

BOOK REVIEWS

William Zammit, *Printing in Malta 1642-1839 – Its cultural role from inception to the granting of Freedom of the Press, Malta 2008*, pp. xxx + 423, illustrated, ISBN 978-99932-0-535-7.

Normally, I commence reading academic publications by having a good look at the bibliography to note if the author is simply churning out a rehash of previous publication/s and to mark out whether primary sources have been tapped to present an original work. In this case, Dr Zammit has presented an excellent bibliography which can leave the reader literally breathless at the extensive research carried out in both primary and secondary sources. This book's bibliography – that includes research in nine different archives, 9 theses, 139 primary sources, and 190 published secondary sources – leaves no doubt whatsoever that his work is built on very solid foundations, is the fruit of research and personal writings based over a number of years and, equally important, denotes how the author has thoroughly understood and chewed other past but valid publications on printing in Malta. Analysing and presenting coherently such a *corpus* of works is no mean feat. The analytical index is very user-friendly and is certainly not just a dry list of entries. All this shows Dr Zammit to be not just a first-class researcher but also denotes an excellent use of his training as a professional librarian.

The book is logically and chronologically divided into three parts, thus evading flash-backs since this is a history book and not a novel. It is very important that the reader first delves into the short but informative preface where Dr Zammit first spells out his aims before going on to explain the divisions of the book. He points out that the writing of the history of printing is now much more than a mere chronology of events but has also evolved into a consideration of the fundamental role that printed matter has played as a means of communication with all the implications this has brought about. He therefore correctly quotes Francis Bacon who declared that printing changed '*the appearance and state of the whole world*'. Since communication studies is a branch of social history, the importance of this study knows no end. Dr Zammit has partly based his book on his revised research for his Diploma in Library and Information Studies and MA degree but these studies only comprised printing during the rule of the Knights of St John which came to an end in 1798. To complete his work, it was necessary for the author to research

Printing in Malta 1642-1839



William Zammit

further till 1839, the year when press censorship came to an end in Malta, a very logical year in which to end the book.

The first part, entitled *The Maltese Press during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, is mainly a chronology of the history of printing in Malta from its inception in 1642 to the end of the Order's rule in 1798 through material which has been thoroughly revised and updated. The author discusses the motivations behind the introduction of the press together with the difficulties encountered as well as other important specific issues that include ownership, administration, employees, equipment and production capacity.

The second part, entitled *The Eighteenth-Century Printed Product*, is much more important from the cultural point of view because the author deals with four important aspects: censorship and control of local printing; the press's clientele; the printed product and its readership; and the press as a publication house. The author considers this section to be very important and I agree because he is here discussing and portraying a section of the local cultural milieu with its better and worse aspects. Here Dr Zammit gives a very valid contribution towards a proper understanding of Malta's social history and, therefore, is to be congratulated for rising above reciting a mere chronology of facts to explain what was actually happening in a section of Maltese society, always within the parameters of publications and printing. One must keep in mind that this applies to only a section of the population because of the illiteracy then prevailing in the Maltese islands. One must also note the excellent use made of the Order's Archives section which deals with the press.

Maltese Printing Activity during French and Early British Rule is the subject dealt with in the third and final part of the book. The author analyses French bureaucracy, the so-called 'liberty' of the press and notes the existence of some numbers of the *Journal de Malte* which were unknown to us before he discovered them himself. In accordance with the political realities of the time, Dr Zammit deals with the evolution of the press under the British under two headings which reflect the protectorate and the subsequent colonial rule. Censorship was maintained through monopoly though three Protestant Missionary Societies and the Sicilian Regiment were allowed to own printing presses. Dr Zammit delves into what was printed during the first four decades of the nineteenth century, including the origins of the *Malta Government Gazette* which is still in existence today, but bereft of any political content though publications about history, flora and fauna, geology and literature saw the light of day. The last chapter of this section is about the insistence on press liberty which came about in 1839, the result of the deliberations and recommendations put forward by the Royal Commission of Inquiry of 1836. As noted in the epilogue of the book, by 1845 this liberty (subject to a law of libel) resulted in the setting-up of twelve printing-presses, five bookshops and ten book-binding establishments in Valletta alone, chapbooks (still popular in Malta till the 1970s) and the promulgation of a multiplicity of newspapers (including an occasional one in Maltese) which also communicated political ideas.

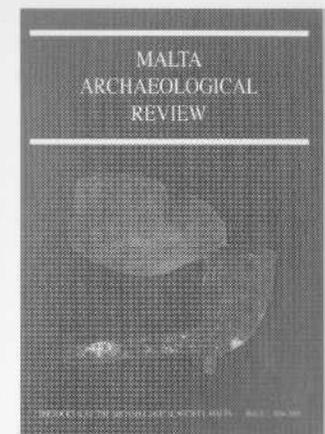
The book is profusely illustrated, thus adding to its usefulness, more so because quite a number of the illustrated items are rare, in private collections and/or in a bad state of preservation leading to the likelihood that they might be lost to future generations. Sixteen tables further expand the author's explanations whilst the appendix, together with the *in toto* presentation of six hitherto unpublished documents, illustrates the workings of a press together with excellent colour reproductions of books produced in eighteenth-century Malta. An excellent foreword by Dr Albert Ganado gives a bird's eye view of the contents. The notes are excellent but here I strongly regret the decision to place them at the end of the book. In my opinion, this decision has somehow marred an otherwise excellent presentation since I firmly believe that such academic works should always be footnoted. Gutenberg Press is to be congratulated on the excellence of the finished product and the same comment applies to Joe Zammit Ciantar for his design and production work. Dr William Zammit has certainly delivered in style what the title of the book leads the reader to expect. Quoting Francis Bacon once more, I have no hesitation in saying that this book is one *to be chewed and digested*.

Joseph F. Grima

P. Camilleri & A. Gingell Littlejohn (editors), *Malta Archaeological Review*, 2004-5, Issue 7, Malta 2008, pp. 72

The latest offering by the Archaeological Society of Malta presents a diverse array of papers highlighting the latest research in the Maltese Islands. This journal remains the only explicitly academic archaeological journal and, as such, its important role cannot be underestimated. It has often been argued that Maltese archaeology is largely dominated by the Temple culture. Yet, as this research shows, there is both plenty of scope in exploring other aspects of the Islands' diverse heritage and to approach Temple culture in fresh ways.

Comino remains very much the lesser known island, in archaeological terms. However, as Keith Buhagiar demonstrates, this tiny island has numerous remains. As the author notes, with the exception of the more architecturally visible modern remains, it is difficult for the non-archaeologist to appreciate Comino's more complex history.



Comino has yielded remains of Punic use and possibly more Roman or Early Christian tombs. While there is only limited evidence for Punic use of Comino as a burial site, the possibility that the island was ritually important during this period is very tantalizing. Certainly, the practice of burying across the water fits in with Punic burial customs and Buhagiar's research reveals the need to rethink the way in which we conceptualize Comino (and Punic archaeology). In particular, his research demonstrates the importance of rethinking the landscape and how we perceive both the land and the sea. Buhagiar also applies the landscape approach to medieval occupation. Given the relative (but growing) dearth of medieval material culture in Malta, this is particularly welcome and one hopes for more research into the topic. Coupled with recent excavations in Mdina, it is very encouraging to see the emergence of a more defined picture of medieval Malta in material terms.

The importance of the maritime landscape cannot be underestimated. This area of research has seen a welcome *floruit* in recent years, confirming once again that the local archaeology scene is vibrant in both fieldwork and intellectual terms. John Wood explores disease and quarantine via a collection of tobacco pipes recovered from Marsamxett harbour which formerly housed the *lazzaretto*. These facilities saw a high volume of activity which, again, offer scope for further research. Wood's detailed pipe catalogue offers a glimpse into how quarantined travellers passed some of their time, in the process highlighting the harbour's cosmopolitan nature. Continuing with the maritime theme, Timothy Gambin explores the now industrialized area of Marsa. Enjoying an advantageous geographical location, Marsa has both modern industrial heritage (which is perhaps not quite appreciated as such) and a much longer history of maritime-related activity. Gambin demonstrates the importance of careful and methodical textual analysis, coupled with fieldwork and more recent excavations. Given the scale of industrialization that has often negatively affected the Islands' heritage, this remains an important approach and, as Gambin notes, it is precisely because of this building activity that archaeological investigation should be a priority.

The usefulness of textual analysis informs the majority of the papers in this volume. Katya Stroud employs this approach to examine the current state of Haġar Qim and Mnajdra temples and explain current conservation strategies. This research is important both in terms of tracing some of the many narratives surrounding the temples, and also in mapping out their biography. The study of biographies, perhaps best highlighted by Arjun Appadurai's seminal *The social life of things: Commodities in cultural perspective*, can also be successfully applied to sites. As Stroud demonstrates, a biography of these two temples contributes to our understanding of how these sites have been perceived and managed, placing interventions in their appropriate context. Roger Le Chevrete, on the other hand, makes use of one of Houel's lithographs and a possible plan found on a limestone fragment in Tarxien to discuss the possibility of two broadly similar structures present at both Tarxien and the Xaghra Circle. The presence of such structures would certainly broaden

existing ideas on mortuary ritual, and it will be interesting to see how these relate to the forthcoming publication of findings from the Xaghra Circle.

Continuing with the prehistoric theme, David Trump revisits the Siculo-Maltese connection and the puzzle of Ognina. Building on Trump's extensive work, this paper re-examines existing notions in the light of new finds from Xaghra and an examination of a wider pottery repertoire from Sicily. The nature of the relationship between Malta and Ognina remains unclear, but Trump's analyses consider the possibility that Malta was a recipient and the later Ognina settlers – who eventually moved to Malta – may possibly have been involved (in ways yet unknown) with the end of the Temple period. Crucially, Trump raises questions which could inform future Early Bronze Age research.

George Azzopardi discusses a possibly Christian burial in Sannat, Gozo, leading to a discussion of the possible mix of religions in Gozo in the late Roman period. Ultimately, the burial's isolated location raises more questions than it answers, in particular regarding Gozo's mortuary landscape. One looks forward to more research by Azzopardi, whose contributions are steadily helping the creation of a more complete archaeological landscape in Gozo, especially with reference to mortuary practices. Finally, an exciting approach to the Maltese countryside is provided by Chris Hunt and Nicholas Vella. The puzzle of early historic agriculture in the Maltese Islands is perhaps one of the most exciting. While a stroll through what is left of the countryside may give the impression of deep time, the origins of the field system are not clearly known. A range of scientific analyses, combined with field surveys and cartographic and documentary evidence, offer one of the best avenues for solving this puzzle. In particular, palynology will help rebuild the environment, in the process shedding light on land-use and numerous other issues.

The diversity of research is one of the journal's strengths, coupled with its openness towards various methodological and theoretical approaches. As current research shows, it is clear that the Maltese Islands still have plenty to offer and, in many ways, the journal sets out new directions for research.

Isabelle Vella Gregory