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Maltese Historical Association (Aust) Inc
(Għaqda Storika Maltija (Awstralija) Inkorporata)

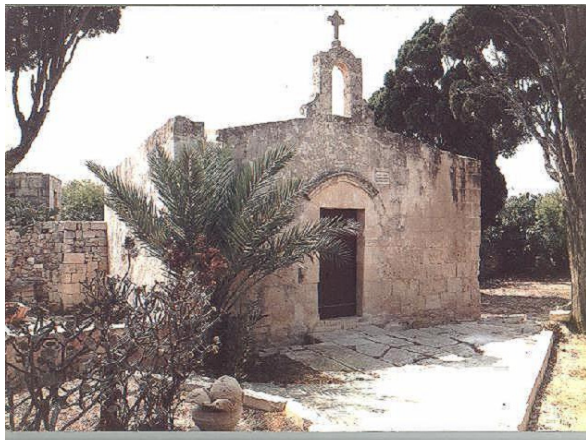
No 3/2011

June Newsletter

This Month: Our next talk will take place at the Maltese Community Centre, 477 Royal Parade, Parkville at 7.30pm on Tuesday June 21, 2011. Professor Maurice Cauchi will be our guest speaker this month and his topic is '*Mediaeval Malta: Exploding Myths*'.

This talk covers the period starting from the end of the Byzantine rule in Malta (870AD) until the arrival of the Knights in Malta in 1530 AD. It is a period that was shrouded in darkness for a long time. A lot of the history that we learned at school about this period was scanty at best and quite misleading most times.

Recent research has discovered several aspects about this period in Maltese history which throws interesting light on that period. After the Byzantines left Malta they made several unsuccessful attempts to fight their way back. The Arabs came to Malta, first to devastate the land, and then to repopulate it. Roger the Norman was not greeted on the shores with shouts of *Kyrie Eleison* but by Maltese in rags who ran away on seeing him. Several battles were fought and lost by warring European



princes, battles which compare in their massive armaments with the Great Siege involving the Knights centuries later. Most of all the much-maligned Gonsalvo Monroy, the villain of the piece, can now be reinstated and remembered in history as a benefactor!

These are some of the historical details that should provide good themes for discussion.

Professor Maurice Cauchi migrated to Australia with his family in 1969. His interest in Maltese cultural issues started in the 1980s with his involvement with the Maltese Literature Group. Later, he became the President of this association (1984-1986), during which time he was instrumental in publishing *Irjieħ*, an anthology of poetry in Maltese written by members of the MLG. He was also chairman of the Education Committee, and President of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria (1989 - 1991), and again from 2004 to 2006, after he returned from his 11-year stay in Malta. From 1989 to 1991, he was also Chairperson of the Ethnic Community Council of Victoria (1989-1991). He also served as a member of the Victorian Ethnic Affairs Commission, of the Ministerial Advisory Council on Multicultural Affairs, of the Victoria Reference Group of the Bureau of Immigration Research as well as President of the Federated Maltese Council of Australia.

From 1992 to 2003, Professor Cauchi resided in Malta. During this time, he was Chairman for the Commission for Maltese Abroad (Ministry for Social Policy, 1992-1994), and Chairman,

Malta Migration Museum (2001-2003). He was largely responsible for establishing a website www.maltamigration.com for the virtual museum, which is the most comprehensive collection of information about Maltese migrant issues. For his services to the community, he was made Member of the Order of Australia (AM) in 1991 and awarded the Medalja għal Qadi tar-Repubblika Ta' Malta ('Medal for Services to the Republic of Malta', MQR) in 1992.

Professor Cauchi has written extensively on various aspects of migration. Among his recently published books are *The Maltese Migrant Experience* (1999), *Maltese Achievers in Australia* (2006), *A Who's Who of Maltese-Background Persons in Australia and New Zealand* (2008) and *Under One Umbrella - A History of the Maltese Community Council of Victoria Inc 1958- 2000* (2010).



April 2011: Dr Claudia Sagona M.O.M., Senior Fellow in Archaeology at the University of Melbourne, has written extensively on Malta's ancient past. In April, she delivered a lecture to the Maltese Historical Association on 'Looking for Mithra in Malta', the topic of her latest book. The cult of Mithra reached the height of its popularity in the second and third century AD in Roman territories after quiet beginnings in the highlands of eastern Turkey sometime in the first century BC. The Mithraic cult reached many parts of the Roman world and it is unlikely that Malta was immune to this popular, yet private and exclusive cult. There is every possibility that Mithraic practices filtered into the islands sometime after the archipelago came under Roman domination in 218 BC at the start of the Second Punic War.

Dr Sagona spoke about evidence she has found on the presence of the cult in the Maltese islands. She discussed objects with Mithraic iconography that have recently come to light, often uncovered during building works, in places like Rabat . A number of these objects,

for example, are now part of the collection at the museum at St Agatha's in Rabat. There is also evidence in the Maltese islands of Mithraic places of worship, known as 'mithraea'. These have been found in numbers



throughout the Roman world and the most convincing cultic site in the Maltese archipelago is located at Ras il-Wardija perched on the west coast of the island of Gozo. In addition to funerary sites with possible Mithraic architectural traits - at Ħal-Resqun, Salina Bay and tal-Kandija for instance - there are early church structures, at places such as tas-Silġ, comprising simple stone buildings and natural caves that might have served an earlier, Mithraic purpose.

Postscript: On March 30, 1988, an ancient graffito was stolen from the site at Ras il-Wardija. It was handed over to the authorities in 2008 and the owner of the land renounced all rights of ownership in favour of the Maltese government. This graffito is now the centerpiece of an exhibition launched earlier this month on the occasion of *Lejlet Lapsi Notte Gozitana 2011* and it will remain on permanent display at the Gozo Museum of Archaeology.



Courtesy of Joe Borg and *Sovrintendenza tal-Patrimonju Kulturali*

Upcoming Events

~ the Bishop of Gozo, HE Mgr Mario Grech, will be visiting Australia in October 2011. The MCCV will host a reception to welcome him to Melbourne; details will be available later in the year.

~ later this year, the MCCV will also host a fund-raising concert by Fr Rob Galea, assistant to the late Bishop Joe Grech.

~ Joseph Calleja, the Maltese tenor, has announced an upcoming visit to Australia – details as they come to hand.

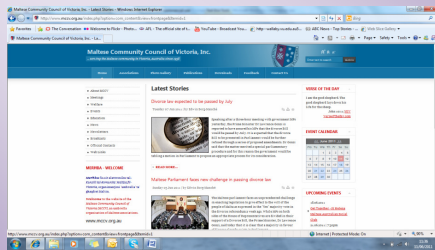
National Census, August 9, 2011

One of the questions we will be asked at the census relates to the language/s we speak at home. The federal government relies on such data when formulating policy in a number of areas, including provision of health care. It is therefore critically important that, if Maltese is spoken at home, you should record this on your census form.



Census
100 years 1911–2011
9 August 2011

Have you visited the new MCCV website?



www.mccv.org.au

Reminder

Memberships for 2011-2012 are now due. These remain unchanged at \$10 for singles and \$15 for couples. Please see Mario Bonnici at our next meeting or mail your cheque to 59 Binnak Drive Watsonia 3087.

Prospective members: please note that you can download a membership form from our website www.mha.org.au

Stop Press - Queen's Birthday Honours

It has been announced this morning that George Saliba has been awarded a Medal (OAM) Of The Order Of Australia "for service to the Maltese Community". Our congratulations to George and the Saliba family.



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