.

13. NAM, CSG/01/Smyth, Vol. 41 (1891), No. 6006. With reference to this appointment, on 13th July 1891, Dr Rocco Carbone wrote as follows: 'I was quietly settled with my family at Żurricco, when all of a sudden I was ordered to take up the duties of Magistrate for Valletta, without delay which I did accordingly with great my sacrifice, being obliged to remove from Żurricco, and find another dwelling either in Valletta or in Sliema and situate my two boys in St Ignatius College.'

14. NAM, CSG/01/Freemantle, Vol. 89 (1896), No. 13,501.

15. NAM, CSG/04/68, No. 2693, 1.vii.1885.

16. Zammit 2004, 30; NAM, CSG/01/Freemantle, Vol. 89 (1896), No. 13,501. The following are examples: Malta Government Gazette (MGG), No. 3176, 10.i.1887, p. 5 – by Government Notice dated 4.i.1887, Dr Rocco Carbone, Syndic of the Sixth District, was authorised to act as Syndic of the Fifth and Seventh Districts until further orders; MGG, 22.xi.1890, p. 539 – by Government Notice dated 22.xi.1890, Dr Rocco Carbone was appointed Syndic of the Sixth and Seventh Country Districts; MGG, No. 3769, 17.ix.1895 – Dr Rocco Carbone was the Syndic of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh Country Districts.

ability which I still possess to perform the important and onerous duties devolving upon me'.¹⁷ However, notwithstanding his services, his request was once more not entertained.¹⁸

In 1896, the Colonial Government decided to abolish the post of Syndic.¹⁹ Dr Carbone, who with brief intervals had held this post for thirty years, in December 1896 – a fortnight before the abolition of this post – sent a letter to the Chief Secretary to Government Sir Gerald Strickland in which he stated that:

*As my health, my physical capacity and my mental faculties are as yet uncompromised it would be the height of my wishes to serve the Government in any way and capacity.*²⁰

In the same letter he also continued, *inter alia*, that he was never 'absent from duties, nor had any leave of absence on account of illness or any other cause'. Governor Sir Arthur John Lyon Freemantle could not, however, meet his request due to his advanced years. In fact, he stated that:

*Whilst fully cognisant of the amount of work performed in the public service by Syndic Carbone I feel myself unable to appoint that gentleman to one of the new posts having regard to his age.*²¹

Dr Carbone was thus forced to retire and, in recognition of his services, received a pension which was equivalent to two thirds of his salary.²² Following his retirement from the public service, Dr Carbone took up residence at 234 Prince of Wales Road (now Manuel Dimech Street), Sliema, where he passed away on 26th May 1898, aged 77, and was buried at the Lija cemetery.²³

As syndic, apart from his diary, Dr Carbone wrote hundreds of reports which he submitted to Government.²⁴ However, apart from these routine reports, in

17. NAM, CSG/01/Freemantle, Vol. 44 (1895), No. 6543.

18. T. Zammit, *Malta, The Maltese Islands and their History*, Malta 1971, 418. In 1895, Dr Agostino Naudi, Dr Giovanni Pullicino and Dr Zaccaria Roncali were appointed Judges in the Superior Courts.

19. W.L. Zammit, 30.

20. NAM, CSG/01/Freemantle, Vol. 89 (1896), No. 13,501.

21. *Ibid.*

22. NAM, CSG/04, p. 213, No. 3807, 29.xii.1896, Letter to Dr Rocco Carbone.

23. PRV, Act of Death 1501/1898. I am indebted to Dr Ray Mangion LL.D. for this information.

24. Cf., for example: NAM, CSG/01/van Straubenzee, Vol. 23 (1873), No. 3408 & Vol. 28 (1874), No. 4120; NAM, CSG/01/Lintorn Simmons, Vol. 1 (1884), No. 92. This last report, dated 25.vi.1884, is particularly interesting as it is a description of a political demonstration and meeting held at Żurrieq in June 1884.

December 1876, at the request of the then Chief Secretary to Government Sir Victor Houlton, he submitted a private memorandum with reference to additional jurisdiction to syndics.²⁵

Dr Carbone's diary, parts of which are being here published for the first time in the appendix to this article, is in the National Archives Malta in CSG/01/Smyth Vol. 41 (1891) No. 6006. It spans the period 1st September 1890 till 13th July 1891. During this period of nine and a half months, Dr Carbone was the Syndic of the Sixth District (Żurrieq, Safi, Qrendi, Mqabba, Kirkop) and of the Seventh District (Żejtun, Żabbar, Ghaxaq and Gudja). From the same diary it also transpires that, for some time, he also carried out the duties of Syndic of the Fifth District (Qormi, Luqa, Tarxien and Paola) because a number of references to this district are extant in this diary.

APPENDIX

The following excerpts from Dr Rocco Carbone's diary form a first-hand account of the duties of, and the various situations encountered by, a district syndic in 19th century Malta. The diary is not being reproduced in whole because most of it is a repetition of the day-by-day business carried out by these officials. Excerpts are denoted by asterisks.

GIORNALE

1^{mo} settembre 1890 – 13^{cl} luglio 1891

1890

- | | |
|--------|---|
| 1 Sett | Seduta Criminale nel Curmi 24 cause impiegate circa sei ore comprise altri doveri |
| 3 Sett | Accesso nello Ospedale Centrale sul cadavere di Giuseppe Souchet della Sliema chi si e' trovato annegato in Calafrana |
| 4 Sett | Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 12 cause, 2 ore impiegate |
| 5 Sett | Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 7 cause 2 ore |
| 6 Sett | Seduta Civile nel Curmi 31 cause oltre altri doveri: sei ore impiegate |
| 6 Sett | Il dopo pranzo sono andato nel Curmi per pagare lavoranti- due ore impiegate |

25. NAM, CSG/01/van Straubenzee 1876, No. 11,768.

- 6 Sett Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 1 causa un ora impiegata
- 8 Sett Seduta Criminale nel Curmi 32 cause oltre altri doveri: sei ore impiegate
- 30 Sett Ho preso nell'Ospedale Centrale la deposizione articulo mortis di Teresa Chetcuti del Zurrico
-
- 1 Ott Accesso nel Tarscien sul furto commesso con violenza a danno di Giuseppe Piscopo
- 1 Ott Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 34 cause oltre altri doveri, 5 ore impiegate
- 2 Ott Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 12 cause due ore impiegate
- 2 Ott Ho preso la deposizione di Giuseppe Decelis in occasione della morte di suo padre Francesco
- 3 Ott Ho preso nel Tarscien la deposizione articulo mortis di Margarita Micallef la quale e` stata colpita da un fulmine: ho esaminato pure un testimonio
- 3 Ott Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 27 cause altri oltre doveri 6 ore impiegate
- 4 Ott Seduta Civile nel Curmi 17 cause oltre altri doveri, 4 ore impiegate
- 4 Ott Pagati nel Curmi i lavoranti
-
- 3 Nov Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico un ora impiegata
- 3 Nov Accesso nello Ospedale Centrale sul cadavere di Luigi Magro del Casale Asciak:essendosi fatta l'autopsia
- 4 Nov Seduta Civile e Criminale nel Casale Curmi 16 cause oltre altri doveri 4 ore impiegate
- 5 Nov Seduta Civile Criminale nel Zeitun 17 cause oltre altri doveri 4 ore impiegate

- 5 Nov Accesso in Casale Luca sul cadavere di Maria Carmela Spiteri morta repentinamente
- 6 Nov Seduta Civile e Criminale nel Zurrico 16 cause tre ore impiegate
- 7 Nov Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 10 cause due ore impiegate
-
- 1 Dic Accesso nel Zurrico in occasione del furto con violenza commesso a danno del Barone Testaferrata Viani
- 2 Dic Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 6 cause due ore impiegate
- 3 Dic Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 15 cause oltre altri doveri tre ore impiegate
- 3 Dic Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 1 causa un ora impiegata
- 4 Dic Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 6 cause un ora impiegata
- 5 Dic Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 13 cause tre ore impiegate
- 9 Dic Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 26 cause oltre altri doveri 4/2 ore impiegate
- 10 Dic Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 20 cause oltre altri doveri 3 ore impiegate
-
- 1891**
- 6 Gen Accesso nell'Ospedale Centrale sul cadavere di Andrew Mifsud
- 6 Gen Ho preso la deposizione articulo mortis nel Zabbar di Margarita Piscopo ed ho esaminati due testimonii
- 7 Gen Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 14 cause due ore e mezzo impiegate
- 7 Gen Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 10 cause due ore e mezzo impiegate
- 8 Gen Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 38 cause oltre altri doveri sei ore
- 8 Gen Accesso in Delimara sul danno dispettosamente cagionato ad Annibale Seychell

- 8 Gen Accesso in Delimara sul danno dispettosamente cagionato a Grazio Mercieca
- 8 Gen Ho pagato i poveri del 6^o Dis^o due ore impiegate
- 8 Gen Ho fatto un inchiesta con aver esaminati diversi testimonii riguardo la caduta di una grossa pietra sopra la persona di Grazia Farrugia la quale si trova in pericolo di morte
- 13 Gen Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 18 cause oltre altri doveri si doveri 4 ore impiegate
- 10 Gen Mi sono portato nell Ospedale Centrale per prendere il detto articolo mortis di Grazia Farrugia
-
- 19 Feb Ho preso nel Zurrico la deposizione articulo mortis di Catarina Farrugia
- 24 Feb Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 28 cause oltre altri doveri 4 ½ ore impiegate
- 25 Feb Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 10 cause un ora e mezzo impiegate
- 25 Feb Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 10 cause due ore impiegate
- 26 Feb Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 30 cause oltre altri doveri 4 ore impiegate
- 26 Feb Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 1 causa un ora impiegata
- 26 Feb Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 1 causa un ora impiegata
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- 6 Apr Accesso nell Ospedale Centrale sul cadavere di Teresa Baldacchino della Micabiba morta repentinamente
- 7 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 48 cause oltre altri doveri cinque ore impiegate
- 8 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 25 cause tutte con molto imputati: 3 ore impiegate

- 8 Apr Ho pagato nel Zurrico i poveri del Distretto due ore impiegate
- 9 Apr Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 31 cause oltre altri doveri 4 ore impiegate
- 9 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun cinque cause due ore impiegate
- 9 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico una causa un ora impiegata
- 10 Apr Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 14 cause due ore impiegate
- 11 Apr Sono stato nel Zeitun per pagare i lavoranti ai quali ho pagati circa £142: tre ore impiegate
- 18 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun una causa un ora impiegata
- 18 Apr Ho fatto gli atti di nascita sul Zeitun: tre ore impiegate
- 18 Apr Ho preso la deposizione articulo mortis a Casale Asciak di Alfonso Cutajar
- 18 Apr Accesso in Casale Asciak sull' incendio avvenuto a danno di Antonio e Giovanni Cutajar
- 21 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 16 cause oltre altri doveri tre ore impiegate
- 22 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 18 cause: tre ore impiegate
- 24 Apr Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 14 cause due ore impiegate
- 25 Apr Sono stato nel Zeitun per doveri relativi lo stati Civili: 4 ore impiegate
- 28 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 12 cause due ore impiegate
- 29 Apr Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 12 cause 2 ½ ore impiegate
- 30 Apr Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 26 cause oltre altri doveri 4 ore impiegate
- 30 Apr Seduta Criminale sul Zeitun 6 cause ora impiegata
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- 26 Giu Seduta Criminale nel Zurrico 2 cause un ora impiegata
- 26 Giu Accesso nella Micabiba a danno di Caterina Cutajar
- 26 Giu Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 12 cause 3 ore impiegate
- 27 Giu Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun una causa oltre altri doveri relativi allo stato Civile 4 ore impiegate
- 27 Giu Accesso nell'Ospedale Centrale sul cadavere di Francesco Cutajar in continuazione dell'accesso nella Micabiba sull'incendio a danno di Catarina Cutajar
- 30 Giu Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 32 cause oltre altri doveri 4 ore impiegate
- 30 Giu Mi sono recato in Casale Asciak per esaminare il casi di Maria Buhagiar vuole rimetterla in qualche stabilimento Caritatevole
-
- 2 Lug Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 23 cause oltre altri doveri connessi alla Carità e pagamenti fatti cinque ore impiegate
- 6 Lug Accesso nel Zurrico sul cadavere di Giuseppe Calino morto per annegamento
- 6 Lug Accesso nel Chircop sul fatto commesso a danno del Parroco Barbara con aver dati [?] ad un [?] con polvere da sparo pesta vicino la sua casa
- 8 Lug Ho pagato i poveri del 6^o distretto: due ore impiegate
- 9 Lug Ho pagato nel Zeitun l' Out door Relief ai poveri del 7^{mo} Distretto tre ore impiegate
- 9 Lug Seduta Civile nel Zeitun 15 cause tre ore impiegate
- 9 Lug Seduta Criminale nel Zeitun 7 cause oltre altri doveri due ore impiegate
- 10 Lug Seduta Civile nel Zurrico 5 cause un ora impiegata
- 11 Lug Mi sono portato nel Zeitun per doveri riguardante lo stati Civili e della Carità
- 13 Lug Alcuni doveri nel Zurrico riguardanto la Carità e lo stato Civile

13 Luglio 1891

R. Carbone