

Mr. Brainbridge,
With the best Christian regards from
C. F. Schlienz. Malta, Sep^r 30th 44

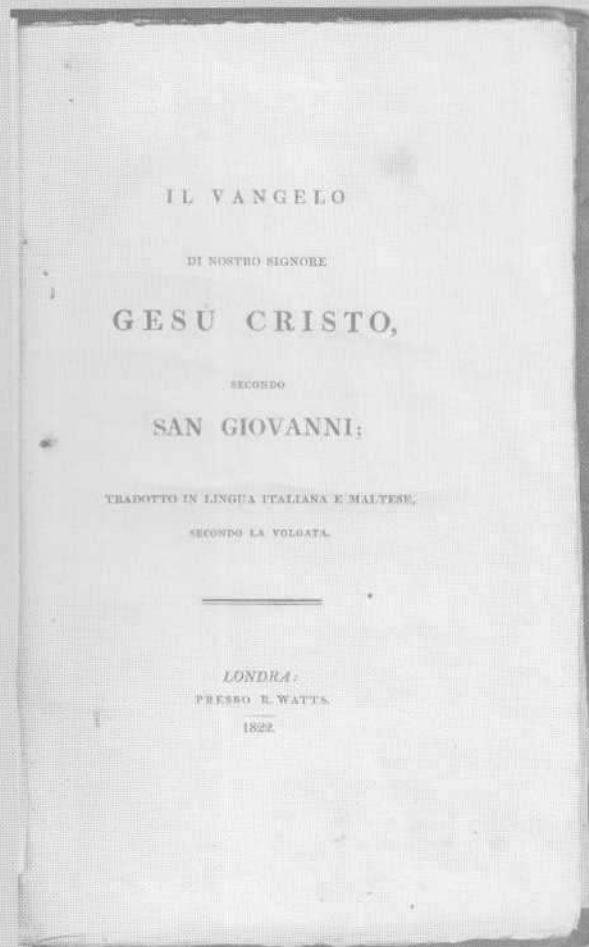


Fig. 1. (above) Cannolo article The signature of the Rev. C. F. Schlienz on a copy of his book on the Maltese language dedicated to a Mr Brainbridge dated September 30, 1838.

Fig. 2. The title page of the Gospel of St John containing a Maltese translation by Giuseppe Cannolo published in London in 1822.

THE TALENTS OF GIUSEPPE CANNOLO (1756-1845): An Appreciation

Albert Ganado

In October 2005 an international conference was held in Malta on "The Founding Myths of Architecture", organized by the firm of architects AP in collaboration with Heritage Malta. Architect Konrad Buhagiar, a partner of AP, invited me to deliver a talk on a subject of my choice and I opted for the theme "Discovering Atlantis: the personal adventure of Georges Grognet". It was while I was working on this paper that the name of Giuseppe Cannolo surfaced quite unexpectedly on an extremely rare print.

Not surprisingly, I was tempted to indulge in trying to find new data on Cannolo as there were some grey areas, including his date of death, in the biographical notes contributed by various authors, including Ninu Cremona, Professor Mgr. K. Sant, Mgr. L. Cachia, Frans Ciappara, and G. Cassar Pullicino. The latest monograph was published in a local weekly in 2006 by Olvin Vella who described the only known copy in the British Library of *La Via Sagra tradotta in Maltese da Gioseppe Martino Cannolo*, printed in Malta in 1796.¹

The Rev. Christopher Frederick Schlienz, Secretary of the Church Missionary Society, knew Giuseppe Cannolo when he was advanced in years. Naming him "Peppu Canolo", he described him as a knife-grinder, self taught, and who by the extensiveness of his oriental learning excelled almost all his countrymen.² The Rev. William Jowett, however, who preceded Schlienz, had written that Cannolo was a student of an eminent professor of Arabic and at the time of the Order he had acted as interpreter of the Muslim slaves.³

1 O. Vella, 'Il-Via Sagra ta' Cannolo', *Il-Ġens*, April 8, 2006, 22.

2 C.F. Schlienz, *Views on the improvement of the Maltese language and its use for the purposes of education and literature*, Malta 1838, 38. Schlienz was one of the few who spelt Cannolo with one 'n'.

3 K. Sant, 'Guzzeppi Maria Canolo: l-ewwel traduttur Malti tal-Vangelu ta' San Ġwann', *Sijon* (1973-1974), vol. 6, nru. 5, 8, quoted by Vella, 22.

In view of his outstanding ability, the Church Missionary Society employed Cannolo to translate the Gospel of St John. The translation was published in London in 1822 by R. Watts with the title *Il Vangelo di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo, secondo San Giovanni; tradotto in Lingua Italiana e Maltese, secondo la volgata*.

At about this time, Cannolo received another important commission. In 1819 a stone with a bilingual inscription, in Greek and Phoenician, was discovered in North Africa⁴ by the renowned orientalist Louis-Domeny de Rienzi, a native of the Département of Vaucluse in Provence. He had travelled widely in Greece and Africa with the Greek savant Ariston de Samos, and he was in Malta in the early 1820s. The Greek part of the inscription was translated for him by M. Pezzali, a Greek merchant from Parga. The Phoenician script was translated by Giuseppe Cannolo.⁵

De Rienzi left Malta in 1822 after depositing the carved stone with Grognet (or as he was wont to sign 'Grongnet') who took it upon himself to draw an exact copy of the carved stone with its two inscriptions. About five years later he sent the drawing accompanied by an explanatory text to Marquis Agricol de Fortia d'Urban, his Parisian friend, a renowned writer and archaeologist, and distinguished member of various Academies in France, Italy, and Germany.

Marquis de Fortia had the inscriptions lithographed in Paris, together with Grognet's write-up, to which he added a note of his own and the date April 30, 1829. The stone was lithographed in actual size (410 x 185 mm) on a sheet measuring 465 x 350 mm. Grognet's write-up and his signature was lithographed at the right flank of the stone, and it certified that '*Les mots Phoeniciens de cette inscriptions ont été traduits par M. Cannolo*'. This lithograph, engraved by the renowned Godefroy Engelmann (1788-1839), is an extremely rare item, with only one known copy extant in Malta.⁶

Grognet had an obsession that led to his undoing in the academic sphere: the discovery of the lost continent of Atlantis. In order to prove that the Maltese islands were the remains of Atlantis, he fabricated an inscription in the Atlantico-Phoenician alphabet on a large stone, proclaiming in 1826 that it had been unearthed at Città Notabile (Mdina).⁷ He then transcribed the inscription he had engraved on the stone and he sent the transcription to Marquis de Fortia announcing the amazing discovery! Together with the transcription, Grognet enclosed his own version of

4 'Discours prononcé à la Société Asiatique, par M. le Marquis de Fortia d'Urban le 7 Janvier 1828', *Annales de la Littérature et des Arts*, 379e livraison, tome XXX, Paris 1828, 5.

5 L-D. De Rienzi, *Questions importante de manuscrits et inscriptions antiques. Réponse à M. Le Marquis De Fortia d'Urban*, Paris 1832, 5. Also Fortia d'Urban 1828, 5-6.

6 The copy extant in Malta is in the author's collection.

7 Grognet had in his possession a latter dated May 7, 1826, signed by Don Giuseppe Felice Galea informing him that during deep excavations carried out in the foundations of the yard of his house at Notabile a large stone had been found, covered with what looked like a Phoenician script. The priest then donated (!) the stone to Grognet.

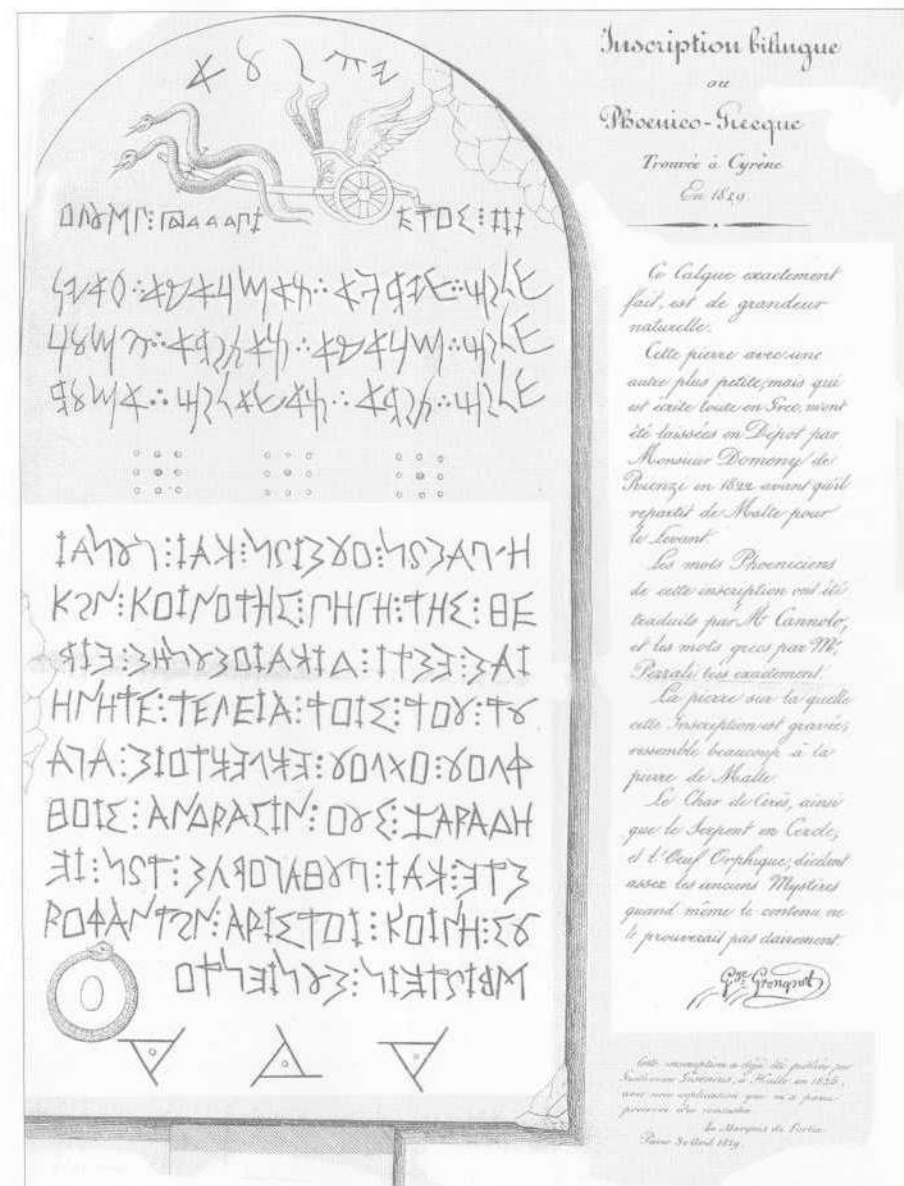


Fig. 3. A lithograph by G. Engelmann published in Paris in 1829 showing the bilingual inscription found in North Africa in 1819. The Phoenician script was translated by Giuseppe Cannolo.

the Phoenician alphabet ostensibly worked out on the basis of the characters used on the stone.⁸

When de Fortia enthusiastically addressed the Asiatic Society at a sitting of February 4, 1828, he informed the members that the Atlantico-Phoenician inscription on the stone had been copied with great care, and he was in possession of a second copy, similar to the first, accompanied by a translation made by Cannolo.⁹ M. le baron Silvestre de Sacy (1758-1838), who presided the sitting, pointed out that the translation '*faite par le professeur maltais Cannolo*' had defects. This can be taken to mean that the translation was quite acceptable, although defective. Grognet's inscription was also lithographed by Engelmann, but this time there was no reference to Cannolo's translation which results only from the printed proceedings of the Asiatic Society.

The Cannolo family was present in Malta since at least the first half of the 17th century. It was at that time that Caporale Antonio Cannolo married Caterina (surname not given) who bore him two sons (if not more) Domenico and Vincenzo. On October 12, 1670, Vincenzo married Veronica Pompor from Vittoriosa who made him a widower after a few years. On September 26, 1676, in Valletta he married Vincenza Chircop. Their son Petruzzo married Maria Psaila in Valletta on April 4, 1701, and they had two sons Giuseppe and Giovanni Battista who married Maria Teresa Mercieca at St Paul's Collegiate Church on June 23, 1743,¹⁰ who bore him two sons.

Giovanni Andrea was born to them in July 1751, while Giuseppe (who is our main concern) was baptised at the Dominican parish church of Porto Salvo on March 3, 1756. He was given the names Giuseppe, Paolo, Calcedonio, while his godfather was Giuseppe Calleja. His father was a sailor in the service of the Order's galleys. He died accidentally when he was hit by an oar. As no pension was granted to his widow Maria, she applied for the use of a room in Strada Stretta (today Strait Street), *sita sotto il Corpo di Guardia* (the Main Guard). Her request was granted on March 13, 1787.¹¹

This room was sited at 130 (not 30 as recorded by Mgr. Sant) Strait Street and, as from 1808 under British rule, it was rented to her son Giuseppe at 12 *scudi* per annum.

8 Fortia d'Urban proceeded to have the inscription beautifully lithographed in Paris by the renowned Engelmann, together with a separate lithograph of the Phoenician alphabet, based on the drawings worked out by Grognet. The lithograph titled *Alphabet Phoenicien tiré de la Pierre Atlantique* was reproduced in the author's 'Bibliographical notes on Melitensia - 2', *Melita Historica*, XIV, 1, Malta 2005, 78.

9 'Discours composé pour la Société Asiatique, par M. Le Marquis de Fortia d'Urban, séance du 4 Février 1828', *Annales de la Littérature et des Arts*, 384e livraison, tome XXX, Paris 1828, 12, fn. 3. Also *Archéologie. Inscription Atlantico-Phénicienne*, Paris 1829, 5.

10 NLV, Adami ms. 94, f. 511. Apart from the family tree of Giuseppe Cannolo in this manuscript, the author has come across other members of the Cannolo family in parochial records of the 18th century. In 1734 Rosalia was born to Paolo and Margherita Cannolo, while a Giovanni was born in 1738 to Raffaele and Maria Cannolo. A Raimondo was born to Giacomo and Maria Cannolo in 1742, while Vincenzo and Giovanna Inguina who married at St Paul's on August 16, 1741, had seven children between 1742 and 1757.

11 NLM, AOM 659, 152.

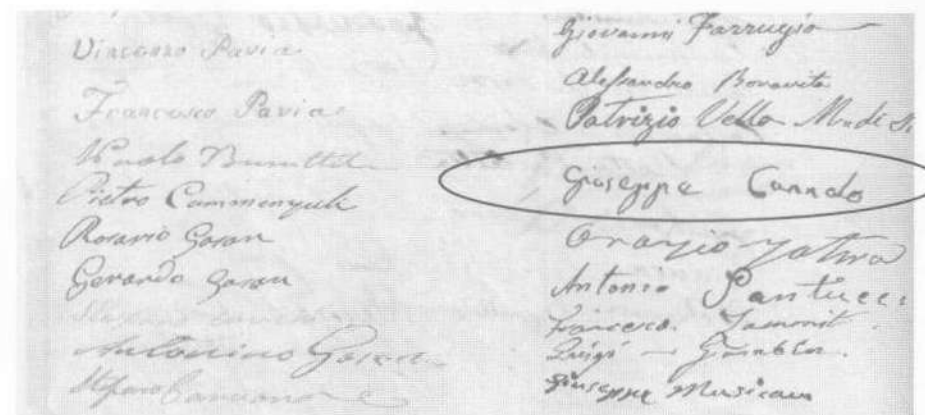


Fig. 4. The signature of Giuseppe Cannolo among the electors of Valletta appointing their representatives in 1836 to the *Comitato Generale Maltese* formed to petition the Royal Commission



Fig. 5. A lithograph showing the old church of St. Publius, Floriana, with its cemetery constructed in 1778 where Giuseppe Cannolo was buried in 1845

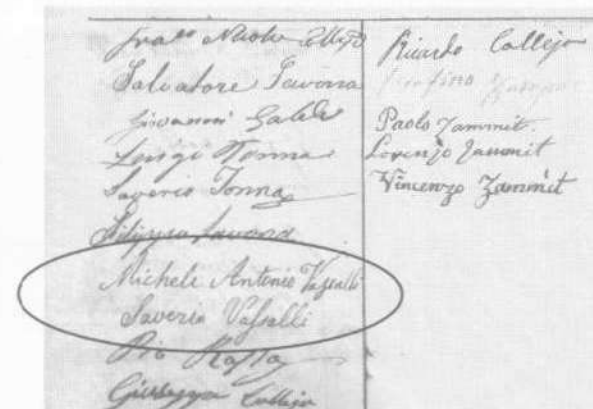


Fig. 6. The signature of Michele Antonio Vassalli and Saverio Vassalli, sons of Mikiel Anton Vassalli (1764-1829), among the booksellers of Malta appointing their representatives in 1836 to the *Comitato Generale Maltese*

No contract of lease was signed, it was just a verbal agreement. Giuseppe continued paying rent until at least the end of 1843, when he was nearing the end of his days.¹²

Shortly after he rented that room, Giuseppe married Maria Antonia Azzopardi, daughter of Andrea and Maddalena La Speranza, at the Collegiate Church of St Paul on January 22, 1809.¹³ In 1836 the 100 members of the *Comitato Generale Maltese* were chosen by 11,712 electors to submit the Maltese grievances to the two Royal Commissioners appointed in that year.¹⁴ When I was writing the story of the records of the *Comitato* for the Essays published in 2008 in remembrance of Hella Jean Bartolo Winston, I came across the signature of 'Giuseppe Cannolo' among the inhabitants of Valletta.¹⁵ He signed simply 'Giuseppe' and not 'Giuseppe Martino' as he called himself in 1796. The second name 'Martino' cannot be explained. It was not one of the names conferred upon him at baptism and no close relative seems to have borne that name. For some reason he must have adopted it during middle age, and dropped it some time later.

Giuseppe Cannolo was no academician. He never taught at high schools, but his contribution to human knowledge is nonetheless very valuable and noteworthy. Apart from the publications already mentioned, Cannolo translated the entire Old Testament and Thomas à Kempis and he left in manuscript a Maltese Grammar. These works were mentioned by the Rev. Schlienz in a letter dated October 26, 1837, and repeated in an anonymous letter published in the *The Malta Times* on July 5, 1840.¹⁶ The writer, who signed himself with the letter 'X' in a communication on the Maltese language, stated that the said three works were in the possession of private individuals. Indeed, Schlienz had written that the Grammar was in his possession, but its subsequent whereabouts are unknown. On the other hand, the English missionary Rev. Jowett recorded that on September 6, 1818, Cannolo had given him the translation of the last part of the New Testament. It was then that he started working on the Old Testament and by February 1819 he had finished Genesis and half Exodus, with a third of the Book of Psalms. Jowett described Cannolo as an eccentric genius, of very limited means, and yet he disdained receiving any money he did not earn.¹⁷

Although Schlienz's book on the Maltese language was published in Malta in 1838, his preface is dated November 10, 1837. At present, Schlienz wrote, 'I know of no Maltese who has bestowed any serious attention to the cultivation of his

12 NIV, Treasury Series B no. 132 (3), f. 89.

13 Cachia, 107.

14 A. Ganado, 'The Origins of the records of the 'Comitato Generale Maltese', *Guardians of memory – Essays in remembrance of Hella Jean Bartolo Winston*, ed. C.J. Farrugia, Malta 2008, 253-84.

15 Author's collection, vol. marked 'No. 10' and 'Numero Uno, II' of the records of the *Comitato Generale Maltese*, Doc. 45 (electors living in Valletta).

16 Schlienz, 38. See also *The Malta Times*, no. 19, July 5, 1840, 3 (letter titled 'The Maltese Language', signed 'X', dated July 4, 1840).

17 Sant, 8.

native tongue, except an old man, namely Giuseppe Cannolo'. Giuseppe was then 81 years of age but he had another eight years to live. According to an entry in a register of deaths at the National Archive, he died in Valletta on December 23, 1845,¹⁸ and was buried in the Cemetery of St Publius at Floriana, which had been constructed in 1778 by the *Universitas* of Valletta.¹⁹

Notwithstanding his long association with the Protestant missionary society, Giuseppe Cannolo, unlike the sons of Mikiel Anton Vassalli, did not abandon the Catholic faith. Indeed, Schlienz wrote that Cannolo was in many respects 'a zealous Roman Catholic', and he openly argued with one of Vassalli's sons that they should not have changed their faith.²⁰

Giuseppe Cannolo deserves to be better appreciated not only by those who cultivate the Maltese language but also by all those who love Malta as their native country and the good it had to offer over the centuries.

18 NAR, *Liber Mortuorum ab anno 1755. Usque ad annum 1848-49*, Letter 'C', entry December 23, 1845. See also *nota bene* on the frontispiece of the volume.

19 A. Ferres, *Descrizione storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1866, 233.

20 Schlienz.