



Maltese Historical Association

www.mha.org.au

Email: secretary@mha.org.au

Phone: +61 425 708 830

September 2018

Dear Members and Friends of the MHA,

Last month, Joseph Borg spoke about the Troglodyte Chapels in Malta (pages 3-5). This month Professor Maurice Cauchi will speak about the Phoenicians in the Mediterranean (page 2).

We are pleased to introduce a new member to the MHA. I am sure we will all make Pauline Theuma welcome, in true Maltese style.

The efforts and persistence of Marlene Scicluna and Mark Avellino have been rewarded. The fifth series of the highly acclaimed programme, Maltese DownUnder, first went to air on 2nd September. The programme is also available online. See page 5 for details

Forthcoming events include the Festa of Marija Bambina (See article page 6). Reskeon will be holding their annual Vittoria dinner dance on Saturday the 8th of September. They also organise the annual mass and procession at St Mary Star of the Sea in West Melbourne, starting at 3 pm on Sunday 9th September (See page 5)

The following Saturday the 15th of September musicworx is putting on a musical, *Fanciful Imaginings*, at St Bernadette's in North Sunshine. If you can, please support Simone Cremona in this wonderful community initiative. (See ad page 9).

Maltese Independence Day celebrations will take place at the Maltese Community Centre in Parkville on Friday 21st September, with a Dinner Dance and painting sales to raise funds for the Malta Hospital. Bookings may be made through the MCCV. See ads on page 2 for more details.

Our Annual General Meeting will take place soon. All members of the committee will stand down. Please consider standing for election.

Special Thanks to Joseph Borg and Professor Cauchi for their contributions to this newsletter, to Mario Bonnici and Paul Vella for their continual encouragement, and to Charlie Portelli for his patience, effort and ongoing support.

Hoping to see you at an event soon,

Charlie G

September Lecture ***The Phoenicians and their Legacy*** ***in the Mediterranean***

by

Professor Maurice Cauchi

In the 8th century BC a great seafaring nation sprang up on the East Coast of the Mediterranean. In their flimsy ships, the Phoenicians traded all over the Mediterranean and beyond. They set up a colony in Carthage which would eventually threaten the might of Rome.

Evidence of Phoenician times can be found all over Malta and Gozo, especially around Mdina and Tas-Silġ, which overlooks their preferred harbour of Marsaxlokk. Professor Cauchi will explore their culture and Malta's contribution in deciphering their alphabet

(See page 2 for more information)

7:30 pm Tuesday 18th September
at the MCCV Parkville
(Enter from Ievers St)

Bring family and friends.
All welcome

Last call!

Is your membership up to date?

Membership subscriptions became due on 1st July.

\$15 for a single or \$20 for a couple

Only financial members are able to stand for election to the committee and to vote at the AGM

Payments can be made to our treasurer, Mario Bonnici, at a lecture or by cheque posted to:

Mario Bonnici
59 Binnak Drive,
Watsonia 3087

Next MHA Lecture ~ Tuesday 18th September 2018
The Phoenicians and their Legacy in the Mediterranean
 by
Professor Maurice Cauchi

The greatest sea-faring nation in antiquity arose, from the 8th century BCE, from a group of several cities on the coast, of what is today Lebanon. These people travelled all the way to Spain and beyond on their fragile boats to trade and to colonise, eventually setting up a colony, Carthage, that could challenge the power of the mighty Roman Empire.

Malta, right in the middle of their pathway, could not escape their influence. Evidence of their stay can be seen even after centuries have passed. Their main settlement areas were primarily around Mdina but remains have been found all over the islands of Malta and Gozo. Of particular interest is the site known as Tas-Silġ, overlooking Marsaxlokk, which was their major harbour, protected as it is from the prevailing north-westerly winds.

A number of interesting aspects will be discussed in an effort to better understand what motivated these people. Their pottery has survived to this day. Their use of pigments was both original and highly desirable by all the rich clients around the Mediterranean. Their culture lasted several centuries.

Of particular interest is the role that Malta has played in deciphering the Phoenician alphabet.



Malta Independent Since
21st September 1964



The Maltese Community Council
Will be Celebrating with a
Dinner Dance
On Friday, 21st September 2018

At the Maltese Community Centre
 477 Royal Parade Parkville
From 7.15pm till 10.30 pm
Dance Music

4 Course Meal will be Served with Wine and Soft Drinks
Tickets \$38 each
 For bookings Contact Our Social Secretary :
Rita Pullicino on 0404 630 351
 or MCCV Secretary Irene on 9387 8922

**(THANKSGIVING MASS WILL BE
 CELEBRATED)**
AT ST. PAUL'S CHAPEL PARKVILLE AT 6 PM.)

A DAY WE SHOULD BE ALL PROUD OF
IT HAS BEEN 54 YEARS SINCE
INDEPENDENCE



Maltese Community Council of Victoria, Incorporated

ABN 66 736 475 892



477 Royal Parade, Parkville, Victoria 3052, Australia
Telephone: (03) 9387 8922 • Facsimile: (03) 9387 8309
Website: www.mccv.org.au • Email: admin@mccv.org.au

30th August 2018

Dear President / Secretary

RE MALTA INDEPENDENCE DAY CELEBRATIONS
21ST SEPTEMBER 2018

We wish to inform you that the MCCV is celebrating Malta Independence day on the 21st September 2018 by holding a **dinner dance** on that day at the Maltese Community Centre.

We are also expecting to receive from Malta a number of paintings which are to be exhibited in the hall on that date.

The paintings which are for sale will be available for purchase with all the proceeds going towards the purchase of medical equipment for the Malta Hospital.

We shall be pleased if you can join us on our Malta Independence Day celebrations.

Would you kindly display the attached notice on your notice board and advise your members of the event.

Kind Regards

VICTOR BORG
 PRESIDENT
 MALTESE COMMUNITY COUNCIL OF VICTORIA

Last month's lecture ~ 21st August 2018
Underground Chapels in Malta
by
Joseph Borg

On the 21st August 2018 Joseph Borg spoke to a small but intimate group about the many underground or cave chapels in Malta. A summary follows but you are advised to look at the [PowerPoint](#) for wonderful photos and descriptions of the many Maltese underground chapels

Prior to the Arab invasion of 870, Malta, along with Sicily and Southern Italy, was under Byzantine rule. No documentary evidence has been found of Greek monastic activity on the Maltese islands following the Norman re-conquest of 1127 but its presence is evidenced in iconography, architecture, hagiography and toponymy. At the time Malta was considered a satellite state of Sicily. It is believed that Siculo-Greek monasticism, and the customs that it upholds, in the form of cave churches and the cults for certain saints, were brought to the islands via Sicily. The roots of the ascetic and eremitic traditions stem from the Orient, particularly Syria and the Nile Delta. The diffusion of cave churches and habitations in Sicily is owed to the move of a Syrian-Palestinian community to Sicily in the sixth century



***MHA Lecture 21 August 2018.
Photo: Charlie Portelli***



The rock-cut hermitages reflect the Greek monastic interest in Eastern eschatology (the doctrine of the last or final things, as death, judgement, heaven and hell) and anchoritic practices, which called for religious seclusion from urban life. There is an allegorical affiliation with death and the grave, the tunnel through which man must pass for eternal life. The cave church serves also as an echo of the Holy Sepulchre - the assumed site of Golgotha, where Christ's crucifixion took place, and one of Christendom's holiest shrines, to which pilgrims flocked. The pious who could not embark on the pilgrimage to Jerusalem could make the spiritual link

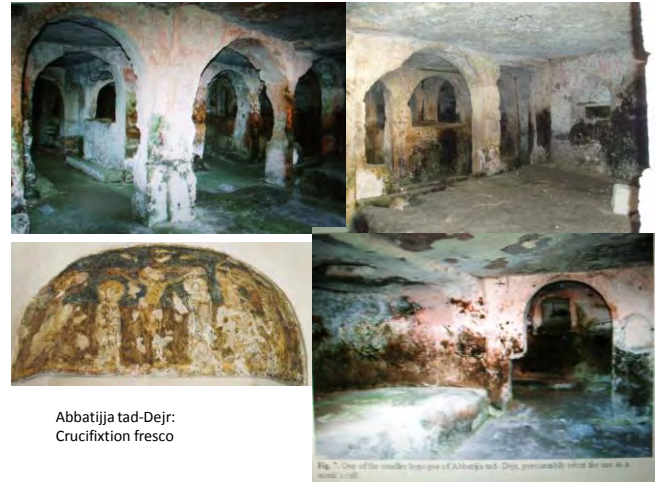
through the cave, serving as a symbol of Christianity's greatest mystery - the Resurrection of Christ. The fascination with rock-cut spaces led to a number of Sicilian-Greek saints setting up home and hermitages in caves. These include Philip of Agira, who was a principal figure in Sicilian-Greek monasticism and whose cult following in Malta remains markedly strong.

The creative and intellectual reawakening that took place in Sicily at the turn of the twelfth century, following the Norman conquest, was reached in great part due to travelling Calabrian monks who injected the Siculo-Greek community with new beliefs and traits, such as the cult of the obscure Irish Saint Catald, mostly in Taranto but also in Malta, where a partially rock-cut church dedicated to the saint was built in Rabat above an Early Christian cemetery. Siculo-Greek Monasticism in Malta probably owed its origin to Basilian monks, who travelled from Sicily to Malta as part of their missionary work. Part of the mission of these monks was to convert the natives, and it is presumed that the Muslims living in caves were deemed a likely community for conversion. If the surviving frescoes in the Siculo-Byzantinesque style prove testimony enough, then this conversion might have proved successful. As was the case in Sicily and Pantelleria, followers of Islam preferred to convert to Greek-rite Christianity rather than the Latin-rite, which they presumably related to their Norman overlords.

The different types of cave churches and troglodytic settlements of Malta can be divided into urban and rural settlements. However, there are no major differences between the two, and they are a result of the same religious and social realities. The urban cave churches are mainly found in the proximity of Mdina, most of which are hewn from or reutilised spaces from earlier Palaeo-Christian catacombs in present day Rabat, to which they have a close relationship. On the other hand, those which are rural are scattered in the countryside, mostly in the hilly Northern part of the island.

The existence of a number of **Dejr** (derived from the Arabic *dejr*) toponyms seems to hint to a Greek presence on the island and the possibility of ‘a convent or a monastery’, as this is one of the meanings of the word, along with ‘the cell of a monk’. However, none of the cave churches or troglodytic settlements that are known in Malta can be **firmly** identified as one of these supposed monastic establishments.

One such examples of the **Dejr** toponym is in **Abbatija tad-Dejr**, a paleo-christian hypogeum that was reutilised in the early post-Muslim period as a cult centre. The art historical evidence supporting the claim that this might have been a **dejr** is found in the images which decorate the walls of this hypogeum.



Abbatija tad-Dejr:
Crucifixion fresco

Fig. 7. One of the smaller tombs of Abbatija tad-Dejr, presumably used for use as a small chapel.

St Paul's Catacombs, Rabat



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St Paul's Catacombs, Rabat

This oratory was formed by the recutting of burial-chambers at the entrance to Malta's major palaeo-christian cemetery. It bears a superficial resemblance to the two Byzantine oratories in the Catacombs of Santa Lucia in Syracuse, and like them it seems to belong to a late phase in the history of the site, between approximately the sixth and eight centuries A.D.

St. Agatha – Rabat

The church is re-cut from a palaeochristian hypogeum. The remains of the funerary architecture can still be made out, together with the remains of a possibly 5th century A.D. Greek inscription painted in red ochre.



St Agatha's Crypt, Rabat

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St. Mary Magdalene – Rabat

The church, and the adjoining chambers, are re-cut from a hypogeum, or a cluster of small hypogea. It is entered down a steep flight of steps and is neatly excavated on a roughly circular plan. The walls are carefully stuccoed with a cement mixture of ground pottery and lime, and gird by a continuous rock-bench. 0.45 x 0.92 m. The church seems to fit with the description of the *Cimiterium Sancti Pauli*, next to the parish church of St. Paul, visited in 1575 by Pietro Dusina who describes it as a rock-cut burial crypt with a stone altar. It presumably served the purpose of an ossuary. A great quantity of bones (*innumerable quantità di ossa*) was noted around 1647, when its altar was dedicated to St. Mary Magdalene.

Other underground churches discussed were:

St. Paul's Grotto – Rabat
S. Maria della Speranza – Rabat
St. Cataldus – Rabat
S. Maria della Grotta – Rabat (Il-Madonna ta' l-Ghar)
Nativity of the Virgin - Fort St. Angelo, Birgu
S. Maria della Virtú – limits of Rabat
S. Leonardo (San Anard)– Wied Liemu, limits of Dingli and Rabat.
Our Lady of Hope (tal-Isperanza) Mosta
Chapel of St Paul the hermit
St. Brancatus (Ghar San Brinkaw) – Gharghur
St. Nicholas (Ghar San Niklaw) – Mellieha
Nativity of the Virgin – Mellieha
St. Leonard (San Leonardo tal-Gebel) – Minsija, San Gwann
Unknown Dedication (L-Ghar tas-Slaleb) – Wied il-Kbir, Qormi
Bormla: Church of the Holy Angel
Filfla: Assumption
Msida: Immaculate Conception
San Pawl il-Bahar: St.Martin's Grotto.
GOZO:
Victoria: Annunciation.
Xlendi: St.Domenica.
Kerchem: St.Catherine of Siena
Ghar il-Hamrija: A medieval troglodyte chapel on Comino

*For details, photographs and legends of these amazing chapels, I highly recommended Joseph Borg's PowerPoint and Lecture recording, which can be found [here](#).
CG*

Maltese DownUnder Returns for Fifth Season

After struggling for funding, Maltese DownUnder returned to C31 (channel 44) on Sunday 2nd September, largely thanks to the efforts of Marlene Scicluna and Mark Avellino. The MHA is pleased to be one of the sponsors of this highly rated bilingual community programme. The 2nd episode, this Sunday, will feature the 60th Anniversary of the MCCV.

Maltese DownUnder screens on Sundays at 4pm, with repeats on Tuesday at 2.30pm & Friday at 12.30pm. It is also available on demand on YouTube [here](#).

[MCCV Article](#)

[MDU Sponsors](#)

Festa Ta' Marija Bambina ~ 3 pm Sunday 9th September 2018 St Mary, Star of the Sea, West Melbourne

Every year, on the second Sunday in September, Reskeon organises the Festa of Marija Bambina on behalf of the Fathers of the Missionary Society of St. Paul. This year, the Feast will be celebrated on Sunday 9th September at St. Mary Star of the Sea, West Melbourne, starting at 3.00 pm, with Rosary, Mass, Procession (weather permitting) and Benediction. The Maltese Choir of Victoria and the Maltese Own Band Philharmonic Society will be in attendance. (See article Page 6)



Marija Bambina Procession Melbourne 2016

Photo: C. Gatt

The Feast of Marija Bambina

The Nativity of Our Lady, on 8th September, is dear to the heart of the Maltese. It is also known as the Vittoria (Victory), as it coincides with the end of the Great Siege of Malta in 1565, the rebellion of the Maltese against the French (September 2, 1798) and their departure from the island (September 5, 1800), and the surrender of Italy on September 8 1943, during World War 2.

The following summary of a fascinating Times of Malta article by Fabian Mangion gives further insight into how this veneration came about:

After the Great Siege, a church was built in Senglea. Completed in 1580, it was dedicated to Our Lady of Victories.

In 1618 the captain of an Austrian galley saw a small statue floating in the flotsam of a shipwreck near the Dalmatian coast. Recognising it as a religious artefact, he resolved to donate it to a church. At the request of two passengers from Senglea he donated it to their church, which at that time did not have a statue or even a painting of Our Lady. The little statue soon became known as il-Bambina. It was placed on a small altar which later became known as the altar of Our Lady of Perpetual Help.

In 1718, during a severe drought, the statue was carried, by bishop's decree, on a penitential pilgrimage to the sanctuary of Our Lady in Qormi called Tal-Hlas. On the way back it started to drizzle, and then it rained heavily.

In 1813, a deadly plague devastated the island. The Senglea chapter vowed to hold three votive processions in perpetuity if the city was spared. Senglea was unaffected, and the pledge has been observed ever since.

During WW2, heavy bombardments on January 16th 1941 severely damaged the basilica of Our Lady of Victories. The Bambina and other valuables were moved to Birkirkara. With the lessening of air raids, it was decided to risk returning the Bambina to Senglea on 8th September 1943. During the procession through the war-torn streets, news arrived that Italy had surrendered. Malta was now safe and free. Read the full article [here](#).

In Malta, festivities take place in Senglea, Naxxar, Mellieħa, and Xagħra, Gozo. Since 1878, an annual rowing regatta takes place in the Grand Harbour. The parish of the ancient village of Naxxar, which is also dedicated to our Lady of Victories, celebrates with a BBQ, processions and music. See the 2018 programme [here](#). Mellieħa will celebrate with lots of fireworks, bands and processions, and many [other activities](#).

Xagħra in Gozo will celebrate the birthday of its patron saint and the 45th anniversary of the crowning of their statue of Marija Bambina with a Pontifical Mass, processions and a choir. It will hold its traditional horse and donkey races. Re-enactments of the Great Siege and World War II, and a midnight three-dimensional architectural show in front of the basilica are part of the [extensive programme](#).

In Melbourne, on 6 September, Reskeon Maltese Association, on behalf of the Missionary Society of St. Paul, organised a Mass followed by light refreshments at the Maltese Community Centre, Parkville. The Australian Xagħra Association will celebrate Mass at the Maltese Cultural Centre in Albion on September 7, and Reskeon will hold their annual Vittoria Dinner Dance at the Firenze Reception Centre on Saturday 8th September.

On Sunday 9 September, the Feast of Marija Bambina will be celebrated at St. Mary Star of the Sea, West Melbourne. Rosary at 3.00 pm will be followed by Mass, accompanied by The Maltese Choir of Victoria. Weather permitting, a procession will take place with the statue of Our Lady accompanied by the Maltese Own Band Philharmonic Society. This will be followed by Benediction. Reskeon Maltese Association organises the Feast of Marija Bambina on behalf of the fathers of the Missionary Society of St. Paul.



The original Bambina



The Bambina at Star of the Sea, West Melbourne. Photo: C. Gatt

**BACK TO
MALTA
ISLAND PARTY!**

MALTESE FOOD!

MUSICAL BINGO!

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**NICKY BOMBA'S
BUSTAMENTO**

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7.30 - 11 TICKETS @ EVENTBRITE
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Saturday 15th September @ 6:30pm

St Bernadette's Community Centre
21 - 29 Cooke Ave, Sunshine North

For bookings visit www.musicworx.org

musicworx

presents

Fanciful Imaginings

An Anthology of Musical Dreams

Standard \$20

Children (under 12 years) \$10

musicworx was founded in 2014 with the aim of bringing people together to develop and share creativity and talent in the music realm while producing amateur musical productions in Melbourne's North Western region.

Fanciful Imaginings

showcases the talent of budding performers. Join us on a musical journey where fantasy may just turn into reality and dreams do come true!

The theatrical production includes some of the most memorable songs to hit the stage from shows such as Les Miserables, Fiddler on the Roof, Phantom of the Opera, Chicago and Annie as well as a selection of the best Disney classics of all time.

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