



Maimuna's Marble tombstone (21st March 1174) found in Gozo between Xewkija and Sannat, now in the Gozo Museum.

THE ARABS IN MALTA

Godfrey Wettinger



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The Islamic Era in the history of Malta is the *pons asinorum* of Maltese historiography. No other period of Maltese history is so fraught with admitted or hidden psychological complexes, with unconscious fears and hates that imaginary skeletons in the national cupboard should become common property to the delight and scorn of all. Much the same attitude once characterised other parts of the Mediterranean littoral which had lived for centuries under the hegemony of the Arabs during the High Middle Ages only to pass through the trauma of a Christian Reconquista and the alienation resulting from the subsequent technological and economic superiority of European culture. In Spain until recently most of the leading scholars of Arab civilization have been non-Spaniards, like R. Dozy, E. Levi-Provencal, H. Terrasse and C.-E. Dufourcq, but for several decades now Spaniards have been coming forward with great credit to their scholarship, men like A. González Palencia, R. Menéndez Pidal, C. Sanchez Albornoz and Américo Castro, though the attitude of some might still verge on a love/hate relationship.¹ In Sicily the mighty achievement of Michele Amari still towers above all others, but much work has also been done by later Arabists like C. A. Nallino,² F. Gabrieli³ and U. Rizzitano,⁴ so that one can safely say that the traditional chauvinistic interpretation of Arab times is now relegated to the exponents of the folkloristic puppet shows and the other denizens of the Sicilian 'undergrowth of history'.

Bibliographical Outline

G. F. Abela⁵ and most later Maltese historians until recently⁶ have insisted in effect that the Muslim Arab rulers and their Christian Maltese subjects could have had nothing in common except presumably a fierce hatred of each other. Throughout early modern times Malta and the Maltese were caught up in the never ending crusade of the Knights against Islam on the one side and that of Islam's *jihad* against Christians on the other, and this is inevitably reflected in the interpretation Maltese historians traditionally give to their history 'under the Arabs'. Abela frequently preferred the secondary largely wishful accounts of Tommaso Fazello⁷ and Rocco Pirri⁸ of the achievements of Count Roger in Malta to Malaterra's primary⁹ one because the latter's account seemed to him 'less probable'; one might nowadays think that Abela could thus get rid of the Arabs quicker and earlier. Sebastiano Paoli's observation that Count Roger merely subjected Muslim Malta to the payment of tribute was rejected by Count Ciantar in 1772¹⁰ precisely because it contradicted in effect what Fazello and Pirri had written out of pure invention (their own or that of their sources). Confusion and error also resulted in large measure from the innumerable forged documents produced with consummate industry by abate Giuseppe Vella in the later eighteenth century.¹¹ Miège's account is in fact vitiated by his acceptance of some of the stuff put

into currency by Vella which he innocently found at second hand in a local manuscript.¹² G. A. Vassallo, commenting on this information, is reasonably diffident but seems to end up accepting much of it.¹³ A. A. Caruana's would-be major study is ruined by his belief that abate Vella could not have imagined all the details his documents allegedly record and weaves them in together with the better established ones.¹⁴

In 1896 A. E. Caruana argued at tedious length that the Arabs were so tolerant in religion and so few in number that their stay in Malta left little mark on the island and its inhabitants. He also strove to prove by unsound linguistic argument that the Maltese language was of Punic not Arabic origin.¹⁵ Much of this was echoed in excellent English by Augusto Bartolo in 1915.¹⁶ Back in 1896, A. Mayr had given the first adequate scholarly account of the Arab or Muslim period of Maltese history based on the documentation available at the time, but his opinions were ignored by most later Maltese historians until recently partly, perhaps, owing to their unfamiliarity with the German language.¹⁷ In fact, Ettore Rossi's introduction of a strong element of modern historical judgment on the Arab and Norman periods was probably more effective precisely because he wrote in Italian.¹⁸ Recently, A. T. Luttrell reviewed the matter again on three occasions and also carried out a thorough investigation of the 'invention' of the traditional accounts.¹⁹

Sources

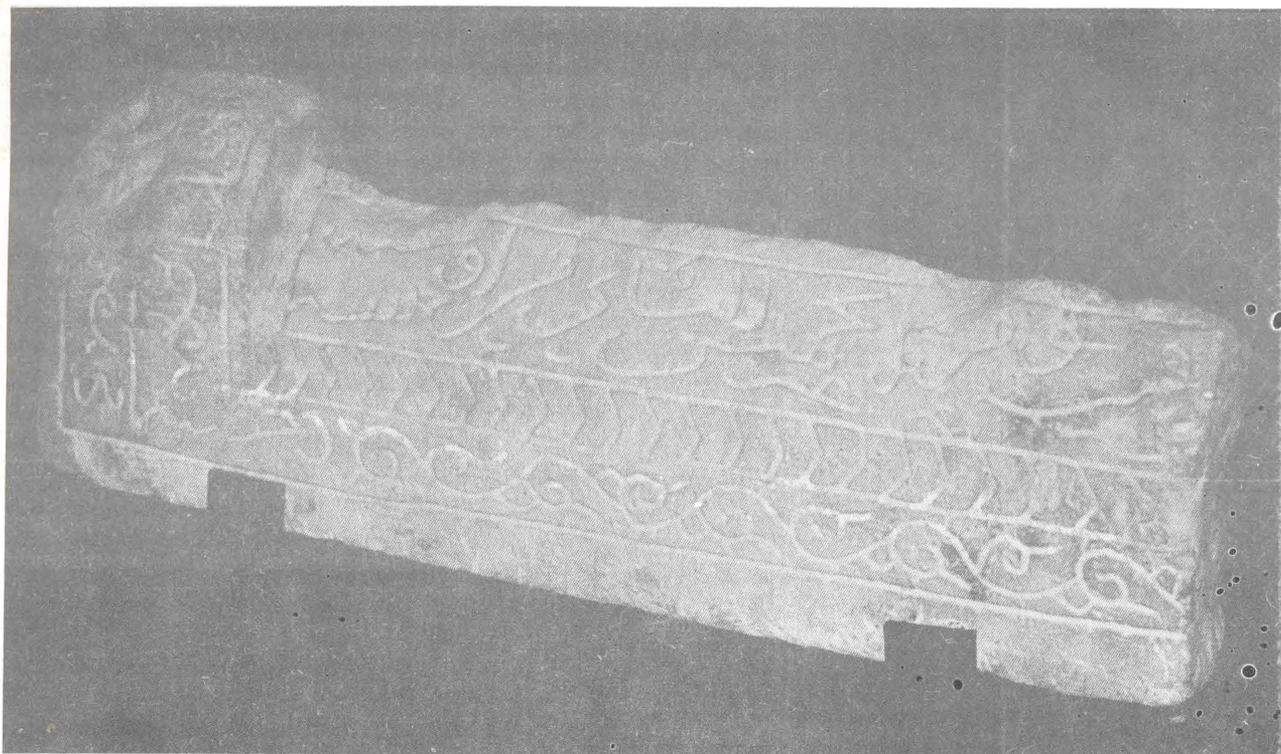
These are extremely scanty though not as much as Commendatore Abela seems to have thought.²⁰ Most of the brief references to Malta in the Arabic sources, both geographical and historical, have been used by M. Amari a century ago and appear in his *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*.²¹ P. Minganti has recently reviewed them systematically and adds some information and comments in the light of recent discoveries and scholarship.²² Mbarek Redjala subsequently made a thorough study of most of them, comparing the texts with manuscript originals and adding several items, though none of much import.²³ One vital text he missed is available in the

Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin, already published in Tunisia and possibly elsewhere and used by M. Talbi in his *L'Emirat Aghlabide*.²⁴ None of the fragments amounts to more than a couple of score words or so, most of them are shorter, very laconic, even obscure and frequently of insecure relevance. Several merely repeat each other, and others are of late authorship and unknown ultimate source. Possibly others remain to be discovered, perhaps in countries as far away as India, the final resting place of the holy literature of some of the Shi'ite sects derived from those which once dominated over Sicily as well as Malta.²⁵ Nothing apparently has come out of the Geniza documents so eloquent on the commercial contacts of Tunisia and Sicily in the High Middle Ages.²⁶

Archaeological discoveries for the Arab period have been disappointing so far. In 1881 the Saracenic Cemetery at the back of the Roman Villa began to be excavated, and the work was then resumed by Temi Zammit in the 1920's.²⁷ The dated tomb-stones strangely enough belong to the Norman period. No prominent building survives at all from the so-called Arab period, no mosque – in fact, no structure of any kind. A few Muslim graves have been noted elsewhere on the island and the well-known Maimuna tombstone hales from Gozo.²⁸ This has led several to discount completely the importance of the Muslim legacy in Malta, forgetting that even in Sicily surviving Muslim architectural traits can only be found on buildings of Norman age.²⁹ The reason may lie in the destruction which frequently is known to have accompanied the Christian re-conquest in Sicily, and also the perishability of the Maltese *franca* stone so widely used for building. It should also be noted that no systematic archaeological diggings have ever taken place on recognizable Muslim sites except for the Rabat cemetery already mentioned, and it is also hardly practical to carry out extensive archaeological excavations at Mdina, the locality most likely to contain Muslim remains. Possibly much may be discovered at the Citadel of Rabat, Gozo, and conceivably also in the unbuilt space outside Mdina, Malta, next to Rabat. In any case, the Saracenic pottery sequence should be established as early as possible. Typical Moorish dwelling plans could eventually possibly be discovered and recognized.



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A Saracenic tombstone from the Muslim cemetery at Rabat, Malta (dated post 1106-07), with an inscription in modified Kufic characters.

Hundreds of Arab coins were discovered in 1698 during the re-building of the Cathedral, destroyed in the earthquake of 1692, but they were melted down and sold as bullion to help in financing the work in progress.³⁰ A few specimens were saved but were then unfortunately donated to cardinals and others abroad and cannot now be traced any further.³¹ The Museums in Malta contain a number of gold coins of the Arab Era with writing on them in the Arabic script, as well as others dating back to Norman times, some with writing in both the Arabic and Latin scripts. Much more, apparently, is also to be found in private collections. But their provenance is insecure. Even if one could be sure that they were found in Malta or Gozo they would not themselves alone provide much information of an economic nature though they could possibly have a cultural significance. Their Arabic script itself is eloquent proof of the persistence of Arabic culture in Norman and Suabian times, and the Arabic phrases recorded to have existed on a number of the coins of the 1698 hoard could be taken as

an indication of Shi'ite, probably Fatimid, influence.³² Had the whole hoard of 1698 survived or been properly recorded one should have been able to discover the year when it was hidden away, and associate it with some important event in Saracenic history such as, conceivably, the conquest of Malta by King Roger in 1127 or, even better, the final expulsion of the Muslims at an unknown date during the first half of the thirteenth century.

Of Christian sources, the letter of a monk refers to the imprisonment of the bishop of Malta at Palermo at the time of the fall of Syracuse to the Muslims in 878 A.D.³³ Then, another monk, Goffredo Malaterra, provides a thousand word account in Latin of the coming of Count Roger to Malta in 1090 A.D.³⁴ Bishop Burchard on his way through Sicily in 1175 on an embassy to Saladin on behalf of his sovereign the Emperor, provides an important reference to the island.³⁵ An imperial pardon of 1198³⁶ and an official report of 1240 provide other side-lights on the communal relations between Christians and Muslims in the island.³⁷

They exhaust the whole list of relevant Christian documents.

Pre-Arab Malta

At the time of the arrival of the Arabs, Malta was under Byzantine rule.³⁸ The whole island had been Christian for centuries; Christian tombs have survived from the period. The Byzantine rulers had a *dux*, or military leader, on the island, as well as a *drungarios* and *archon*, indicating that they had there an important naval station. It is unknown what language was spoken, except that Greek was probably the language of administration. A few Greek inscriptions have also survived. The argument that the common inhabitants spoke some form of Late Latin is weakened by the lack of adequate support from the place-names: possibly they still spoke some form of debased Punic.³⁹

The Arab Invasion

The invasion of Sicily started in 827 A.D., but the conquest of the island was not achieved before 878, and even then a number of small Greek mountain towns in the Nebrodi mountains managed to retain some form of independence for much longer.⁴⁰ It has long been known that the famous Arabic *Chronicle of Cambridge* puts the date of the Arab conquest of Malta at 29 August 870 A.D.⁴¹ Ibn Haldun⁴² puts it in the previous year, but Ibn al-Athir⁴³ explains that in 256/870–71 the Muslims of Sicily came to the relief of Malta then besieged by the Byzantines, who withdrew when they heard of his coming. Apparently, therefore, in 870 Malta was already in Muslim hands. However, the precise date remains doubtful. *Kitâb al-'Uyun* speaks of the conquest of Malta in 256/870–71 attributing it to the 28 August, only one day's difference from that of the *Chronicle of Cambridge*, admittedly a remarkably close correspondence. But *Kitâb al-'Uyun*⁴⁴ speaks of a conquest not a relief operation and cites the inscription on the castle of Habashi at Susa which was recorded by Ibn al-Ġazzâr: 'All the hewn stones and marble columns in this castle were brought here from the conquest of Malta by Habashi son of 'Umar', identified by M. Talbi⁴⁵ with

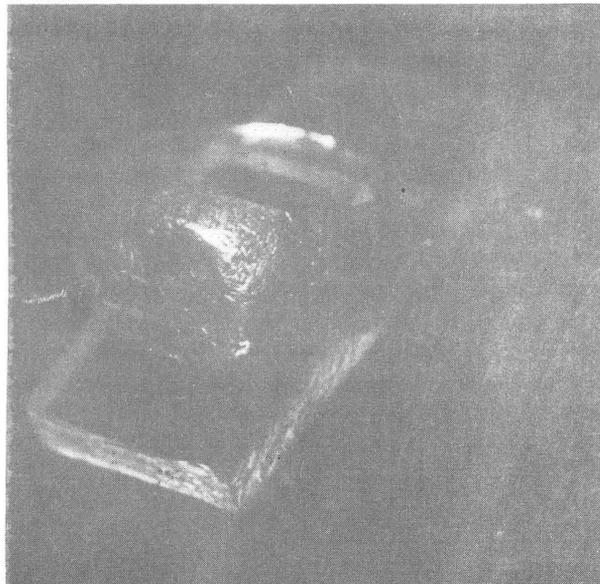
Ahmed bin 'Umar bin 'Abd Allah bin Ibrahim bin al-Aghlab, the commandant of the Muslim fleet – Habashi, or Abyssinian, being merely his nickname.

Not only is the precise date of the capture of Malta therefore somewhat dubious in the best Muslim authorities, several historians have allowed themselves to be misled by abate Vella's fabrications and have reviewed various other possible dates and they give detailed accounts of would-be Muslim assaults in 833 and 836 A.D. These include both Miège and G. A. Vassallo.⁴⁶ Much later and completely independently Ettore Rossi came to the conclusion that it was unlikely that the Muslims would have refrained from attacking Malta until 869 A.D.⁴⁷ when their invasion of Sicily had started so much before, pointing out that Ibn al-Athir records the despatch of a Sicilian Muslim fleet 'against the islands', presumably the islands near Sicily and therefore probably including the Maltese islands. It would be highly interesting to find out whether abate Vella could possibly have known of this passage, whether directly or indirectly. Of course, a reading of Maltese history which posited an early occupation or conquest and a long period of co-habitation of the earlier inhabitants with their conquerors, whether before or after 869 A.D., would necessarily mean that many of Malta's pre-Arabic place-names should have survived the Arab settlement, whatever happened to the original inhabitants afterwards. Since 99% of the Maltese placenames recorded in fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth century documents are undoubtedly of Semitic origin, this would surely mean that the pre-Arabic language itself belonged to the Semitic group of languages, inevitably some form of Late-Punic.⁴⁸

If, however, the first conquest of Malta only took place in 869 and the Maltese Christians showed any complicity with a Byzantine liberating force only one year later, one could expect the Muslim forces to show them little or no mercy. An expulsion of the few thousand inhabitants in the circumstances cannot be ruled out, and would become highly probable if only one were certain that their language had long ceased to be Punic, and was either Late Latin or Greek, since one would expect a large proportion of the place-names to reflect this fact, and that their subsequent dearth could not otherwise be explained. The Semitic nature of the pre-

by St. Paul himself, but several Christian symbols were found and, spectacularly, graffiti showing a man wearing a monk's cowl, the world Paulus, and a Roman vessel. Since recent and not so recent 'tradition' had already associated the site with the coming of that apostle to the island, in effect these finds could be taken as proof of its continuity down the near-two thousand years that have elapsed since those events. Unfortunately, the finds have been completely rejected by Margarita Guarducci, whose authority in Christian epigraphy is of the highest.⁵⁷ In addition, one may point out that the place-name 'Milqi' does not go back more than some 350 years, being represented in late medieval documents by 'Bundichi', a Christian surname still extant in 1417, the place-name Beniarad has nothing to do with 'Bin il-Werriet' as claimed, and 'Venerand' is merely a variant of Beniarad, a mere palaeographical error.⁵⁸

The Christian Semitic vocabulary of the Maltese language has been adduced as evidence for the continuity of Christianity on the grounds, presumably, that it was introduced before the arrival of the Arabs and that it could not have been reintroduced in post-870 times because it did not exist in Muslim Arabic. It can, however, be said that there is no evidence of the former and that a Christian vocabulary can be found throughout the



A silver ring with inscription 'Rabbi Alla Wâhid' found in the Rabat cemetery.

Arab world wherever the need for it arose – in Spain, for example, where it is claimed, the Bible itself was translated into Arabic by the Bishop of Seville early in the eighth century for the use of Mozarabs,⁵⁹ where a thirteenth century vocabulary of Arabic in use among missionaries endeavouring to proselytise among the solidly Muslim population of Valencia contains words like 'maghmudija', 'iq-rar' and 'tqarban'⁶⁰ and where in 1506 an Arabic Christian Doctrine was issued for the use of the forcibly converted Arabic speaking ex-Muslims of Granada.⁶¹ From Sicily a beautifully written Psalter of the year 1153 with three parallel texts in Greek, Latin and Arabic, has survived showing that even there the Church was finding it necessary and possible to cater for speakers of Arabic.^{61b}

Islam in Malta

There is no doubt that for some three centuries Islam was the religion of the majority, if not the absolute totality, of the Maltese inhabitants. Even as late as 1175 Bishop Burchard, on his way to Saladin as the representative of the Emperor, when passing through Sicily apparently without touching at Malta, reported that the island was inhabited by Saracens.⁶² Numerous Muslim tombs have been found, about a hundred in the Rabat cemetery alone, some with twelfth century dates, including the well-known Maimuna tombstone from Gozo of 1174.⁶³ No remains of mosques or other specifically Muslim buildings have, however, been discovered. Still, as already noted, the same can be said of Sicily, where practically none of the Muslim architectural remains dates back strictly to the Arab period but merely to that of the Normans, and yet it is known that large tracts of the island had been thoroughly Islamicized by the time of the Norman re-conquest.

The Arabization of the Maltese Islands

It is at present universally admitted by linguists that the Maltese language is derived from Arabic without any of the much talked about Punic elements once claimed for it. The Arabs arriving mainly from Sicily brought with them a form of

sent place-names would, in that case, be attributable directly and solely to a re-peopling of the island by Arabic speakers who were not necessarily directly of Arab ethnic origin. Though the mass expulsion of conquered inhabitants was rarely resorted to by Muslim conquerors, stern punitive measures were undoubtedly taken at the time of the final conquest by Habashi, as is evident from the inscription at Susa recorded by Ibn al-Gazzâr (*ob.* 1004). Soon afterwards the bishop of Malta is found incarcerated at Palermo,⁴⁹ and archaeological sites in Malta at San Pawl Milqi and at Tas-Silġ have both shown signs of destruction at levels corresponding to the arrival of the Arabs.⁵⁰ Much disruption of normal life must have occurred, but it is impossible to judge its extent. Undoubtedly, Maltese Christians must have joined the multitude of refugees fleeing from Sicily before the Arab advance to safer places like Calabria on the mainland. It should also be remembered that so many treasure hoards of Byzantine coins were discovered in the late Middle Ages in Malta as in Sicily that such hoards were invariably supposed in both islands to consist of *moneta Heleniana* even when, as in 1698, they can be shown to have consisted, at least in part, of Muslim coins instead.⁵⁷

Survival of Christianity

This, of course, is largely tied up with the physical fate of the original inhabitants: how many had fled, were expelled or massacred during the invasion or invasions? In North Africa Christianity survived down to the eleventh century in a few places; throughout the Levant several communities of Christians survived down to the present day. In Sicily, Christianity survived largely only in the hill towns west and south of Messina, towns which even managed to maintain a shadowy independence for very much longer than the rest of the island.⁵² In Malta and Gozo, no archaeological evidence of the practice of Christianity has been found for centuries after the Muslim invasion – no churches, paintings or statues belong to this period, and there are no known Christian graves either.⁵³

Al-Qazwîni (*ca.* 1203–83), who had access to earlier partly lost sources, reports that after the

Muslim year 440 (1048–49) Malta was attacked by the Byzantines, who demanded the women and possessions of the inhabitants.⁵⁴ The Muslims took stock of the situation and discovered that they were outnumbered by their slaves. They therefore proposed that the latter should join them in resisting the Byzantines; if successful they would give them their liberty and what they owned should be shared with them. Otherwise they would all be killed. Agreement was reached and the islanders resisted the Byzantines as a combined force. God granted them victory; they beat the Byzantines and routed them. The slaves obtained their freedom and the Maltese subsequently became so powerful that the Byzantines never again dared to attack them. One should note that Qazwîni's text never once refers to Christian inhabitants, but merely to the *ghabîd*, or 'slaves' of the 'freemen'. Most Maltese historians, however, have preferred to interpret the incident as a political and social pact between the Muslim rulers and their Christian Maltese subjects – who would no doubt have been called Mozarabs in Spain. But why should they have expected the same death from the invaders as their Muslim rulers if the invasion succeeded? Would Christians, in fact, have helped their Muslim rulers against a Byzantine liberating force? Could they have been trusted sufficiently by their erstwhile masters? How could the Muslim free population have possibly subsequently granted freedom and equality to a servile Christian population which outnumbered it? Count Roger in 1090 could hardly have refrained from granting supremacy in the island to the Christian community if it existed and was larger than the Muslim one, and yet his secretary Malaterra failed to refer to any such Christians at all. It would make much more sense if one understood the word *ghabîd* to refer to a subject population, perhaps indeed partly of indigenous origin, already Islamicized and Arabized – Muwallads not Mozarabs. This would fit precisely all that is known about the two episodes of 1048–49 and 1090 and would also explain the lack of archaeological evidence for the survival of Christianity.⁵⁵

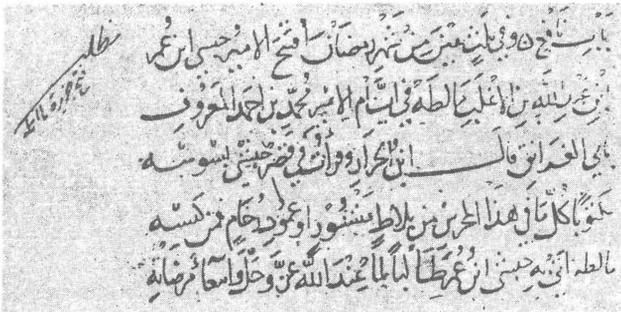
In 1966 a preliminary report on the excavations at San Pawl Milqi came out with remarkable claims which stirred the popular imagination.⁵⁶ Not only was a 'holy well' found and 'identified' with the one used for baptising the first Christians on the island

2. - [فتح الأمير حبشي لجزيرة مالطة]

وفي ثلاث تميمين من شهر رمضان ، افتتح الأمير حبشي بن عمر
ابن عبد الله بن الألب مالطة في أيام الأمير محمد بن أحمد المعروف
بأبي العتراني .

قال ابن الجزار : « وقرأت في قصر حبشي بسوسة ، مكتوبا :
« كل ما في هذا المجرس من بلاط منشور أو عمود رخام فمن
كيسة مالطة ، أتى به حبشي بن عمر ، طالبا لما عند الله عز وجل
وابتغاء مرضاته . »

Extract from Kitāb al-'Uyun referring to the taking of Malta by
the Arabs: Staatsbibliothek Preussischen Kulturbesitz,
Orientabteilung, We 342 Bi. 6a, fol. 6.



Extract from al-Qazwini referring to a pact between the Ahrâr and
their 'Ghabid' in Malta in order to resist an impending Byzantine
invasion of the island; text and translation in Paolo Minganti,
'Fonti storiche arabe', Missione archeologica italiana a Malta
(1964) (Roma, 1965), p. 19.

... غزاها الروم بعد الاربعين والاربعمائة حاربوهم وطلبوا منهم الاموال والنساء واجتمع
المسلمون وعدوا انفسهم وكان عدد عبيدهم اكثر من عدد الاحرار فقالوا لعبيدهم حاربوا معنا
فان ظفرتم فانتم احرار وما لنا لكم وان توانيتم قتلنا وقتلتم فلما وافى الروم جلوا عليهم جلة رجل
واحد ونصرهم الله فهزموهم وقتلوا من الروم حلقا كثيرا ولحق العبيد بالاحرار واشتدت شوكتهم
فلم تعزم الروم بعد ذلك ابدا.....

"... I Rûm l'assalirono dopo il quattrocenquaranta (1048-1049); dopo alcuni scontri con gli abitanti, lor domandarono i beni e le donne. Allora i Musulmani si adunarono, si contarono e videro che il numero dei loro schiavi eccedea quello de' liberi. Ondeché fecero agli schiavi questa proposizione: Prendete le armi (loro dissero) insieme con noi; e se vincerete sarete liberi, e ciò che abbiamo sarà vostro; se non osate, noi saremo uccisi, ed anco voi lo sarete. (Assentirono): venuti i Rûm (innanzi la città i maltesi) dier dentro come un sol uomo; e Dio li aiutò, sì che sconfissero il nemico e ne fecero strage. Gli schiavi (quindi) si unirono (in campo politico) co' liberi; crebbe la potenza di entrambi e i Rûm, dopo questo fatto, non infestarono l'isola mai più ..."

spoken Arabic probably very close to the one then spoken in Tunisia, substantially different from Classical Arabic, having already lost all forms of the verb other than the Indicative and Imperative, and most forms of nunation in the nouns, with the dual also becoming relatively rare and the prefixes of the verb in the Imperfect taking the *maghribi* formation. One can retain that since then the morphology of the language has remained more conservative than the Tunisian dialect itself, but the syntax has continued to change through the influence of European patterns of sentence construction. On the other hand, certain curious formations in morphology and syntax tend, somewhat confusingly, sometimes to be attributed to an eastern influence – Lebanese, for example – on the Maltese language.⁶⁴

The extent of the Arabization of Malta is shown by the thoroughly Arabic character of the local place-names, practically every one of the few words of Latin or Greek origin in them, (eg. Forn, Xlendi, Stabal) having become part of the Arabic lexicon throughout the Arab world. On the other hand, systematic study is revealing a surprising number of references in the place-names themselves to Greek personal names (Hal Kirkop – Rahal Percopu; Wied Inċita – Wied Nikita or Nicetas; Ta' Xbiex – Ta' Sabas) which, taken together with the surnames of Greek origin (eg. Cachia, Callus, Cumbo, perhaps Grixti and Schembri) might indicate the persistence of a substratum of persons with Greek names or surnames. The latter, however, might be of Norman or even post-Norman age.⁶⁵ Careful comparison with name frequency in Sicilian chronological sequences might yet provide important evaluative information on the probable dating of such names in Malta itself in spite of the obvious hazards involved. In any case, inhabitants who had accepted assimilation to the Arabs would not have usually retained their pre-Arab Greek names, but would have replaced them with normal Arab ones.

The place-names both in Malta and Gozo also refer to scores of Arab personal names, as can be shown through an examination of the names of Muslim serfs in Norman Sicily (eg. Maržuq, Buġibba, Ghallis, Żonqor, Għasri, Salāma). It is clear, also, that several of the traditional Maltese surnames started off as Arabic personal names of various types (eg. Sammut, Xerri, Ghaxaq, Buhagiar, Said, Agius).⁶⁶ In the fifteenth century

Malta still had numerous persons with names of obvious Arabic origin which 'died out' in the next century or so (eg. Muhammed, Hakim, Hafaride, Xara, Qutiti, Mahanuc and Mohtar).⁶⁷ Not only is Arabic frequently necessary to understand what was meant by place-names like *Marsa Muxet*, the port of the (animal) wintering-places, *Torba*, the grave, *Hamiem*, the public washing place or bath, *Migar* (or *Mgarr*, as it is now invariably written), the water-courses, but it is also sometimes necessary to know something of Arab and Muslim ways for a full understanding of names like *Ghabidmur*, the Slave of the Light, or *Bir Jahlef*, Jahlef's well, both referring to the Almighty, a fact which, incidentally, would rule out the authenticity of *Bir Jahleb*, a mere corruption of the former.⁶⁸

Moorish styles of architecture must have predominated. As late as 1536 Quintinus wrote in the first printed description of Malta that apart from the city of Mdina and some houses in the suburb of Rabat, 'one would take all the rest for African huts'.⁶⁹ In fact, fifteenth century documents reveal that the medieval town house had its *miglis*, or sitting room, apparently quite different from the *sala*, or European style reception room.⁷⁰ In addition, the word *miglis* is to be found in rural place-names indicating better its later persistence in a traditional peasant setting.⁷¹ No doubt, originally they would have had their *dukkiena*, or stone bench, along the wall, on which visitors sat or reclined, Roman fashion, on brightly coloured home-made mats, and on which they could also, in inner rooms spread their mattresses at night.⁷² This explains why even in the late fifteenth century, detailed property inventories practically never included chairs and hardly ever more than one proper bed of European style.⁷³ This also explains the other frequent references to 'mattresses sewn according to the custom of the Maltese', mattresses which could be rolled up and put away during the day-time.

In the late fifteenth century one of the better houses at Mdina had its *cammara*, its *sala*, its courtyard and its *sikifa*.⁷⁴ Another town house of the same period belonging to Jews had the *sikyfe*, a kitchen, a room downstairs called the *miglisi* facing the entrance to the tenement (therefore facing the *sikifa*) and various adjoining rooms belonging to other persons, a cistern, a stable, and several rooms over them all and the *sikifa*.⁷⁵ None of this could be

have persisted down to the middle years of the thirteenth century. In the fifteenth we meet with the first poem in Maltese, the 'spoken Arabic' of the Maltese people.

Social and Economic Developments 'under the Arabs'

Al Qazwini's account suggests that the Muslims in Malta in 1048 were divided into two classes: the *ahrar* or free men and the *ghabid* or unfree with the latter outnumbering the former and obtaining complete social and political equality with them in that year.⁸⁶ No Christians are mentioned until 1090, when they appear as mere *captives* of foreign extraction with a status which must have approximated closely to that of slaves. They were freed by Count Roger and taken out of the island by him. At the time Malta had its *qâ'id* or military governor in overall command.

Al Idrisi, a geographer, is the only Arab writer who gives some reliable facts on the economy of the island of Malta, admittedly in Norman times but certainly relevant for most or all of the proper Islamic period of Maltese history.⁸⁷

Away from the island of Pantelleria at a distance of 100 miles towards the east one finds the island of Gozzo with a secure port. From Gozzo one goes to a small isle named Kamuna. From there going eastwards one finds the island of Malta. It is large and has a sheltered port on the east side. Malta has a town and abounds in pastures, sheep, fruit and honey.

It would seem, therefore that animal husbandry was supplemented mainly by some horticulture and bee-keeping. The cultivation of cotton and cumin seed is not mentioned. Possibly they were hampered by lack of suitable markets abroad, being cut off from the Christian world and having competing suppliers rather than markets in the Muslim one. Still, it seems that it was the Arabs who introduced the growing of cotton to Sicily and from there eventually to Malta, together with new types of fruit like oranges. And it seems likely that by this period the growing of olives and the production of oil from the local olive crop, apparently one of the mainstays of Maltese agriculture in classical times, had come almost to a complete end.⁸⁸

On the other hand it is clear that corsairing was an important activity, carried out of course at the expense of Christian shipping and coastal towns. Count Roger found so many Christian captives in Malta that there were fears, no doubt exaggerated, that his vessels would founder with their weight. The main victims would seem to have been Greeks because they greeted their deliverer with shouts of joy in Greek.⁸⁹

The Coming of Count Roger, 1090

Malaterra's account of the coming of Count Roger to Malta and Gozo in 1090 is one of the key sources of Malta's medieval history.⁹⁰ He describes the preparations which Count Roger made before his departure from Sicily, his arrival in Malta at the head of his fleet, his disembarkation on horse-back and his routing of the islanders who opposed him and the devastation of the countryside for the space of a day or two before the island's military commander, the *gaitus* or *qayd*, begged for peace. According to Malaterra, the terms of peace were: (a) the islanders' recognition of Count Roger as their overlord, (b) their surrender of all war implements, (c) their promise to pay a yearly tribute, and (d) their freeing of all their Christian *captives*. Malaterra thereupon deals with the latter, and describes how they flocked out of the town, greeting Count Roger with palm-leaves and cries of *Kyrie Eleison*. They were then taken by him to Sicily, where he offered them a free town in which to live, but they refused as they all preferred to return to their various home towns. Here it should be noted that Malaterra never once referred to any Christian Maltese inhabitants, but only to these foreign Christian captives. Again, however, this has not prevented most Maltese historians from interpreting or amending Malaterra's words as proofs of the survival of Christianity on the island. Although negative arguments do not normally carry much weight, Malaterra's failure to refer to Maltese Christians can surely not be easily explained away. Significantly, the Muslim inhabitants were allowed not merely to stay on the island, but they were obviously left in complete control of the administration. This alone makes it extremely unlikely that there was a sizable indigenous Christian community

in the Maltese islands in 1090, or even in 1048 only forty two years previously, whether in slavery or enjoying the status of *dhimmi* normally accorded to conquered 'peoples of the book', i.e. Christians or Jews, by their Muslim rulers.⁹¹ Incidentally, there is not a shred of documentary evidence to support the 'traditions' that Count Roger rebuilt the cathedral and numberless churches and sanctuaries throughout the island, that he endowed the cathedral chapter and that he repaired and garrisoned Fort St. Angelo.⁹² That he gave Malta its national colours is now universally acknowledged in academic quarters an impossibility.⁹³

Sub-Islamic Times

For a generation not much seems to have changed. No doubt, the local Muslim corsairs had to restrict their activities to harming the subjects of the Byzantine Empire normally at loggerheads with the Normans of Sicily and South Italy, and possibly even that was banned. Finally in 1127 King Roger, the son of Count Roger, re-conquered the Maltese Islands in the course of his conquest of all the islands between Sicily and the North African coast.⁹⁴ And apparently this time he left a permanent Christian garrison there. From this time onwards Malta was to have again a Christian administration and a Christian 'establishment'. But the growth of a Christian population seems to have been a very slow process. Bishop Burchard's statement in 1175 that Malta was inhabited by Saracens is supported by the contemporary existence of Muslim graves some fifty years after the second Norman conquest, though Malta is known to have had a bishop by 1156.⁹⁵ One might speculate that the Lentini estates in Sicily were given to the bishopric of Malta at about this period when the diocese could be considered to have been *in partibus infidelium*. Possibly at a later stage, when the Christian community, in one way or another, had become the predominant one on the island, the bishop's estates in Malta itself, perhaps consisting of land vacated by the exiled Muslims, were acquired. It is therefore clear that Islam was tolerated in Malta, as in Sicily, side by side with Christianity and Judaism, for about a century after 1127, though signs of communal trouble can be discerned in the

pardon given in 1198 to the Christian community for the assassination of a Muslim.⁹⁶ Such communal trouble is possibly dimly recorded in the Ghajn Klieb folk-tale. It is interesting and extremely suggestive that the lost original document of 1198 was a bi-lingual one, the text in Latin being followed by one in Arabic filling nine lines in Arabic characters unfortunately not transcribed in the register of which the surviving version is itself only a copy.

From 1127 onwards it is probable that the Muslim community was headed by a *qadi*, a judge or magistrate.

The Expulsion of the Muslims

One of the best-known and most detailed mediaeval documents of Maltese history, the report made by Giliberto Abate in 1240, preserved only in summary form in a text which presents many exasperating difficulties of interpretation, gives a unique set of figures of the relative strength of the three communities of Muslims, Christians and Jews both in Malta and in Gozo by household:

	Malta	Gozo	Totals
Muslims	681	155	836
Christians	47	203	250
Jews	25	8	33
Totals	753	366	1119

It should be added that the totals given above do not belong to the text.⁹⁷ Naturally, it is impossible to believe that as late as 1240 A.D. Malta only had 47 Christian households. Perhaps the text is corrupt; possibly an 'M' standing for a 'thousand' was inadvertently dropped; possibly the letters for a number of 'hundreds' were dropped instead; possibly the figures only apply to a specific portion of the Island's population, e.g. that on the royal estates. However it may be, the figures as they are prove the survival of a large Muslim community even as late as 1240. In 1249, according to Ibn Haldun, the emperor Frederick II sent the Maltese Muslims into exile together with those of Sicily,⁹⁸ who are known from other evidence to have been exiled to Lucera in east central Italy after a rebellion in Western Sicily in the 1220's.⁹⁹ At Lucera we hear of Riccardus Malthesii accepting baptism



Original pictures of two Saracenic graves in the Rabat cemetery uncovered in 1921 now in the possession of Dr Paul Xuereb, the Librarian, University of Malta.



as late as the year 1300,¹⁰⁰ and in Malta much before that one hears of disputes concerning the disposal of their property.¹⁰¹ The disappearance of Islam from the Maltese islands was, therefore, a long drawn out affair. In addition, one has to remember that the decree of expulsion, which has not survived, seems to have applied to Muslims only not to 'Arabs' or 'Moors', to a religious not to an ethnic group. In all probability, in Malta as in Sicily, all that the Muslims had to do to escape expulsion was to accept formal baptism which they probably did,

especially if they had property to lose.¹⁰² Thus a sizable section probably stayed behind both in Malta and in Gozo, showing a pronounced preference at first for the Greek rite rather than the Latin one, if they followed here the example of their Sicilian contemporary compatriots. All this explains the survival of the Maltese language largely in the form it had taken during the centuries of Muslim hegemony, in spite of the steady entry into the islands of settlers from Europe, of soldiers, administrators, churchmen and merchants.

NOTES

1. W. Montgomery Watt, *A History of Islamic Spain* 'Islamic Surveys, 4' (Edinburgh, 1967), pp. 186–91.
2. See especially his edition of M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia* (Catania, 1937–39).
3. Especially his 'Cento anni di studi arabo-siculi', *Studia islamica II* (1954).
4. Eg. his *Storia e cultura nella Sicilia saracena* (Palermo, 1975).
5. G. F. Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta, Isola nel Mare Siciliano, con le sue Antichità ed altre notizie* (Malta, 1647), pp. 251–69.
6. Eg. Temi Zammit, *Malta: the Maltese Islands and their History* (Malta, 1952), p. 76: '... the Saracenic occupation of Malta was purely military, and that no extensive colonisation was attempted. During the Saracenic occupation, the natives must have kept aloof from the garrison that professed a religion so violently averse to Christianity...' A. P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta* vol. I (Malta, 1974), is much more appreciative. A. T. Luttrell, *Approaches to Medieval Malta* (Malta, 1975) is the best modern synthesis.
7. Tommaso Fazello, *Le due dece dell'istoria di Sicilia ...*, Italian transl. (Palermo, 1628), p. 411.
8. Roccho Pirri, *Sicilia Sacra ...* (Palermo, 1733), p. 905.
9. Goffredus Malaterra, 'De rebus gestis Roberti Giuscardi, Ducis Calabriae et Rogerii, Comitis Siciliae', *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores* (Bologna, 1927), pp. 94–96.
10. G. A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata ...*, I (Malta, 1772), pp. 698–99.
11. D. Scinà and A. Baviera Albanese, *L'Arabica impostura* (Palermo, 1978). Leonardo Sciascia's novel *Il Consiglio d'Egitto* (1963), is concerned precisely with abate Vella's nefarious 'discoveries' and complex character and the complicated political background to his activities.
12. D. Miège, *Histoire de Malte*, vol. II (Paris 1840), pp. 20–30, esp. p. 21–25.
13. G. A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta raccontata in compendio* (Malta, 1890), pp. 42–43.
14. A. A. Caruana, *Frammento Critico della Storia Fenicio-Cartaginese, Greco-Romana e Bizantina, Musulmana e Normanno-Aragonese delle Isole* (Malta, 1899).
15. A. E. Caruana, *Sull'origine della lingua maltese: studio storico etnografico e filologico* (Malta, 1896), esp. pp. 243–305.
16. A. Bartolo, 'History of the Maltese Islands', in *Malta and Gibraltar Illustrated*, ed. by Allister Macmillan (London, 1915), esp. pp. 46–51.
17. A. Mayr, 'Zur Geschichte der älteren christlichen Kirche von Malta', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, xvii (1896).
18. E. Rossi, historical section of article on 'Malta', *Enciclopedia italiana* (Treccani) (Rome, 1929); *idem*, 'Le lapidi sepolcrali Arabo-Musulmane', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, xii.
19. A. T. Luttrell, 'Malta nel periodo normanno', *Atti del congresso internazionale di studi sulla Sicilia normanna* (Palermo, 1973); *idem*, 'Approaches to Medieval Malta', *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights* (London, 1975), esp. pp. 26–34; *idem*, 'The Christianization of Malta', *The Malta Year Book 1977*.
20. Abela did not use any Arab source at all, and did not distinguish between primary and secondary sources.
21. M. Amari, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, original Arabic version, not available to the present writer, belongs to 1857; Italian version reprinted in 1982 (with Appendix of 1889) (3 vols.) M. Amari's *Storia dei Musulmani de Sicilia*, 2nd edition ed. by C. A. Nallino, reissued recently (no date) at Catania, is still the standard work on its subject, essential for anyone trying to understand Maltese history in the Muslim period.
22. P. Minganti, 'Fonti storiche Arabe', in *Missione Archeologica Italiana, a Malta: Rapporto preliminare della campagna 1964* (Roma, 1965), pp. 17–21.
23. M. Redjala, 'L'archipel maltais dans le littérature historico-géographique arabe', *Actes du Premier Congrès d'Études des Cultures Méditerranéennes d'Influence Arabo-Berbère* (Algiers, 1973), pp. 203–08.
24. Anonymous manuscript entitled *Kitab al °Uyun wal-Haqâ °iq Fi Ahbar al-Haqâ °iq* in Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Orientabteilung, We 342 Bl.6a, fol. 6; published in Omar Saidi, 'Kitab al °Uyun', *Les Cahiers de Tunisie*, XX, No. 79–80 (1972), p. 51. T. S. Brown, 'Byzantine Malta: a Discussion of the Sources', in *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights* (London, 1975), ed. A. T. Luttrell, cites the edition of *Kitab al °Uyun* that was published by O. Saidi in Damascus in 1972.

25. U. Rizzitano has published two letters concerning internal Sicilian history during the Kalbite period which he found in a register of letters preserved in India. U. Rizzitano, 'Nuovi fonte arabe per la storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia', in his *Storia e cultura nella Sicilia Saracena* (Palermo, 1975).
26. S. D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 3 vols., shows that innumerable letters of that source derive or are concerned with Tunisia or Sicily, but does not refer to any about Malta.
27. A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches to Medieval Malta', in *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights*, pp. 26–27. In 1975 Luttrell was engaged on reconstructing Zammit's discoveries from the latter's notebooks and photographs preserved in the National Museum at Valletta: *ibid.*, p. 27; see also T. Zammit, 'Saracenic Remains in Malta', *Melita*, V (1925), pp. 1–3, with 4 plates.
28. For the Maimuna tombstone see M. Amari, *Le epigrafi arabiche di Sicilia*, new edition (Palermo, 1971), pp. 218–30. The best and most authoritative account of Muslim graves in Malta and Gozo is E. Rossi, 'Le lapidi sepolcrali Arabo-Musulmane', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali*, XII.
29. M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, III, pp. 840–46.
30. Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Cathedral Archives, Misc. Ms. 169 'Giornale della Santa Chiesa Cattedrale, 1651–1700,' pp. 1227–1230, 1308–09; Notarial Archives, Valletta, Not. Giovanni Domenico Gatt, R 281/36, fols. 34–35 et seq., 521–23; *ibid.*, *idem*, R. 282/38, fols. 177–178; National Library of Malta, Valletta, Library Ms. 21 'Relazione del tesoro trovato sotterra allorché nel 1698 si fabbricava la Cattedrale'.
31. G. A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata . . .*, I, pp. 692–93.
32. G. Wettinger, 'The Gold Hoard of 1525', *Melita Historica*, VII, No. 1 (1976).
33. The bishop's name is not recorded: Theodosii monachi atque grammatici, *Epistola de espugnatione siracusarum* in L. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, i parte 2 (Milan, 1735), 264A, but see M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, I, pp. 547–48, especially the additions by C. A. Nallino, the editor. See also T. S. Brown, *op. cit.*, p. 83.
34. Goffredus Malaterra, *op. cit.*
35. *Monumenta Germaniae Historica: Scriptores*, xxi (Hanover, 1869), p. 236.
36. C. Schroth-Köhler, T. Kölzer, H. Zielinski, 'Zwei staufische Diplome für Malta aus den Jahren 1198 und 1212', *Deutsches Archiv*, 33 (1977), pp. 519–20.
37. Frederick II's reply to Giliberto Abate in E. Winkelmann, *Acta Imperii Inedita seculi XIII* (Innsbruck, 1880), pp. 713–15.
38. The best treatment of Byzantine Malta is T. S. Brown, 'Byzantine Malta: a Discussion of the Sources', in *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights*; see also *ibid.*, pp. 21–25 by the general editor A. T. Luttrell.
39. See P. P. Saydon, 'I Maltesi parlavano Latino?', *Il Ponte: rassegna Maltese di cultura e attualità*, No. 4 (January 1966).
40. Taormina was not taken before 902 A.D.
41. M. Amari, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* (1982 reprint), I, p. 279.
42. *Ibid.*, II, p. 178.
43. *Ibid.*, I, p. 387.
44. See references in fn. 24.
45. M. Talbi, *L'Émirat Aghlabide* (Paris, 1966), p. 475.
46. D. Miège, *op. cit.*, pp. 21–26; G. A. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta raccontata in Compendio* (Malta, 1890), pp. 42–43.
47. E. Rossi, *op. cit.*, pp. 428–29.
48. P. P. Saydon, *op. cit.*; *idem*, 'The Pre-Arabic Latin Element in Maltese Toponymy', *Orbis*, V (1956); Prof. J. Aquilina, *Maltese Linguistic Surveys* (Malta, 1976); G. Wettinger, 'Non Arabo-Berber Influences on Malta's Medieval Nomenclature', *Proceedings of the Second International Congress of Studies on Cultures of the Western Mediterranean*, II, (Algiers, 1978); *idem*, 'Some Maltese Medieval Place-Names of Archaeological Interest', *Atti del Colloquio Internazionale di Archeologia Medievale, Palermo-Erice, 1974*, (Palermo, 1976); *idem*, 'The Place-Names and the Personal Nomenclature of Gozo, 1372–1600', *Oriental Studies presented to Benedikt S. J. Isserlin . . .*, (Leyden, 1980); *idem*, 'Some Grammatical Characteristics of the Place-Names of Malta and Gozo in Early Modern Times', *Journal of Maltese Studies*, No. 15 (1983).
49. The source is the letter by the monk Theodosius. It should be noted that the authenticity of this letter has been put in doubt by G. M. Columba in *Centenario della Nascita di Michele Amari* (Palermo, 1910) II, pp. 408–09 where it is suggested that it was actually written towards the middle of the eleventh century: cf. editor's note to M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 2nd edition, I, p. 548. B. Lavagnini, 'Siracusa occupata dagli Arabi e l'Epistola di Teodosio Monaco', *Byzantion*, xxix–xxx (1959–1960), pp. 267–79, does not allude to the matter.
50. A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches to Medieval Malta', pp. 26–27.
51. G. Wettinger, 'The Gold Hoard of 1525', *Melita Historica*, VII, No. 1 (1976).
52. R. Papa Algozino, *Sicilia Araba* (Catania, 1977), pp. 36–40; cf. esp. p. 39: 'È accertato, comunque,

- che la pratica del culto cristiano in Sicilia non venne mai ostacolata, come è documentato; che, soprattutto, nella Sicilia orientale non sparve mai la fede cristiana e la cultura greco-bizantina'. According to D. Mack Smith, *A History of Medieval Sicily* (London, 1968), p. 6: 'the vast majority of Christians eventually gave up practising their faith'.
53. E. Rossi 'Le lapidi sepolcrali ...', p. 431, stated that he could not find the Muslim tomb inscription allegedly found in 1881 which, according to A. A. Caruana, 'bewailed the lack of fidelity of the population in Malta', and suggested that Caruana might have mis-read it as he did not consider it probable that any inscriptions had been lost.
 54. Arabic text and Italian translation in P. Minganti, *op. cit.*, p. 19, from *Atâr al-bilâd* of Al Qazwini.
 55. Al-Qazwini dated the incident to 1049-50 but A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches to Medieval Malta', p. 26, prefers to date it a decade earlier.
 56. M. Cagiano de Azevedo, *Testimonianze Archeologiche della Tradizione Paolina a Malta* (Rome, 1966).
 57. See her review in *Archeologica Classica*, XVIII, fasc. 1 (Rome, 1966), a brief answer by Cagiano de Azevedo in the same journal, XVIII, fasc. 2, of the same year, and her riposte in the same place, XIX (1967).
 58. Instead of 'Milqi' one finds the surname "Bundiki" or "Bundachi" in older documents: eg. *Ecclesie sancti pauli di lu bundiki alias gued saldin*, contrata, 15.i.1509, Not. B. de Sillato, Notarial Archives, Valletta, Ms. 1069, f. 78^v; Cola Bundichi had to serve on Fridays at Mdina town square: G. Wettinger, 'The Militia Roster of Watch Duties of 1417', *The Armed Forces of Malta Journal*, No. 32 (1979), p. 34; For Bin Werrad see G. Wettinger, 'Early Maltese and Gozitan Place-Names', *Civilisation*, No. 10, s.v.
 59. P. K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs* (London, 1963), pp. 516, 543.
 60. R. Martí, *Vocabulista in arabico*, ed. C. Schiaparelli (Florence, 1871).
 61. Alcalá, *Arte para ligeramente saber la lengua araviga* (New York, 1928).
 - 61a. British Museum, Harley Ms. 5786; facsimile in: *Palaeographical Society*, 1st series (London, 1873-83), pl. 132, and in M. Besson, *L'Eglise et la Bible* (Geneva, 1927), pl. 66. See Bernhard Bischoff, 'The Study of Foreign Languages in the Middle Ages', *Speculum*, xxxvi (1961), especially p. 220.
 62. See ftn. 35.
 63. Ftn. 28. Cp. roughly similar and largely contemporary Muslim tomb inscriptions in S.-M. Zbiss, *Corpus des Inscriptions Arabes de Tunisie: Inscriptions de Tunis et de sa Banlieue*, 'Notes et Documents', vol. xiii, t. I, pref. by G. Marcais (Tunis, 1955).
 64. J. Blau, *The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaeo-Arabic: a Study of the Origins of Middle Arabic*, 'Scripta Judaica V' (Oxford, 1965). For Maltese dialectal affinities see Alexander Borg, *A Historical and Comparative Phonology and Morphology of Maltese* (October 1978).
 65. The will of Guglielmo di Malta drawn up at the Citadel of Gozo on 8 February 1299 contains the signature of a witness actually written in Greek characters: H. Bresc. "Malta dopo il Vespro Siciliano", *Melita Historica*, VI, No. 3 (1974), p. 320.
 66. In spite of all its faults, the main source for such data from Sicily is undoubtedly S. Cusa, *I diplomati Greci ed Arabi di Sicilia pubblicati nel testo originale, tradotti ed illustrati* (Palermo, 1868); for further details see also: G. Wettinger, 'The Archives of Palermo and Maltese Medieval History', *Proceedings of History Week 1982* (Malta, 1983).
 67. G. Wettinger, 'The Militia List of 1419-20', *Melita Historica*, V, No. 2 (1969); *idem*, 'The Militia Roster of Watch Duties of 1417'.
 68. For names like Jahlef see E. Vroonen, *Les Noms de Personnes en Orient* (Cairo, 1946), p. 53.
 69. Horatio C. R. Vella (transl. and ed.), *The Earliest Description of Malta (Lyons, 1536) by Jean Quintin d'Autun* (Malta, 1980), p. 31.
 70. *Cuiusdam domus sive migilisi sitae et positae intus dictam civitatem*, 11 December 1452 (probable): Cathedral Museum, Mdina; Curia Episcopalis Melitensis, Acta Originalia, vol. 3, fol. 89; *terciam partem pro indiviso quam habet in migilisi et sala et iurium suorum de et ex loco et praedio urbano sito in notabili civitate*, 17 June 1499, NAV, Not. J. Sabara, R 494/2.
 71. Bir il-Miġlis, Hirib tal-Miġlis and tal-Miġlis: G. Wettinger 'Early Maltese and Gozitan Place-Names', *Civilisation* (in progress).
 72. G. Wettinger, 'Some Maltese Medieval Place-Names of Archaeological Interest', pp. 349-51, 364-65.
 73. Eg. Inventory of the effects belonging to the late Nobilis Franciscus Laureri, 8 January 1502, Not. Julio Cumbo, NAV, R 196A, fols. 9-18^v, does not seem to contain a reference to a single chair.
 74. *Item ubi fuerent dicti testes Jn domo magnifici capitanei et Jn quo loco vel coram quibus si Jn camnara vel ala sala oy ala scala sive alu cortiglu oy ala sikjfa*: Cath. Mus., Mdina, CEM, AO, vol. 3, fol. 3.
 75. G. Wettinger, *The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Ages* (Malta, 1985) doc. 56.

76. C. Trasselli, 'Domus, billacha, sikifa, kutuba, mac-cagnanu', *Bollettino*, 'Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani', vol. I (1953) pp. 308–310.
77. Abdelaziz Daoulatli, *Tunis sous les Hafsidés: Evolution Urbaine et Activité Architecturale* (Tunis, 1976), p. 13.
78. Eg. deeds of Notary Laurentius de Apapis, NAV, R 203.
79. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Oriental Manuscripts, No. 3330 (Ancien fonds 1375).
80. J. Cassar Pullicino, *Kitba w Kittieba tal-Malti*, I (Malta, 1962), pp. 3–5.
81. G. Wettinger and M. Fsadni, O.P., *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena: a Poem in Medieval Maltese* (Malta, 1968); *idem*, *Il-Ghanja ta' Pietru Caxaru: Poeżija bil-Malti Medjevali* (Malta, 1983). Fr. H. Born translated them into Maltese in 1974: A. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta* (Malta, 1974), pp. 82–88, 102.
82. This version, preserved by Yaqut, is not quite identical with the one Amari found in Qazwini but seems more reliable in that, in the introductory part, Yaqut writes of the *qaid* not the king of Malta, though he then blunders in placing Malta in Andalusia, which mistake is however also to be found in the version used by Amari, C. F. Seybold, 'Analecta Arabo-Italica', *Centenario della Nascita di Michele Amari* (Palermo, 1910), 1, pp. 209–211; cf. M. Amari, *Le epigrafe arabiche di Sicilia* (Palermo, 1971), pp. 29–39. That the mechanical clock constructed by the Maltese mechanic was the one in Palermo constructed for Roger I was only Amari's conjecture based on Qazwini's reference to the king of Malta.
83. M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, III, pp. 784–85.
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 773–74.
85. G. Wettinger and M. Fsadni, *L-Ghanja ta' Pietru Caxaru: Poeżija bil-Malti Medjevali* (Malta, 1983), pp. 37–43.
86. R. Brunschvig, article 'Abd', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, I (Leiden, London, 1960). M. Talbi, *L'Émirat Aghlabide*, frequently translates 'abid' as *esclaves noirs*, vide pp. 136, 251, 284–85, 306, 488, 683. His other references to slaves do not have the corresponding Arabic terms and it is therefore not possible to say whether they also were 'abid'.
87. M. Amari, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, I, pp. 53–54.
88. Cf. G. Wettinger, *Agriculture in Malta in the Late Middle Ages*, offprint with minor emendations from *Proceedings of History Week 1981* (Malta, 1982).
89. See below on the coming of Count Roger.
90. See fn. 9.
91. Cl. Cahen, article 'Dhimma', in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, II (Leiden, London, 1965).
92. On the origin of these and other 'traditions' see A. T. Luttrell, 'Girolamo Manduca and Gian Francesco Abela: Tradition and Invention in Maltese Historiography', *Melita Historica*, VII, No. 2 (1977), esp. pp. 110–11, 121.
93. It is acknowledged even by A. P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta* (Malta, 1974), who also abandons almost all the other legends concerning the coming of Count Roger, thus correcting what he said in an earlier paper 'I Normanni a Malta', in *Atti del Congresso Internazionale di Studi sulla Sicilia Normanna* (Palermo, 1973).
94. Alessandro Telesino, *De rebus gestis Rogerii Siciliae Regis*, ed. L. Muratori, *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, V (Milan, 1724), p. 617; relevant passage is in A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches to Medieval Malta', p. 31. A. P. Vella, *Storja ta' Malta*, pp. 98–99, used both the Caruso edition of Telesino, the only one available in Malta, and a transcript of the relevant passage from an edition prepared by D. Clementi based on a Barcelona manuscript.
95. A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches', p. 33; cf. *idem*, 'Le origini della parrocchia a Malta', *Atti del VI congresso di storia della chiesa in Italia* (1981), II, esp. pp. 1190–1192.
96. Reference in fn. 36.
97. Text in: E. Winkelmann, *Acta Imperii Inedita seculi XIII et XIV*, I (Innsbruck, 1880), pp. 713–15. On Abate's report see A. T. Luttrell, 'Approaches', pp. 38–40 and I. Peri, *Il villanaggio in Sicilia* (Palermo, 1965), pp. 101, 137; *idem*, *Uomini, città e campagne in Sicilia dall'XI al XIII secolo* (Roma-Bari, 1978), pp. 154–55, 223–24.
98. M. Amari, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, II, p. 213. In general, citations have been made from this collection in preference to the ones by Minganti and Redjala because it is easier to read them there in their proper context.
99. P. Egidi, 'La colonia saracena di Lucera e la sua distruzione', *Archivio Storico per le Province Napoletane*, vols. 36–39, esp. vol. 36, p. 604, fn. 3. 'Per la data del primo trapiantamento accetto senz'altro le conclusioni del Winkelmann, *Kaiser Friedrich II*, vol. I, excur. IV, pp. 537–538, e cioè che esso sia avvenuto in piu volte durante gli anni 1224 e 1225. Una seconda immigrazione vi fu certo nel 1246'.
100. *Ibid.*, vol. 36, pp. 674–75: '... il Richardus "Malthesii", altro milite, e il Riccardo Budin che si convertirono anche essi nel 1300'.
101. V. Laurenza, 'Malta nei documenti Angioini del R. Archivio di Napoli', *Archivio Storico di Malta*, V, p. 118, doc. XXII: 'quasdam possessiones sitas in territoriis et insulis de possessionibus quondam

[*scil. quorundam*] Sarracenorum de ipsis insulis eiectionum', 23 May 1271.

102. Of particular interest on the condition of the Muslims in Sicily around 1183–84 is the account by Ibn Gubayr in M. Amari, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula*, I, pp. 137–80.

Further notes:

A year's stay at Oxford has enabled the present writer to refresh his thoughts on several points of the original version of this paper. Additions which could not be incorporated in the paper above follow here.

p. 5. On the survival of Christianity in countries under Islamic rule see R. W. Bulliet, *Conversion to Islam in the Medieval Period: an Essay in Quantitative History* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, 1979). Bulliet shows how it took centuries for complete populations to switch over from one religion to another. However, the minute size of the Maltese islands and of their population at the time render both increasingly liable to catastrophic episodes.

p. 5. On the significance of *ghabid* in Al-Qazwini it is essential to consider carefully what D. Pipes has to say in his *Slave Soldiers and Islam: the Genesis of a Military System* (New Haven and London, 1981). It is clear that there was no military slavery in Malta in 1048–49, but Pipes shows that normal slaves, almost invariably Muslim, could easily be enrolled in the armed forces of a Muslim state. A few examples of individual Christian slaves taking up arms on behalf of their Muslim masters have been adduced, but it still remains absolutely inconceivable that a Christian slave force outnumbering their Muslim masters could have been trusted with the defence of the island against an invading army of Byzantine would-be liberators.

p. 11. On Arab agriculture in general during the Middle Ages see A. M. Watson, *Agricultural Innovation in the early Islamic World* (Cambridge, 1983).

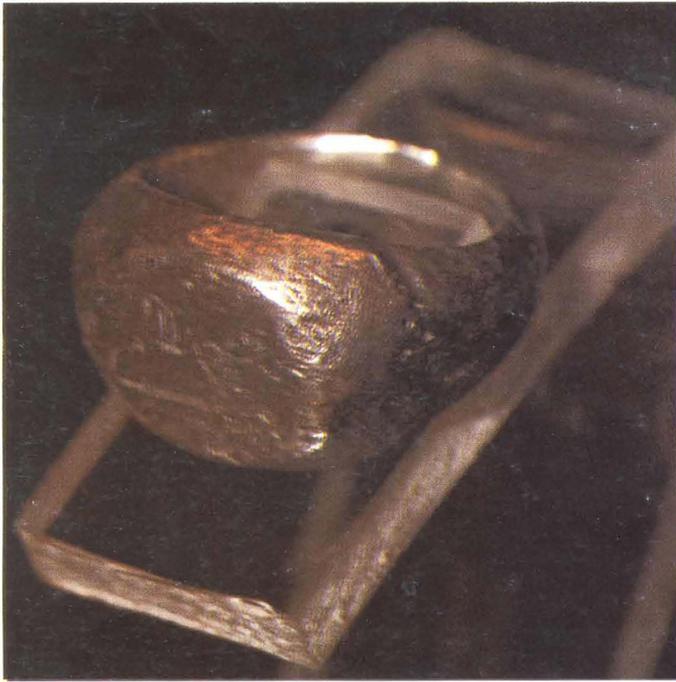
p. 12. Bishop Burchard's statement (1175) that Malta was inhabited by *Saracens* has been interpreted as 'inhabited by Orientals' by L. Cutajar, 'kelmtejn tal-Hbieb fuq l-Ilsien Malti', *Il-Berqa*, 23 February 1953. According to N. Daniel, *The Arabs and Medieval Europe* (London, 1979), p. 53, *Saracens* originally meant Arabs;

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later it meant 'an unspecified residuum of Arabic-speaking Muslims'. From the twelfth century onwards in many contexts it meant 'Muslim'. "'Saracen'" is never used to refer to a Christian Arab'. See also especially *ibid.*, p. 216.

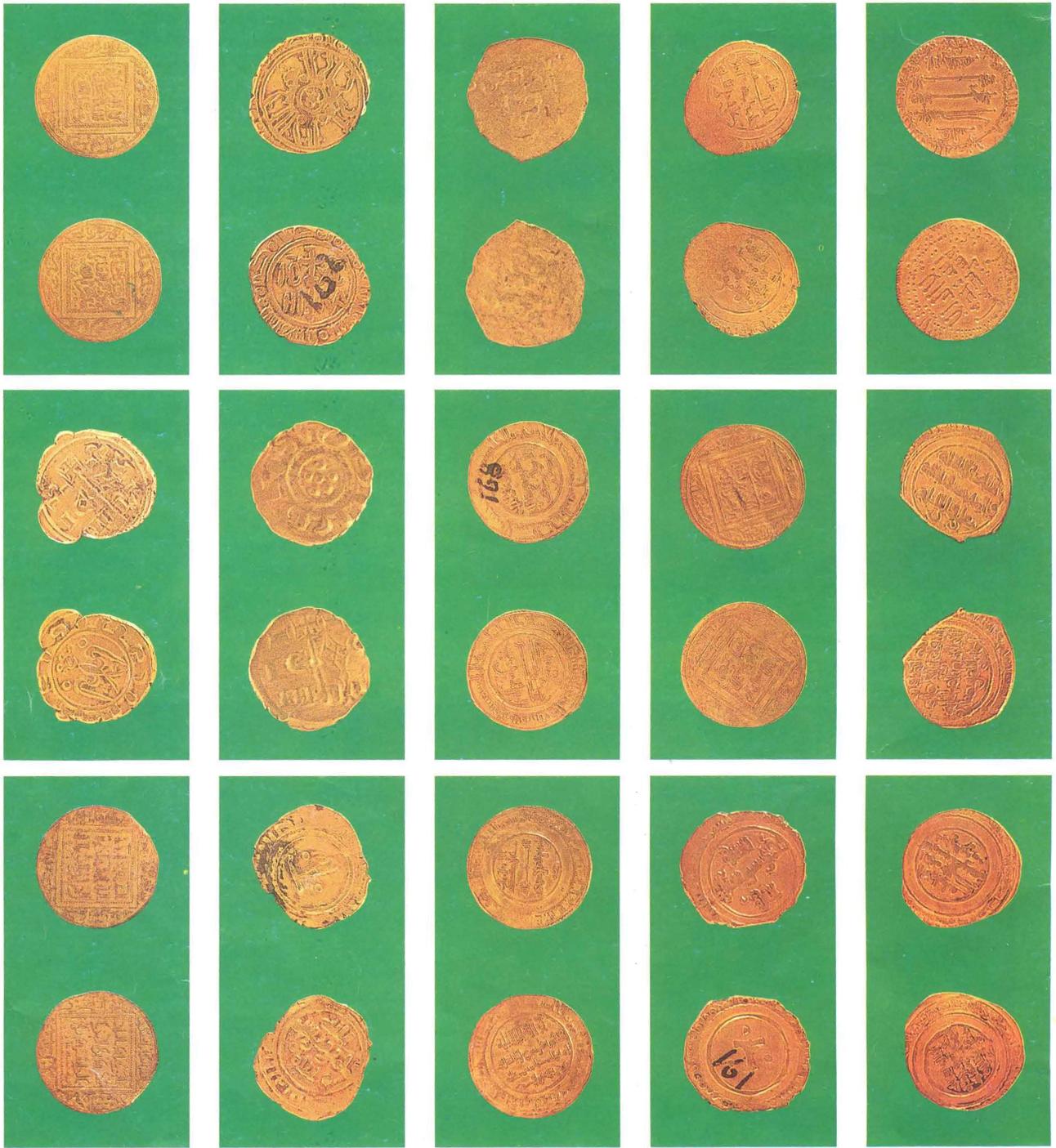
p. 12. On the re-Christianization of the Maltese islands. For Christian missionary activity among Saracens during the High Middle Ages, see B. Z. Kedar, *Crusade and Mission: European Approaches towards the Muslims* (Princeton, 1984). On missionary schools of Arabic in Spain, see A. Bertheir, 'Les Ecoles de Langues Orientales fondees au XIII^e Siecle par les Dominicains en Espagne et en Afrique', *Revue Africaine*, 73 (1932); *idem*, 'Un Maitre orientaliste de XIII^e siecle: Raymond Martin O.P.', *Archivum Fratrum Praedicatorum*, (1936); Jose M^a Coll, 'Escuelas de lenguas orientales en los siglos XIII y XIV', *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia: Revista de ciencias historico-ecclesiasticas*. 17(1944), 18(1945), 19(1946); D. Urvoy, 'Les musulmans et l'usage arabe par les missionnaires chretiens au moyenage', *Traditio*, 34 (1978), pp. 12–13. On Maltese Muslims at Lucera, see P. Egidi, *Codice diplomatico dei Saraceni di Lucera* (Naples, 1917), doc. 398, 28 October 1300, for the pension granted to Riccardus Maltesii called Philippus de Luceria since his baptism. Doc. 322 4 September 1300, had still referred to him as Riccardus de Maltisio as one of five *milites* of the Saracens of Lucera. At least two families of Maltese Muslims at Lucera are recorded to have undergone the same experience as that of their co-religionists there by being sold off into private slave-ownership in 1301: *ibid.*, doc. 469, 7–28 February 1201 (*Dallesium Maltesium masculum*, *Garufam matrem eius*, and *Maltesium sellarium*, *Alaxmannam uxorem eius*, *Lyam et Bulfactory fratres eius*); see also *ibid.*, doc. 454, 5 February 1301, for the names of young Muslim children at Lucera including two from Malta aged ten.



A silver ring with inscription 'Rabbi Alla Wāhid' found in the Rabat cemetery.

A Saracenic tombstone from the Muslim cemetery at Rabat, Malta (dated post 1106-07), with an inscription in modified Kufic characters.





(1) ca. 1190 (17mm.); (2) William I, 1154–66 (13mm.); (3) ca. 1190 (10mm.); (4) A.D. 1050 (15mm.); (5) A.D. 901 (19mm.); (6) Frederick II, 1197–1250 (12mm.); (7) William II the Good, son of William I, 1164–89 (10mm.); (8) ca. 1126 (24 mm.); (9) A.D. 1086 (21mm.); (10) A.D. 1005 (12mm.); (11) ca. 1270 (29mm.); (12) Tancred, 1189–94 (15mm.); (13) ca. 1150 (26mm.); (14) Count Roger, 1090–1101 (15mm.); (15) A.D. 1050 (15mm.)

Identifications are those currently accepted at the National Museum; provenance is uncertain.