

The Islands of Malta and Gozo in Greek and Roman History and Literature

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Abstract. Malta, Gozo and Comino, the Thrinacia of Homer and the Melitē, Phoebe and Lampas of Scylax, form an archipelago in the centre of the Mediterranean Sea inhabited by both Phoenicians and Greeks before the coming of the Romans to those islands. Many geographers mention them, but other authors refer to their importance as places of production of textiles and other natural goods like oil and honey. Of particular importance was the site of the temple of Juno and Hercules known to Phoenicians, Greeks, Romans as well as to Numidians. Malta and Gozo were also praised for their good harbors and stone. The Grand Harbour itself served as an important Byzantine base with its tower and inner harbour, both places bearing Greek names. Malta was converted to Christianity in AD 60 following St Paul's shipwreck there, where he spent three winter months. The aim of this article is to scrutinize the information about Malta and Gozo in numerous Greek, Roman and Christian sources.

Keywords: Malta, Gozo, Mediterranean Archaeology, History, Literature, Geography.

Malta ir Gozo graikų ir romėnų istorinėje tradicijoje ir literatūroje

Anotacija. Maltos, Gozo ir Komino salos, sudarančios salyną centrinėje Viduržemio jūros dalyje, yra glaudžiai susijusios su antikine tradicija. Homeras visas šias salas vadino Trinakija, Skilakas – Melite, Febe ir Lampada. Prieš įsitvirtinant romėnams, salos buvo apgyvendintos finikiečių ir graikų, minimos daugelio autorių, kurie nurodo jas buvus svarbiais tekstilės, aliejaus ir medaus gamybos centrais. Malta dar buvo garsi Junonos ir Heraklio šventykla, žinoma ne tik graikams ir romėnams, bet ir finikiečiams, ir net numidams. Antikos laikais Malta ir Gozo taip pat garsėjo patogiomis įlankomis ir akmens kasyklomis. Vadinamoji Didžioji įlanka, saugoma gynybinio bokšto, buvo Bizantijos laivyno uostas. Minėtos vietovės iki šiol išlaikė graikiškos kilmės vardus. 60 metais, prie Maltos krantų sudužus šv. Pauliaus laivui, saloje priimta krikščionybė. Straipsnyje nagrinėjama Antikos ir krikščionių autorių pateikiama informacija apie Maltos ir Gozo salas.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Malta, Gozo, Viduržemio archeologija, istorija, literatūra, geografija.

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The Geographical Position of Malta and Gozo

The Maltese archipelago consists of three major and inhabited islands, Malta, Gozo and Comino, each bigger than the next. In addition, Comino has a smaller island, Cominotto, on its western end, while Malta has Filfla on the south-west of the island, St Paul's Island in the north-east, and Manoel Island in the east. Besides these small islands, one also encounters around Malta various islets, like Filfla's Islet, Għallis Rocks in the north-east and Delimara Point's Islet in the south-east; around Gozo, Fungus Rock and other islets in the West, Ġebel tal-Halfa and other islets in the south-east, and Fessej Rock in the South; and around Comino, islets by Cominotto and others in the north. None of these last-mentioned islets are inhabited.

The total area of the Maltese Islands is nearly 316 square km: that of Malta is 246 square km, that of Gozo 57 square km, and that of Comino and Cominotto 2.6 square km. The perimeter of Malta is 137 km, that of Gozo 44 km. Malta is 27 km long and 15 km broad, while Gozo is 15 km long and 8 km broad.

The Maltese Islands are south of Sicily (visible on very fine days) by about 81 km, north-east of northern Tunisia by 282 km, 241 km south-west of Italy, and 322 km north of Libya. It is equidistant to the Straits of Gibraltar and to Lebanon. The people are Maltese, of ancient Phoenician European stock, who speak the only Semitic language in Europe, of very ancient origin, but who write in Latin characters. They practice the Roman Catholic religion.

The Historical Background

The islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino have been populated since early prehistoric times. Traces of habitation of this period have been recorded at Għar Dalam in the south of Malta, and at an early neolithic village at Skorba towards the north of Malta. Massive temple building followed in the fourth millennium BC at Mnajdra and Hagar Qim in the south west of Malta and at Tarxien and Paola (Underground) in the east of Malta. Similar temple building took place at Ġgantija in Gozo. The Tarxien locality includes also the Bronze Age period, the period which was represented also by temples and fortifications at Borġ in-Nadur in the south east of Malta and Bahrija in the west of Malta (Bonanno 2001). This last phase provided the background for early Greek and Phoenician migrations to Malta in the ninth century BC.

Both the Greeks and the Phoenicians were to be found in nearby Sicily about the same period they came to Malta and Gozo¹. In the case of the Greeks, their presence on Mount Eryx in western Sicily and other localities in the Bronze Age is attested by widespread colonization and emigration sustained by the accounts of Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes and Vergil (Graham 1982, 83–162). However, when the curtain of history is raised, we find the Phoenicians and the Greeks occupying the western and the eastern parts of the island respectively (Moscato 1968).

¹ Vella 2002, 6, quoting 735 or 734 BC as the first Greek colonization in Sicily in history.

The Sicilian conflict between these two peoples was the result of expansionist policies from both peoples. Battles and wars, advancements and retreats over the centuries brought about hardly any changes in the geography of the island, although the loss of life was great. It was in this scenario that the islands of Malta and Gozo must have become places of refuge in nearby waters.

The coming of the Greeks and the Phoenicians to Malta and Gozo gave clear indications of the importance of the islands as places of refuge, as well as of refueling their calls within the harbors with agricultural and ceramic products. Government became organized in both islands, and municipalities are attested to have existed by extant inscriptions written in both Phoenician and Greek². This harmonious co-existence in Malta and Gozo of two different peoples in conflict with each other in nearby Sicily is confirmed by bilingual dedication to common gods³.

This coming of the Greeks and the Phoenicians to Malta and Gozo brought about the original names of the islands, the last of which is also called ‘Għawdex’. The names of *Melitē* and *Gaulos* are Greek, and as in the case of other islands in the Mediterranean under Greek influence, the same names that were given to the islands were also given to their chief towns⁴.

Melitē was the name of a Greek nymph, but it was also applied to other towns and islands, including the one in the Adriatic Sea. *Gaulos*, which etymologically is related to neither Gozo nor Għawdex, was also the name the Greeks gave to the Phoenician ship currently in use and called ‘*gwl*’ by the Phoenicians. The names of ‘Għawdex’ and ‘Gozo’ are a transliteration of *Gaudos*, an island off the south-western coast of Crete. Both *Gaudos* and *Gozo* were wrongly transferred to *Gaulos*, *Gaudos* by Strabo, and *Gozo* by subsequent equivalence.

Greek names of towns, villages, forts and other places still in existence in Malta are the following: Qormi from Ὀρμοί, pronounced since Byzantine times as “Ormi”; Kirkop from Προκόπιος; Birgu from πύργος, pronounced since Byzantine times as “Pirgos”; Mistra from μύστρα, pronounced since Byzantine times as “Mistra”; Għar Lapsi from ἀνάλαψις, Doric dialect of ἀνάληψις, meaning “Ascension Cave”, and Wied ir-Rum, meaning, “the Valley of the Byzantine Romans”⁵.

Among the Greek inscriptions found in Malta, two are noted, which predate the Roman occupation of the islands in 218 BC. One of them refers to a municipal government led by two chief magistrates by the name of Hereas and Cotes⁶. The very fact that two chief magistrates are mentioned, and not one, confirms that this inscription goes back to the Graeco-Phoenician period. This Greek inscription found in Malta is comparable to a Punic inscription found in Gozo, which also mentions two *suphets*, that is, local governors⁷. Both municipal governments were independent of each other, and both were made up of

² *C.I.S.* 1.132 and *C.I.G.* 14.953.24.

³ *C.I.G.* 3.32.5753.

⁴ SCYL. 111; CIC. *Ver.* 2.4.103, and PTOL. *Geog. s.v. Glauconis.*

⁵ For a discussion of these names, see Vella 2019, 144–145 and 155, and Vella 2022b.

⁶ *C.I.G.* 14.953.24.

⁷ *C.I.S.* 1.132.

either Phoenician or Greek members, depending on either which island was politically predominantly Phoenician or Greek, or the roster of alternating government in each island.

Another inscription of pre-Roman dating is bilingual, and it refers to a dedication to Heracles *Archegetes* by Dionysius and Sarapion of Tyre⁸. Greek inscriptions continued to appear in Malta and Gozo even centuries after the Roman occupation of the islands⁹, including those on coins (Coleiro 1971, 67–91). In the case of the latter, Phoenician deities continued to appear alongside with the Greek letters. All this confirms that the local culture of the inhabitants even under Roman influence was happily a composite one incorporating both Greek and Phoenician elements. This influence was so strong that even by the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Maltese culture and language continued to be Graeco-Phoenician, strong enough to fall into the arms of new settlers, the Byzantine Greeks of Sicily. The present Maltese name of Sicily is *Sqallija*, whose penultimate accent and hard consonant of k=q betrays the influence of Greek Σικελία¹⁰.

The Romans took over the islands of Malta and Gozo in 218 BC, when Rome was at war with Carthage for the second time. This shows that the Phoenicians of Malta and Gozo, morally and militarily sustained by their brethren in Tyre's daughter-city of Carthage, survived in their presence there even during and after the first conflict between Rome and Carthage, despite the frequent navigations and sea-battles that took place during that conflict in the sea south of Sicily. The turnover into Roman power is described by Livy in his *Ab urbe condita*, where he mentions two thousand Carthaginian soldiers stationed in the islands who were handed over to Roman rule¹¹.

Malta, together with Gozo, now belonged to the province of Sicily, whose praetor governed the islands from Syracuse after the usurpation of Hiero's kingdom. It continued to have municipal governments of five councillors (*quinqueviri*) in each island, including the single mayors (*patroni* or *protoi*) who were Roman Knights¹². In addition, there was stationed in Malta from the times of Augustus a *procurator* of the two islands who reported to the emperor directly¹³. Both the *patronus*, often a priest himself, and the *procurator* devoted money to the enhancement and repair of temples, and to the cult of the emperor¹⁴. Malta and Gozo were not Roman colonies, but enjoyed Latin status from the times of Julius Caesar (Cary and Scullard 1975, 278). They also enjoyed the privilege of minting coins locally (Cahn 1983, 158–160), which, as mentioned, continued to represent Phoenician deities with Greek inscriptions. Despite the fact that no resistance is recorded by Livy, no privileges or status were granted to the islands, such as were given to a few towns in Sicily¹⁵.

⁸ C.I.G. 3.32.5753.

⁹ C.I.G. 14.601.

¹⁰ Further on Phoenician and Carthaginian Malta, see Bonanno 2005, 11–123.

¹¹ LIV. 21.51.1–2.

¹² See e.g. both the Lucius Castricius' inscription in Greek and the Caius Vallius' inscription in Latin in Vella 2002, 68–70 and 77–82 respectively.

¹³ C.I.L. 10.7494.

¹⁴ See e.g. C.I.L. 10.7494 and the Ceres Julia Augusta in Vella 2002, 71–74.

¹⁵ According to Cicero 2 *Ver.* 3.6.12–13, Messina and Taormina were granted the status of *civitas foederata*, while Centuripae, Alesa, Segesta, Aliciae and Palermo were granted the status of *civitas sine foedere, sed immunis ac libera*.

Commerce thrived under the Romans, although this generally meant the provision of oil, fruit, wine, timber, honey and clothes to rich businessmen in Rome itself¹⁶. Roman farmhouses were in fact factories of agricultural products¹⁷, while in town textile factories were recorded to have existed¹⁸. Stone-masonry¹⁹ and pottery-production (Bonanno 2005, 241–243) were among the various occupations that were appreciated in Roman times.

The religion of the islands before the coming of St Paul to Malta in AD 60 was, judging from Roman coins alone, Graeco-Phoenician (Coleiro 1971, 67–91). The major temple highly venerated there was that of Hera and Heracles, otherwise known to the Phoenicians as Ashtarte and Melqart, to the Romans as Juno and Hercules²⁰. The renown of this temple, occupying the site of an ancient Neolithic temple and transformed into a Byzantine church (Cagiani de Azevedo 1964) was attested by many *ex voto* offerings from kingdoms of the Mediterranean countries, as well as by becoming an attraction to despoiling pirates and praetors alike²¹.

The coming of St Paul to Malta in AD 60 throws further light on the political and religious situation of the island at that time. In the account of the *Acts of the Apostles*, the inhabitants are called *barbaroi* (*Acta Apost.* 28.2). Excluding the modern connotation of the word, since they were praised for their kindness shown to the victims of that shipwreck, *barbaroi* is interpreted either as a Semitic word meaning ‘inhabitants of the countryside’ (Vella 2014, 48–50), or as people who did not speak Greek²². Both interpretations are possible, because St Paul’s Bay is situated where once was countryside, while the author of the *Acts*, writing in Greek, would see the then predominantly Phoenician-speaking inhabitants as non-Greek speaking, that is, *barbaroi*. This is confirmed by Syrian St Luke’s understanding of the local conversation in Punic, which accompanied the miracle of the viper.

The status of the religion of the islands seems to have remained unchanged until the time of Constantine. No inscriptions or archaeological sites point to a Christian Malta before the conversion of the Empire, despite tradition (Vella 2002, 90–91). This was to be expected as Christianity was not welcome in the Empire itself. Any conversion that took place was kept at a low profile under times of persecution, which suggests that Publius, Governor of Malta at the call of St Paul, must have been a different person from the canonized bishop of Athens of the same namesake, but who was martyred in Athens itself as late as 180 AD (see further below).²³

¹⁶ See Talbert 1985, 149, regarding Sicily.

¹⁷ Cic. *2 Ver.* 2.2.72.176; 2.2.74.183; 2.5.11.27.

¹⁸ Cic. *2 Ver.* 2.4.103.

¹⁹ Diod. 5.12.2–3.

²⁰ Vella 1982, 272–276, and Vella, 1986, 315–321.

²¹ Cic. *2 Ver.* 2.4.104.

²² L. & S. 1948, s.v. βάρβαρος. See also Vella 2022a.

²³ Vella 2002, 129; see further below.

Malta and Gozo in Literature

The first time that the Maltese archipelago was mentioned in Greek literature was by Homer in the *Odyssey* by the names of Phaethusa (Malta), Lampetia (Comino) and Phoebe (Gozo understood), three islands making up Thrinacia, sacred and uninhabited islands inhabited only by these three nymphs and by 7 herds of 50 immortal cows each, and 7 herds of 50 immortal sheep each. The journey to these islands from Scylla and Charybdis (Straits of Messina) has been analyzed by myself in this same journal in 2012 (Vella 2012, 7–36). This identification of Lampetia with Comino has been recently made by myself relying on the three names Scylax gives to the three islands of the Maltese archipelago, namely, Melite, Gaulos and Lampas (Vella 2021). Melite, the largest of these three islands, has been identified in the same paper on Scylax with Phaethusa as a result of Ovid’s words calling Phaethusa the eldest of the three nymphs (*sororum / maxima*)²⁴. Scylax’s Lampas has been identified with Lampetie on etymological grounds, while by elimination, Phoebe, not mentioned by both Homer and Ovid, the last, however, mentioning her as “the third nymph” (*tertia*)²⁵, must then be identified with Gaulos (Gozo). The reason why Homer and Ovid never mentioned Phoebe by name is that Phoebe and Thrinacia are two synonymous names, that is, “the goddess-moon of the triple phases”, a notion represented on Roman coins minted in Malta by the thrinax (Vella 2015, 86–87).

From Scylla and Charybdis, Odysseus and his men made a straight course south to Thrinacia (αὐτίκ’ ἔπειτα θεοῦ ἐς ἀμύμονα νῆσον ἰκόμεθ’). This was a deserted island (ἐν νήσῳ ἐρήμῃ), far out from any other land (ἀλλ’ ὅτε δὴ τὴν νῆσον ἐλείπομεν οὐδέ τις ἄλλη φαίνεται γαιάων, ἀλλ’ οὐρανὸς ἠδὲ θάλασσα). From here, first the west wind drove Odysseus’ boat to the east, south of Pachynus, and after surviving alone in the tempest, a south wind drove Odysseus, holding to the heel of the boat, toward Scylla and Charybdis (ἐνθ’ ἧ τοι ζέφυρος μὲν ἐπαύσατο λαίλαπι θύων, ἦλθε δ’ ἐπὶ νότος ὄκα, φέρων ἐμῷ ἄλγεα θυμῷ)²⁶.

Malta and Gozo have been described by Greek and Roman geographers since the 4th century BC. These geographers were not interested directly in the islands, but in the whole Mediterranean. According to Scylax in the 4th century BC, Malta and Gozo were Carthaginian²⁷, according to Diodorus Siculus, who wrote in the early years AD, they were still Phoenician²⁸. Although the difference between Phoenician and Carthaginian is political, to say that Malta and Gozo were Phoenician in Roman times is a confirmation of Roman failure at romanizing the roots of the island. This is further confirmed by failure of Latin to take root there, despite many centuries of Roman occupation. The predominant Phoenician presence, among other minorities, was to pave the way for the Arabization of the islands after the conflict of the Arabs with Byzantine Christians in Sicily and its waters.

²⁴ Ov. *Met.* 2.346–347.

²⁵ Ov. *Met.* 2.350.

²⁶ Hom. *Od.* 12.261–262, 351, 403–404 and 426–427.

²⁷ Scyl. 111.

²⁸ Diod. 5.12.2–4.

Some of these geographers just mention the islands of Malta and Gozo. These are Ptolemy, Mela, Strabo, Pliny, Procopius, and Stephanus of Byzantium²⁹.

Other authors mention Malta with some comments, as Naevius does in his account of the first Punic War, and Livy in his account of the second Punic War.

Thus, Scylax says that Malta, together with Gozo and Lampas (Comino) (Vella 2021), were inhabited by the Carthaginians, and confirms that both Malta and Gozo had cities bearing the same names as themselves. In addition, he says that Malta served as a harbor³⁰. Only two lines by Naevius reflect the fires and devastation that took place in Malta, albeit he is the only author who mentions Malta in the first Punic war, from which we know that Malta survived as a Carthaginian settlement³¹. Ovid says that Malta was fertile³², while Grattius refers to Malta's corals³³.

Others showed they possessed greater knowledge of the islands, although they did not mean to write directly about them. Early in his career as an orator, young Cicero revealed detailed information not only about Caius Verres who despoiled the islands, but also about the already mentioned temple of Juno and Hercules, which he says was ancient and was always respected, and the Maltese local products, such as purple-dyed clothes, carpets, honey and roses. This temple, which he called *fanum Iunonis*, but which accommodated the veneration of Hercules who, in Phoenician times, was venerated under the name of Melqart along with Ashtarte³⁴, stood on a promontory in the south-east corner of the island, with a harbor nearby. Cicero talks about the international reputation of its sanctity, and illustrates this point by telling the story of the scrupulous effort of Masinissa, king of Numidia, to have returned to that temple ivory tusks of immense greatness which were stolen and brought to the king in Africa by his prefect. Cicero says that these tusks, together with other items of great artistic workmanship, were stolen by Caius Verres, Praetor of Sicily and its islands³⁵.

Diodorus Siculus refers to Malta's many harbors, all providing the different advantages for the mariners, to its prosperity, its clothes and houses, both of very good quality. He also refers to Gozo's advantageous harbors. He concludes each description of the two islands by saying that they were (in his own times) settlements (ἄποικοι) of the Phoenicians³⁶.

Livy, Augustus' chief historian, gives us an account of how Malta and Gozo passed over into Roman power at the beginning of the second Punic War. When Hiero was sent away with his royal fleet and a praetor was left to protect the coast of Sicily, Tiberius Sempronius Longus, consul in 218 BC, the year when war broke out, sailed from Lilybaeum to Malta, and on his arrival, Hamilcar, son of Gisco, prefect of the garrison, with little

²⁹ Ptol. *Geog.* 4.3.13; MELA 2.7.171–174; STR. *Geog.* 6.2.11, 17.3.16; PLIN. *Nat.* 3.8.92, 5.7.42; Procop. *Bell. Hist.* 3.14.16, and St. Byz. *s.v.* Μελίτη and Γαῦλος.

³⁰ Scyl. 111.

³¹ Naev. *Poen.* 4.37.

³² Ov. *Fast.* 3.567–568.

³³ Grat. 401–405.

³⁴ Vella 1982, 272–276, and Vella 1986, 315–321.

³⁵ Cic. *Ver.* 2.4.103–104; see also 2.2.72.176, 2.2.74.183, 2.5.11.27, *Att.* 10.7.1 (198), 10.8.10 (199), 10.9.1 (200), 10.9, and 10.18.2 (210).

³⁶ Diod. 5.12.2–4.

less than two thousand soldiers, as well as the town, that is, *Melitē*, surrendered with the rest of the island³⁷.

Other authors actually came to Malta and Gozo, and left us very important descriptions of one or the other of the islands. It is unfortunate that Hecataeus, who actually was an inhabitant of Gozo, and who described that island, has not survived except through a short quotation by Stephanus of Byzantium³⁸. St Luke in his *Acts* says that the inhabitants were kind and superstitious, for they provided hospitality to the shipwrecked both on arrival and on departure, and were forward in interpreting religiously the incident in which a viper bit a hand of St Paul as he was laying sticks on to the fire. He also refers to the miracles St Paul performed on the father of Publius, governor of Malta, and on the sick inhabitants themselves. He does not mention the conversion of the inhabitants into Christianity, nor the institution of a Church there.

St Luke's detailed account of the journey from Crete to Malta and then to Syracuse leaves us with no doubt that this was the island St Paul came to. It provides us with the exact month of departure from Crete, that is, November / December, seven lunar months after April, a time commonly excluded from safe sailing. That the boat was driven by a north-easterly wind from the Adriatic Sea to Malta, south of Sicily, makes complete sense, but it would not make sense if the boat was shipwrecked on the coast of *Melitē* (Mljet) off Dalmatia (Croatia); for a boat to get shipwrecked on that *Melitē*, driven by a north-easterly wind, would have to be positioned in the very narrow channel of sea lying between that *Melitē* and Dalmatia, the channel which, instead, would have protected the ship. Also, one has to bear in mind that the Adriatic Sea covers the area from the Venetian Gulf down to the entrance of the same sea between the heel of Italy and Epirus. From the southern parts of the Adriatic Sea, however, a north-easterly wind would drive a boat straight down to the island of Malta. Furthermore, after a stay of three months in Malta, St Paul's next call is given as Syracuse, the nearest port of call en route to Rome. From *Melitē* in the Adriatic, however, the nearest port of call would have been *Brundisium* (Brindisi) instead³⁹.

Myths on Malta and Gozo in Classical Times

Various myths were created on Malta and Gozo by Classical writers and modern ones. These myths were often created by confusing the islands of Malta and Gozo with other islands elsewhere in the Mediterranean Sea. Such myths include the derivation of the name of *Melitē*, the reference of *Gaudos* to *Gaulos*, and those of Calypso and the Melitaeans to the same islands. A brief discussion of these references follows.

The name of Melitē / Melita

As said above, the name *Melitē* was applied to a nymph, one of the Nereids, daughter of Nereus and Doris. These Nereids, minor goddesses of the sea, accompanied Poseidon,

³⁷ Liv. 21.51.1–2.

³⁸ Hecat. s.v. Γαῦλος.

³⁹ Acta. Apost. 27.27–28.12.

god of the sea. In Latin, *Melite* was either retained in its Greek form, as in Ovid⁴⁰, or given the Latinized form of *Melita*. Because of this derivation, one therefore excludes any possible derivation from Greek μέλι, meaning ‘honey’, much less from Latin *mel*, *mellis*, also meaning ‘honey’, whose root includes double *l*. The myth arose from Jean Quintin’s statement⁴¹. Arabs may have helped retain the name from the times of the Byzantine Greeks, but were not the inventors of the name.

The Greeks in Malta and Gozo

Another myth is the theory that in these islands one comes across no settlements of Greeks, except for the Byzantine Greeks from eastern Sicily in later times. The justification of the existence of Greek script on inscriptions is explained by calling Greek script found in Malta in the Roman period as *lingua franca*. This, however, does not take into consideration the existence of the Hereas and Cotes inscription which, as explained above, has been dated as definitely preceding the arrival of the Romans in Malta and Gozo. Nor is the so-called *lingua franca* explained if the existence of Greek settlers by 218 BC in Malta and Gozo is denied. The Greek that was written in these islands’ inscriptions, together with Punic and, later, with Latin, were meant to be read and understood by three different peoples dwelling here, not unlike the Greek which was added to Hebrew and Latin on the writ of accusation nailed to Christ’s cross⁴².

QVINQVEVIRI

Yet another myth was created in Malta regarding the letters of QVIR one meets with in some of the Latin inscriptions also found in Malta and Gozo, which some modern authors interpreted as short for *tribus Quirina*, instead of our QVINQVEVIR, that is, a member of a committee of five governing either the island of Malta or the island of Gozo. This *tribus Quirina* was suggested to be a privilege bestowed to a Knight or to the whole people⁴³. Similarly, other privileges were wrongly attributed to these islands, such as the *civitas foederata*, *civitas libera atque immunis*, or the *civitas sine suffragio*⁴⁴. Finally, one meets the attempt to date late into the Roman period the first institution of the *Municipium*, one in Malta and one in Gozo, the institutions which we know were already in existence during the stay of the Greeks and the Phoenicians in Malta and Gozo in pre-Roman times (Vella 2002, 65–68). Reference has already been made above to a Greek inscription found in Malta which clearly refers to a Council with two ἄρχοντες, in the style of Punic local government, instead of the later πρῶτος τῆς νήσου καὶ τῶν Μελιταίων⁴⁵, or the *Primus Melitensium*⁴⁶, both languages and expressions found in Roman times.

⁴⁰ Ov. *Fast.* 3.567.

⁴¹ Vella ed. 1980b, 32.

⁴² Vella 1995a, 14–15; Vella 1995b, 1–2, and Vella 2002, 5–7.

⁴³ See commentary in Vella 2002, 56. For an inscription using QVIR, see the Marcus Vallius’ inscription in Vella 2002, 82–83.

⁴⁴ See discussion above, and in Vella 2002, 51–62.

⁴⁵ See the Lucius Castricius’ inscription in *C.I.G.* 14.601 and *Acta Apost.* 28.7.

⁴⁶ See the Temple of Apollo’s inscription in Vella 2002, 74–75.

Battus of Cyrene

Ovid confuses the kingdom of Battus in Cyrene with Malta, and says that Anna, Dido's sister, escaping from her brother Pygmalion, found refuge in this island, where the inhabitants are described as unwarlike⁴⁷. We know, however, that Battus was from Thera and that he founded Cyrene in 631 BC from numerous sources, such as Pindar, Herodotus, Diodorus Siculus, Catullus, Silius Italicus, Justin, Pausanias and Hesychius Alexandrinus (Vella 2002, 110–113).

Strabo

Strabo makes two mistakes when referring to our Malta and Gozo; but by his reference to these islands as one archipelago not far from *Pachynus* of Sicily, he clearly meant these two islands in the center of the Mediterranean Sea⁴⁸.

The Melitaeen Dog

Strabo's first mistake is his assertion that in the island of Malta were dogs called 'Melitaeen'. It was, however, the other island of the same namesake in the Adriatic Sea to which other Classical authors attribute the Melitaeen dog. So does Pliny, quoting Callimachus, when he places *Melitē* in between *Corcyra Melaena* and *Illyricum*⁴⁹. He adds that these dogs used to be laid on the stomach of the sick to cure them⁵⁰.

Other Classical authors mention the Melitaeen dog but, however, they do not indicate which island was the home for such dogs. Such authors include Aesop, Tymnes, Agatharchides, Aristotle, Theophrastus, Plutarch, Lucian, Athenaeus, Alciphro, Hesychius Alexandrinus, Suidas and Galen⁵¹.

Others, including Strabo himself, confuse the issue by referring the Melitaeen dog to the island of Malta in the center of the Mediterranean Sea. These are Polemo, who says that *Melitē* (presumably the one in the Adriatic Sea) is close to Italy, but within the political confines of Sicily⁵²; and Stephanus of Byzantium, who says that *Melitē*, whose inhabitants he correctly explains were of the race of the *Oeniadae*, was situated in between Epirus and Italy, but that it was a settlement of the Carthaginians⁵³.

The confusion of the Adriatic Sea with the central Mediterranean Sea was also made without reference to the Melitaeen dog. So does Lycophron, who says that *Melitē* was close to *Othrōnus*, but washed by the waves of Sicily⁵⁴, and the same Stephanus of

⁴⁷ Ov. *Fast.* 3.567–579.

⁴⁸ Str. *Geog.* 6.2.11.

⁴⁹ Plin. *Nat.* 3.26.152.

⁵⁰ Plin. *Nat.* 30.5.43.

⁵¹ Aesop. *Fab.* 73; Tymn.; Agatharch. p. 293.17; Arist. *H.a.* 612b.10, *Pr.* 10.12.20; Theophr. *Char.* 21.9; Plut. *Mor.* 2.472; Lucian. *Merc. Cond.* 34, *Symp.* 19; Ath. 12.518e–f, 519b; Alciphro. 2.19.3 (3.22); Hesych. s.v. Μελιταίων; SUID. s.v. Μελιταίων κινίδιον, and Gal. 18.1 p. 291.12.

⁵² Polem. hist. in *Et. Gen.* s.v. Μελιταία κινίδια.

⁵³ St. Byz. s.v. Μελίτη.

⁵⁴ Lyc. *Alex.* 1027–1033.

Byzantium⁵⁵. This island of *Melitē* in the Adriatic Sea was further confused with *Melitē*, south of Sicily, by post-classical authors in their identification of the site of St Paul's shipwreck. This controversy persisted well into the eighteenth century⁵⁶.

Other authors, referring to *Othrōnus* and *Melitē* near *Corcyra* to the Adriatic Sea without adding any confusions are Apollonius of Rhodes, Pliny, Hesychius Alexandrinus and Agathemerus⁵⁷.

Finally, it may be pertinent to refer to the comment of Jean Quintin in his description of Malta when he says that, at the time of his writing (1533), these dogs were not even known to the inhabitants; he adds doubt to their provenance in ancient Malta when he says that they were 'perhaps' born in Malta in ancient times⁵⁸.

Gaudos of Crete

The second mistake of Strabo is his calling *Gaulos* as '*Gaudos*'. *Gaudos*, however, was an island situated off the south-western coast of Crete as mentioned by Mela and Pliny⁵⁹. This island received various other names in different times, some of which are corruptions or developments of others.

Thus, the scholiast of Homer's *Odyssey* 1.85 calls it *Ōgyliā*⁶⁰, which Hesiod calls *Ōgylē* and identifies with *Caudī*⁶¹. The author of the *Etymologicum Gudianum* calls it *Caudus*⁶². Suidas calls it *Caudos*⁶³, St Luke in his *Acts*, *Klauda*⁶⁴, the author of *Stadiasmus*, *Claudia*⁶⁵, Ptolemy and Hierocles Historicus, *Claudē*⁶⁶.

Homer's Ogygia

This island of *Gaudos* was often mistakenly identified with Homer's *Ogygia*, the island of Calypso⁶⁷. Strabo himself quotes a fragment from Callimachus referring it to the island of Calypso⁶⁸; so do yet another fragment of Callimachus not quoted by Strabo and the author of the *Etymologicum Gudianum*, the latter mistakenly having Καύδω καὶ Καλυψοῦς for Καύδω καὶ Καλυψοῦς νήσω, thereby mistakenly separating *Caudus* from what appears to be the nameless island of Calypso⁶⁹.

⁵⁵ St. Byz. s.v. Ὀρθῶνος.

⁵⁶ Vella 1980a, 61–64, and Vella ed. 1980b, 70, n. 319. See also Muscat 2018.

⁵⁷ A.R. 4.566–575, 1150; Plin. *Nat.* 4.12.52; Hesych. s.v. Ὀρθῶνος and Agathem. 23.

⁵⁸ Vella ed. 1980b, 24.

⁵⁹ Mela 2.7.13 and Plin. *Nat.* 4.12.61.

⁶⁰ Sch. Hom. *Od.* 1.85.

⁶¹ Hes. *Fr.* 70.

⁶² *Et. Gud.* s.v. Κυθήρεια.

⁶³ Suid. s.v. Καύδω.

⁶⁴ *Acta Apost.* 27.16.

⁶⁵ *Stad.* 328.

⁶⁶ Ptol. *Geog.* s.v. Κλαῦδος, and HIEROCL. HIST. s.v. Κλαῦδος.

⁶⁷ Hom. *Od.* 1.84–85.

⁶⁸ Call. *Fr.* 13.

⁶⁹ Call. *Fr.* 470 and *Et. Gud.* s.v. Κυθήρεια.

The only two authors who correctly refer Ogygia to what is now one of five submerged islands off the Promontory of Lacinion near Croton in Southern Italy were Scylax and Pliny⁷⁰. The description which Homer gives to Odysseus' voyage from Thrinacia (Malta) to Ogygia, and from Ogygia to Scheriē (Kerkyra) is very accurate, and this has been analyzed by myself in this journal in 2012 (Vella 2012, 7–36). From Thrinacia to Ogygia, Odysseus first sailed east off south of Pachynus, then north toward Scylla and Charybdis (Straits of Messina) and then north-east to Ogygia. From Ogygia to Kerkyra he kept an east-north-east direction. The precision which Homer adopts in these last trips of Odysseus make the proposals of Apollonius of Rhodes and Procopius unacceptable⁷¹. Apollonius of Rhodes identified Ogygia with Nymphaea, one of the islands next to Dalmatia (Croatia), while Procopius identified Ogygia with one of the three islands north-west of Kerkyra by the name of Othoni.

That the island of Gozo, *Gaulos* in classical times, was different from Calypso's island is confirmed not only by Apollonius of Rhodes and Procopius, but also by Propertius and Mela who identified *Ogygia* with *Aeaea*⁷². In the case of Mela, it is very important to note that in one and the same sentence, Mela includes four different islands, each different and distinguished from the others, namely, *Aeaea* (Calypso's island, so he says), *Gaulos*, *Melita* and *Cossura*. But *Aeaea* was taken by other classical authors as Circe's island instead. These included Homer, Apollonius of Rhodes and Vergil⁷³. Pliny, however, refers Circe's island to the coast of Latium⁷⁴.

Gaudos of Malta

To come back to Strabo's second mistake, that of calling *Gaulos* as *Gaudos*, one must add a further point. Jean Quintin, who wrote the earliest description of Malta in Latin in 1533, which he published in 1536 in Lyons, calls Crete's *Gaudos* with the name of 'Gozo', as it was known in his times (Vella 1980b, 42). The same name of *Gozo* has been applied to Malta's sister island already by the first quarter of the sixteenth century, by Jean Quintin himself⁷⁵ and in other maps of the same period. In one particular map, the name of *Gozo* is even accompanied by the other name of *Claudus*, a name also given to Crete's island⁷⁶. This is a clear indication of how the confusion of names arose from the statement of Strabo. *Gaudos*, off Crete, called *Claudus* or *Clauda* by other classical authors and *Gozo* in the sixteenth century, transferred its names to *Gaulos*, off Malta. This was probably carried out by the Phoenicians themselves who survived the destruction of Carthage in 146 BC in their presence throughout the Mediterranean, including Malta and Gozo, and *Gaudos* of Crete, whose city's Phoenician name was *Phoenicia* itself. Indeed, the name of *Gaudos*

⁷⁰ Scyl. 13 and Plin. *Nat.* 3.10–11.95–97.

⁷¹ A.R. 4.566–575, and Procop. 822.18–21.

⁷² Prop. 3.12.27–31 and Mela 2.7.171–174.

⁷³ Hom. *Od.* 10.135–137; A.R. 4.661–663, and Verg. *A.* 384–387.

⁷⁴ Plin. *Nat.* 3.5.57.

⁷⁵ Map in Vella ed.1980b, iv.

⁷⁶ See map produced in Vella 2002, 150.

survived and took over the original name of the island (*Gaulos*) in such a way that it is still called today by two names, Gozo and Ghawdex, the two names derived from *Gaudos*.

St Paul in Malta

From the Christian era, myths include the timing of St Paul's shipwreck in Malta, the site of the shipwreck, his so-called imprisonment and the ordination as bishop (and subsequent canonization) of Publius, Chief of the island and *Patronus* of the *Municipium*, after the shipwreck.

As said above, St Paul's ship must have left Crete for Rome as late as November or December, seven lunar months after April (*Acta Apost.* 27.9). On the fourteenth night the sailors realized that they were approaching land, and the following day they got shipwrecked on a Maltese coast, now already December (*Acta Apost.* 27.39–44). Yet, the Maltese celebrate the feast of St Paul's shipwreck on the 10th February, the month the captain of the ship was probably already negotiating the shipment to Italy of the prisoners and others by another Alexandrine boat; for three months later, that is in March, that ship sailed for Rome calling at Syracuse, Rhegium and Puteoli (*Acta Apost.* 28.11–12). All this is confirmed by St Luke's statement that this Alexandrian ship had spent the winter in Malta (*παρακεχειμακότι*)⁷⁷.

Half a century ago, the island (mistakenly called islands, for it is one island) of Salamone, adjacent to the territory of the same namesake in the north-eastern corner of Malta and at the mouth of Xemxija Bay, was renamed as 'St Paul's Islands'. To this island, on the 10th February, 1960, I, as a boy, saw Mgr Sir Michael Gonzi, then Archbishop of Malta, going in a boat and being ferried to that island to inaugurate the 19th centenary celebrations. However, Jean Quintin's earliest description of Malta in Latin was still buried in the Archives. Quintin, like many others of his times, believed that St Paul never got shipwrecked on this island (Vella 1980b, 42); but he was curious enough to record accurately the opinion of the Maltese people when he lived in the island for three years. He records from their account that St Paul's ship got shipwrecked on a jut of land washed by sea on both sides, upon which place a chapel was erected. This place, he records, had been called after St Paul 'from very ancient times' (Vella 1980b, 44). Today, new myths keep cropping up, such as the recent one pointing to Marsaxlokk, in the south-east of the island, as the site of St Paul's shipwreck.

Jean Quintin also records the imprisonment of St Paul in a hewn cave close to the city (Vella 1980b, 44). The *Acts of the Apostles* make no reference to such imprisonment, but clearly say that Publius put up the shipwrecked ones (ἡμᾶς) for three days in his own estates (χωρία/ *praedia*, the words which in Greek and Latin admittedly referred to both urban and rural places), which St Luke clearly identified with those localities surrounding the site of the shipwreck (ἐν δὲ τοῖς περὶ τὸν τόπον / *in locis autem illis*)⁷⁸. Both

⁷⁷ *Acta Apost.* 28.11.

⁷⁸ *Acta Apost.* 28.7. Dessain 1953, 1044, in *Acta Apost.* 28.7: 'Publius seems to have found lodging for all those shipwrecked'. The author makes no identification with St Publius.

for the miracle he performed on Publius' father, and for many others on the rest of the inhabitants⁷⁹, as well as for the fact that survival from a shipwreck prohibited one to be detained in prison, and there were as many as 276 on board⁸⁰, including Romans, sailors and soldiers, St Paul could not have been imprisoned in that cave for three months!

Finally, neither the *Acts of the Apostles* nor Jean Quintin, who recorded everything about St Paul's shipwreck as reported to him by the local inhabitants, make any mention of the ordination of Publius, Chief of the island, nor of the setting up of a local Church, although the latter may well have taken place, considering that he had three months to do this, and for sure he had set up several Churches in Greece and Asia Minor. Publius, a Roman Knight in the times of Nero, must have kept his conversion a secret to retain his position as Chief of the island and representative of the Praetor of Sicily. Even if he resigned from his Office, he could not be identified with the Bishop of Athens who was martyred in that city in AD 180. This year is sometimes given by different hagiologists even as AD 112 or 125, when Malta's Publius would have been a centenarian by then! The confusion of the two personages is confirmed by celebrating the feast of St Publius 'of Malta' and that of Athens on one and the same day, that is, the 21st or the 22nd January.

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⁷⁹ *Acta Apost.* 28.8–9.

⁸⁰ *Acta Apost.* 27.37.

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