Essays on de Soldanis

ISSUE EDITOR
OLVIN VELLA

Journal of Maltese Studies, no. 27

Department of Maltese
University of Malta
in collaboration with midseaBOOKS
CONTENTS

Preface ......................................................................................................................... v

List of abbreviations ............................................................................................... vii

De Soldanis: approaches to a biography

Joseph Cassar Pullicino ......................................................................................... 1

De Soldanis and the Maltese Pre-Enlightenment

Frans Ciappara ......................................................................................................... 35

An unpublished letter by de Soldanis – 22 April 1753

Alain Blondy ............................................................................................................. 71

A letter by de Soldanis in the Bibliothèque nationale de France

(BnF, naf 5398, foș 165-166)

Carmen Depasquale .................................................................................................. 81

An unknown work by de Soldanis: Notizie sopra l’origine ed avanzi
della Biblioteca della Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana

William Zammit ......................................................................................................... 91

De Soldanis: a bibliography

Joseph Cassar Pullicino ......................................................................................... 141
Four of the five contributions which are appearing in this collection were presented at the Conference on Agius de Soldanis organised by the Department of Maltese on the 16th of May 2007. The principal aim in organising this event was to urge established scholars to publicise their research on de Soldanis and to encourage others to investigate this figure. In recent years some historians specialising in the eighteenth century have published insightful works on the role played by Maltese literati during this period and they are all in agreement that de Soldanis deserves much more importance than has ever been accorded to him. Although his linguistic input has long been recognised, especially through the effort of the late Joseph Cassar Pullicino, the monumental figure of Mikiel Anton Vassalli has overshadowed that of de Soldanis and we feel that such an unbalanced attitude is neither accurate historically nor does it do justice to the development of the Maltese language. In fact, de Soldanis was responsible for a number of initiatives in support of Maltese. One of his more significant merits was that through his writings a new and fruitful contact was made available to foreign scholars interested in our language. His correspondence with foreign philologists and literati is evidence of the esteem in which he was held. It is our hope that through this edition of the Journal of Maltese Studies as well as through other works
scheduled to be published in the near future by students of the Department of Maltese, this esteem will be enhanced in our own times as well.

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to Prof. Manwel Mifsud, Head, Department of Maltese, for being the driving force behind this publication; to Prof. Albert Borg for his continuous support; to the staff at Midsea Books, especially Joseph Mizzi and John Busuttil for their help during the Conference and now with the design for, and publication of, this collection; and to the student researchers Rosabelle Carabott, Reno Fenech and Joanne Trevisan for the task of proofreading which they conducted so cheerfully.
# List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACM</td>
<td>Archives of the Cathedral, Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AIM</td>
<td>Archives of the Inquisition, Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AOM</td>
<td>Archives of the Order of St John, National Library of Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASV</td>
<td>Archivio Segreto Vaticano</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corr.</td>
<td>Correspondence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libr.</td>
<td>Library</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misc.</td>
<td>Miscellanea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAV</td>
<td>Notarial Archives, Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NLM</td>
<td>National Library, Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PA</td>
<td>Parish Archives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SU</td>
<td>Sant’Ufficio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>Segreteria di Stato (Malta)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The subject of my lecture today is a Gozitan ecclesiastic whose multi-faceted activity as historian, grammarian, lexicographer, controversialist and librarian marks him out as an outstanding eighteenth century man of letters.

Many of you here this evening will be familiar with the basic facts concerning Giovanni Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis, which one can briefly summarise here. Born at Rabat, in Gozo, on 31 October 1712, he studied Latin and other languages in Malta, and was appointed Canon of the Collegiate Church of Gozo at the early age of seventeen, when he was not yet ordained priest. He studied Philosophy and Theology at the Jesuits’ College in Valletta. De Soldanis also studied Law, graduating from the University of Padua, in Italy. His publications include a grammar of the Maltese language, which he considered as a direct survivor from the

* This lecture was first published by the Malta Historical Society as *Gio Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis: 1712-1770* (Malta, 1996). It is being republished here with updated footnotes.

1 In a ‘Lettera Responsiva... sopra i Bordoni’ included in I. S. Mifsud’s *Biblioteca Maltese* (Malta, 1764), 386, de Soldanis refers to his early youth when he lived in Malta (‘allorché facevo io dimora in Malta nella mia tenera età’). See also NLM Libr. 358 – *Biografia del Canonico Don Francesco Agius de Soldanis*. A note dated 6 March 1891 at the end of this sketch states that it was copied from a manuscript existing in the Gozo Public Library.
original Punic language. As a member of at least four Italian academies he was held in high esteem and kept up a steady correspondence with some of their prominent members. In 1763 he was appointed first Librarian of what is now known as the National Library. He died on 30 January 1770.

These data about de Soldanis have been known for at least 216 years, ever since his friend and colleague Count G. A. Ciantar included a brief biographical sketch of the Gozitan Canon in his *Malta Illustrata* in 1780.² Interesting comments by G. A. Vassallo appeared in *L’Arte* in 1865. In 1928 and subsequent years an intelligent interest in de Soldanis’ pioneering work set in with the publication of a study by G. Curmi, who not only reproduced de Soldanis’ first-ever full description of the old marriage customs of the Maltese but also his modest collection of 387 proverbs. To this period also belongs Mgr. G. Farrugia’s Maltese translation of de Soldanis’ history of Gozo, which was later published by Government in two volumes.

For many years after the Second World War there was a sustained scholarly interest in academic circles, encouraged by the Chair of Maltese at the University, at that time held by Prof. J. Aquilina. This interest resulted, *inter alia*, in the publication of de Soldanis’ *Djalogi*, edited by the present lecturer in 1947 and later translated into English by D. Marshall in 1971. Three theses for the degree of Master of Arts were also presented – one on the Romance element in his Dictionary by M. R. Gatt (1974); another, by E. Gatt, on the Semitic element (1984), while J. Zammit Ciantar utilized the toponymic terms registered by de Soldanis for his thesis ‘A Linguistic Study of Gozitan Toponymy’ presented for M.A. in 1978. Short articles of a general nature appear from time to time.

² *Malta Illustrata, ovvero Descrizione di Malta... del Commendatore F. Giovan Francesco Abela... corretta, accresciuta e continovata dal Conte Giovannantonio Ciantar*, Libro IV Not. IV (Malta, 1780), 590-92.
However, this is just a beginning. We are in no way claiming that we know enough about de Soldanis and his work; on the contrary, we stress that a definite biography has become an urgent desideratum. In the short time at my disposal I shall suggest a few approaches to such an undertaking by indicating some fresh biographical details gleaned over a number of years from available manuscript and printed sources. I hope that my sympathy with my subject will not serve as an opportunity for panegyric but rather to clear existing doubts and to present de Soldanis primarily as a human being conscious of the principal currents of contemporary European, mainly Italian culture. In particular I shall stress the importance of utilising surviving correspondence of a familiar kind, diaries and letters to intimate friends not written with a view to publication, in order to illustrate as much as possible the full personality of our subject.

One could usefully mention here that Gianpier Francesco was not an only son. There were at least three other brothers in the Agius family, all of them possessed of some measure of learning and in the employ of the Order. Fra Melchior Agius held the post of sacristan at the Conventual Church of St John. He was the author of [*Il Tesoro delle Sacre Reliquie conservate in Malta nella maggior Chiesa Conventuale di San Giovanni Battista dell’Ordine Gerosolimitano pubblicato dal Sacerdote F. Melchior Agius Religioso del dett’ Ordine e consagrato all’Ecc. F. Giacomo Francesco de Chambray Bali dello stess’ Ordine.* This 14-page booklet was published in Rome in 1750 by the same Generoso Salomoni who issued de Soldanis’ Maltese Grammar during the same year. On 12 June 1773 Melchior bequeathed the fifth part of his removable property to Fr Francesco Xuereb, nephew to the Agius brothers. Fra Salvatore Agius had served as Hospital Chaplain for some years and was *Fra Cappellano*

3 NLM Libr. 1146 ii, p. 241.
d’Obbedienza Magistrale when he died on 28 May 1762 at the age of about 45 years. Fra Giuseppe Agius, who had some literary pretensions, was the author of a diary recording useful details of life and events in eighteenth century Malta. For many years he was Chaplain at the Camerata, and later Maestro dei Diaconi at the Conventual Church of St John. When Jacques de Chambray died on 8 April 1756 he wrote a sonnet extolling the virtues and merits of the distinguished Knight.

For most of his life, and I may say to this very day, de Soldanis was known by the title of Canon. We have already seen that he was appointed Canon of the Collegiate Church of Gozo at the early age of seventeen. Bishop Alpheran de Bussan (1728-1757) must have seen unequivocal signs of rare intellectual powers in this precocious Gozitan youth that made him extend to de Soldanis protection and preferment in his ecclesiastical career. In 1750, at the age of 38, de Soldanis had tried, unsuccessfully, to improve his status within the ecclesiastical hierarchy. His close friend and contemporary diarist Ignazio Saverio Mifsud throws light on de Soldanis’ efforts to improve his priestly career.

Besides the backing of the local Bishop, in seeking ecclesiastical preferment de Soldanis also sought, not necessarily successfully, the patronage of high-ranking Princes of the Church in Rome. In 1750 he had set his eyes on a vacant seat of Canon at the Malta Cathedral. But Cardinal Portocarrero, whom he already knew, wrote from Rome on 6 October 1750 to inform him that the seat was intended for someone else. There was nothing more that he, Portocarrero, could do except to wait for a more propitious occasion to intervene on de Soldanis’ behalf.

4 NLM Libr. 13, p. 826.
5 Ibid., pp. 91, 109; Libr. 1146 ii, pp. 195, 279, 281.
6 NLM Libr. 155, f. 217v.
On 26 June 1753 Mifsud recorded in his diary that the vacant canonry in Gozo created earlier that year by the death of Canon Dalli had been conferred by Bishop Alpheran on Canon D. Francesco Agius ‘personaggio molto insigne per aver dato alle stampe...’, while Don Giuseppe Abela, hitherto Master of Ceremonies, was appointed to take de Soldanis’ place. However, although de Soldanis had only obtained his new seat as Canon in June of that year, he was to retain his own place and seniority in terms of the authority communicated to him by Mifsud and duly approved by the Bishop. Naturally the other Gozitan canons strongly resented this and they vigorously appealed from the decision. De Soldanis lost his case as he did not contest this point at law and he had to take his place in the usual way.

Six years later, when Archpriest Don Adeodato Formosa, who was also Provicario of Gozo, died on 4 September 1759, several candidates competed to fill this important post. Among them was de Soldanis. However, on 10 September Canon Cauchi, who had the reputation of being an exemplary though rather strict ecclesiastic, was appointed Provicario. On 10 December 1754 Portocarrero informed de Soldanis that, notwithstanding his good offices and recommendations in the proper quarters, the vacant Prepositura at Birkirkara had been conferred on another candidate. Cardinal Domenico Passionei (1682-1761) had previously bluntly stated in a letter addressed to de Soldanis on 20 September 1754 that, having never dared to bother the Pope, not even on behalf of his own nephews, he would certainly not be in a position to do so on behalf of others. The best he could do was to recommend his case to another Cardinal.

7 NLM Libr. 11, p. 253; Libr. 19, ff. 265v, 269r.
8 NLM Libr. 13, pp. 151-53.
9 NLM Libr. 155, f. 209. For information on Cardinal Domenico Passionei see Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastico... compilato dal Cavaliere Gaetano Moroni Romano... li (Venezia, 1851), 271-72.
Mifsud gave more details about this vacancy in his diary. On 28 July 1754 he recorded that de Soldanis was one of the candidates for the post of Preposito and on 3 August 1754 he noted that there were six examiners and six candidates for the post. The examination lasted from 8 a.m. to 7 p.m. – ‘cosa che fece stordire a tutti’. People were saying that de Soldanis had come out very well in all the cases set by the examiners. Some of the cases related to matrimonial matters, others to usury or to the Birkirkara Archpriest’s duties regarding the celebration of Mass. Furthermore, each candidate had to improvise an oration on the theme set down by the Bishop Videns Hyerusalem flevit super illam. The choice eventually fell on Don Giacomo Bertis, Parish Priest of Qrendi, who served as Provost of Birkirkara from 1755 to 1769.10

Alberico Archinto (1698-1758), who held the important post of Cardinal Secretary of State, was another Prince of the Church who wrote out a testimonial in favour of de Soldanis. He had come to know de Soldanis during his brief stay in Rome in 1758, and had formed a good opinion of him based on the praise-worthy qualities which he possessed not less than on his vast learning. On 21 March 1758 he strongly recommended de Soldanis to Bishop Bartolomeo Rull (1757-1769) for special help and favour in his needs.11 Rull’s reaction is not known. However, it is significant that de Soldanis dedicated his Nuova Scuola dell’antica lingua Punica, which remained unpublished, to Bishop Rull. Cardinal Archinto died shortly after writing this testimonial, aged 60, after holding the high post of Cardinal Secretary of State for only 30 months.12

10 NLM Libr. 11, pp. 383, 386, 424, 489, 501, 570, 599, 607. See also E. B. Vella, Storja ta’ Birkirkara bil-Kolleġjjata tagħha (Malta, 1934), 503.
12 Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastico... ii (Venezia, 1840), 277. See also Enciclopedia Italiana (Treccani) iv (1929), 52.
De Soldanis is well known as the historian of his native Gozo. In writing his *Il Gozo antico-moderno* he set out to do for Gozo what G. F. Abela had done for Malta in 1647. The idea had been maturing in his mind since 1738. In his Foreword *Ai Leggitori* he explained that in 1647 Commendatore Abela had used his learned pen (‘*dotta penna*’) to describe Malta but giving only a brief and succinct account of Gozo. Those who wrote after him did exactly the same thing. Then in 1738 the Bali Siniscalco Fra Ferdinando Ernesto de Stadl, who was interested in the annals of these islands, asked de Soldanis to supply further information about Gozo which was not included in Abela’s work. At that time de Soldanis hastily put together a brief description. Little by little, carried away by his love of country, he later succeeded in writing a full description.¹³

There is an early reference to *Il Gozo antico-moderno* in the draft of a reply sent to Padre Bonaventura Attardi, who had informed de Soldanis on 26 July 1741 that, at the request of the *Accademia del Buon Gusto*, of Palermo, of which de Soldanis was also a member, he had started work on the history of his native city of S. Filippo. De Soldanis regretted that he could not do the same thing with regard to his *Gozo antico-moderno* because the Grand Master wanted him to preach the Lenten sermons in the Collegiate Church in Gozo. This left him no time to write on other topics.¹⁴

By the middle of 1742 de Soldanis was still at work on his history of Gozo and he was casting about for a fit person to whom he could dedicate his work. Bali Fra Sestio Dericard,

---

¹³ NLM Libr. 145, ff. 8-9. The title of this revised and corrected version of Libr. 145A reads as follows: *Il Gozo antico-moderno e sacro-profano, Isola Mediterranea, adiacente a Malta Africana – consacrato all’eroiche virtù dell’Illmo. e Revmo. Monsignore Fra Don Paolo Alphan de Bussan Vescovo di Malta e Gozo... dal Sacerdote Gio Pietro Francesco Agius Canonico dell’Insigne Chiesa Collegiata e Matrice del Gozo.*

¹⁴ NLM Libr. 155, f. 32v.
a close friend to whom he later dedicated his *Della Lingua Punica* (1750), was kept informed of progress reached in the matter. On 30 July he wrote from Paris stating that it was his considered view that the history of Gozo should be addressed as of right to the Grand Master. He himself would decline such an offer, which more befittingly should be made to his superior, the Grand Master.\(^\text{15}\) De Soldanis, however, thought otherwise and on 10 June 1746, as we know, he addressed his work to his life-long benefactor Bishop Alpheran de Bussan.

It also emerges from Dericard’s letter of 30 July 1742 that de Soldanis had been urged to undertake this work by both the Bali Stadl and Count G. A. Ciantar. De Soldanis appears to have gone out of his way to sing Ciantar’s praise in this work. The occasion presented itself when de Soldanis mentioned that he had asked Ciantar’s opinion about some coins or medals discovered in Gozo. The mutual respect existing between them comes out very clearly from the text in the manuscript (p. 100), which is here reproduced:

> onde conoscendo in Malta il sovraccennato signor Conte Ciantar, Gentiluomo nostro eruditissimo, in quest’anno (1746) stesso per la sua rara virtù da S.M. Cristianissima aggregato Socio dell’Accademia Reale delle Iscrizioni e Belle Lettere di Parigi, le ho trasmesso alcune di queste monete, il quale con la solita sua bontà dopo qualche tempo si è compiaciuto onorarmi colla risposta, il primo marzo 1746, la quale per essere piena di erudizione a gloria delle due nostre isole, degna della sua penna ho creduto far piacere a li antiquari, ed a Letterati riportarla intera colla moneta seguente gozitana...

Ciantar’s reply to de Soldanis reads as follows:

> Per appagare in qualche parte il vostro genio erudito, mio reverentissimo Signor Canonico, io ben volentieri vi comunico

\(^{15}\) NLM Libr. 146 iii, f. 198v.
in queste poche linee le osservazioni sopra l’antica medaglia, ultimamente scoperta in codesta isola, vostra Patria. Ma non aspettate da me una lunga e studiata Dissertazione. I miei affari domestici, le varie mie occupazioni letterarie non mi permettono tanto. Mi bisogna dividere me stesso alle mie cure, ed il tempo alle applicazioni. Nè m’è d’uopo di diffondermi in siffatte scuse …

Due mention must be made here of another Maltese who in various ways helped de Soldanis in establishing contact with prominent men of culture associated with learned academies in Florence and other Italian cities. This was Michel Angelo Grima (1713-1799), well known as a famous surgeon but still in the early years of his career at the time we are speaking of. Since 10 May 1750 he had been in Florence gaining experience at the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova. De Soldanis had been in correspondence with him from 12 June 1752. Both of them were members of one or more learned academies. De Soldanis belonged to the Accademia del Buon Gusto, of Palermo, and to the Accademia degli Erranti, of Fermo. Grima was a member of the Accademia dei Giorgofili ed Etruschi, of Florence. Both of them were members of the Accademia degli Apatisti, of Florence, as well as of the Accademia Botanica e di Storia Naturale, of Cortona. It was through Grima’s good offices with Ludovico Coltellini, Secretary of the Cortona Academy, that de Soldanis had been admitted to that Academy.

At Grima’s request de Soldanis wrote a dissertation on the glossopietre which he showed to Giovanni Lami (1697-1770), Professor of Ecclesiastical History at Florence and famous antiquary and man of letters, and for which he (Grima) tried to find a printer. At Grima’s suggestion de Soldanis refuted the arguments adduced in 1752 by M. Ladvocat, Librarian of the Sorbonne, and vindicated the Maltese tradition regarding St Paul’s Shipwreck on Malta. In 1757 his
dissertation on the subject appeared in French in Avignon, followed by the publication in Venice of an Italian translation in 1758. Grima also promoted the sale of de Soldanis’ grammar (1750) directly or by presenting complimentary copies to influential scholars and personalities. As a result of Grima’s interest in de Soldanis’ work, the latter wrote a sonnet in Maltese in 1758 – an acrostic in praise of Coltellini, whom we have already mentioned. Grima also drafted the wording for the dedication to Dr Giovanni Lami of a book by de Soldanis, most probably his *Annone Cartaginese* (1757).

Time and again in his correspondence de Soldanis shows his readiness to help foreign visitors engaged in scholarly work. To illustrate this trait in his character one could quote his letter of 18 October 1756, addressed to M. Savalete de Bucheloi for onward transmission to the Academy of Sciences in Paris. M. Jacques Lacombe had been sent to Malta by this Academy to study the various aspects of local Natural History, especially those relating to the sea, like marine plants. In strict compliance with the Academy’s instructions, before returning to Sicily he wished to spend a few days in Gozo to complete his assignment. De Soldanis gladly welcomed M. Lacombe and his companion, the Parisian painter Antoine Favray, at his home in the Citadel. In his letter he explained that he had done so as a gesture of good will, on the recommendation of the Knight Turgot, a naturalist whom he knew in Malta, and out of respect for the members of the learned Academy.

Our National Library holds two works by Lacombe, namely *Dictionnaire portatif des Beaux-Arts ou Abrégé* (Paris, 1753) and *Dizionario portatile delle Belle Arti, ovvero restretto...* (Venice, 1758).

---


17 NLM Libr. 155, f. 96r.
There were quite a few diarists noting down events and gossip in eighteenth century Malta. The names of Fra Gaetano Reboul, de Soldanis’ brother Giuseppe and Ignazio Saverio Mifsud immediately come to mind. De Soldanis himself had, early in his career, recorded the ecclesiastical events and the popular customs observed during the year 1733.18

By far the most important of these diaries is that kept by I. S. Mifsud, covering the periods (i) from 1 January 1740 to 13 June 1741 (NLM Libr. 9), (ii) from 1 January 1753 to 31 December 1755 (Libr. 11), and (iii) from 1 January 1756 to 25 December 1765 (Libr. 12, 13 and 14). De Soldanis’ name keeps cropping up in Mifsud’s diary and there is no doubt that de Soldanis was Mifsud’s ‘intimo amico e corrispondente’.

It is to Mifsud that we owe certain details concerning the office of librarian assigned to de Soldanis by the Balì Tencin, founder of what is now known as the National Library.19 On 20 June 1763 he noted in his diary:

In detto tempo il Balì Tansè faceva mettere in ordine la pubblica libreria, e chiamò a se per aiutarlo il Canonico Dr. D. Francesco Agius del Gozo, il quale essendogli riuscito di fare un Coadiutore, passò nella Valletta, e nel Forfantone, luogo adatto per la libreria, gli fu dato dal Balì un’appartamento con l’assegnamento, come si dice, di dieci scudi per mese.

On Thursday, 11 August 1763, Mifsud called at the Library and spent the whole morning watching de Soldanis at work indexing the books belonging to the two collections combined – Tencin’s and Portocarrero’s: ‘Il Canonico Agius Bibliotecario stava applicato in far l’indice faticosissimo alfabetico, si dei nomi e cognomi delli autori, che delle materie.’

19 See Zammit, 91-139, in the present volume.
During his visit Mifsud took occasion to buy from de Soldanis a number of duplicate publications, which de Soldanis was ready to dispose of, for the price of 40 scudi:

Con detta occasione comprò esso scrittore dal medesimo Canonico Agius la gran raccolta delli opuscoli scientifici e filologici del P. abbate Calogero, che sono 51 tometti ed altri libri, che il Canonico aveva, e si disfece per averli trovato nella pubblica libreria, e sono i seguenti, per il prezzo che si nota a futura memoria...

These books included Bosio’s *Istoria della Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana*, and his *Vita dei Santi della Religione Gerosolimitana*, besides Calogero’s collection of 51 booklets, priced at 25 scudi.\(^{20}\)

Between June 1757 and April 1758 de Soldanis was in Italy. It was his third visit to Rome. Accompanying him were Canon Giuseppe Gauci and his brother Abbate Francesco Gauci, who had been recommended to de Soldanis’ care by their father Dr Gauci. They had crossed over to Malta on 25 May 1757 to make preparations for their voyage. Leaving Malta on 9 June 1757 they reached Rome on 19 July 1757.\(^{21}\)

It is not generally known that de Soldanis kept a detailed diary of this visit to Italy, during which *inter alia*, he had graduated in Law in Venice. In June 1758 de Soldanis obtained from Grand Master Pinto the warrant to practise as a lawyer in all the Courts under the jurisdiction of the Grand Master.\(^{22}\)

---

\(^{20}\) NLM Libr. 14, pp. 99, 156-57. Similar but more specific information is given in NLM Libr. 358, already quoted, viz. ‘avendo costituito suo Coadiutore il Rev. D. Giuseppe Calleja, recossi alla Valletta dove con somma diligenza attese a disporre negli scaffali i libri ed a formare un copioso Indice delle opere quali in quell’epoca trascendevano il numero di dieci mila, comprese in volumi presso a ventimila’.

\(^{21}\) NLM Libr. 12, pp. 206, 232. The party returned to Malta on Friday, 21 April 1758 (ibid., p. 446).

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 480.
Unfortunately this diary, in 568 pages folio size, is not available and may be presumed lost. Ciantar lists the *Itinerario Italico* among the manuscripts left by de Soldanis, adding that its author had left it to Rev. S. Ab. Gianantonio C. Beretta.\(^{23}\)

Mifsud actually handled and read it during his stay in Gozo in October 1759. The entry in his diary under the date 5 October 1759 reads as follows:

> Avendo lo scrittore [i.e. Mifsud], in tutti detti giorni di dimora fatta nel Gozo, letto l’Itinerario ben lungo del Signor Canonico Agius del viaggio da lui fatto per l’Italia nel 1757 e 1758, compreso in un libro Mss in foglio, di carte scritte 568 col titolo Itinerario Italico del 1757 e 1758, descritto dal Dr. Canonico R. Gio Pietro Francesco Agius, lo scrittore osservò e stimò di qui notare le infrascritte cose …\(^{24}\)

For most of his life until his appointment as Librarian de Soldanis lived in Gozo. There he felt isolated intellectually, in the midst of the predominantly rustic society of his native Gozo. He lived within the Citadel, indulging in his literary pursuits and drawing invaluable support from his private library made up of bellettristic publications, as well as from a small museum containing rare items of antiquarian interest.\(^{25}\) The appearance of some Maltese friend or foreign personality in Gozo was most welcome. Such a visit was that of Ignazio Saverio Mifsud on the afternoon of 6 October 1759. It seems that Mifsud was paying an official visit to Gozo in his capacity as Consultore del Sant’Uffizio (Inquisition) and de Soldanis paid him due deference, introducing him to his fellow-canons of the Collegiate Church as well as to the

---

23 G. A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata...* Libro IV, Not. IV, p. 591. See also NLM Libr. 14, pp. 100, 118 under dates 21 June and 8 July 1763.
24 NLM Libr. 13, p. 170.
25 Ibid., p. 166.
Provicario of Gozo and entertaining him to coffee or lunch at his home with members of the Gozitan Clergy. The following extracts illustrate this aspect of de Soldanis’ personality:

A di 8 Ottobre 1759: Fu lo scrittore a pranzo dal Signor Canonico Agius, assieme col Canonico Mangion, col Signor Canonico Vassallo, Canonico Borg... i quali tutti furono trattati con tutta proprietà.

A di 10 Ottobre 1759: Di mattino lo scrittore celebrò nella Matrice nell’altare di S. Francesco di Paola; indi passò in casa e bevè il caffè col Signor Canonico Agius...26

Ad ora di pranzo ebbe lo scrittore a pranzo i seguenti invitati: il Provicario del Gozo Canonico Cauchi, il Canonico Francesco Agius... Riusci... il pranzo molto fastoso, e di gusto.27

This was not the first time that de Soldanis had hosted Mifsud in Gozo. On 4 July 1756, at the end of a previous visit to Gozo, Mifsud celebrated Mass at the Capuchin friary in Gozo and took leave of the friars. He then called on de Soldanis at his home and stayed with him for lunch before setting out for Mġarr to return to Malta...28 Mifsud resided in Valletta in the area known as Arcipelago; he also had a garden in Birkirkara, where he spent his holidays.29

In July 1749 de Soldanis was informed by the Knight de Guast Jr., Luogotenente Generale in Gozo, that the Portuguese Knight Fra Don Giuseppe Almeida, Falconiere of the Grand Master, had expressed the desire to see a Maltese Grammar published. In February 1750 he had passed on to Almeida the draft of his manuscript grammar but soon after he took it back as he was leaving for Naples with the learned English Milord Charlemont. Almeida possessed many languages, including Maltese which he could speak fluently.

26 Ibid., p. 169.
27 Ibid., p. 172.
28 NLM Libr. 12, pp. 61-62.
29 Ibid., pp. 267, 320.
like a native. He corresponded with the foremost European men of letters and over the years he built up a select library, including manuscripts relating to the affairs of the Order. De Soldanis had first met Almeida in the apartment of Padre Paolo Maria Paciaudi.30

1750 happened to be Jubilee Year and de Soldanis had gone to Rome where he stayed on for some months, admiring the magnificent buildings – above all the libraries, especially that of the Collegio Romano, where he met the learned Padre Pietro Lazzari, Librarian and Lecturer (Lettore) in Ecclesiastical History. During his sojourn in Rome he wrote his work Della Lingua Punica addressed to Fra Sestio Angelo Dericard, a Balì of the Order who, while in Malta, enjoyed writing and speaking in this language. De Soldanis and Dericard were old friends – for almost 20 years de Soldanis had been his Procuratore Generale in Malta and he continued to correspond with Dericard for many more years after leaving Malta. By letter dated 5 September 1756 from Paris, Chevalier Turgot, a naturalist, informed de Soldanis of Dericard’s death, adding that, should de Soldanis ever decide to go to Paris, he (Turgot) would show him how high he esteemed his friendship and if he could be of help to him instead of Dericard he would do it most willingly (‘onde se al luogo del Balì Ricard vi posso in qualche cosa servire lo farò molto volentieri’).31

In his old age, on 26 July 1756, Dericard communicated to de Soldanis the opinion of M. Bonamy, Historiographe ancien pensionnaire de l’Académie des Belles Lettres as well as member of the Académie Royale des Inscriptions on his grammar. On 16 September 1756 M. Mandoux, Prêtre habitué de la Paroisse St. Paul, in Paris, informed de Soldanis that M. Bonamy had read

30 De Soldanis, Della Lingua Punica, 67-70.
31 NLM Libr. 146 iii, f. 214v.
his grammar with great satisfaction and that he desired to have him received as *Académicien des Belles Lettres*.\(^{32}\)

It is not generally known that de Soldanis’ literary and artistic connections included a few British personalities. In the Preface to his Maltese grammar (1750, p. 67) he stated that in February of that year he left Malta for Naples with the learned English traveller Milord Charlemont (*collo studioso viaggiatore Inglese Milord Charlemont*). He referred again to Charlemont when, in 1751, he wrote an *Apologia... contro Michele Acciaro* who had plagiarized his account of the Conspiracy of the Slaves masterminded by Mustapha, Pasha of Rhodes in 1749. We read that the figure of Mustapha shown on the copper engraving in the publication *Mustafà Bassà di Rodì... o sia la di lui Congiura* (1751) had been drawn by the painter Favray and that at the beginning of 1750 it was copied by the English painter D’Alton ‘who had made the tour of the Levant with Milord Charlemont and others with whom I had the good fortune to travel to Naples on their ship’ [my translation].\(^{33}\)

A brief note on these two will not be amiss here. James Caulfield, first Earl of Charlemont (1728-1799) was an Irish statesman who, according to the *Dictionary of National Biography* ‘in 1746 went to the Continent, residing for a year in Turin, and afterwards visiting Rome, the Greek islands, Constantinople, the Levant and Egypt.’\(^{34}\)

The ‘signor D’Alton’ mentioned in de Soldanis’ *Apologia* was Richard Dalton (1715?-1791) ‘draughtsman, engraver and librarian to the King’. He was trained as an artist and went to Rome to pursue his studies. The relative entry under his name in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, states that in 1749 [he] travelled with Roger Kynaston and John Frederick to Naples, South Italy and Sicily, where they joined a party consisting

---

\(^{32}\) Ibid., f. 213r.

\(^{33}\) NLM Libr. 146 ii, f. 350.

\(^{34}\) *Dictionary of National Biography* ix (London, 1887), 326.
of James Caulfield, Earl of Charlemont, Francis Pierpoint Burton and others. From thence Dalton accompanied Lord Charlemont on his tour of Constantinople, Greece and Egypt. He was the first Englishman to make drawings of the monuments of ancient art in these countries... Some of these he etched and engraved himself... but his drawings and engravings are of little value from either an artistic or an antiquarian point of view.\(^{35}\)

In 1750 de Soldanis mentioned that he had first met the Portuguese Knight Fra Don Giuseppe Almeida at the apartment of Padre Paciaudi.\(^{36}\) Paolo Maria Paciaudi (1710-1785), corresponding member of the Accademia Francese delle Iscrizioni e Belle Arti, in 1761 accepted the post of Antiquary and Librarian offered to him by the Duke Philip of Parma. His Memorie de’ Gran Maestri del Sovrano Ordine Gerosolimitano, published in Parma in three volumes in 1780, is well known among collectors of Melitensia. He also wrote some archaeological works, including Alcune Singolari e Strane Medaglie (Napoli, 1748).\(^{37}\) De Soldanis was also interested in medals and inscriptions and he sent him a Greek inscription found in Malta for his views. On 28 September 1748 Paciaudi wrote to de Soldanis from Naples informing him that Mr Askew, whom he already knew, was with him in that city and that he had shown him the inscription but both he and Askew agreed that it was just an impressive imitation (copy) which should be ignored (‘ma egli ed io conveniamo che è un solennissimo pasticcio da non farne caso’).\(^{38}\)

Anthony Askew (1722-1772) was a doctor who, in the words of the Dictionary of National Biography ‘is far better known as a classical scholar than as physician’ although ‘he

\(^{36}\) De Soldanis, Della Lingua Punica, 70.
\(^{37}\) Enciclopedia Cattolica ix (Città del Vaticano, 1952), 506.
\(^{38}\) NLM Libr. 146 ii, f. 241.
had a good practice and was physician to St. Bartholomew’s and to Christ’s Hospitals... He helped to develop the taste for curious manuscripts, scarce editions, and fine copies’. Before taking the degree of M.D. and establishing himself in London he studied for one year in Leyden and he then visited Hungary, Athens, Constantinople, Italy and other countries. He is the author of a manuscript volume of Greek inscriptions, now preserved in the British Museum.\(^{39}\)

Askew’s name also figures in a letter to de Soldanis, written in Italian by an Englishman, Thomas Blackburne, in July 1749. He wrote from Messina to thank de Soldanis for the hospitality extended to him during his stay in Gozo and went on to say that at the beginning of June Mr Askew was still in Holland and it was doubtful whether he had returned home. As for him (Blackburne) he had enjoyed his tour of Sicily where he had come across a history of the antiquities of Rome which he had sent to him, knowing that he was keen on antiquities.\(^{40}\) I have not been able so far to trace any information about Blackburne in the standard reference works consulted.

Like other eighteenth century Maltese men of letters, de Soldanis had a good knowledge of Italian. All along, however, he was conscious that Italian was not his mother tongue and he modestly showed his readiness to have his Italian text improved when still in manuscript. As early as 1746 he stressed in his preface to *Il Gozo antico-moderno* that after 12 years of literary isolation in Gozo he found that his style needed polish and improvement. There is a genuine note of modesty in his words:

\(^{39}\) *Dictionary of National Biography* ii (London, 1885), 192-93. See also E. Benezit, *Dictionnaire critique et documentaire des Peintres, Sculpteurs, Dessinateurs & graveurs de tous le temps et de tous les pays...* ii (Paris, 1924), 8.

\(^{40}\) NLM Libr. 146 ii, ff. 243r-244r.
Finalmente se in tutta non scorgerete quel dolce e studiato stile ch’usano oggidì i Letterati, e ch’ancora viene imposto dal buon gusto, deggio essere in qualche modo da Voi compatito, mentre in 12 anni che vi sono, dopo la mia partenza, alla residenza, altro non ho sentito discorrere che sopra le mete de’ grani, delle culture dei giardini, dello stato de’ seminati per indi pronosticare se l’annata diviene o buona o cattiva, com’ ancora sopra il giuoco, caccia e cose simili e non sopra erudizioni letterarie come a molti del Paese converrebbe, così non ho potuto acquistare miglior stile dagli uomini morti che parlano ne’ miei pochi libri.41

On 29 June 1753 Stefano Borgia (1731-1804), who was later raised to the dignity of Cardinal, informed de Soldanis that, on receipt of the manuscript which he was due to receive through M. A. Grima, he would retouch the text so as to bring it in line with the style currently followed at that time: ‘Quando la riceverò... soprattutto vi accomodarò lo stile secondo il gusto del secolo per quanto il mio corto intendimento il comporterà.42

With the benefit of hindsight, we may say that it was partly this concern to polish the style of his Italian text that landed de Soldanis into serious trouble in 1750 in respect of his account of Mustafà Baxà’s Turkish Conspiracy.43 Many of us will recall, from our school days, the 1749 episode in Maltese history known as ‘The Conspiracy of the Slaves’ encouraged by the presence here, more as a guest than as a slave, of Mustafà, Baxà of Rhodes. What is not generally known is that the discovery of this plot aroused considerable interest and concern abroad and gave rise to several publications recording the event. In particular it seems that the Portuguese Knights were seriously worried about this attempt on the life of the Portuguese Grand

41 NLM Libr. 145, f. 9v.
42 NLM Libr. 146 ii, f. 70r.
43 Cp. Ciappara, 54-55, in the present volume.
Master Emmanuele Pinto. But it was not only that: in a special sense Malta was still considered as the bulwark of the Christian Faith, and therefore any attempt on the life of the Grand Master or against the Order and Malta was tantamount to an attack on Catholicism.\footnote{G. Curmi, ‘La valorosa impresa effettuata dai Cristiani schiavi sulla galera ‘Lupa’ nel 1748 e la congiura dei Turchi in Malta nel 1749’, \textit{Malta Letteraria} (January 1931), 15-17.} I list hereunder, in chronological order, six accounts that appeared within a short time of the events:


Relaçaō Exacta, e Verdadeira da Conjuraçaō, que Mostafà Baxà de Rhodes intentou fazer na Ilha de Malta, com os escravos Mahometanos, parase fazerem senhores della, em 29 de Junho de 1749 e das circunstancias com que foy descuberta, e castigos, que tiveraō os complices della. Escrita por hum Cavalleiro Maltez, Residente naquella Ilha, e remetida a esta Corte ao Excellentissimo, e Reverendissimo Senhor Principal Almeida Portugal. Lisboa, 1750.
Mustafà Bassà di Rodi Schiavo in Malta, o sia La Di Lui Congiura all’Occupazione di Malta descritta da Michele Acciard. In Napoli 1751.

In addition the following items figure among the unpublished manuscripts preserved at the National Library:

Libr. 1
Sonetti di vari dopo la scoperta della Congiura degli Schiavi (pp. 579-92)

Libr. 18
Ragguaglio della Congiura tramata in Malta dal Mustafà Bassà di Rodi ed altri schiavi Turchi. Si narra come l’avessero ordita, come si fusse scoperta, e come si fusse riparata (pp. 309-54).
Persone tormentate, e poi condannate per causa della ribellione che far doveano i schiavi in questa Città nel di 29 giugno 1749 (pp. 355-68).
Lettera Scritta [in data 17 maggio 1751] da Salvatore Borgia Accademico Cortonense Al Dotto Signor Canonico Francesco Agius In rapporto al furto letterario fattogli dall’Acciard (pp. 469-76).

Libr. 142 v
Relazione mancante in alcune parti della congiura ordita dal Bassà di Rodi (pp. 495-501).
Discorso morale sopra la cospirazione di Mustafà già Bassà di Rodi ed altri Turchi schiavi in Malta, scoperta li 6 Giugno 1749, detto [dal Canonico Agius... in favella nostra maltese...] nell’Insigne Chiesa Collegiata dell’Isola del Gozo li 21 Settembre dell’anno 1749 (pp. 505-13).

Libr. 142 vi
Nove Sonetti sopra Mustafà Bassà creduto autore della congiura degli schiavi (pp. 611-21).
Relazione dei castighi pubblici in Malta dei ribelli Turchi (pp. 623-41).
Soon after the publication of Acciard’s book de Soldanis wrote an *Apologia contro Michele Acciard* in which he claimed that he was the real author of the book. Acciard, with whom in 1750 he had left the manuscript of the book when he met him in Naples on his way to Rome, had offered to revise the text and to have it published. Instead, he had plagiarized the work. Acciard denied this, stating that he had based his account on information supplied to him by Sac. Don Michele Casatta, Prince of Colubrano, who had been an eyewitness of the events that had taken place in Malta.

De Soldanis stressed that Acciard had simply added the first two chapters and a few other revisions in the text. From the documents available one can say that de Soldanis was justified in complaining that

>i soli primi due (capitoli) indi disfigurò, con aggiungere cose e fatti niente appartenenti all’opera, e lontani dalla mia idea, mutilando al contrario a proprio capriccio quanto faceva al proposito il mio argomento. E questi sono quei due capi interamente disfigurati e con diverso carattere e stile dall’altro che leggesi negli altri sette.

As if this was not enough, Acciard’s book created a most unpleasant situation for de Soldanis. Certain comments in the publication presented the Order in bad light. De Soldanis himself had pointed out the anti-Order tone of certain statements in the book: ‘*qui comincia far dimostrare un veleno inorpellato il Signor M. A. contro la Religione Gerosolimitana, riporta alcune parole del privilegio che forse giammai avrà mai veduto nè letto*’.45

To make matters worse, the book that appeared in Acciard’s name was attributed to de Soldanis in Malta, where it was well known that he was writing a book about the conspiracy that failed. And the Order, officially or unofficially, must have expressed its displeasure to the

45 NLM Libr. 142 iv, p. 340.
Ecclesiastical Authorities that a member of the Maltese Clergy should dare to write about the Order in such hostile terms. The matter also reached the Vatican’s ear and Pope Benedict XIV himself summoned de Soldanis to explain his conduct. De Soldanis, however, succeeded in proving his innocence to the Pope. We owe this information to de Soldanis’ brother Giuseppe Agius who entered the following item in his Giornale under the year 1751:

Mio fratello il Canonico dell’isola del Gozo Francesco Agius ebbe una chiamata dal Ssmo Papa Benedetto XIV e dopo aver andato uscì per innocente. Fu imputato che aveva fatto stampare un libro sopra la congiura di Malta, ed in esso toccava la giurisdizione del Gran Maestro che se i Maltesi si ribellassero, essendo mal trattati dal Governo, non chiamansi ribelli.46

As a tailpiece one may mention that in 1887 Acciard’s account was published in Malta in the original Italian by Messrs Giovanni Muscat, and six years later, in 1893, a Maltese version by Giovanni Faurè appeared under the title Il-Konġura l-Kbira tal-Irsiera Torok f’Malta mwebbla minn Mustafà Baxà ta’ Rodi fíż-żmien li kien irsir – Ġrajja ta’ Pajjiżna miktuba bil-Malti minn Giovanni Faurè. Twenty two years ago a fresh translation (1974) by our friend Michael Galea appeared in the series ‘Rumanzi Il-Ħajja – Nru 20’: under the title Mustafà Baxà ta’ Rodi Isir f’Malta jew Il-Konġura l-Kbira – Rakkont ta’ Michele Acciard maqlub għall-Malti minn Michael Galea.

De Soldanis’ name is inextricably linked to the Maltese language. His first publication on the subject, Della Lingua Punica presentemente usata da’ Maltesi (1750) had for its sub-title ovvero Nuovi Documenti li quali possono servire di lume all’antica lingua etrusca. As a point of peculiar bibliographical interest one may mention here that there exist copies of this book with a slightly different imprint. One version gives

46 NLM Libr. 1146 i, p. 821.
the name of the printer ‘Per Generoso Salomoni alla Piazza di S. Ignazio. Con licenza de’ Superiori’ with the addition of the words Si vendono in Malta, while the other version does not give the name of the printer but shows that it was on sale ‘Appresso Gregorio Roisecco Mercante Libraro in Piazza Navona’. In this latter version, which I have seen by courtesy of our Society’s President Dr Albert Ganado, the name of Generoso Salomoni appears at page 65 on the title page of the second part of the book, i.e. *Nuova Scuola di Grammatica per agevolmente apprendere la lingua Punica-Maltese*.47

De Soldanis’ work on the Maltese language echoes these two pet ideas – (i) that Maltese derives directly from the original Punic Language, and (ii) that it may be of help to the study of the Etruscan language. De Soldanis’ theories, quite untenable in our time, have earned severe strictures from various scholars. The late Prof. P. P. Saydon, for example, described de Soldanis’ grammar as an ‘unsuccessful attempt at reducing the Maltese language to grammatical rules.’48 His statement that ‘the words punico-maltese reflect the opinion of the author’s times, an opinion to which none of the Maltese scholars of today gives his support’ may equally apply to the other notion that Maltese may bear some relation to the Etruscan language.

This notwithstanding, one cannot ignore the positive results of this work in which he proposed and actually used Latin characters for writing Maltese. In Lesson XX, § V, of his unpublished revised grammar he stated: ‘Un alfabeto della lingua con lettere latine, per poterla e scrivere e leggere venne da me formato al 1750, col parere de’ periti Lettori della Sapienza di Roma

nelle lingue orientali." These included ‘il Signor Abbate Eva, Lettore della lingua araba nella Sapienza, e Beneficiato in S. Giovanni Laterano, ed il Signor Abbate Assemani Lettore della Siriaca.’

De Soldanis underlined the beneficial effect of the new alphabet on the adoption of a uniform method for teaching Christian doctrine in these islands.

Anche il fù nostro Zelantissimo Pastore (Mons. Fr. Paolo Alpheran de Bussan) tutto intento a pascere la gregge da Dio a lui commessa, come da più anni nudriva nel suo generoso petto il desiderio di uniformare nel metodo tutta la sua Diocesi per l’istruzione della Dottrina Cristiana, subito che ha scoperto il metodo da me pubblicato, e che con un alfabeto, tutto formato con lettere latine, e con cui si è aperta la strada di scrivere con esse il nostro parlare, cioè le nostre voci e termini, fece pubblicare in Roma la Dottrina Cristiana al 1752 colla traduzione maltese, a proprie spese, e questa così tradotta presentemente da tutti li Curati viene insegnata al loro commesso Popolo, la quale porta il seguente titolo Taghlim Nisrani migiub fil Gharbi &cc. u migiub issa fil Malti mir-Reverendu Cassis Don Franciscu Wzzinu, bl’ordini tall’Illustrissimu, u’Reverendissimu Monsignur F. Paulu Alpheran di Bussan, Arciviscuvu ta Damia, u’Iskof ta Malta, F’Ruma 1752. Ghant Generosu Salomoni; Fisuk ta Sant Ignaziu, bis-sensia ta Superiuri.51

De Soldanis had a clear concept of the need of cultivating the Maltese language:

Io non so se in tutto il mondo, se bene poniamo mente, v’abbia nazione coltivata, la quale restò senza chi abbia faticato a conservare nel suo candore la propria favella! Ogni nazionale con grammatiche e con vocabolari procurò

49 NLM Libr. 144 – Nuova Scuola dell’antica lingua Punica scoperta nel moderno parlare Maltese e Gozitano aperta agli studenti Maltesi e Forestieri del Canonico Gianfrancesco Agius... seconda edizione accresciuta, e corretta dall’autore, f. 113v.

50 De Soldanis, Della Lingua Punica, 19.

51 NLM Libr. 144, Lezione XX, § VII, ff. 113v-114r.
illustrarla, ornarla, crescerla, e pubblicarla con mille note ed interpretazioni... La sola Malta può gloriarsi di essere nel possesso della illustre ed antica lingua orientale, che conosciamo al mondo, ed insieme dolersi della disavventura di esser mancata, e rimasta senza Grammatica e senza proprio Vocabolario, ma tanto quella che in modello apparve al 1750, oggi ampliata e corretta, quanto questo tutto nuovo si consegna al pubblico, e con cui in avvenire ogni nazionale potrà pregiarsi ed ogni estero valersi per esaminare ed approfittarsene della pregevole antichità, e fecondità della Lingua Punico-Maltese.\(^{52}\)

De Soldanis went on to say that his Maltese alphabet had not only been accepted locally but also commended by foreign men of letters. We quote here from a few letters addressed to him. L’Abate Stefano Borgia, Secretary of the Accademia and later raised to the dignity of Cardinal, became a close friend in 1752.\(^{53}\) He was full of admiration for de Soldanis’ works and augured him a lasting fame with other established literary personalities of that time. This is what he wrote on him:

Seguito la lettura delle vostre opere, benché con qualche lentezza, e vi assicuro che se seguirete la via intrapresa farete gran giovamento alla Repubblica Letteraria, e v’immortalarete come Gori, Passeri, Maffei, Olivieri, ed altri celeberrimi Letterati, poiché restituire al Mondo una Lingua, che apportavagli grandissimi vantaggi, quale si è la Punica, come à fatto l’Etrusca per mezzo de’ sopradetti valentissimi.\(^{54}\)

\(^{52}\) Ibid., Lezione XVIII, § VI and VII, f. 106v.
\(^{53}\) NLM Libr. 146 i, f. 139v.
\(^{54}\) Borgia was referring to distinguished personalities in the world of Letters. Scipione Maffei (1675-1755) was the author of the highly esteemed tragedy Merope (1714) and of various archaeological studies (Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico vii (Torino, 1936), 76). Fabio Olivieri reached the high dignity of Cardinal (Dizionario di erudizione storico-ecclesiastico... xlviii (1848), 303). Antonio Francesco Gori (1691-1757) was
In the previous year Borgia had sympathised with de Soldanis when Michele Acciard, of Pisa, plagiarized his account of the Conspiracy of the Slaves which took place in 1749. Borgia was quite aware that de Soldanis was working on his dictionary and on a revision of his grammar. On 29 June 1753 he wrote to him from Fermo:

Torno di bel nuovo ad esortarvi a compiere il vostro dizionario che sarà di lume alla Repubblica, ma avvertite che chi fa lume da negli occhi, onde procurate di darlo fuori colla maggior castigatezza possibile. A voi non vi manca il modo, avendovi Messer Domenedio provisto di buoni talenti.\textsuperscript{55}

Another encouraging letter was forthcoming from Count Cesare Gaetani, to whom he had sent a copy of his grammar, probably in 1751. Gaetani wrote to him from Syracuse: ‘Le auguro dal Cielo anni lunghi e felici per poterli sempre impiegare a gloria non meno sua che di cotesta sua meritevolissima Patria, e a beneficio del Mondo Letterario...’\textsuperscript{56} On 1 December 1759 Gaetani wrote: ‘Godo che abbiate dato fine al vostro Dizionario. Quando il vedremo?’\textsuperscript{57}

Fra Bonaventura Attardi, who had already been in correspondence with de Soldanis in 1741,\textsuperscript{58} wrote to de Soldanis on 3 June 1752, acknowledging receipt of his Grammar. He added: ‘e l’assicuro ch’Ella à tentato una strada mai pratticata da nessuno fin’ora, ed io voglio credere che con questa sua nuova fatica s’aprerà la strada ad apprendere con più

well known for his erudite archaeological works, e.g. Museum Etruscum, in 3 volumes, published between 1736 and 1743 (Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico v (1935), 892). Giovanni Battista Passeri (1694-1780) was an archaeologist, described by L. A. Muratori as antiquario maestro del mondo, who upheld the superiority of the Etruscans over the peoples of antiquity. His publications include Picturae etruscorum in vasculis (1767-1770) in 3 volumes. He also completed some of Gori’s unfinished works on etruscology (Grande Dizionario Enciclopedico viii (1937), 607).

\textsuperscript{55} NLM Libr. 146 ii, f. 70 rv.
\textsuperscript{56} NLM Libr. 155, f. 76r.
\textsuperscript{57} NLM Libr. 146 ii, f. 40r.
\textsuperscript{58} NLM Libr. 155, ff. 32, 34.
agevolezza l’Idioma Punico Maltese ito ormai in dimenticanza.’ As regards the ‘Vocabolario’ appended to the work he commented as follows: ‘Al dizionario però bisognerebbe che fosse più copioso per agevolare li curiosi di detto Idioma.’

Rather surprisingly, de Soldanis states in a letter dated 22 April 1753 that he was all the more encouraged to revise and enlarge his two dissertations published in Rome in 1750 because he had been informed from Florence that they were being translated into English with a view to publication in that language. This information is contained in a manuscript letter belonging to Prof. Alain Blondy, of Sorbonne, who very kindly copied it to Canon John Azzopardi, of the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, for eventual use by researchers. The relevant extract from the letter, addressed to a correspondent who has not been identified so far, reads as follows:

Vò proseguendo per ora la fatica de’ due lessici promessi, ed ho di molto accresciuto quelle due dissertazioni pubblicati in Roma l’anno 1750 sulla nostra lingua, incoragito a questa intrapresa, perché sento da Firenze, che si va traducendo in Inglese per imprimere in quell’idioma quel mio picciol trattatello.

Dissenting voices, however, were not lacking. To give one example, Bartolomeo Mifsud (1708-1781), better known as the Capuchin Padre Pelagio, of Żebbuġ, was a learned scholar who pointed out certain shortcomings in de Soldanis’ grammar and criticised him for not consulting his friends before he formed his alphabet. He himself devised a Punico-Maltese alphabet, which bears a lengthy title Alfabeto Punico-Maltese con che facilissimamente da chichesia s’apprende il vero e proprio metodo di parlare, di scrivere e di leggere nell’idioma Maltese, servendosi delle lettere dell’alfabeto

59 NLM Libr. 146 ii, f. 106r.
60 See Blondy, 71-80, in the present volume.
latino a cagione non vi sia il Carattere proprio Punico. Opera nuova mai più comparsa alla luce...\(^{61}\)

In his revised edition of the *Nuova Scuola* de Soldanis expounded on certain aspects of Maltese that are worth recalling today. In Lesson XIII, § XI, he referred to the numerous loan words from Italian that had crept into the language, to the extent that ‘*non si può oggi far un discorso intero dal volgo, (sic) senza introdurvi l’uso di alcune italiane parole, ed italiane Sicilianizzate, e Siciliane Italianizate...*\(^{62}\)

In this context he severely criticised the inhabitants of Valletta, especially the women, for wilfully corrupting the Maltese language:

Parlando della Lingua Maltese, non intendo di far menzione di quella usata da certi uomini, e da certe donne Vallettane, poichè questi, avvezzì ad ascoltare il parlare Italiano, e Siciliano, ed altro idioma dalla forestierie, che come sono coabitatori fissati in Malta, e che sempre in gran numero si ritrovano in detta Città, hanno fatto perdere la vera e materna lingua, e la naturale e dilettevole sua pronunzia. Corre gran pericolo che in avvenire andrà alla peggio in loro bocca, perchè si gloriano, particolarmente le moderne femmine, per non dire ancora gli uomini effeminati, di italianizzare il parlar Maltese; così lo impastardiscono, lo corrompono e finalmente non sapranno mai ben parlare nella materna, ch’è la volgare, nemmeno nell’Italiano, ch’è la commune. Non parlarò dunque di questa volontariamente corrotta favella, ch’è da deridersi piuttosto che lodarsi, ma di quella vera materna frequentata da’ spassionati Maltesi nella Valletta, francamente, e senza corruuttela, usata in tutti gli altri luoghi, e villaggi di Malta e Gozo.\(^{63}\)

As regards foreigners residing in Malta, including members of the Order, de Soldanis pointed out that these stood to benefit from a knowledge of the language in

---

61 ACM Ms. 65, pp. 65-78.
62 NLM Libr. 144, f. 80r.
63 Ibid., Lezione XIX, § II, f. 109r.
general use. It was in their interest to be able to understand Maltese rather than run the risk of being deceived by the lower classes. Speaking through an interpreter was neither satisfactory nor convenient. And as for foreigners married to a Maltese, it was ridiculous to find children speaking their mother tongue which the husband, being a foreigner, could not understand.\textsuperscript{64}

There were Knights holding high office who had, in fact, mastered the Maltese language and could speak it like a native. They considered themselves lucky that they could understand and speak Maltese because they could thus carry out their duties better and derive greater satisfaction from their work. Among these he mentioned the following: Balì Fra Antonio Escudero \textit{Gran Prior di Navarra}, Balì Fra D. Francesco de Sousa, Balì Fra Giacomo Francesco di Chambray, Commendatore Fra Bernardino de Marbeuf, \textit{Luogotenente del Gran Tesoriere e Capitano della Valletta}, the Knight Fra Paolo Antonio di Viguier \textit{Capitano Comandante delle Guardie di S. A. Ema.}, Fra Luigi Liberale Geoufre, \textit{Priore del Sacro Spedale di Malta}, Monsignor Fra Melchior Alpheran \textit{Priore della Maggior Chiesa Conventuale di San Giovanni}, il Cavalier Remiking, the Knight Fra Allessandro le Matayer de la Maye \textit{Capitano di una nave della Religione}, Fra D. Pietro Zarzana, the Knight Fra Francesco di Croze Lincel \textit{Comandante de’ Sciabecchi}, Commendatore Fra Lorenzo Ildaris, the Knight Fra D. Saverio Doz \textit{Prodomo della Prigione o sia Bagno de’ Schiavi}, the Knight Milianchi, Sanese, the Knight Bonelli, Napoletano, the Knight Fra D. Luigi Portoghese, the Knight De Almeida, the Knight D. Ferdinando Melo, and several others.\textsuperscript{65}

The Gozitan canon was particularly forceful in stressing the importance of Maltese for those aspiring to the priesthood, as well as for those already ordained. Here he

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid., Lezione XVII, § VII, ff. 102v-105r.
\item \textsuperscript{65} De Soldanis, \textit{Della Lingua Punica}, 62-63; also NLM Libr. 144, ff. 102v-105r.
\end{itemize}
exposed a serious shortcoming in the educational system of that time. Boys with a vocation for the priesthood went to a grammar school to learn Latin. However, both teachers and pupils found themselves in the unpleasant situation of having to teach, or learn at the same time Italian and Latin – both of them new subjects – through the medium of Maltese, their mother tongue. As a result they studied Latin up to the required standard, while they learned Italian parrotlike, as it was never used outside the school and never heard at home. When they became priests they would have a mediocre, not to say an inadequate knowledge of Latin, or of Italian, which they did not use. After having thus spent the best years of their youth, some of them might have to explain parts of the Breviary, or of the Catechism, in the mother tongue, or in Italian, which they did not understand. They would be incapable of explaining unseen passages from Latin or Italian, or even of writing a letter in Italian, which was neither understood nor spoken.

As a solution de Soldanis argued that teachers should follow his method of reading and writing Maltese in Latin characters and teach it to their pupils who, with the help of his dictionaries, would find the Maltese explained in Italian and Latin, and the Italian explained in Maltese and Latin.

This method would also be of great help to those priests who preached in Maltese and who wrote their sermons in that language, using their own system of writing, which nobody else could make out or understand. There were others who delivered their sermons in Maltese but wrote them in Italian, thus having to translate and preach at the same time, with the result that, unable to find immediately the right Maltese word, they generally used an Italian one, in the process contributing to the further corruption of the Maltese language. For these the above mentioned dictionaries would also be of great help.
De Soldanis finally strongly recommended the use of the alphabet devised by him so that everybody would zealously strive to preserve the language in its pristine purity and perfection. Otherwise it would run the risk of completely perishing and drowning in the sea of oblivion.66

Ladies and gentlemen, we have ranged over a vast spectrum of information about an outstanding eighteenth century Gozitan personality. Ours has been an excursion into the material available at the National Library which other researchers may explore more fully than I have been able to do. I have shown elsewhere de Soldanis’ contribution to the study of Maltese folklore, suggesting that his activity in this field reflects the influence of G. B. Vico (1668-1744), L. A. Muratori (1672-1750) and other pioneers of folklore studies in Italy. There are other topics that call for study. And the possibility of finding relevant material on de Soldanis in some Gozitan library or friary, or in a private collection should be kept in mind. I speak from personal experience here. While giving the finishing touches to the text of this talk I was able to see, through Dr Ganado’s usual readiness to help, a copy of a manuscript entitled Arme Gentilizie delle Famiglie Maltesi e Gozzitane ed alcune altre; Raccolti dal Dottor Canonico Don Gio. Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis. It is not a complete work, covering only family names starting with letters A to C. However, it shows that de Soldanis was also interested in local heraldry.

Much of the material we have been talking about is being made public for the first time. To achieve this purpose we have utilised, besides published works, manuscript sources

66 NLM Libr. 144, ff. 112r-114v. For an account of the educational facilities that existed before the arrival of the Society of Jesus in Malta, as well as those that were available contemporaneously with their institution see V. Borg, ‘Developments in Education outside the Jesuit Collegium Melitense’, Melita Historica vi, no. 3 (1974), 215-54.
which de Soldanis himself bequeathed to the National Library, of which he was the first Librarian, more than 226 years ago. The approach to our subject was facilitated by the light thrown on the cultural scene of those times by his correspondence with Italian and French men of letters – correspondence that projects his own intellectual biography. We have also shown to what extent his linguistic theories, however untenable by modern standards, were accepted as a valid contribution to learning in his time. Our aim will have been fulfilled if the present work will add a human dimension to the growing image of de Soldanis as an aspiring ecclesiastic, a dedicated scholar, a staunch upholder of Malta’s Pauline tradition, a stout promoter of our national language and a proud historian of his native Gozo.
Arme Gentilizie delle Famiglie Maltesi e Gozzitane, ed alcune altre; Raccolti dal Dottor Canonico Don Gio Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis
Let me start by making a small comment. I do not know whether it was intentional on the part of the organisers to hold this conference in this hall named after Erin Serracino Inglott. It is well known how much Erin admired de Soldanis and I am sure he would have been an attentive member of this distinguished audience tonight. But, to come to our subject, the aims of this talk are two. First, I want to show my appreciation to the department of Maltese of the University who have done me the honour of inviting me to give this talk. Secondly, having already contributed my share to the study of Vassalli, it is imperative for me to assess the importance of de Soldanis on the Maltese cultural stage. After all, he furnished Mikiel Anton with more than one idea and justice must be done with him.

In truth, who was de Soldanis or, as he preferred to sign his name, Francesco Agius? What made him regret his stay in Gozo where people discussed only the price of wheat, the growing of crops, the planting of vines, the sowing of

1 See the interview that Erin gave to Alfred Massa in *Il-Hajja*, 5 March 1982.
3 For a bare skeleton of his life, see Cassar Pullicino, 1-34, in the present volume.
grain and the hunting of birds? More to the point, on which grounds did he find a place in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, a work of international prestige? For which reasons did Inquisitor Gregorio Salviati in 1759 refer to him as ‘a man of great talents’? Was he simply paying back the compliment the canon had made him by dedicating a book to him the preceding year?

It is undeniable that the canon, a graduate in law from the University of Padua, was the ‘most erudite man of the island,’ a walking encyclopaedia. He had a detailed knowledge of the works of other writers and in his writings one can detect a sustained engagement with their arguments. He was a bookworm, who must have impressed his contemporaries, as he still impresses us, with his unbounded avidity for knowledge and the flood of his writings. Books were his greatest treasure since ‘without them one works in the dark.’ His library, however, was not just for his private use but he lent his books to fellow Maltese men of letters. Nor was it simply a source of books: it was also a meeting place for the learned. It is likely to have been in the library that he received his colleague Ignazio Saverio Mifsud during his visit to Gozo in October 1759.

---

5 *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* i (Rome, 1960), entry by D. Veneruso, 398-99.
7 De Soldanis, *Discorso Apologetico contra la Dissertazione Storica e Critica in Lingua Francese Descritta dal Signor Abbate Ladvocat* (Venice, 1758).
11 NLM Libr. 13, pp. 169-70.
Foreign journals brought news about books to the attention of scholars. The *Novelle Letterarie* of Florence, for instance, carried a review of de Soldanis’ *Annone Cartaginese*. Moreover, print was supplemented by manuscript copying, which was certainly intended for wider circulation. Among such various works which survive one can mention the ‘Notizie del Convento e Chiesa de’ Conventuali Religiosi di S. Francesco della Valletta’ by padre Attard, the ‘Dissertazione sopra l’origine dell’organo’ by Balti Stadl and the ‘Dissertazione sopra la scritazione del Tempio d’Apolline’ by Vittorio Gristi. This combination of public and semi-public initiatives may be taken as a testimony to the vigorous cultural life in the eighteenth century. It made possible the extensive circulation of ideas among men of letters and created space for intellectual debate.

A personal source of intellectual enrichment was provided by correspondence. Through the surgeon Michel’Angelo Grima, de Soldanis pursued a correspondence with Giovanni Lami, the first librarian of the *Biblioteca Ricciardiana* on the via Ginori, Florence. Lami was by no means de Soldanis’ only correspondent; others were ‘your true friend’ abate Stefano Borgia, and Cardinals Domenico Passionei.

13 See issue no. 17 in NLM Misc. 250.
14 NLM Libr. 142 vi, pp. 591-606.
15 NLM Libr. 155, ff. 153r-158v.
16 Ibid., ff. 169r-178v.
19 NLM Libr. 146 i, f. 139v.
and Portocarrero.\textsuperscript{21} One of the most important channels of correspondence was that which de Soldanis maintained with the Theatine padre Paolo Maria Paciaudi. Fortunately, two years ago at the Biblioteca Palatina of Parma I came across three letters that they exchanged with each other in 1748 and 1760.\textsuperscript{22} The friar, a great admirer of Newton and the \textit{philosophe} Condillac, archaeologist, librarian, anti-Jesuit as well as teacher and friend of Alfieri, was the prime instigator of the reforms in Parma. In his \textit{Nuova Scuola della Lingua Punica} the canon says he had met him in Rome.\textsuperscript{23} Here he also struck up an acquaintance with the Hospitaller Fra Giuseppe Almeida, known to all the \textit{literati} of Europe, and the Jesuit padre Pietro Lazzari, librarian and lecturer of ecclesiastical history at the \textit{Collegio Romano}.\textsuperscript{24}

This is ample evidence that de Soldanis was not an insular Maltese but in touch with the \textit{literati} of his age. He moved freely among them, hopping from one Italian city to another. More than anything, it was such direct, personal contact which ensured that Maltese men of letters were accepted and able to regard themselves as fully accredited members of the European Republic of Letters, an international framework for intellectual communication.\textsuperscript{25} They brought back and gave to Malta what they had learned on the continent. In fact, we

\textsuperscript{23} De Soldanis, \textit{Della Lingua Punica}, 70.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid., 5, 70.
misunderstand the development of Maltese society and institutions if we neglect the foreign influences that have persistently been at work in our country. This is something distinctive in Maltese history. A people that could survive so many conquests could survive and also absorb anything. Stubborn persistency and receptiveness, not insularity, are the marks of the Maltese throughout their history.

Agius was specially related to Tuscany. Here he forged several close personal and intellectual connections, being, for instance, a member of the Accademia degli Apatisti of Florence and the Accademia Botanica e di Storia Naturale of Cortona. These relations determined partly his career. In 1726 two important discoveries shook the academic world of the Tuscan eruditi. In 1720 an Englishman, Thomas Coke, had acquired a manuscript of Thomas Dempster (1570-1635). This Scots scholar, while teaching at Bologna and Pisa early in the seventeenth century, had collected various artefacts and inscriptions as well as a number of passages from Roman authors. He deduced from them the existence of a highly developed civilisation in Italy before the rise of Rome. Coke donated the manuscript to his friend senator Filippo Buonarroti, who supplemented the text with a great quantity of copperplate illustrations.

The two-volume work was ready after four years. It was at that time that the bishop of Gubbio ordered the printing of a set of ancient Umbrian tables known as the Tavole Eugubine. These had been discovered in 1444 but had lain neglected in the archives of the commune ever since. Buonarroti added a

26 In 1758 he composed a sonnet in honour of Ludovico Coltellini, the secretary of the latter academy: Ġ. Cassar Pullicino, ‘M. A. Grima u De Soldanis: Sunett bil-Malti tal-1758’, in his Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti i, 75-81.
lengthy appendix and in the summer of 1726 published *De Etruria regali.*

This was the beginning of etruscology but, what is more important for our argument, it inspired de Soldanis and set him on his course as the promoter of the two chief characteristics of Malta’s national identity, *history* and *language.* To reach both these ends the canon, in his testament dated 14 April 1768, left 500 *scudi* so that with their interest a literary academy would be set up, under the name of *Agiusiana.* Meetings were to be held at the national library, the last one of each year being appropriately dedicated to the ‘Punic-Maltese’ language and some aspect of Maltese history.

In Malta, historical investigation had been dead for the last hundred years, since the publication of *Della Descrittione di Malta* by *commendatore* Fra Gio. Francesco Abela in 1647. De Soldanis contemplated issuing a new edition of the book with historical and critical annotations. Giuseppe Giacomo Testaferrata, another erudite of the period, would have liked to do this work, too. He had the backing of Paciaudi, who had first put the idea into his head. He was a relative of Abela while Count Ciantar, the correspondent of Muratori and the Sicilian Antonio Mongitore, had eye

---


28 NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, ff. 255r-256v, 15 April 1768. See appendix one.

29 De Soldanis, *Lettera sopra la Fondazione, ed Esistenza della Chiesa e Convento de’ RR. Padri Cappuccini del Gozo di Malta* (Malta, 1759), 27.

30 Through de Soldanis, Testaferrata sent the text of his *La Croce Ottogona* to Paciaudi to comment upon: de Soldanis to Paciaudi, 25 September 1760, Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, Cass. 65, no. 1.

Che nell’ultima radunanza dell’Accademia che si fa in tutti gli anni si debba trattare della Lingua Punico-maltese, o di qualche cosa che spetta alla Storia di Malta e Gozo.
problems. For his part, Agius was staying in a desolate place like Gozo without the required material at hand. However, since he knew how much the two were jealous of each other – Ciantar even accused him of passing information on to the canon – Testaferrata refused.\(^{32}\)

Eventually it was Ciantar who issued the new edition.\(^{33}\) But if de Soldanis failed in his intent he still devoted a significant part of his scholarly energies assembling material that was relevant to the history of his countrymen. Besides manuscripts and books he had enough coins,\(^{34}\) medals, inscriptions, pottery, fossils and statues to make a museum of these antiquities.\(^{35}\) He wanted nothing to be lost that could throw the least ray of light on the history of the Maltese islands. He wrote on the adventure of the Christian captives who succeeded to bring their ship, the ‘She Wolf’, back to Malta\(^{36}\) and on the conspiracy of the Turkish slaves in 1749.\(^{37}\) His sense of historical memory was so acute that he compiled a diary for the year 1733\(^{38}\) and an ecclesiastical one for the next year.\(^{39}\) His *Itinerario Italico*, which he left to his friend Mgr Gio. Antonio Beretta of Milan, describes his

\begin{itemize}
\item Testaferrata to Paciaudi, 10 January 1761, Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, *Fondo Paciaudi*, Cass. 92.
\item G. A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata, Ovvero Descrizione di Malta Isola del Mare Siciliano ed Adriatico, con le sue antichità ed altre notizie, divisa in quattro libri, del commendatore fra Giovanfrancesco Abela, vicecancelliere della Sagra ed Eminentissima Religione Gerosolimitana, corretta, accresciuta e continovata dal conte Giovannantonio Ciantar*, 2 volumes (Malta, 1772, 1780).
\item De Soldanis, *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tieghu*, i, 85.
\item De Soldanis, *Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tieghu* ii (Malta, 1953), 14.
\item Michele Acciard, *Mustafà Bassà di Rodi schiavo in Malta, o sia la di lui Congiura all’Occupazione di Malta* (Naples, 1751).
\item NLM Libr. 142 vi, pp. 281-321.
\item NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 288-305.
\end{itemize}
voyage to Italy in the years 1757-58.\textsuperscript{40} Everything interested him, even the statutes of the Sodalità della Buona Morte at Sannat\textsuperscript{41} or the memorial which the parish priest and people of Qormi presented to Grand Master Pinto so that their village would be promoted to the status of città.\textsuperscript{42}

Even so, he was particularly interested in Gozo since Abela had largely ignored it.\textsuperscript{43} To make amends for this omission, ‘moved by his love for his country’, he started writing Il Gozo antico-moderno. In this comprehensive work the canon describes the Gozitan place names, the setting up of the collegiate church and the other parishes, as well as the arrival of the religious orders in Gozo. He dwells on the rulers of the islands, from the time of the ‘giants’ to that of the Knights Hospitallers. But he had the foresight to write not only on political events but on every phase of human life and activity: funeral customs, the fertile land with its fruit and vegetables, hunting, coral, clay, the Gozitan fungus – a remedy against dysentery,\textsuperscript{44} the alabaster found at Żebbuġ in 1738. Above all, the Gozo antico-moderno is a eulogy of those Gozitans who enhanced the name of their island but who lay forgotten in the limbo of the past. The aim of de Soldanis was

\begin{quote}
To immortalise their talent
And embalm honour with the ink.\textsuperscript{45}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{40} NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, f. 253v, 5 November 1769.
\textsuperscript{41} NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 113-17.
\textsuperscript{42} NLM Libr. 142 iv, pp. 399-412.
\textsuperscript{43} Abela, Della Descrittione di Malta, 118-23.
\textsuperscript{45} ‘Che nella fama immortalar l’ingegno / E coll’inchiostro imbalsamar l’onore’ – De Soldanis, Lettera sopra la Fondazione, ed Esistenza della Chiesa e Convento de’ RR. Padri Cappuccini, 26.
All the same, if de Soldanis dedicated his life collecting everything that concerned the history of Malta he gave first importance to the Maltese language, an authentic document of Maltese identity. This means that several years before Herder he identified language as the best, original and sacred inheritance of the people.46

From where did this tongue originate and how was it formed? Fortunately, de Soldanis’ linguistic itinerary can be precisely followed. In his Gozo antico-moderno he refers to the several theories about the origin of Maltese. But, possibly comforted by, among others, Abela’s47 and Magri’s48 convergent opinion, the canon held it was derived from Arabic, ‘not purified Arabic but adulterated and mixed with the languages I have mentioned.’49 So he wrote in 1746 but later he shifted his argument and took the view that Maltese is derived from Carthaginian. In support of this theory he published in 1757 Annone Cartaginese, confirming that the Maltese could understand the words of Hanno in Plautus.50

46 G. Brincat, Malta. Una Storia Linguistica (Genoa, 2003), 235-37.
47 Abela, Della Descrittione di Malta, 257-59.
48 D. Magri, Breve racconto del viaggio in Monte Libano (Viterbo, 1664), 16. See also G. Mangion, ‘La letteratura barocca a Malta’, Journal of the Faculty of Arts iv, no. 4 (1971), 272-75.
49 De Soldanis, Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tieghu i, 67.
50 De Soldanis, Annone Cartaginese cioè vera spiegazione della I scena dell’atto V della commedia di M. A. Plauto in Poenulo fatta colla lingua moderna Maltese o sia l’antica Cartaginese (Rome, 1757), 5. Note also what Quintinus wrote in 1536: ‘although their language is such that it cannot be well expressed in Latin letters, and much less can it be pronounced by any other people except by the inhabitants, still the Maltese understand most of the Punic words which a Carthaginian character of the name of Hanno uses in the play of Plautus’ – Jean Quintin d’Autun (ed. and trans. H. Vella), The Earliest Description of Malta (Malta, 1980), 19. On this thesis see the biography of the canon by G. A. Vassallo, L’Arte, anno III, no. 71 (1865), 4-7 and L. Cachia, ‘L-Akbar Żball ta’ de Soldanis’, in L-Ilsien Malti – Ilbieraħ u Llum (Malta, 1994), 94-97.
In his 1754 reply to a Parisian journalist of the *Journal Étranger*, who held that Maltese is derived from Arabic, Agius takes endless pains to inform his readers how he came to embrace this thesis of the Punic origin of Maltese. At first, he says, it had seemed a daunting project. In former centuries this nation of formidable people (the Phoenicians) had terrified all Europe but ‘today we hardly know its name, much less its character.’ Its language was altogether unknown, and, like Vassalli, he was surprised how it survived. It only had the good fortune of being inherited from father to son, from son to nephew, from nephew to grandnephew. ‘Nobody ever thought of it. Only God kept it alive.’\(^51\)

The journalist based his arguments on two points: the Arabs stayed in Malta for a long time and the Maltese understood Arabic. On the one hand, the canon does not deny that the Saracens’ occupation lasted for more than two centuries but did not the Arabs occupy other parts of Europe as well? And if they did not plant their language in these places, why did they have to do so in Malta? The example of our island should surprise nobody. In the kingdom of Tunisia ‘there are today some villages in which their Arab inhabitants speak only Spanish.’ And in his *Verona Illustrata* Marquis Maffei cited a people in northern Italy who preserved their own German tongue.\(^52\)

De Soldanis reinforces the point by a subsequent observation. Does not an Italian understand Spanish and perhaps even a little French and Provençal as well? This is so only because the four tongues are derived from Latin. So can it be said for Maltese. The people of the island understand Arabic for the simple reason that

\(^{51}\) NLM Libr. 143 i, ‘Lel Karrai’, f. 2r.

\(^{52}\) S. Maffei, *Verona Illustrata* i (Verona, 1732), 521-22.
both languages have the same source, Hebrew or Punic.\textsuperscript{53} Besides, not all Maltese sounds can be expressed with the Arabic alphabet. This must be, de Soldanis affirms, a ‘sufficient reason to convince us that our language cannot recognise Arabic as its mother tongue.’\textsuperscript{54}

It would have been most unfortunate if this ancient and prestigious language were lost. Elsewhere the canon comments on how much profit Maltese could be to Etruscan, both being derived from Punic.\textsuperscript{55} But he was interested primarily in his own tongue and in lesson XIV of the \textit{Nuova Scuola dell’antica lingua punica}, or the revised grammar of 1750, his enthusiasm knows no bounds and bursts forth into extravagant praises of the Maltese language. It is neither a primitive nor a rough tongue but elegant, expressive and concise: ‘Can the other languages ever express what Maltese says succinctly in one word?’\textsuperscript{56} It was for this reason, partly, that he collected the proverbs\textsuperscript{57} and the dialogues or conversations.\textsuperscript{58} But what I like best about de Soldanis is that he insists, like Herder in \textit{The Songs of the People}, that song has the ‘divine spark of genius’. He boasts that the musicality

\textsuperscript{53} De Soldanis, \textit{Risposta del Canonico Giopietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis al giornalista di Parigi che può servire d’avviso a chi legge il Giornale Straniero del mese di Luglio 1754, pubblicato dal medesimo giornalista in lingua Francese nella sopradetta città, s. d.}

\textsuperscript{54} De Soldanis, \textit{Della Lingua Punica}, 45-46.

\textsuperscript{55} De Soldanis, \textit{Risposta del Canonico Giopietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis al giornalista di Parigi}, unnumbered. Agius made the same comment in the \textit{Journal Historique} when he claimed that both languages ‘derive from the same source, that is Punic, which was brought into Italy, as in Malta, by the same people’: \textit{Suite de la Clef, ou Journal Historique sur les Matieres du temps} (September 1756), 198-99.

\textsuperscript{56} R. Clark, \textit{Herder: His Life and Thought} (Los Angeles, California, 1955), 258-60.

\textsuperscript{57} ‘Apoftegmi e Proverbi Maltese raccolti e spiegati in lingua Italiana’: NLM Libr. 142 i, pp. 1-99. These 387 proverbs were published by G. Curmi in \textit{Malta Letteraria} (May-December 1928).

\textsuperscript{58} NLM Libr. 144, ff. 192r-199v. See the study by Ġ. Cassar Pullicino in \textit{Il-Malti} (September 1947), 99-125. The same study but without the dialogues was again published in \textit{Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti} i, 60-74.
of Maltese is such that the extemporaneous versification of
the countrymen and women surpass by far the efforts of
several poets.\textsuperscript{59}

However, in preserving the pure forms of the words
of the people, de Soldanis had another seminal aim: to
describe, so many years before Vassalli,\textsuperscript{60} the dialects of
the island. Malta, he stated, was a small island, only sixty
miles in circumference. Nevertheless, country people were
distinguished from each other by the way they pronounced
the syllables. And a Maltese well instructed in these
nuances could differentiate between an inhabitant from
Birkirkara and another say from Żejtun.\textsuperscript{61} This picture of
the way the people spoke in the eighteenth century is one
of de Soldanis’ great merits.

He castigated severely, of course, those men and women
in the harbour area who unnecessarily bastardised their
language with the result that they spoke neither good
Maltese nor good Italian.\textsuperscript{62} This does not mean though
that Maltese does not borrow foreign words; even the most
cultivated languages do so. Is it not true, he asks, that French
has many Italian words and that Latin borrows from Greek,
Italian from Latin, and Spanish from Italian and Arabic?
Maltese is derived from Carthaginian but ‘I can’t swear that
every word is Punic’, de Soldanis states in his introduction
to the \textit{Damma}. Anyway, these foreign words put on a Punic
dress: ‘Punic grafted the words of those people who came to
stay here or to take their place.’

Having sung its praises, de Soldanis passes on to
describe how this language was to be kept alive. First of
all he composed an alphabet, a grammar\textsuperscript{63} and a Maltese-

\textsuperscript{59} NLM Libr. 144, f. 85v.
\textsuperscript{60} M. A. Vassalli, \textit{Ktŷb yl Klŷm Mâlti} (Rome, 1796), xviii-xix.
\textsuperscript{61} NLM Libr. 144, f. 82v. Thanks to Olvin Vella for this reference.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid., f. 109r.
\textsuperscript{63} De Soldanis, \textit{Della Lingua Punica}.
Latin-Italian dictionary or *Damma*. The latter, which unfortunately is still in manuscript form, has several uses. Primarily, it gives the exact meaning of words. For instance, if it had been published in 1720 there would not have arisen the problem over the form of baptism. How were the Latin words *in nomine patris* to be translated, *in* or *with the name of the Father*? This was a fundamental theological problem since if the form is wrong the sacrament is invalid. In Maltese, de Soldanis assures his readers, these two terms have the same meaning.

Besides, he meditated, time is both envious and voracious and those words that are not registered are forgotten. This could be seen, for instance, from some words published by Abela and the Magri brothers, which were lost in less than a century. De Soldanis’ dictionary, therefore, is superior to Vassalli’s in this respect. Mikiel Anton, who, on his own testimony, consulted the canon’s manuscript, was a purist and left out several non-semitic words. By contrast, the canon registered all the words the people spoke.

All the same, for Maltese to make any progress at all it was necessary, before all else, that it be standardised. Whoever wrote for his own use could invent the rules and employ the method he liked, but those who wanted their work to be read had to see that it was understood. He brought the example of those preachers who wrote their sermons in an alphabet understood only by them. When they died their writings were valueless and were torn up or thrown away.

---

64 NLM Libr. 143 i-iv.
66 NLM Libr. 144, ff. 107r-108v.
Instead, de Soldanis engineered a solution to a difficult problem and formulated a Latin alphabet composed of twenty-six letters. He thus ignored the advice of his friend Giovanni Cachia who counselled him to use Arabic letters for Arabic sounds.\textsuperscript{68} Even so, he received the approval of such an eminent academic as abate Giuseppe Aloisio Assemani, professor of Syriac at ‘La Sapienza’ at Rome.\textsuperscript{69}

This alphabet was to be used not only in the teaching of Maltese but also in learning Latin and Italian. At that time, the teaching of these two foreign languages was a torment to students and teachers alike. And it was so superficial that ‘let them write a letter and for sure they will drown in a span of water.’ It was a waste of time for these young men in their prime of life. A fertile ground must be irrigated and de Soldanis provided the canals for the water to pass through. His was a simple idea: first, the students were to learn Maltese and then, by means of this Latin alphabet, Italian and Latin as well.

Once the teachers understand well my method, the reading and writing of Maltese in the Latin alphabet … and teach it to their students, this will be of great comfort to them, as it is not much difficult. And who cannot see this? … Can the teachers wish anything better to their disciples and the students from their masters?\textsuperscript{70}

After all this, what can we conclude about de Soldanis, a well-known figure in the literary European world of the eighteenth century? In other words, can we put him in the temple of the enlightened?\textsuperscript{71} Can we identify him with the

\textsuperscript{68} See the letter Cachia wrote to de Soldanis dated 27 September 1744. He was no expert but advised the canon that some letters of his alphabet ‘fanno brutta figura’: NLM Libr. 155, f. 131v.


\textsuperscript{70} NLM Libr. 144, f. 110rv.

\textsuperscript{71} On the Enlightenment in Malta see F. Ciappara, \textit{Enlightenment and Reform in Malta, 1740-1798} (Malta, 2006).
meaning of Kant that at the time of the Enlightenment man reached his manhood because he started using his own mind and did not let anyone think for him?\textsuperscript{72}

We must admit that the canon was a rabid patriot. He dedicated his life so that the Maltese preserve their tongue, history and traditions.\textsuperscript{73} Malta and Gozo retained such a hold over his loyalty that, however far away he may be, however long his absence, he always felt himself to be a stranger and a foreigner until he returned to his native land. A letter to his friend Dr Michelangelo Grima expresses such deep affection. He congratulated him for preserving his love for his island home while abroad and, citing Montesquieu, told him that ‘at our coming into the world we contract an immense debt to our country, which we can never discharge.’\textsuperscript{74}

But despite his genuine enthusiasm it is possible to identify various lacunae that obscure his greatness. Let us take, for instance, the part he played as a practical philosopher. Like Vassalli he was interested in education, one of the main themes of the age of the Enlightenment. He expressed his hope to Bishop Rull that his grammar would be of great help to those boys destined for the ‘ecclesiastical army’.\textsuperscript{75} But what about the other children? He knew that ‘in most countries parents send their girls to school. In Rome and other places kings who have the well-being and happiness of the people at heart pay teachers for this purpose.’ This was not the case in Malta where girls roamed the streets demanding alms and losing their innocence instead. De Soldanis proposed the setting up of

\textsuperscript{72} I. Kant, ‘An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?’, in Kant (ed. H. Reiss), \textit{Political Writings} (Cambridge, 1991), 54-60.
\textsuperscript{73} See the essay by Ġ. Cassar Pullicino in \textit{Il-Bennejja tal-Folklore Malti} (Malta, 1964), 8-14.
\textsuperscript{74} NLM Libr. 142 vi, p. 1.
\textsuperscript{75} NLM Libr. 155, f. 16r.
a conservatorio for ten girls in a house at the castello of Rabat. They were to be under the supervision of a maestra to teach them ‘feminine virtues’. He also suggested how the project was to be financed. Divine providence was to have pride of place. Do perhaps the capuchins, he asks, ever lack what to eat and dress? The università or commune of Gozo was to contribute its part too, but de Soldanis makes another suggestion later copied by Vassalli. Pious foundations, like the legato Navarra, were to serve this purpose, as they served to redeem Gozitan slaves. 

Compared to Mikiel Anton’s these projects appear weak and feeble. The brilliant plan of Vassalli, a national primary education, would have transformed the Maltese – ‘masters of their own language, proficient in arithmetic, skilled in diverse trades and especially conscious of their duties of men and citizens.’

If we are looking for something brave in de Soldanis we do not find it either in the Accademia Agiusiana. There are two reasons for this. First, on 5 November 1769 the canon made a codicil by which he annulled the foundation of the previous year. Secondly, even if it were set up we should not think that, like learned societies in Germany, it was intended to foster intellectual innovation or encourage discussion of new ideas. It would have been, in the words of Muratori, simply a form of perditempo (waste of time) and fuggilozio (how to escape laziness). Like the members of the Accademia dei Fervidi, set up by I. S. Mifsud in 1743, its members would have read insipid pieces to each other, devoid of any

76 NL M libr. 142 v, pp. 360-62.
78 NAV, Notary Felice Camenzuli, 11/656, unnumbered, 5 November 1769.
79 On these academies, see R. J. W. Evans, ‘Learned Societies in Germany in the Seventeenth Century’, European Studies Review vii (1977), 129-51.
literary value. In other words, it would have been a haven for a select band of elite who buried themselves from the world to discuss irrelevant trivia, frivolous stuffy pedantry and useless nonsense, not an institution dedicated to the ‘greatest utility of society’.

De Soldanis falls short of true greatness even in his literary and academic works. He deserves of course our praises for printing the first grammar of Maltese even though this work has been dismissed simply as ‘historical and sentimental’. Nevertheless, he devoted every ounce of his extraordinary energy to collect the sources of Maltese history; and we must give him credit for arousing, like his colleagues, the Capuchin padre Pelagio, I. S. Mifsud and Count Ciantar, the enthusiasm of his countrymen for their past. He accumulated all that was prestigious in the inheritance of the nation and put it at the service of the people.

Making known whatever can throw light on antiquity has always been the laudable custom of the learned men of the past as it is of the literati of the present enlightened century. Hiding anything that can be useful to scholars is a crime.

But this mass of data was simply of interest only to antiquaries or, as Carl'antonio Barbaro referred to them, while describing the archaeological sites found at Marsa in 1768, i curiosi di cose antiche. The next step was to realise that the knowledge of the past should not be transmitted passively:

80 For a record of the papers or lezioni prepared by its members: NLM Libr. 1, pp. 203-315. For an assessment of its importance: V. Laurenza, ‘Società Culturali in Malta durante il Settecento e l’Ottocento’, La Brigata, anno 1, no. IV (1932), 85-91.
82 NLM Libr. 142 ii, f. 2r.
83 C. A. Barbaro, Degli Avanzi d’Alcuni Antichissimi Edifizi, Scoperti in Malta l’Anno 1768. Dissertazione Storico-Critica (Malta, 1794), 2.
chronological lists of governors, bishops and inquisitors, place names, description of objects like the statue of Hercules\textsuperscript{84} or the assembly of inscriptions in Latin.\textsuperscript{85} The paper on which such data was put down was good only to wrap pepper in, as happened to the Biblioteca Maltese of Mifsud.\textsuperscript{86}

Historical research is not the good food of curious men but the implements with which to better the material and spiritual life of the people. In the words of Leibniz, the essence of history is \textit{utilitas} and Giovanni Lami warned his colleague Lorenzo Mehus that the historian should also be a philosopher and not simply a reproducer of facts.\textsuperscript{87} This means that data must be interpreted\textsuperscript{88} and, like the English ambassador in Naples, William Hamilton, the historian should try to put his information in a context.\textsuperscript{89} According to Herder, history must give us characters of people and individuals. This is the point, too, that that fine historian Marc Bloch made in his posthumous book, \textit{The Historian’s Craft}:

it is men that history seeks to grasp. Failing that, it will be at best but an exercise in erudition. The good historian is like the giant of the fairy tale. He knows that wherever he catches the scent of human flesh, there his quarry lies.\textsuperscript{90}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{84} NLM Libr. 142 ii, ff. 1r-10v.
\item \textsuperscript{85} NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 244-65.
\item \textsuperscript{86} G. Pisani, \textit{Lettera di un Maltese ad un Cavaliere Gerosolimitano Professo} (Vercelli, 1783), 34.
\item \textsuperscript{88} E. Cochrane, ‘Muratori: The Vocation of a Historian’, \textit{The Catholic Historical Review} li, no. 2 (1965), 153-72.
\item \textsuperscript{90} M. Bloch (trans. Peter Putnam, preface Peter Burke), \textit{The Historian’s Craft} (Manchester, 1992), 22.
\end{itemize}
De Soldanis was capable of writing good history. In the second chapter of Mustafà Bassà di Rodi he questioned the established political order, meaning that as change had occurred in the past it might again occur in the future. When the Hospitallers came to Malta in 1530 the inhabitants lost their local government, the consiglio popolare, but he emphasized that his compatriots subjected themselves to the Order only voluntarily. After they had expelled their feudal lord Gonzalvo Monroy, King Alfonso of Spain in 1428 had given them the right to govern themselves and take up arms if they were given to some other nation, _manu fortì_. The Maltese protested vehemently and surrendered to the wish of Charles V only when they realised that their country was to be the bastion of the Cross against the Crescent and that this was an occasion to join the European nobility against the barbarian.

De Soldanis did not, of course, explicitly argue for a right of resistance, but his comments on a past episode of disobedience implied that there were circumstances in which it was legitimate. His claim that the people had anciantly ruled themselves provided a powerful justification for their aspirations. Inquisitor Passionei at once realised his threat to the government. He informed the cardinal secretary of state that the canon had tried to introduce ‘a type of republican government against the sovereign and despotic authority of the grand master.’

The canon’s courage appears stronger when one realizes the circumstances of the book’s publication. When he presented the manuscript to the censor appointed by the _Sagra Congregazione dell’Indice_ the reviser, the Dominican

92 M. Acciard, _Mustafà Bassà di Rodi_, 31-34.
93 ASV, SS 118, f. 155r, Passionei – SS, 29 May 1751.
Fra Tommaso Maria de Luca, claimed that the work was written so badly that he could not understand parts of it. But besides these grave stylistic defects he condemned ‘the out-of-place assertions against the grand master and the Order.’ He corrected and cancelled parts of them and gave his approval for publication of the book only on condition that the author first presented it to the Order’s ambassador in Rome. De Soldanis defied him. The book was published in Naples as originally written but under the name of Michele Acciard.94

Pinto accused him of ‘several unfounded and prejudicial statements against the government and the Religion’95 and ordered the copies of the book to be collected.96 He also reported the author, whom he called ‘insolent and vile’, to Pope Benedict XIV. The canon was summoned to Rome where he was interrogated by Cinotti, one of the ablest criminal judges of the pope. He was reprimanded97 and ordered to apologise to the grand master on his return to Malta.98

De Soldanis, who had shown the colours of a true patriot in the service of a ‘noble and generous nation’, the defender of the nation’s liberties, submitted and preferred to give up history altogether rather than expose himself to the persecution of the government. This historian manqué was rehabilitated so that he was appointed the first librarian of the national library set up by Bailiff de Tensin in 1763.99 After all, he was not receiving his salary to reconstruct the

94 AOM 1574, pp. iii-iv (between pp. 182-83), Pinto to Solaro, 14 June 1751.
96 AIM, Corr. 52, f. 220r, SS – Passionei, 27 April 1751.
97 AIM, Corr. 53, f. 58r, SS – Passionei, 23 August 1752. For the fable, perpetrated by his brother, that de Soldanis was declared innocent by Benedict XIV: NLM Libr. 1146 i, p. 821. Cp. Cassar Pullicino, 23, in the present volume.
98 AIM, Corr. 100, f. 117r, Passionei – SS, 1 July 1752.
99 C. Testa, The Life and Times of Grand Master Pinto, 1741-1773 (Malta, 1989), 201.
past with its memories of liberty and insurrections and throw the existing order into question.

History in the hands of de Soldanis must serve ulterior ends than historical development. Let us take his linguistic studies, in which he expended his best strength and which distinguished him more than anything else as the child of his age. ‘If there has been a century’, so he triumphantly wrote to Giovanni Lami, ‘which can glorify itself on having brought to life again languages thought by the republic of letters to be dead, and of which one knew only their name, the present century is the one which has surpassed all others.’

He mentions the Etruscan and the Celtic languages as an example. These languages had either not yet been born at all or else were very young when the Punic language ruled supreme in Africa, Asia and in most of Europe. Now this eloquent language was debared from every corner of the world and was spoken only in Malta and Gozo.100

It must not be imagined that in his thesis de Soldanis was an isolated dreamer, an obscure and a solitary academic whose conclusions were comprehensible to no more than a handful of sympathetic writers. He had the backing of such a celebrated expert in oriental languages as Johannes Henrich Maius.101 His work was so well-known that it was instrumental for General Charles Vallancey to prove that the Irish language was a ‘Punic-Celtic compound’. An Essay on the Antiquity of the Irish Language, published in Dublin in 1772, reproduced 141 ‘Punic-Maltese’ words, culled from Della Lingua Punica and supposedly corresponding to Irish meanings.102

100 NLM Libr. 155, f. 98rv.
101 J. H. Maius, Specimen Linguae Punicae in hodierna Melitensium Superestitis (Jessae, 1718).
This linguistic theory of the Punic origin of Maltese has been successfully refuted by Wilhelm Gesenius. In his *Versuch über die Maltesische Sprache* which he published in 1810 at Leipzig he established the Arabic origin of Maltese. He accused de Soldanis of incompetence in the comparative criticism of languages and proved that the canon’s knowledge of Hebrew rested on some vague and often quite erroneous recollection of early instruction. And still less value must be attached to his comparison of Maltese with the ancient Etrurian and ‘Egyptian’.  

For which reason did the canon change his previous scientifically correct theory for one philologically mistaken? We have already speculated on the linguistic reasons for this change. But could there have been some other explanation that fitted in with his deeply religious convictions? Plausibly, the dissertation that the canon wrote against abbé Ladvocat in 1758 could give us some clue. This librarian of the Sorbonne had contended that the language of Malta changed with every coloniser. At the time of the Romans, therefore, it must have been Latin. It is hard to exaggerate the effects of these arguments and de Soldanis engaged closely with this line of thinking. If Ladvocat’s hypothesis were true, an obvious difficulty arose because in that case St Luke would not have referred to the inhabitants as ‘barbarians’. In turn this means that St Paul would not have been shipwrecked at Malta but, perhaps, at Meleda.


(Mljet) in Dalmatia\textsuperscript{105} and the most momentous period in the annals of the islands would have been destroyed by a stroke of the pen.\textsuperscript{106} According to de Soldanis this reasoning must have had a serious flaw and exposed the weakness of his adversary’s thinking. It was his firm belief that the Maltese never abandoned the island but cohabited with every new master that conquered it. Nor did they ever ignore their original language, of which they were so jealous.

This last assertion was bold but unhistorical. In other words, de Soldanis was not guided by a genuine search for truth but was rather inclined towards writing apologetic history. Listen to the moving exhortation to his compatriots:

You Gozitans heeded his [St Paul’s] voice without delay. You understood his message at once, for which I congratulate you. And as, since that day, you have chosen him as your father and protector, may you also, one day, join him in heaven after living here on earth the message he has preached.\textsuperscript{107}

But de Soldanis was not only convinced that history displayed the guiding hand of divine providence in human affairs. He still tied it to the role of providing moral examples for the promotion of virtue and the perfection of the soul.\textsuperscript{108} That is, he upheld the traditional humanist ideal of history as a lesson in virtue. After describing the life of prayer and fasting that Fra Antonio di San Carlo led at the sanctuary of Our Lady at Qala he exclaims: ‘You see, dear reader, what

\textsuperscript{105} For this thesis see especially I. Giorgi, Divis Paulus apostulus in mari, quod nunc Venetus sinus dicitur naufragus, et Melitae Dalmatanensis insulae post naufragium hospes... (Venice, 1730).

\textsuperscript{106} De Soldanis, Discorso Apologetico, 62-83.

\textsuperscript{107} Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu ii, 3.

\textsuperscript{108} For this comment: G. Spini, ‘I trattatisti dell’arte storica nella Controriforma italiana’, in his Contributi alla storia del Concilio di Trento e della Controriforma (Florence, 1948), 109-36.
great love this man had for God.’

Another case refers to Girgor Bonnici of Nadur. When this saintly man opened a beehive he found inside the model of an eagle and a ship made of honey and wax. These were ‘a gift from God to his servant who always walked in the way of the Lord.’

History, therefore, was to be at the service of religion, an exercise in oratory. Descartes and his followers were the cause of this malaise common all over Europe, that the ars historica passed into the hands of the rhetoricians. They succeeded to expel history from the reign of science because they said it is impossible to establish historical truth. Fortunately, this dangerous abyss had been overcome by the eighteenth century and history re-established its supremacy over pyrrhonism. The inductive method started being applied to historical research and, as in physics, experiment and evidence became supreme.

The Gozitan canon, however, failed to evaluate the sources with a critical eye and the conservatism of his historical writing is evident also at the level of method. He did quote Jean Mabillon but there is no indication that he was aware of the Frenchman’s concern with the critical use of evidence. No wonder that he could lose himself so easily in the intricacies of fanciful speculation. I admit that he questioned S. Agata’s stay in Malta and S. Corrado’s at Mosta. But these were exceptions and, like the first historians of their country, de

109 Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tieghu ii, 100.
110 Ibid., 154.
114 Discorso Apologetico, 83.
115 NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 39-40.
Soldanis, faced by an obscure past and a paucity of written material, did not scruple to dream up national *mythistoires*. He based his work on the fabulous opinions of other writers’ or upon popular tradition and wrote a collection of apocryphal stories. Does not the man from Gharb, Bernard Zammit, whose strength matched his height, provide sufficient evidence that the ‘giants’ really inhabited Gozo? Is not the church dedicated to St Paul at Marsalforn ample proof of the saint’s visit to the island? On which historical bases can one say that when in the fourth century the vandals expelled the Christians from North Africa S. Rossiniano came to Gozo and set up the first Augustinian convent? Perhaps on what ‘an old and reliable Augustinian related to me’? This is the same mistake that padre Pelagio made. Who were, for instance, the forty Maltese martyrs at the time of Emperor Licinio? Or on what historical evidence can we say that the ‘Arabs carried the Maltese Christians together with their saintly bishop to Palermo to be there killed’? Such writing reflects, Momigliano comments, the ‘ferocious and controversial character that ecclesiastical history assumed since the Reformation.’

To conclude, de Soldanis and his colleagues – though he was a bigger man than they were – represent the earlier phase of the Maltese Enlightenment. This pre- or early Enlightenment was a late product of baroque culture whose agents did not have a political programme. If they did succeed to formulate an idea of national conscience, their horizon did not reach beyond their immediate environment

---

116 Għawdex bil-Ġrajja Tiegħu i, 54.
118 Ibid., 78-79.
119 ACM, Misc. 56, ff. 33r-41v.
120 Ibid., f. 38r.
and in no way can we call them the men of the future. After all, as has been well underlined, ‘it was perfectly possible to participate in the Republic of Letters as a correspondent, antiquary, historian and bibliophile and remain contentedly ignorant of Enlightenment thinking.’ Their conservatism is symbolised by the humiliating retreat of de Soldanis before the arrogance of the Order. The dreamers of a new Malta would never publish their works, as the canon did, under another’s name. Nor would they do like Don Vittorio Gristi. This priest and chancellor of the inquisition ‘was known for his hatred of the Order’ but kept his grumbles to himself. He had to content himself with leaving the text about the rights of the Maltese in his drawer, taking it out every so often plausibly to polish his arguments. It was only, he unashamedly informs us, an academic exercise which he wrote not for publication but to while away the time.

This was a literary as distinct from a political Enlightenment. This dramatic change was represented by the attempt of the Order’s ambassador in Rome, Bailiff Solaro, so that De l’Esprit des Lois would not be put on the Index of Prohibited Books. In this period Malta presented those political and cultural conditions that justify the use of the historical term ‘enlightened absolutism’. The two grand masters Pinto and Rohan were both ‘philosopher kings’, assisted by able functionaries and led by the new spirit of utility in the service of the public good. Their programme included a change in the economy, education,

122 Robertson, The Case for the Enlightenment, 41.
124 F. Ciappara, The Roman Inquisition in Enlightened Malta (Malta, 2000), 113.
125 PA (Birgu), Lanzon v, p. 539.
126 M. Rosa, Riformatori e Ribelli nel ’700 Italiano (Bari, 1969), 93.
judicial process, public administration and the relations between State and Church.\textsuperscript{127}

As a prominent member of the clergy\textsuperscript{128} and the chancellor of the tribunal of the inquisition in Gozo,\textsuperscript{129} de Soldanis was a stranger in this milieu. Temperamentally and intellectually he was not the man to propose such reforms. He wrote a sonnet in honour of the Augustinian Don Bartolomeo Attardi, the antagonist of Muratori.\textsuperscript{130} And if he quoted Montesquieu\textsuperscript{131} and Voltaire,\textsuperscript{132} this did not mean that he shared their political ideas; Cardinals Roberto Bellarmino\textsuperscript{133} and Cesare Baronio\textsuperscript{134} were more to his tastes.

I hope I have persuaded you that the intellectual priorities of this hard-working man, full of curiosity, were conservative. It is my contention that he would have felt more at ease in the dead silence of the antiquities he had in his museum than in the deafening din of the French Revolution and among such fierce personages of the Maltese Enlightenment like Fabrizio Grech, Mikiel Anton Vassalli and Nicolò Muscat.\textsuperscript{135} This was no longer the time for historical erudition; it was the time for action.


\textsuperscript{128} For his unsuccessful attempts to become the archpriest of Gozo and the provost of St Helen’s: NLM Libr. 13, pp. 151-53 and NLM Libr. 146 i, ff. 25r-26v – letter of F. S. Scerri to Agius, 29 April 1755.

\textsuperscript{129} AIM, Corr. 96, ff. 137v-138r, Salviati – SU, 16 January 1759.

\textsuperscript{130} The sonnet is an appendix to Bartolomeo Attardi, La Risposta senza Maschera al Signor Antonio Ludovico Muratori (Palermo, 1742), unnumbered.

\textsuperscript{131} NLM Libr. 142 vi, p. 1.

\textsuperscript{132} Discorso Apologetico, 70.

\textsuperscript{133} Ibid., 24, 73.

\textsuperscript{134} Ibid., 69.

\textsuperscript{135} For these chief figures of the Maltese enlightenment: Ciappara, Enlightenment and Reform.
... Più considerando come in Malta, particolarmente in questa Città Valletta non esservi fondata un'Accademia Letteraria, ove possono radunarsi Uomini Letterati, e dar saggio in pubblico del loro talento, così stabilisco e fondo un'Accademia Letteraria da nominarsi Agiusiana in questa Città Valletta di Malta sotto l'invocazione del glorioso San Filippo Neri, e da conservarsi in perpetuo, sotto le regole e leggi che saranno prescritti dal Sr. Commissario e Bibliotecario di questa Biblioteca della S. Religione Gerosolimitana, quello si che voglio et ordino che sia onninamente osservato sotto pena di nullità di questa Fondazione tutto quanto viene da me ora scritto ed ordinato.

Che una volta al mese, o almeno una volta ogni due mesi si tenghi l'Accademia, o l'erudita radunanza.

Che in questa ogni Accademico debba dire qualche cosa e lasciare in scritto quanto disse in mano del Sr. Segretario dell'Accademia.

Che nell'ultima radunanza dell'Accademia che si fa in tutti gli anni si debba trattare della Lingua Punico-maltese, o di qualche cosa che spetta alla Storia di Malta e Gozo.

Che da cinque in cinque anni si dià in premio una moneta d’oro del valore di scudi cinquanta all’Accademico che meglio avrà trattata la materia. Il giudizio dovrà farsi colla pluralità de’ voti deli Ssri. Associati Accademici per voti secreti nel Bussolo, e non per acclamazione o a voce viva, altrimente la fondazione non avrà luogo e si rende nulla.

Più voglio et ordino ch’il Sr. Segretario dell’Accademia Agiusiana reggistri in un libro apparte quanto si tratta e si delibera in tutte l’Accademie dalli Sigri. Accademici, e che tenghi apparte li scritti che gli saranno consegnati dalli Ssi. Accademici.
Più voglio et ordino che la radunanza di quest’Accademia si faccia nella Sala della Biblioteca della Religione Gerosolimitana.

Più voglio et ordino che la ricezione delli Ssi. Accademici sia fatta nella radunanza dell’Accademia dalli ascritti Accademici, e che siano reggistrati in un libro apparte.


Voglio ch’il danaro degl’interusuri del mio capitale di 500 scudi sia amministrato dal Bibliotecario pro tempore existente, e che se il capitale delli 500 scudi venghi o tutto o in parte restituito, che lo riceva il do. Bibliotecario, e lo impieghi di nuovo a Persone ben stanti col consenso ed approvazione del Sr. Commissario di questa Biblioteca pro tempore existente.

Più voglio et ordino che se questa Biblioteca venisse a mancare e sarà disfatta, e non collocata altrove, come si vede oggi stabilita, che questa fondazione dell’Accademia Agiusiana venghi ad essere nulla, come se mai fosse fatta e fondata, che vadi a favore d. Capitale delli miei Ssri. Eredi infrascritti.

Più voglio ed onnimamente commando, che doppo che questo mio solenne Testamento sarà aperto, fra due mesi
inclusive questa mia Fondazione debba essere approvata, confermata, e corroborata del Sermo. Principe di Malta e Gozo, e Gran Maestro di quest’ordine Gerosolimitano con un magistrale decreto in tutto e per tutto senz’alcuna eccezione di quanto sopra venne da me descritto, e se fra due mesi inclusive non viene ottenuto do. rescritto dell’approvazione di questa Fondazione, e se doppo ottenuto, non si osserva quanto venne da me ordinato appuntino, allora voglio che detta fondazione ipsofacto sia nulla, e come mai fosse fata, ed il capitale mio delli 500 scudi vadi a favore delli miei SS. Eredi infrascritti, e non altrimente.

[...]


Io Canonico Francesco Agius Protonotario Aplco.

NAV, Notary Felice Cammenzuli, 11/656, ff. 255r-256v, 15 April 1768.
APPENDIX TWO

Paùn repposizione, v'era proprio paura vivello a una sepp un
mundo mio, all'ultimo puntare condizioni del mio stato è stato
pericolo, ora ed è stato deluso, e persino perfino. Mi sembra mio fratello
come... No, per non partecipare che più non poteva prendermi al suo,
pericolo, credo che più. E quasi dunque, è intorno tempo di...
Sempre ancora, il mondo vuole ancora. Conosco, in tal caso a
viva voce la voce del mondo. Delle notizie confuse, confusi,
Stà assenza. Restava sempre attaccato all'alba delle medaglie
altre, e mi è accaduto che mi fosse la prora di un cieco spaventa-
tori di mandarli, e mi avanza e fabbrica, e nel caso tranquillo
la medaglia unica, se così le meraviglia, lo cieco spaventa
è accanto, o labirinto nuovo... Sotto la mancanza di '85,
Roma la quale... una catena e le, più oltre: mi ritrovo nel
capo con risquировать... Vorrei trovare l'opera seguente per non
queste somma, nelle medaglie '85. Mo è vero è vero... A lefe
di aumentare, e fare constante sciarva in mano, quando mai verrebbe
fuori il processo, mi trasmettendo loro copia, certamente che tranne
mento alla più grande e a fare qualsiasi al fine scritto Distruo.
the first letter to padre Paciaudi, dated 7 May 1748
APPENDIX THREE

No già letto e rileggo con molte grazie l'ordine, giunto a me a Roma, sempre più vado osservando la sua profonda e intuitiva giustizia ammira monetaria. In poche che rimondò in Malta comprese il suo antico rito religioso, e in quei simboli si rivelò la difficoltà che non a me solo, ma ad altri amici venne il mio di apporto di libri, sarebbero molto che pensare, faccia invece segnando nelle sue pensa. Le P. Roma non m'aveva nella prima, speranze le scende, dell'altra Medaglia di Parma volata e f. figliuoli, m'avei fosto nelle libertà di viaggiante, non era conveniente lasciare segnata questa lettera; ma giacché fu ad avvenuto per la prima, giorni si spera essere convenne per la seconda, altra prendere la libertà d'approvare e mettere sentimenti e vivolizioni.

M'ha posto in curiosità non prescissa la citazione che ella fa, in essa riguarda nel (dicescappare inizio). L'elito monumento di versione eternom, non avendo avuto cor al giorno Vaggi passato reprop, se il comunicare il patrione non le pregiudica il apporto di avò a somma favore, posa forse poter ritornare qualche cosa di saper per me.

Lodando col S. Nicolò Inglese nostro amico senza la scrittura greca, che leggei nel giardino abate di P. Ronci, m'assegn...
the second letter to padre Paciaudi, dated 27 May 1748
Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, Fondo Paciaudi, Cass. 65, no. 2.

Il vostra benevolenza e gentilezza mi hanno rassodato e confortato; desideravo con tutte le mie forze assistere alla tua nascita e partecipare alla tua gloria. Sarei stato felice di assistere alla tua nascita, ma la mia condizione attuale non mi permette di fare questo.

P. M. S. P. R. c.

Il vostro amore e affetto mi hanno profondamente commosso. Sono stato felice di potervi assistere nella vostro laborioso e impegnativo lavoro.

F. G. P. R. c.

Il vostro amore e affetto mi hanno profondamente commosso. Sono stato felice di potervi assistere nella vostro laborioso e impegnativo lavoro.

P. M. S. P. R. c.
The third letter to padre Paciaudi, dated 25 September 1760
Biblioteca Palatina di Parma, Fondo Paciaudi, Cass. 65, no. 3.
The National Library of Malta keeps several letters that de Soldanis sent to Count Ciantar. This unpublished letter was sold by auction in Switzerland about ten years ago. It was in a pre-stamped folder on which one can read: Raccolta d’autografi di personaggi illustri fatta da L. F. Pieri. Then there is a scroll for the name, followed by the titles: titoli, patria, nascita, morte. Another scroll bears the data dell’autografo and soggetto; this is followed by the last title: opere.

This letter remained in an Italian collection because it was sent to a member of the famous Vettori family. The recipient of de Soldanis’ letter was Antonio Francesco Vettori who had just published Del culto superstition di Cibele, detta dagli antichi la Gran Madre, dissertazione dedicata... agli... soci dell’Accademia colombaria, colla quale s’illustra una statuetta di marmo che si conserva a Roma nel museo Vettori (Rome, stamp. di Apollo, 1753).

De Soldanis thanks Vettori for having sent him this book. This shows, if necessary, that the Maltese scholar kept up a correspondence with many other learned persons in Europe. But this letter shows that some of the Knights were also ‘culture thirsty’, since de Soldanis complains that it had not been possible for him to read the last dissertation by Vettori, Dissertatio philologica qua nonnulla monumenta sacrae vetustatis...
ex Museo Victorio⁠¹ depromta aeri incisa tabula vulgantur, expenduntur, illustrantur (Rome, ex typogr. Palladis, 1751), because it had been passed on from one Knight to another who shared a common interest in art and archaeology.

Speaking of himself, de Soldanis explains to his correspondent that, having heard about the translation into English of his last two essays published in 1750 (Due dissertazioni della lingua punica presentemente usata da Maltesi, Roma, G. Roisecco, 1750), he was working on an enlarged edition of them and on the publication of two lexicons (the then published Dizionario maltese-italiano e italiano-maltese).

But he wanted to promote Count Giovan’Antonio Ciantar, the most famous Maltese scholar of those times (per far maggiormente conoscere alla stessa il bel talento di questo nostro Sig. Conte). Indeed, he might be known by Vettori for his De Paulo Apostolo in Melitam... naufragio ejecto... (1738), since de Soldanis immediately links Ciantar to terra sigillata from St Paul’s Grotto and regrets that the Maltese of his times could not make vases with it, like their ancestors used to do (come altrefiate formava de’ vasi della terra).

De Soldanis does not seem to understand why a nobleman, so talented and well-known as Ciantar, a foreign correspondent of the French Academy, decided ‘to bury himself and his family’ in Malta (qui sepolto colla sua famiglia). In order to show Ciantar’s talent, de Soldanis sends an epigram dedicated by the Count to King Louis XV and explains to him two verses of a poem, Genua liberata, which he had sent him.

These two poems are related to the French victory over the Austrians at the beginning of the Austrian War of Succession, when the Republic of Genoa was definitely turned away from the Austrian alliance and became one of the surest allies of the French.

¹ Pietro Vettori (1499-1585), the well-known philologist, signed Victorius.
The difficult situation is well known. While the French armies were victorious in Flanders, the Austro-Sardinian army occupied Genoa and entered Provence. But as the French were counter-attacking, the people and the nobles of Genoa, insulted every day by the Austrians, decided to react. It was raining on this 5 December 1747 evening. Austrian soldiers could not carry a heavy gun and expected to be helped by the Genoese of the Portoria district. A young boy, called Balilla, on behalf of all, refused and threw the first stone. On the 6th, Genoa was in revolution. Even the Austrian general Botta was hit by a stone on his face. On the 10th, at night, he and his army left the territory of the Republic for good. This news was like a thunderbolt in Europe! Within a few days, the French army cleared Provence and Genoa of any Austrian presence. On 4 May 1748, Louis XV’s new ambassador arrived in Genoa: he was the duc de Boufflers, the King’s cousin! Genoa had never had such an honour! He was warmly congratulated by the doge, Gian-Francesco Brignole (de Soldanis writes Bignola), who, before his election in March 1746, had been minister of Genoa in Paris from 1736 to 1739. His coat of arms bore an eagle, like the Emperor’s, and a cock, an emblem of the French (gallus, cock; Gallus, Gallic), as de Soldanis explained to Vettori.

The history of this war was written in Latin by an Italian, Castruccio Bonamici (De Bello italic) and his description of king Louis XV’s victory sounds like Ciantar’s epigram: ... Regem ipsum in medio rerum cursu, rara inter regnantes moderatione, victoriae temperasse suae, ut communi saluti consuleret; eoque fuit eius mirabilior moderatio, quo tot expugnatis in Belgio arcibus, perterritis Batavis, invicto exercitu, quaecumque alibi accepisset bello damna, sarcire facile posse videbatur, et peritissimi erant duces qui victoria uti suaderent. At Rex quietam Europam quam suam maluit.
La mancanza di materia da scrivere non mi permise incommodare V. S. Illma colle mie lettere, ma questa volta il commodo, che mi si rappresenta m’incoragisce di formare poche e breve linee almeno per marca della memoria, che giustamente conservo della di lei degnissima Persona per le mie infinite obbligazioni.

Sento e con mio sommo contento, come pubblicò la sua erudma penna qualche dissertazione sù Cibele, e la leggerei con mio indicibile piacere. Crederebbe V. S. Illma, che l’ultima di lei favoritami dissertazione l’anno 1751 ancora non pervenne alle mie mani? Così è, passa da mano in mano da questi Sig.ri dilettanti Cavalieri, ed io non posso più averla.

Una volta le parlai sul Ciantar, o sù certi versi che formì per Genova, allorache fu dal General Botta proseguita, appunto in questi stessi giorni cercando altre coserelle per il mio studio, incontrai que’ versi, et altri fatti per il Regnante Monarca di Francia, quali copiasì, per far maggiormente conoscere alla stessa il bel talento di questo nostro Sig. Conte, qui sepolto colla sua famiglia.

Non è stato possibile a me di far capire a questa gente, come possono formare come altrefiate formava de’ vasi della terra qui et altrove conosciuta per Grazia di S. Paolo, onde risolsi con questo commodo trasmetterla poca quantità di questa terra, tratta dalla stessa Grotta, ove riposò S. Paolo Apostolo, con cui forse in Roma con più agevolezza potrà ritrovare, chi glene facesse quelle forme che desidera.
Vò proseguendo per ora la fatica de’ due lessici promessi, ed ho di molto accresciuto quelle due dissertazioni pubblicati in Roma l’anno 1750 sulla nostra lingua, incoragito a questa intrapresa, perché sento da Firenze, che si va traducendo in Inglese per imprimere in quell’idioma quel mio picciol trattatello.


Di V. S. Illmo
Malta 22 Aprile
1753,

Umo ed Obb. Servo
Francesco Agiùs

Majestati Christianissimae
Ludovici XV
Galliae et Navarvae Regis,
Piis, Felicis, Triumphatoris.
Epigrama

Si mihi Virgiliis donavent plecta camoenae,
Vel Salaminiacae murmura plena tubae;
Non Anchisiadae currus, aut arma referreta,
Aut Argiorum fortia facta Ducum;
Sed celebrare suos mellem, Ludovice, triumphos,
Partaque bellaci clara trophoea manu,
Et coniuratis acies, Belgasque subactos,
Eversasque arces, edomitosque Duces.
ESSAYS ON DE SOLDANIS

Nos vero tenui cithara donavit Apollo,
   Estque impar caeptis nostra Thalia suis.
Sed tua quid nequeat virtus? Hac sola disertum
   Ne faciet: major su mihi Phoebus eris.

   Genua liberata
   (a) Binae certabant Aquilae, sed vindice Gallo,
       una manet victrix, altera victa fugit
   (a) Alluditur ad Insignia imperialia, et Ducis Reip.
       Genuensis (de gente Bignola) quorum utrumque
       Aquilam gerit
RACCOLTA D'AUTOGRAFI DI PERSONAGGI ILLUSTRI
Fatta da L. F. Pieri.

Franco Burigni

Titoli. Enrico

Patrizia. Rege nell'Isola di Malta

Nascita. 1702

Morte. 1769

Data dell'autografo.

29 Agosto 1733, Malta.

Soggetto.

Comprava il Rege da Delli Nuovi la piantina di due legioni che fa a Malpensa.

Opere.

Grammatica della lingua maltese. Roma 1750

Due Redi della lingua maltese, pretendita di Malta. 1790

Dizionario maltese-italiano e italiano-maltese

Discorso apologetico sul manoscritto di "Paolo de'Paoli" 1797

Ispessimento delle lettere del Rege Burigni nella lingua maltese. I'antica estragione. Roma 1755.
Amo figlio di S. Maria e del sig. Colone

Francesco Agius

Carissimi,

Sono stato informato da un amico di una notizia tuttora non pubblicata che potrebbe interessare l'inquisizione della stessa. Si tratta di un documento che mi è stato consegnato da un amico che lo ha trovato in un manoscritto antico. Il documento parla di una ricerca sull'arazzo del Vaticano, che è stato oggetto di molte controversie nei secoli passati.

La ricerca ha portato alla scoperta di una serie di lettere di epoca medievale che discutono del arazzo dei quadri di San Pietro. Secondo le informazioni ricevute, l'arazzo era stato commissionato per essere utilizzato come decorazione per la sala del Vaticano, ma la sua realizzazione fu gravata da molte difficoltà.

Riferimenti:

1. Lettera del cardinale Alessandro Farnese alla curia vaticana, 1532
2. Documento dal Petit Palais, Parigi, 1600
3. Lettera del papa Inno XII alla famiglia Farnese, 1798

La ricerca ha portato a una serie di conclusioni interessanti, come la scoperta di un'antica tecnica di tessitura che era stata utilizzata per la creazione dell'arazzo. Inoltre, si è constatato che l'arazzo era stato commissionato a diversi artigiani di notevole fama, che avevano lavorato su richiesta del cardinal Farnese.

Rispetto a questa scoperta, mi sembra opportuno che la ricerca venga pubblicata in modo che possa essere esaminata da un grande pubblico. Inoltre, si dovrebbe considerare la possibilità di creare un'edizione completa del manoscritto, che potrebbe essere di grande interesse per gli studiosi dell'epoca.

Resto a disposizione per qualsiasi ulteriore informazione sulla questione.

[Signature]

1755
n conoscere per frequenti lettere, onde riuscì con grande commodo a persuaderla dica quantità di queste cose, trattata della prese. Sotto, che ripeto il libro sopra, con un furo indire in cui egualmente, per un mezzo, chi gl'assegnerà quelle fomod che desidera.

Vo provvedendo per ora, la faccia di due lozioni promesse, e le si mando ausiliarie, quelle due dissertazioni pubblicate in Roma l'anno 1750. Nelle opere English, incoraggiato a quelle volar, se non, se non. Beve, di viendome @inglese per imprimere in quel idioma quel mio prezioso trattello.

Mille rispetti alla compagna e alla società del fratello, o partecipando, innanzi all'obbedienza, e del sodisfera il paterno in oggetto, quel appezzamento giù riservando inmettimento.

G. A. Milli
Mala 28 Aprile
1758.

[Signature]
Majestas Christianissima
Ludovicus XV.
Gaullae et Navarrea Regis,
Ei felici, triumphator.
Ogiermones.

Si nici vigilia donaret plecta Camoenae,
Oth Belonians numquam plane tubae;
Non undita locivi, aut arma regemors;
Ant Agrippam forte facta Deum est;
Tis celebrab tur molend, Ludovicum triumphor,
Nonque bellaci, sed trophaeum manum,
Et onere acri, Babasque labores,
Exorsaque saltis, domusque aures.

Adjus vel uxu, utrura donavit Apollo,
Cogitque impetu ceptis regem Thalia lay.

Se tua quid quaeris virtus? Hae soli diximum
Majusque: major nunc, Carthaginiensis.

Prena liberata
(a) Binae constare aquilae, sed vindice falle,
Quae mandat victus, altera victus fugit.

(a) Aquila (aquila) imposita et aegypti luctans (aegypti) sunt.
A rather long letter, signed Il Canonico D. Francesco Agius, bibliotecario, dated Valletta 6 del 1764, written in Italian and addressed to Chevalier Etienne-François Turgot, is found in the manuscript section of the Bibliothèque nationale de France under the title: Pièces diverses sur les colonies, XVIIIe siècle. The relevant colony is Guyana, South America. For an explanation of the connection between de Soldanis and this colony and of how it came about that this letter found its way in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, it would be worthwhile to give some information about Chevalier Turgot who befriended de Soldanis during his sojourn in Malta and with whom de Soldanis continued to correspond when Turgot returned to France. In fact, in the National Library of Malta there is a considerable collection of the correspondence exchanged between de Soldanis and Chevalier Turgot.¹

Turgot was born in Paris on 16 June 1721. He was received into the Order in the Langue of France on 6 September 1722. Subsequently, he came to Malta where he received his training on the Order’s galleys, but he never took his

¹ See NLM Libr. 146. Some of this correspondence was exchanged between the two friends when Turgot was in Malta while de Soldanis was in Gozo. Turgot’s letters are in Italian, except for a few in French.
vows. Since he was the second child in his family, when his eldest brother died without issue, he assumed the titles of Marquis of Sousmons and Count of Mesnil and married Marguerite Capon. He served in the army of the King of France and on 11 March 1763, he was appointed governor general of Guyana and of Cayenne Island. On 11 October 1764, he was raised to the rank of brigadier in the King’s armies and was awarded the decoration of Chevalier de Saint-Louis. Turgot arrived in Guyana on 22 December 1764 and returned to France in April of the following year because the colonization of Guyana was not a success, as many of those who went to the colony with a sense of adventure and with the hope of becoming rich quickly fell ill or died. Turgot died on 25 December 1788 in his castle at Bons in Normandy. Although there is no reference to agriculture in the above-mentioned letter, it is worth mentioning that in 1760 Chevalier Turgot was one of the founders of the Société royale d’Agriculture. He was a cultured man, with a wide knowledge of natural history, agriculture, chemistry and medicine. He was interested in rural and political economy like his brother, the famous economist and controller of finances of Louis XV and, later, a minister of Louis XVI. Turgot wrote various Mémoires on natural history. He used to discuss this subject in his correspondence with various

2 NLM Misc. 241. As the letter F for Frère does not appear against his name, one can conclude that Turgot was never a professed Knight.

3 He is the anonymous author of Mémoire instructif sur la manière de rassembler, de préparer, de conserver et d'envoyer les diverses curiosités d'histoire naturelle which was published in 1758 together with the work of the so-called ‘father of forestry and husbandry’, Henri-Louis Duhamel du Monceau, entitled Avis pour le transport par mer des arbres, des plantes vivaces, des semences et de diverses autres curiosités d'histoire naturelle. For further information about Turgot’s life, see Archives de l’Académie des Sciences, Paris, Extrait de la Notice de M. A. Lacroix lue le 12 décembre 1932, 37-45.
acquaintances\textsuperscript{4} including de Soldanis. It is known that Turgot brought over to Malta various trees and plants, that he owned two gardens and that in 1746 he compiled a list of seeds with their names in Latin, in Italian and occasionally in Maltese.\textsuperscript{5} In his letters to de Soldanis, Turgot used to promise that he would send him many seeds including those of coffee, cinnamon, cotton from Senegal, palm trees from America and India, cherries from America, peas from Madagascar, flower bulbs unknown in Malta and plants which grow close to sea water and which would thrive in Marsa. Turgot was also in close contact with the botanists of his time, including Buffon, Rouelle, Macquer and Jussieu. When Turgot was appointed governor general of the new colony of Guyana he did not forget the Order and Malta. He asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the duc de Choiseul, to obtain from the King a concession for the Order in Guyana on condition that Maltese families or other families chosen by the Order be sent to the colony. The King acceded to the request\textsuperscript{6} and Chevalier Turgot, in agreement with the duc de Choiseul, gave instructions to Chevalier Menon who was sent to Malta to persuade the Grand Master that the said concession would greatly benefit the Order. Menon was also instructed to tempt some members of the Maltese nobility to establish themselves in the new colony. Turgot makes specific mention of Monsieur l’abbé Fournier, whom he describes as a Maltese nobleman who loves France and

\textsuperscript{4} See Turgot, (Etienne-François, marquis de) – 126 lettres ou billets autographes ou dictés, signés de 1775 à 1788, Archives de l’Académie des sciences, Paris. These letters, all dealing with agriculture, are addressed to André Thouin, an agronomist and horticulturist.

\textsuperscript{5} NLM Libr. 242.

\textsuperscript{6} See BnF, naf 3605-3606, Papiers du Chevalier Turgot relatifs à l’administration de la Guyane française. The King was prepared to grant a vast tract of land – where 10,000 or more Maltese could settle – which could be divided into various villages, and to grant the Order another tract of land to establish a commandery and to fund it.
who could indicate to Menon some priests who might be tempted to go to Guyana. Among these he singles out Don Francesco Agius: il y a à Goze le chanoine Don Francesco Agius. Chevalier Menon was also instructed to lure Joseph Farrugia, a surgeon who had studied medicine in Paris, un excellent sujet qui a fait ses études à Paris, and to make a request to the Grand Master for two men capable of building row-boats and brigantines and for other necessities including donkeys, horses, pigs and goats as well as trees and plants. Turgot says that the Maltese are particularly suited for the establishment of a colony, especially in a hot country. The males are strong, hard working, good swimmers, excellent sailors and well-behaved. The females are fecund.7

Notwithstanding Turgot’s insistence the Grand Master explained to Louis XVI why he could not afford to allow any Maltese to leave the Island: if Malta were to be attacked by the enemy he would not have enough manpower to defend it. The Grand Master also said in his letter that, after all, the Maltese were more inclined to be sailors rather than farmers.8

The letter of de Soldanis

This letter was sent in reply to another by Turgot dated 2nd October ‘last’. In a letter which Menon sent to Turgot immediately upon his arrival in Malta, a letter dated 7 January 1764, Menon says that he arrived in Malta ‘on the 3rd of this month’ after having left France ‘on the 13th of last October’. Therefore, this letter of de Soldanis dated only 6 del 1764 must necessarily be dated 6 January 1764. In this letter

---

7 BnF, naf 5398, ff. 144-149, Instructions pour le chevalier de Menon. Données par M. le chevalier Turgot sous le bon plaisir de M. le duc de Choiseul.
8 See AOM 1578, ff. 60-64.
de Soldanis first states that Turgot’s letter was delivered to him by Chevalier Menon. He adds that he came to know of his friend’s appointment from his friends as well as from the gazettes. He was referring to gazettes published in various European cities and which were received in Malta. Thus we are aware that de Soldanis used to read them. It has been mentioned above that in the instructions which Turgot gave to Menon, specific mention was made of de Soldanis. In fact, in his letter de Soldanis states that Chevalier d’Aulan had asked him to write to Turgot per andarvi in sua compagnia e nel suo governo dove ce n’è ove pescarsi mille cose di utile e erudizione. Turgot had such a good opinion of de Soldanis’ wisdom that he tried to persuade him to associate himself with him by tempting him with the thousand and one things which Guyana could offer de Soldanis in his pursuit of higher knowledge. However, de Soldanis replied that at the age of 50 it was too late for him to embark on such an adventure. Moreover, he had already retired in Malta and had requested that a co-adjutor be appointed to minister in his place in the church in Gozo. He added that he had been in Malta for barely a month when the bailli de Tencin, with the approval of the Grand Master, had requested him to oversee the library of Valletta which Tencin had established for public use. In order to become its librarian, he had to vacate the house in which he had been living and had gone to live in an apartment which had been assigned to him. He then refers to the library. Tencin, who already owned many books which he had chosen and which had fine binding, had increased his collection by purchasing from his own funds the famous book collection of Cardinal Portocarrero. De Soldanis adds that he was putting all the books in their proper order and that he was compiling a catalogue: the list already comprised twelve volumes. He remarks that when a Knight died his books became the property of the library;
those books which the library already had a copy of were sold and with the proceeds other books were bought. De Soldanis opines that the library would become one of the best in Europe. He then reverts to Turgot and Guyana. In this colony the life of Turgot was to undergo a complete change. Everything was new: climate, customs, seeds. De Soldanis tells Turgot that he was going to hand the letter to Chevalier Menon and that he was sure that Menon would find a way to deliver it to him in Paris or ‘wherever he (Turgot) was going’. De Soldanis added that he did not want to miss the opportunity of sending the letter by means of the vessel which was waiting for a favourable wind in order to sail for France and on which the Grand Master was sending falcons to the King!

De Soldanis ends his letter by assuring Turgot that if he were to come across a Maltese or a Gozitan who was tempted to go to Guyana he would encourage him to undertake the voyage. Then, after telling Turgot that he would do this more willingly if he could be sure that the Maltese or Gozitan would have been assigned a parcel of land upon his arrival in Guyana, he requests further information: When such an individual arrives in Marseille what will he have to do in order to reach Cayenne? Moreover, who will provide for his upkeep until he reaches Cayenne?

In conclusion, de Soldanis tells Turgot that although the letter was long, not only did its writing not tire him, on the contrary, he took great pleasure in writing to him.

It is worth noting that in the Register kept in the Bibliothèque nationale de France which contains the names of those who went to Cayenne, the name of only one Maltese citizen is found, Giacinte Caussi [Cauchi ?]. He registered on 3 May 1764 and concerning him there is the following entry: né à Malte le 28/6/1747. Il est parti pour Cayenne et
recommandé par le chevalier de Menon.

This register does not seem to record the name of any other Maltese. However, in a letter which the duc de Choiseul sent to Turgot on 7 January 1764 it is said that 60 Maltese came forward with the aim of embarking for Cayenne. In fact, in a letter which Menon sent to Turgot, dated Malta, 7 January 1764, he says ‘I cannot assure you that I shall succeed, but I bet that I shall not fail.’ Menon adds that his undertaking was difficult, that Maruzzo, Turgot’s gardener in Malta, was going to send him all the seeds which Turgot had asked for and that some noblemen were ready to undertake the voyage!

Finally, it is worth mentioning that Turgot delayed his departure for Cayenne by one year and nine months after his appointment as governor and then spent only four months there. The enterprise was a failure and many Frenchmen who went to Cayenne fell ill and died. Turgot spent the last years of his life trying to acclimatize in his huge park many trees and plants which he brought over to France from Guyana and from the four corners of the world. During his final years, Turgot also wrote extensively about natural history and botany for the Société royale d’agriculture.

9 BnF, ms fr 6234, unpaginated: born in Malta on 28 June 1747. He left for Cayenne with a recommendation by Chevalier de Menon.
Ieri mattina il Sr Cav de Menon mi fece l'onore ed il gran piacere di rendermi una lettera di V. S. Illma in data 28bre passato. Non posso farle comprendere il gusto che ne ricavai, ritrovandomi per grazia nella di lei memoria. Dalle gazzette e da amici ho saputo la nomina che S. M. Cristianissima fece della sua persona nel Governo di Cayenne e stavo perplesso se fosse già andato al nuovo governo, motivo che mi lasciò scrivere per rallegrarmi di questo passaggio, ma ora che mi vedo onorato del suo foglio che mi riempì di vera allegrezza, prendo la libertà di congratularmi seco fermamente e come sarà qual sovrano avrà luogo di farsi onore e gloria per tutta la sua vita, ed ai posteri lascerà senz’altro immortal memoria.

Venuto la prima volta a Malta, M le chevalier d’Aulan mi disse che sarebbe luogo e tempo opportuno ch’io vi scriva per andarvi in sua compagnia e nel suo governo, dove ce n’è ove pescarsi mille cose di utile ed erudizione, ma ciò l’avrei fatto se io non avessi gli anni cinquanta sulle mie spalle, non per altro che per impararmi, goderla, e starvi sotto una si amichevole guida.

Feci al Gozo un mio aiutante cioè un coadiutore che serve a mio luogo in chiesa, mi ritirai a Malta per godere la mia quiete e tranquillità, non mi ero ancora per un mese qui ritirato in una casa a parte che mi vidi dal Sr Balì de Tencin coll’approvazione di S. A. Ema chiamato ad averne cura della sua eretta Biblioteca ove sono nell’appartamento destinatomi, in maniera che ora non posso più pensarvi al Gozo.

Questo Sigr. Balì al certo che s’immortalà con questa si necessaria e vantaggiosa opera. Comprò la famosa biblioteca del fu Cardinal Portocarrero della

APPENDIX
Religione, un erede del Porporato con l’obbligo di lasciarlo alla medesima Religione per uso pubblico. Vi unì già la sua che è scelta di libri di ottima edizione a legatura, tutto poi posta in casa a parte ove scrivo la presente, situata nella piazza dei Cavalieri detta volgarmente del Forfantone, oggi Libreria pubblica. Io sto già posta in buon ordine e formare il catalogo di tutti i libri che ve ne sono già da dodici volumi.

Contenta la Religione di questo desiderato ed ambito bel frutto per crescere il numero dei libri in vantaggio del pubblico ordine che oggi in avanti i spogli dei Signori Cavalieri che muoiono in convento e fuori, parlando dei libri, tutti vengano in Biblioteca, i duplicati si vendranno ad utile della Biblioteca in maniera ch’il denaro della vendita dei duplicati sarà impiazzato in compra di altri libri che qui non se ne ritrovano. Già per Malta ce n’è per sufficienza e quanto basta per i primi anni, ma secondo i primi stabilimenti deve questa essere delle prime d’Europa.

Certamente che V. S. Illma dev’essere contenta del suo si vasto impiego ed a me sembra che va nascere ad un altro mondo, mentre ch’ivi rinverrà tutto nuovo, clima, costumi, semplici, e un modo di vivere tutt’altro che tiene in Parigi. Io non so se questa l’arriverà in Parigi, la scrivo a sorte, perverrà forse per altre mani de’ suoi che la giungerà ove và, spero di consegnarla allo stesso Cavde Menon perché ha forse più agevole la via di transmetterla, e non vorrei perdere la congiuntura della nave che a momenti attende favorevole il vento per porsi alle vela, mentre ha i Falconi per il re imbarcati.

Se mai vi trovavo qualche Maltese o Gozitano che vorrà risicare se stesso a farsi ivi patriota, volontieri gliene farei fare questo viaggio, senza dubbio
ESSAYS ON DE SOLDANIS

potranno farvi del pane questi miei paesani, perché da loro sono industriosi ed atti alla fatica, molto più se venendo gli si accorderà della terra. Avrei a caro sapere in questo caso ove indirizzarli, giunti a Marsiglia, perché questi potessero andare a cercarla nel nuovo governo, e quali mezzi potrà ricavare per poter vivere almeno sino che vi giunga a Cayenne, è ben necessario che questa sia in notizia per chi vorrà intraprendere questo viaggio, e non più essere senon qualche uno atto e povero che ricercar vuole fortuna, e consacrare la sua vita in quel mondo nuovo. Me ne sono steso molto, ma come par ch’io sono suo, a godere la fiorita sua conversazione, non trovo stanchezza, anzi piacere sommo. Si ricordi dunque di me, anche così lontano, e si persuadi che sono e sarò sempre

umile ed obbediente suo servo

Il Canco D. Francesco Agius
Bibliotecario
De Soldanis has received academic attention as an early pioneer of the study of the Maltese language, a folklorist and a historian. His contribution in those areas has been more or less studied and published upon, this given the fact that a substantial portion of his manuscripts together with all his published works are to be found in the National Library of Malta collection. Gradually other manuscript material written by de Soldanis is coming to light, both in Maltese private collections as well in public and private ones on the Continent. De Soldanis’ literary contacts, especially with Italian and French savants, together with his membership in a number of prestigious academic institutions, are resulting in the tracing of new material. The latter is further enhancing our knowledge of the multi-faceted cultural interests and literary output of one of the foremost Maltese literati of the eighteenth century.

De Soldanis’ role as the first librarian of what was subsequently to evolve into that nothing less than the Malta National Library is a case in point in this regard. Prior to

1 For the most exhaustive, near-contemporary, bio-bibliographical account of de Soldanis, see G. A. Ciantar, *Malta Illustrata* ii (Malta, 1780), 590-92. For a modern one see Cassar Pullicino, 1-34, in the present volume.
the discovery of de Soldanis’ *Notizie* here discussed and reproduced, very little was known about his activity as librarian during the last years of his life, namely between 1763 and 1770. Information on this undoubtedly important cultural contribution has, to date, been limited to de Soldanis’ appointment, in 1763, by de Tencin as librarian for his budding public library and the fact that de Soldanis was responsible for the compilation of the early catalogues of the collection.

In the present study the significance of de Soldanis’ *Notizie* will be discussed within the broader context of the development of libraries in Malta during the Order’s rule. The *Notizie* constitutes the most contemporary and exhaustive primary source relating to the establishment of the Order’s Biblioteca Pubblica, and hence of one of the foremost cultural institutions on the island during the second half of the eighteenth century. In it de Soldanis, while at times providing facts and documentation already known from other sources, also provides a wealth of new information.

De Soldanis’ account is replete with observations, comments and references which enrich our knowledge about his intellectual interests and familiarity with the mainstream European current, not least being the promotion of a sense of national awareness and pride. The author’s role as a major figure in promoting Maltese national consciousness has been discussed by the present author in another publication. Whether or not that group of Maltese eighteenth-century intellectuals central among whom was de Soldanis, and who preceded Mikiel Anton Vassalli, constituted a fundamental force in the moulding of Maltese national identity, and if indeed they can be considered as ‘enlightened’, is at long last being discussed. This certainly fundamental issue in Maltese early modern history has long been overlooked, and the contrasting opinions recently
expressed on it have created some healthy debate on Maltese historical issues which goes beyond staple petty parochial or partisan fare.2

The document

The full title of de Soldanis’ account is *Notizie sopra l’Origine, ed Avanzi della Biblioteca della S.R. Gerosolimitana, eretta in Malta al 1761, ed aperta al 1766*, and it consists of a neatly written manuscript on 15 unmarked folios, describing the setting up of Bailli Jean-Louis Guerin de Tencin’s (1702–1766) library and its transfer to the Order. The main text is augmented by 38 footnotes, some of which are of considerable length and contain previously unknown material. The text contains few corrections. While de Soldanis’ name does not feature anywhere on the document, there can be no doubt about his authorship. Besides the strong calligraphic evidence in this regard, the content itself makes this quite obvious. Thus de Soldanis refers to his 1757 book on the St Paul shipwreck as his work.3 The document is undated; it was possibly written during 1767, following the library’s inauguration on the previous year and when de Soldanis had been a librarian for four years. No reference in the work is datable to after 1767, but the work does refer to the publication, early in that year, of Ignazio Saverio Mifsud’s *Biblioteca Maltese*.4

2 Compare the views expressed by Frans Ciappara in various publications, but especially in *Enlightenment and Reform in Malta*, and those of the present author in *Il Naufragio di San Paolo in Malta osia la Conversione di San Paolo e dell’Isola... A Maltese eighteenth-century play* by Vittorio Gristi (Malta, 2004), 47-82.
3 *Notizie*, [f. 3], fn. 10, ‘Vedi il mio Discorso Apologetico sopra il Naufragio di S. Paolo...’.
4 Ibid., [f. 3v], fn. 11, ‘Impressa a Malta al 1764 e pubblicata al 1767’. On the vicissitudes regarding the printing of this work, see W. Zammit, *Ignazio Saverio Mifsud, 1722-1773* (Malta, 1997), 14, 16.
Notizie sopra l'origine e crescita della Biblio-
teca della S.R. Serenissima, Venezia, in-
Messa al 1761. ò aperta al 1766.

Venne il mondo, letterario, che questi ne primi suoi secoli, in furono alzati in più lunghe Biblioteche, e, sempre con Monarchi Savienti e doti, o da altri Borsonaggi celebri, poter ai tempi d'ogni più vicini, avanzar la scienza, ed agli uomini l'amore del loro acquisto, e darono v'ignio cresciuto, in manie al ché grandi ripieghi narravano d'una: mi, le loro, che c'è, che d'altre in onora passavasi di odi-
servavano, e visse in poco Bibliotec. Siamo alla fine arrivate a un secolo, che può chiamarsi Secolo delle
Biblioteche, poiché potiamo numerare continuando più nuove Biblioteche, e tutte con fondazioni opulenti. Nas-
te in questo secolo, le quali in ogni tempo rendebbero gloriose il nome di Przmano e Fondatori, il numero di
tese Biblioteche sono quasi tutte riportate dal Leyserlick
(1), dall'Autore dell'Enciclopedia Italiana (2), e sembra
chiarissimi soggetti. Sebbene la miglior parte delle

(1) Magnus. Theoriam, vite humanae, in Bibliothecas.
(2) Encyclopaedia ord. Dissimulata, uzuem in Bibliothecas.
(3) Il Chiarissimo Sig. Capo Dato Domenico Shiovio nel Ra.
The holograph copy of the *Notizie* here discussed is to be found in the Communal Library of Palermo, and no copy of it is known in Malta. Not only is the work not mentioned in modern bibliographies of de Soldanis, but its lack of mention by contemporary eighteenth-century sources makes it likely that it was little known locally even at the time of its writing.\(^5\) It is possible that de Soldanis had written the description for the benefit of a Sicilian cultured acquaintance, a fellow member of the *Accademia del Buon Gusto* of Palermo and to whom he sent it.

### Early libraries in Malta and abroad

De Soldanis opens his account by referring to the intellectual benefits which had resulted from the setting up of libraries in the civilised world throughout history. While mentioning various examples since antiquity, he aptly describes the eighteenth century as ‘the Century of Libraries’, this justified by the hundreds of libraries which were founded and others which were enriched during the course of that century and up to his time of writing.\(^6\)

In discussing the existence of libraries in Malta prior to that set up by de Tencin in 1760, de Soldanis is brief; yet he does provide some information which is either new or else throws further light upon what is already known.

The possession of modest book collections in Malta prior to the settlement of the Order of St John on the island in 1530 seems to have been limited to some religious Orders, the Cathedral and possibly a few noble families. As in the case of various other cultural aspects, the establishment of the

---

\(^5\) Neither Ciantar (1780) nor Cassar Pullicino (1996) refer to the *Notizie* in their respective bibliography of de Soldanis’ manuscript and printed works.

\(^6\) *Notizie*, [f. 1].
Order – while leaving little initial impact – was to eventually result in important developments, the fruits of which may still be enjoyed today. By 1798, when the illustrious Order was ignominiously expelled from Malta, an impressive and well-managed Biblioteca Pubblica had been set up, eventually to be transformed into the present-day National Library of Malta.

The earliest reference as yet traced regarding the setting up of a library under the auspices of the Order is dated 1555. The Hospitallers’ Chapter General convened in that year under the grandmastership of de la Sengle (1553–1557) had stipulated that a library was to be created from books found in possession of deceased members pertaining to that institution. Since it was inserted within the ecclesiastical stipulations enacted by the Chapter General, this enactment was presumably intended for the benefit of the Order’s conventual chaplains. The assigning of the Order’s library to the responsibility and utilisation of the Order’s ecclesiastical branch was to remain a characteristic down to the establishment of de Tencin’s library over two centuries later. The means through which books were to be acquired as described in 1555 – namely through the incorporation of works formerly belonging to knights and conventual chaplains who had passed away was, moreover, to remain the standard one down to the expulsion of the Order. De Soldanis makes no reference to the 1555 enactment.

The 1555 enactment was to remain a dead letter and this is borne out not only by the total lack of evidence confirming the actual setting-up of a library, but particularly by the subsequent development in the matter. This took place in

7 AOM 288, f. XLIV, under Ecclesia, ‘Item che si facci una bibliotheca o libraria nella quale se ripongono tutti li libri della fratelli defuncti, che pertengono al comune thesoro per commodità delli Religiosi nostri che vorranno studiare.’
1612 when, during the Chapter General held on that year, the Order’s Grand Prior, Pietro Urrea Camarasa, successfully petitioned for the establishment of a library under the control of the Order’s ecclesiastical branch.\textsuperscript{8} While not referring to the 1555 document, Camarasa’s petition seems to have been directly inspired by it. The 1612 decision was this time put into practice since a library under the responsibility of the grand prior is definitely known to have existed by 1636 at the latest.\textsuperscript{9} De Soldanis, while not mentioning the first two dates, refers to this last one which really constitutes the earliest definite confirmation of the existence of the conventual chaplains’ library.\textsuperscript{10} Thus, contrary to what is stated in most published works, neither 1555 nor 1649 (actually 1650) are tenable as the foundation years of the first library belonging to the Order in Malta.\textsuperscript{11} The library, known as Biblioteca di San Giovanni was to remain in existence until 1763.

While not signalling the foundation of the conventual chaplains’ library, the 1650 documentation provides the earliest reasonably detailed information about it. In a petition addressed to Grand Master Lascaris (1636–1657) and dated 22 March 1650, the procurators of the Assembly of the conventual chaplains drew attention to the 1612 rule, stating that for many years the provisions therein established had been followed, thereby confirming the existence of the library prior to 1650. The Order’s officials of the treasury had, however, eventually resorted to the practice of selling by auction books inherited from deceased

\textsuperscript{8} AOM 295, f. 18.  
\textsuperscript{9} AOM 111, f. 215, decree dated 11 June 1636.  
\textsuperscript{10} Notizie, [f. 4] main text and fn. 13.  
\textsuperscript{11} De Soldanis, Notizie, [f. 4], fn. 13 gives the date as 22 March 1649, as is actually given in the original decree; however he seems to have overlooked the \textit{ab incarnatione} marginal note besides the date and which puts the latter as 1650. A. A. Caruana, in The Royal Public Library of Malta: A Brochure (Malta, 1898), and all subsequent published histories of the library similarly give 1649 as the year when the library was established.
members, while other books were kept in the treasury and not passed over to the assembly for their incorporation in the library. The Assembly thus asked the grand master and council to endorse a number of new regulations aimed at the better running and care of the collection. These included the identification of a dust and humidity-free location in which to house the library and the appointment of a reliable person as custodian. The library was also to be inspected by the grand prior annually and an acquisition register was to be kept. The custodian was, under penalty of excommunication, forbidden to remove any book from the library or to allow others to do so without a receipt and the deposit of at least double the value of the book taken out. In the case of multiple copies, two copies of the same work were to be retained, with any additional copies being sold and the proceeds then used for the purchase of other suitable books which the library did not possess. The last rule was also adopted following the establishment of de Tencin’s Biblioteca Pubblica.

The proposed rules – the earliest known – were formally accepted on 27 March of that year and the hall above the oratory of the conventual church was assigned as the library’s premises. In 1680, the library was, following instructions from Grand Prior Viani, transferred to another hall above the great sacristy of St John’s.

The vicissitudes of the Biblioteca di San Giovanni down to its suppression in 1763 indicate sporadic attempts at its running with, however, long periods of neglect. Thus, notwithstanding the regulations drawn up in 1650, by the beginning of the eighteenth century the conventual chaplains’ library was in a bad state. In February 1704 the Assembly complained that the collection had been seriously

12 AOM 1987, f. 84rv.
13 Caruana, 2.
impoverished due to the great amount of books and manuscripts which had been taken out on loan but never returned and about which no record had been kept. The limit for borrowing was consequently put at three books or manuscripts which had to be returned within five days of their borrowing under penalty of excommunication. Besides providing information as to the library’s condition, the 1704 reference is the earliest one to specifically confirm the presence of manuscripts in the collection.

A more detailed set of regulations governing the acquisition policy and general administration of the Biblioteca di San Giovanni were put into effect in early 1705 by Grand Master Perellos (1697–1720). The primary concern of the new set of rules was to eliminate ambiguity as to the disposal of books inherited by the Order from its members, while at the same time establishing the library on a sounder footing. The first rule stated that books pertaining to members who had died in debt were to be sold in order for their respective creditors to be given their due. The second confirmed a previous disposition whereby books collections worth over 300 scudi were not to be handed over to the library, but sold by the treasury. The valuation of such collections was to be undertaken by treasury officials together with others appointed by the grand prior. The Hospitallers’ right to dispose of a fifth of their property as they wished was also to be applied in the case of books. The fifth stipulation gave the grand prior and his officials the responsibility to choose suitable chaplains for the running of the library. Books inherited from deceased members and which were being kept in

14 AOM 1939, ff. 26v-27, ‘si vede al presente ridotta ad un stato miserabile per essersi da quella [biblioteca] levata quantità grande di libri in pregiudizio della comunità...’
15 AOM 1987, ff. 84v-85v; Notizie, [f. 4], fn. 13.
the treasury were to be handed over and be incorporated in the library. Particularly revealing as to the contents of the library was rule seven which stated that poetical works, novels and comedies were not to form part of the collection, but sold off and the proceeds used to purchase other books deemed more suitable for an ecclesiastical library. Possibly the earliest reference to the censoring of material reaching a library on the island, the rule confirms that the collection was primarily intended for its utilisation by the conventual chaplains. Knights were, however, also allowed to borrow books, while Maltese who were not conventual chaplains do not seem to have been allowed access. Finally, rule eight stipulated that duplicate copies of books found in inherited collections were to be sold by the treasury, which was also to retain the proceeds from such sales.

The extent and regularity of the observance of the latter regulations down to the dissolution of the library cannot be ascertained. By 1760 the library seems to have once again fallen into a state of neglect. On 15 November of that year, that is just five days prior to de Tencin’s purchase of the Portocarrero library from the treasury, the latter requested the librarian, Fra Giovanni Battista Gras, to draw up an inventory of the books in the chaplains’ library.\textsuperscript{16} Shortly after starting his work in 1763, however, Gras realised that it was going to be a futile exercise since most of the collection, amounting to close to three thousand volumes, was ravaged by bookworm. The books had apparently been housed in a large bookcase for many years and in a state of utmost disorder. Gras therefore advised the treasury that the best course of action was to try to salvage those books which had not been completely ruined. Pilfering and the non return of books given out on loan had continued to take their toll on the collection.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{16} Notizie, [f. 4], reproducing the document.\textsuperscript{17} Ibid., [f. 4rv], reproducing the document.
On 20 September 1763, three days after Gras’ recommendations, the treasury ordered that the books still in a good state were to be incorporated with the library to be set by de Tencin. As for the rest, as well as for duplicates, they were to be sold and the proceeds passed on to the newly-established library.\textsuperscript{18} The sale took place on the premises itself and raised 450 scudi.\textsuperscript{19} The demise of the Biblioteca di San Giovanni was thus intimately tied up with one of the greatest cultural achievements in eighteenth-century Malta: the foundation of the Biblioteca Tanseana, later to be transformed into the island’s first real public library.

The information given by de Soldanis on the library set up by Grand Prior and subsequently Bishop of Malta Fra Luca Buenos (1649–1666 and 1666–1668 respectively) is particularly important since this development is sparsely documented elsewhere. The library was set up in the grand prior’s palace and consisted of a small but precious collection. This library was augmented by Buenos’ successor as Grand Prior, Fra Pietro Viani (1666–1700). De Soldanis transcribed the inscription which was set up to commemorate the establishment of the library. The collection may have been incorporated with the Biblioteca di San Giovanni when Viani had the latter transferred in 1680. Neither de Soldanis nor other sources, however, state that this collection was incorporated within the Biblioteca Pubblica and its eventual fate is not clear.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., [f. 4v], reproducing the document.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., fn. 14.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid., [f. 5rv]. The grand prior’s palace faced St John’s church. The palace was completely destroyed during an air raid in April 1941.
The setting up of the *Biblioteca Pubblica*

Cardinal Joaquín de Portocarrero (1681–1760) and the Bailli de Tencin, both members of the Order with an illustrious career were instrumental in the founding of the *Biblioteca Pubblica* in 1760. The initiative taken by de Tencin was characteristic of the period and constitutes further evidence of European cultural influence reaching the cosmopolitan island.

Hailing from a wealthy and distinguished Iberian noble family, Joaquín de Portocarrero was admitted within the ranks of the Order in 1716. Marquis of Almenara and occupying various posts of importance, Portocarrero was, in 1743, created Cardinal by Benedict XIV. Cardinal Portocarrero had amassed an extensive and valuable library as well as a collection of scientific and mathematical instruments together with a numismatic collection in his Roman residence. In 1748 the cardinal donated his coin collection to Benedict XIV. Portocarrero’s life-long attachment to the Order, even if not resident on the island, was reflected, among other, in his successful insistence to wear the Order’s eight-pointed cross on his cardinal *mozzetta*. He also financed the founding of a commandery for the Order in Rome.

Portocarrero had at least twice entertained the idea of donating his book collection to the Order for the setting up of a library during his lifetime and this is confirmed by contemporary documentation. Just a few days following the accession of Grand Master Pinto to the magistracy in January 1741, Ignazio Saverio Mifsud recorded the rumour

---

22 Ibid., 112. See also Lettera della Santità di Nostro Signore Papa Benedetto XIV con cui si determina doversi portare dall’Eminentissimo, e Reverendissimo Signor Cardinal Portocarrero... la Gran Croce Ottogona di tela bianca sopra la mozzetta Cardinalizia (Rome, 1745).
that Portocarrero intended to donate his book collection, valued at the time at 40,000 scudi, to the grand master. The latter had, on his part, expressed his desire to have the Order’s armoury transferred from the magistral palace to the foundry premises so that the palace armoury could be transformed into a library housing Portocarrero’s donation and make the collection accessible to the public. Monthly literary soirées were to be held in the library, with the involvement of the Maltese Carmelite Giuseppe Cachia.\textsuperscript{23} For unknown reasons, however, the donation did not materialise at that time. The project was again taken in hand on the initiative of Portocarrero around 1760, when the cardinal informed de Tencin, with whom he became acquainted during the latter’s term as the Order’s ambassador in Rome, of his intention to donate his library to the Order for the use of its members, the Maltese and other inhabitants of the island. Besides donating the collection itself, Portocarrero intended to create a foundation for the payment of the salaries for the library personnel as well as for the purchase of additional books. The project had received the blessing of the Order and details seem to have been worked out, but it had not been formalised on Portocarrero’s death which occurred in Rome on 22 June 1760.\textsuperscript{24}

While not specifically referring to his collections, Portocarrero had, besides the payment of minor pensions to

\textsuperscript{23} NLM Libr. 9, Ignazio Saverio Mifsud’s diary, p. 414, dated 4 February 1741, ‘nel medesimo giorno si disse che il Baglio Almenara diede in dono al nostro Gran Maestro una librarìa di quaranta mila scudi. E così il Gran Maestro vuol levare dal Palazzo l’armeria, e farla nella fonderia, e la fonderia la fa nella Floriana; ed in luogo dell’armeria nel Palazzo vuol mettere la librarìa ad uso commune d’ogni sorte di libri di legge, morali, medicina, antichità &c e particolarmente poesie: purche ogni mese si dovranno fare l’accademie, ed il Prencipe dell’Accademia s’elesse il P. Giuseppe Cachia Carmelitano. Ancora però non si vede niente: Iddio facci, che sia tutto vero.’ Mifsud was just nineteen years old in 1741.

\textsuperscript{24} Notizie, [ff. 5v-7]. De Soldanis gives extensive biographical notes on both Portocarrero and de Tencin, see ibid., [ff. 6-7v], fn. 20 and 21 respectively.
members of his household, appointed the Order’s treasury as his universal heir. Thus the cardinal had dispensed with the right of leaving a fifth of his estate to individuals of his choice, facilitating the Order’s takeover of practically his entire property. News of the cardinal’s death reached Malta in mid-July and Pinto sent instructions for an elaborate funerary service and a mausoleum in memory of the deceased benefactor. A catalogue describing the cardinal’s library and collection of instruments was also compiled, listing the value of each book and was sent to the Order’s treasury in Malta. It is however known that prior to the compiling of the catalogue, books from the deceased cardinal’s collection had already found their way to third parties.

The Bailli de Tencin, one of the wealthiest and most cultured members of the Order and who was himself the proud owner of an impressive library now entered the scene. He had actually already played a major role in the negotiations for the donation of Portocarrero’s library to the Order during the cardinal’s own lifetime and now sought to prevent the selling of the book collection and to have it brought over to Malta and made available to the public, respecting the deceased cardinal’s intention. The contract for the purchase of the library, together comprising the bookcases and the scientific instrument collection was signed on 25 October 1760. In its preamble de Tencin stated that his aim in acquiring the Portocarrero library

25 NLM Libr. 13, p. 300, I. S. Mifsud’s diary, entry dated 14 July 1760. For a copy of Portocarrero’s testament see AOM 930, pp. 206-10.
26 AOM 1516, f. 127, Pinto to Ambassador Breteuil, dated 16 July 1760. ASV, SS 138, f. 200, Inquisitor Zondadari to Secretariat of State, dated 19 January 1778. NLM Libr. 264 consists of the catalogue of Portocarrero’s library and instrument collections.
28 Copy in AOM 767, ff. 132v-135; Notizie, [f. 9rv].
as described in the catalogue held by the treasury was to set up a public library in the Order’s convent. The contract consisted of four clauses. Firstly, the treasury was obliged to transport over to Malta the books and book cases which were, together with the cardinal’s instrument collection, to be handed over to de Tencin. Secondly, de Tencin was to pay the treasury the sum of 7,000 Maltese copper scudi, divided equally in sums of 1,000 scudi and which were to be paid at the start of every year from 1 January 1762. In the case of de Tencin’s death occurring before the full settlement of that sum – as in fact happened – the purchaser’s estate was not to be burdened with the remaining debt. The third clause stipulated that while de Tencin was to be handed over the collection for his use during his lifetime, all the books listed in the Portocarrero catalogue were to remain the property of the Order, being, by virtue of the same contract, immediately donated back to the Order by their purchaser. The implicit justification of this clause seems to have been twofold: the fact that de Tencin had ‘bought’ the collection at a price far lower than its real value as given in the catalogue and also that it had been de Tencin’s intention all along to develop the collection into a public library to be handed back to the Order following his demise. The fourth and final clause confirmed the Order’s possession of the collection by stating that any books found missing following de Tencin’s death were to be paid for from his estate in the amount listed in the catalogue. The contract was confirmed on 20 November of that same year, by which time the books and bookcases had not yet reached the island.

By mid-May 1761 the Portocarrero library had reached Malta and was housed in a building facing Piazza dei Cavalieri (now Republic Square). This edifice belonged to the Order and was known as il Forfantone since it was

29 NLM Libr. 13, p. 538, I. S. Mifsud’s diary, entry dated 14 May 1761.
previously utilised for the playing of cards. De Soldanis quips on the word carte by remarking that whereas the building used to accommodate card players, now it fulfilled the nobler function as a place where paper, in the form of books, are read.\textsuperscript{30} De Tencin rented the premises from the Order and proceeded to make the necessary alterations to transform it into a library.\textsuperscript{31} The Forfantone – a decayed and unsuitable structure by the 1790s – continued to house the library until its transfer to the purposely-built edifice in 1812. De Tencin appointed de Soldanis as librarian,\textsuperscript{32} and by August 1763 the latter was busy compiling alphabetical catalogues of the collection by author as well as by subject.\textsuperscript{33} De Soldanis describes his catalogues in quite some detail, well enough to confirm that his catalogues still exist in the National Library of Malta Library manuscript collection.\textsuperscript{34} De Tencin’s own book collection was added to the library\textsuperscript{35} and further additions and donations resulted in the collection swelling up to 18,000 volumes in various languages by the late 1760s.\textsuperscript{36} Besides published works the library also included a collection of manuscripts, many of which were formerly part of the Portocarrero and de Tencin collections.

A document of central importance which is reproduced by de Soldanis and of which neither the original nor any other copy is known is that granting the newly-established library the required permission to retain prohibited books

\textsuperscript{30} \textit{Notizie}, [f. 10], fn. 28.

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid., [ff. 9v-10].

\textsuperscript{32} NLM Libr. 14, p. 99, I. S. Mifsud’s diary, entry dated 20 June 1763. De Soldanis himself does not refer to his own appointment.

\textsuperscript{33} Ibid., pp. 156-57, entry dated 11 August 1763.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Notizie}, [f. 14rv]. Thus the present NLM Libr. 603 (2 volumes), 605 (6 volumes) and 606 (1 volume) correspond to de Soldanis’ author, subject and alphabetical subject catalogues as described in the \textit{Notizie}.

\textsuperscript{35} NLM Libr. 265 consists of a catalogue of de Tencin’s own collection.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Notizie}, [f. 12].
in its collection. This had been requested by de Tencin and the Congregation of the Holy Office granted de Tencin’s request on 18 November 1761. This finally explains the rather puzzling presence of a considerable corpus of prohibited literature in the library at a time when controls over locally printed or imported matter was still exercised.37

De Tencin died on 10 June 1766 and as stipulated in the contract of October 1760, the library reverted to the possession of the Order’s treasury. In November of that year the treasury appointed Fra Jean Baptiste de Valabres as Commissioner to the library,38 while de Soldanis proceeded with his work until ill-health forced him to retire. He was succeeded by Gioacchino Navarro who was to serve as librarian under the Order’s, the French and the British administrations in succession.

The next important development took place in 1776 when the Order’s Chapter General convened during that year established the library on a firmer footing. On 26 November 1776 detailed regulations were issued governing the administration of the institution, which, from that date onwards, was officially designated as the Order’s Pubblica Biblioteca. Books formerly belonging to deceased members of the Order were to be passed over to the library to be added to the collection or – in the case of duplicates – to be sold off and the proceeds used for the library’s benefit.39

The precarious state of the Forfantone as well as the expansion of the library’s book stock induced the Order to embark upon the construction of the first purposely-built edifice to house a library on the island. In 1784 the Polish-born architect Stefano Ittar was commissioned to design a

37 Ibid., [f. 10rv]. For a detailed study on the exercise of censorship in Malta throughout the eighteenth century, see W. Zammit, The Dissemination of Unorthodoxy and New Ideas in Malta, 1700-1798 (Ph.D. Thesis, 2001).
38 Notizie, [ff. 12v-13v], reproducing Valabres’ appointment.
39 AOM 309, ff. 102-103v; 312; AOM 312, ff. 375-377v.
new library, which was completed in 1796, six years after Ittar’s death. The building, however, was not to be utilised for the purpose for which it was constructed until 1812 when the transfer of the library finally took place.40

**Expanding the collection: 1760–1798**

From its inception in 1760 down to the expulsion of the Order of St John from the Maltese islands in June 1798, the *Biblioteca Pubblica*’s collection relied upon four means through which its collection was augmented. Entire book collections formerly belonging to other institutions in Malta or abroad continued to be acquired and amalgamated with the library’s own collection throughout the period. Donations from foreigners, from members of the Order and from Maltese individuals constituted a further way in which the library was enriched. The 1776 stipulation whereby books reaching the Order following the death of its members had to be passed over to the *Biblioteca* seems to have been scrupulously adhered to, resulting in a vast amount of books to be added to the collection. Duplicate copies resulting from any of the above means of acquisition were then sold, with the resulting funds being utilised for the purchase of other works.

The library’s original core collection itself was made up of the amalgamation of the Portocarrero and de Tencin libraries, to which the salvageable books from the *Biblioteca di San Giovanni* were added. A number of other collections were gradually passed over to the library. Thus, in 1772 the *Camerata* library was transferred to the public library. The *Camerata* had been originally intended as a house of retreat for members of the Order and by 1772 its library contained

---

hundreds of books as well as a collection of manuscripts. The Camerata collection itself comprised libraries which had been donated by members of the Order during the previous years. These included the collections donated by Bailli de Beveren, Bailli Chiurlia and Knight Commander Cavaniglia. Detailed inventories of these collections were handed over to the public library together with the books themselves. During the following year duplicates and incomplete works were sold off and the proceeds used to buy other material which the public library did not possess.41 A major addition was the library of the suppressed Order of St Anthony of Vienne which was acquired by the Order of St John and assimilated in the public library in 1781. Through this acquisition the library came into possession of one of its most outstanding treasures: the fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript describing the life of St Anthony the Abbot.42 The manuscript is dated 14 April 1426 and is numbered first in the library’s collection of manuscript codices.

One of the last collections to be merged with that of the public library was that housed at the Order’s hospital or Sacra Infermeria. In 1682 Fra Giuseppe Zammit had donated his library – consisting mostly but not exclusively of medical works – to the hospital. In 1797 the remnants of this collection were transferred to the public library. Such works include extremely rare and at times unique publications which can be identified as having belonged to Zammit through the manuscript ex-libris F. Joseph Zamit dedit et donat inscribed on the work. One outstanding work thus acquired and still forming part of the collection is Emanuele Arias e Porres’ Problemi Geometrici, consisting of exercises in military geometry and stating to have

41 For these inventories see NLM Libr. 266.
been printed in Malta. The book, of which only one copy is known, is undated, but internal evidence points to its printing during the 1650s.

Besides the amalgamation of entire collection, the Biblioteca Pubblica was also enriched through bequests by a number of individuals. Among the earliest of these donations was that of Louis XV of France who, in 1761, ordered that a copy of every publication printed in the royal printing press was to be sent over to the Order’s library in Malta in perpetuity.\footnote{Notizie, [ff. 11v-12].} A number of Maltese \textit{literati} are also known to have donated books or money to the library, either during their lifetime or through testamentary stipulations. De Soldanis himself is known to have left his manuscripts to the library as apparently did Ignazio Saverio Mifsud. Both de Soldanis’ and Mifsud’s manuscripts are extremely important, particularly for the island’s linguistic and social history. Among the former are de Soldanis’ manuscript dictionary of Maltese and his history of his native Gozo. Mifsud’s collection of twenty-four mostly manuscript volumes and known as \textit{Stromata} contain an inexhaustible wealth of information about social life in eighteenth-century Malta, not least contained in his manuscript diary covering the years 1740 to June 1741 and from January 1753 to December 1765.\footnote{On de Soldanis’ collection of manuscripts in the National Library of Malta, see the bibliography, 145-151, in the present volume; on Mifsud’s, Zammit, \textit{Ignazio Saverio Mifsud}.} Of a different nature was the donation made by the Maltese conventual chaplain Fra Gaetano Bruno. In 1782 Bruno donated the very considerable sum of 10,000 \textit{scudi} to the library. The money was to be invested and the accruing interest was to be used for the purchase of books.\footnote{On Bruno see J. M. Wismayer, \textit{A Miscellanea of Historical Records} (Malta, 2003), 137-43.}
The most regular means through which the library book stock was increased, however, was the acquisition of works following the death of members of the Order. Whether substantial or modest, housed on the island or else on the continent, collections formerly pertaining to members of the Order were transported to the Biblioteca where they were examined and incorporated in the main collection. One of the more substantial collection to be thus acquired consisted of the library of Knight Commander Sainte-Jay following his death in 1765. Sainte-Jay had indeed expressed his desire to donate his extensive collection to the public library during his lifetime but this never materialised due to technical difficulties. Sainte-Jay’s collection was well-known on the island and it comprised both printed and manuscript works. On his death in 1779, Knight Commander du Guaste, himself a former president of the library, left eight hundred volumes of modern works to the library. Another substantial acquisition was that following the death of Bailli de Breteuil, the collection of whom had to be shipped from France to Malta.

Recent research undertaken on the National Library of Malta collection has revealed yet another intriguing fact about the collection: the impressive number of editions of works by British authors which were acquired by the library during the eighteenth century. Often consisting of translations into French or Italian but also of first editions in English, the presence of such material indicates familiarity with literary, philosophical and scientific British works by members of the Order. Particularly valuable is a collection of first edition copies of John Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, first published in London in 1689.

46 *Notizie*, [f. 8rv] and fn. 25. See also C. Depasquale, *Joseph de Fassion de Sainte-Jay, Chevalier de Malte: Le Commandeur dans sa Famille* (Malta, 2005).

47 See W. Zammit, ‘English-Language books in Malta during the Knights’ time; Part II: British-authored publications in the Order’s Biblioteca Pubblica, 1760-1798’, *Treasures of Malta* xii, 2 (Malta, 2005), 41-52.
The auctioning of duplicates and other material deemed unsuitable is known to have been held on a regular basis on the library premises and they constituted a major means through which books were disseminated on the island. Moreover it provided the required funds to purchase additional works and at times to pay for general library expenses. On 6 November 1766, following the death of de Tencin the procurators of the Order’s treasury established the system whereby such material was made available for sale to the public. De Soldanis provides considerable detail on how the system functioned. The selling of such material was held every Saturday. Slips of paper indicated the title, format, price and shelf location of every book for sale. Any individual interested in the book could ask to examine it and decide whether to purchase it or not.

The book sale system remained in force until the end of the Order’s rule in 1798. Particularly impressive were the auctions held in 1786 of books from the Breteuil estate and, in 1790, of material belonging to various deceased French knights which had similarly been brought over to Malta. Such sales were well attended and the possibility of acquiring rare material provided a primary motivation for participation.

The library was open to the public between 8am and 11am and between 2pm (3pm in Summer) and 5pm throughout the year. Friday was a holiday and Saturday was reserved for the sale of books. On days when the library was going to be kept close, a notice with the word *Vacat* was affixed at the stairway.

---

48 *Notizie*, [ff. 12v-13v], reproducing the document.
49 Ibid., [f. 13v], fn. 35.
50 Zammit, *The Dissemination of Unorthodoxy*, 140.
51 *Notizie*, [f. 14v-15].
Library and Museum: 1760–1903

As with many state-owned libraries founded in various European countries during the eighteenth century, such libraries originally also fulfilled the purpose of repositories of ancient remains, objects of interest from a natural history perspective and sometimes of specialised collections related to any branch of learning. These often embryonic artefact collections – as in the Maltese case – were to provide the core around which the nation’s museum collection would eventually form, subsequently to be separated from the library and become a prime national cultural institution in its own right.

From its initial establishment, de Tencin’s library also housed a collection of this nature. Besides his book collection, Cardinal Portocarrero also owned an impressive collection of scientific and mathematical instruments. This collection seems to have been housed in the cardinal’s library itself and, upon his demise, it was catalogued together with the books. It comprised an impressive variety of instruments, mostly developed during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. These included an array of compasses, microscopes, spirit levels, measuring instruments, Newtonian telescopes, a variety of solar clocks as well as an armillary sphere, a pneumatic machine and a small optical camera. It is moreover highly probable that at least a number of pieces in the collection consisted of antique items, while others are described as being made of silver and hence likely to have been of interest from an artistic viewpoint.52

The pneumatic machine or vacuum pump was possibly the largest and most impressive instrument in the collection. Pneumatic machines consisted of rather large and elaborate air pumps. Developed from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards, these were fitted with one or two crank-operated cylinders, a rod, or gear and rack work system and topped with a sealed glass container or bell-jar into which a ringing bell was placed. The air was removed from the glass sphere, thus demonstrating the elimination of sound in a vacuum. Small animals were sometimes placed under the pump bell-jar and their death by asphyxia demonstrated the effects of lack of air. Alternatively the glass sphere was substituted by a metal container into which air was pumped, demonstrating the effects of higher than normal air pressure. The Portocarrero pneumatic machine seems to have been quite sophisticated since it comprised no less than crystal glass bells, two glass domes and another container made of brass. The reference to a ‘small optical camera’ refers to a portable camera obscura. This consisted of a box-like sketching instrument. A lens in the drawtube and a mirror at 45 degrees to a horizontal focussed the image onto a ground glass screen on the top of the box. A piece of paper was put onto screen and the image was copied directly.

Portocarrero’s instrument collection was not only housed in the Forfantone with the library itself but, as in the case of the book stock, it was expanded through the acquisition of other instruments formerly pertaining to deceased members of the Order. Following the death, on 11 November 1766, of Bailli Jacques Armand de Vachon Belmont, the latter’s collection of scientific instruments was integrated with that of the library. By the 1770s, the instrument collection had expanded considerably, with one particularly interesting item consisting of a map depicting the surface of the moon.
Besides the mathematical and scientific instruments collection, the Order’s Biblioteca Pubblica also gradually built up a collection of artefacts of an archaeological interest, together with fossils and other items pertaining to natural history. This budding collection of antiquities mostly found on the Maltese islands owed much to the initiative of de Soldanis. It is in fact known that a number of the artefacts acquired by the library were originally owned by de Soldanis. Other items were acquired through donations by others.

New information has emerged regarding Giovanni Francesco Abela’s collection of Maltese archaeological remains and its acquisition by the Order. Up to now it has always been held that Abela’s collection had been taken over by the Order following the expulsion of the Jesuits from the island, to whom Abela had bequeathed his collection by testamentary disposition. New documentary evidence, however, confirms the Order’s interest in acquiring Abela’s collection for the Biblioteca Pubblica prior to the suppression of the Jesuit presence on the island which took place on 22 April 1768. In a letter sent by Inquisitor Mancinforte to the Papal Secretary of State dated 25 January of that same year, the inquisitor wrote that

The Grand Master has expressed his desire through one of his auditors, the lawyer Gatt, to acquire the small museum of antiquities pertaining to Commendatore Abela, consisting of artefacts excavated on the island. The Grand Master’s intention is to add this collection to the other artefacts already housed in the public library. This desire was communicated to the Rector [of the Jesuits] who, in an attempt to gain the Grand Master’s goodwill at such a critical moment as the present one, has offered to hand over the collection by way of a gift. This gesture was accepted by

53 For a detailed study of Abela’s donation to the Jesuits, see A. Bonanno, ‘Giovanni Francesco Abela’s Legacy to the Jesuit College’, Proceedings of History Week 1983 (Malta, 1984), 27-37.
the Grand Master and the customary procedure is underway for the handing over of the collection.54

This not only indicates that Abela’s collection was actually acquired before the expulsion of the Jesuit Order from Malta, but moreover that a nucleus collection of antiquities already existed in the public library prior to January 1768, formed on the initiative of de Soldanis. By 1772 Abela’s collection seems to have been at least in part transferred to the library.55

The stipulations enacted by the Order’s Chapter General in 1776 regarding the books pertaining to deceased members of the Order were also to be made applicable to scientific and mathematical instruments as well as to antiquities and Natural History specimens. These were hence to be passed over to the library’s museum collection:

The library is moreover enriched by a developing Museum, where various mathematical instruments, antiquities and other objects pertaining to Natural History are conserved for the benefit of those interested in such things. Upon such and similar objects, however, no regulations have been enacted as yet. It is thus advisable that the same stipulation regarding books is applied to such objects when found in possession of deceased members of the Order, whose estate is not burdened with debts. Such objects, while of little value for the Treasury, would, on the contrary, prove very useful and enriching to the public library.56

It seems that by 1812, when the library collection was finally transferred to the purposely-built edifice, the last public building erected by the Order on the island, the

54 ASV SS Malta 131, f. 29.
55 Ciantar, 70, ‘In una di queste [library rooms] si va formando un Museo; al quale si sono aggiunte le anticaglie rimase nel Museo del casino di S. Giacomo, lasciato del nostro Comm. Abela a’ PP. Gesuiti.’
56 AOM 312, f. 376v.
library’s museum collection had been decimated. No reference to the collection of instruments is made anymore, while a number of medals in the collection are known to have been sold during the Blockade of Valletta by the Maltese insurgents against the French between September 1798 and September 1800. Following more settled times after 1800, however, the library’s museum collection was enlarged. This took place either as a result of private donations, as was that by Gerolamo Ratto in 1808 and consisting of stuffed animals or by having items scattered in public buildings, such as the Palace, transferred to the library.57 Throughout the nineteenth century the library continued to fulfil the function of a museum, with the collection being augmented over the years. Various visitors also referred to the collection in their published descriptions of their ramblings around the island. The *Malta Penny Magazine* of 6 June 1840 referred to the collection in the following manner: ‘In the Public Library is kept a small collection of antiquities and curiosities, found at various times in this island and at Gozo, together with a few birds, a wolf, a wild cat and a snake, all stuffed.’58

In 1871 the librarian, Cesare Vassallo, published a description of the library’s museum collection. Another, shorter description was published by Antonio Annetto Caruana in 1898.59 It was only in 1903 when, on the initiative of Themistocles Zammit, a separate museum was for the first time established and the Public Library collection was described, numbered and transferred to the museum premises at Palazzo Xara in Valletta.60

58 *Malta Penny Magazine*, issue 39, 6 June 1840.
59 C. Vassallo, *Guida al museo, ovvero i monumenti di antichità Maltesi conservati nel museo della Pubblica Biblioteca di Malta* (Malta, 1871); Caruana, 14-15.
60 For a history of this museum and subsequent developments, see Gambin.
APPENDIX

Notizie sopra l’Origine ed Avanzi della Biblioteca della Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana, eretta in Malta al 1761, ed aperta al 1766

Vantasi il mondo Letterario, che quasi ne’ primi suoi secoli, vi furono alzate in più luoghi Biblioteche, e sempre da Monarchi doviziosi e dotti, o’ da altri Personaggi celebri, poscia ne tempi a’ noi più vicini, avanzate le scienze, e negli uomini l’amore del loro acquisto, andarono vieppiu crescendo, in maniera, che grandi o’ picciole raccolte di buoni libri, di codici, ed altri manoscritti ovunque passavasi si osservavano, e ridotte in poco Librerie; Siamo alla fine arrivati ad un secolo, che può chiamarsi Secolo delle Biblioteche, poiche possiamo numerare centinaja di nuove Biblioteche, e tutte con fondazioni opulenti stabilite in questo secolo, le quali in ogni tempo renderanno glorioso il nome de Promotori e Fondatori; il numero di queste Biblioteche sono quasi tutte raccolte dal Beyerlinck,1 dall’autori dell’Enciclopedia Francese,2 e da altri chiarissimi soggetti,3 sebbene la miglior parte delle [f. 1v] antiche ed acclamate Biblioteche, arrichite tanto de’ libri stampati o’ manoscritti non ci rimane che la di loro dolorosa rimembranza, o’disfatte, o dall’invidioso tempo, o dal rapace fuoco consummate, ed incenerite.

Vive ancora quella memoria della Biblioteca, che una volta alzovvi il Re d'Egitto Osimande, il quale al suo frontespizio fece scrivere in lettere greche ψυχῆς ἰατρεῖον vale à dire = Animi medica officina = o secondo il chiarissimo P. Zaccaria⁴ = Officina animorum medica = e nell'Enciclopedia Francese = Le Thresor des remedes de l'Ame⁵ =, perché i libri tramandano soavemente all'animo un ben dolce pascolo, e sono i loro Autori quei Precettori che danno conti nova lezione a chiunque desidera acquistare [f. 2] virtù senza mercede e senza voce alta = Hi sunt Magistri, qui nos instruunt sine virgis, et Ferulis, sine cholera, sine pecunia: si accedis non dormiunt, si inquiris, non se abscondunt, non obmurmurant, si oberrès; cachinnos nesciunt si ignores⁶ = et a giusto motivo invaghito de' libri l'Imperatore Giuliano alla fronte delle famose sue alzate Biblioteche una in Costantinopoli, in Antiochia l'altra, à vista di tutte, che vi entravano, fece porre il seguente avviso e memoria = Alij quidem Equos amant, alij aves, alij Feras, mihi vero a Puerulo mirandum acquirendi, et possidendi libros insedit desiderium.⁷ = Un bello ed ammirabile esempio di un Monarca!

Un'altra non è bene da intralasciarsi pur ben comprendere quanto possano giovare le Biblioteche, voglio dire di Pico della Mirandola, conosciuto dal Mondo per Fenice degli'ingegni. Dopo di essersi egli esposto nella età sua giovanile à sostenere, e difendere in un publico letterario congresso non meno di 900 conclusioni, scorgendo poscia, che varj suoi amici stupidi, e sorpresi oltre modo erano

⁵ Encyclopedie, v. Bibliothèque.
⁶ Encyclopedie loc. cit.
⁷ Ibid.
rimasti ad una pruova tanto difficile del di lui elevatissimo talento ed ingegno, presili per mano con gentilezza, e condottili nella sua nobile Libreria con sincero parlare disse loro = Non vi sorprenda se in me avete ammirato qualche particolare talento: questi libri sono stati i miei Maestri, e all’infaticabile studio sù di essi [f. 2v] fatto devo le scienze tutte, e le letterarie cognizioni, che mai posseggo.8 Ed anche l’esempio del Cardinale Bessariano dev’essere a tutti di piacere. Egli nella Lettera scritta all’eccelso Senato di Venezia, nella quale gli fa donazione di tutti i suoi pregevolissimi Mss. dice = sono i libri pieni delle voti de’ Savj, pieni degli esempj antichi, pieni di buoni costumi, pieni di legge, e pieni di religione. Essi vivano, conversano, e sono letti con noi, c’insegnava, ci ammoniscono, ci consolano, e ci mettono avanti agli occhi le cose antiche e lontane dalla nostra memoria; e tanta è la potenza loro, tanta la dignità, e tanta finalmente la divinità, che se non fossero i libri, noi saressimo tutti uomini rozzi, ed ignoranti, senza avere alcuna memoria delle cose passate, ne alcuna cognizione delle cose divine, ed umane, ed il medesimo sepolcro, che cuopre i corpi degli uomini, coprirebbe ancora il loro nome. = 9

Malta, Isola adiacente alla Sicilia, sebbene piccola non lascia di avere il suo merito, onde fiorì in tempo de’ Cartaginesi, Greci, e Romani, encomiata per li suoi commodi Porti, per il Cottone, Comino, Rose, Miele, Tele, considerabile per il glorioso naufragio di S. Paolo Apostolo, oggi per [f. 3] il Dominio della Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana,10 la quale

8 Schiavo nel Ragionamento per la erezione della pubblica Libreria, pag. 34.
9 Ibid. pag. 37 e Lettere de Prencipi, Tom. 1. pag. 1.
10 Vedi il mio Discorso Apologetico sopra il Naufragio di S. Paolo Apostolo, contra la dissertazione del Signor Abbate Lad vocat alla pag. 65 e 70, dove sono chiamati varj e molti Autori in questa mia opinione, già prima raccolti dal Padre Girolamo Manduca, e ve ne sono molti altri che [vi: crossed out] hanno fatta lodevol memoria, tra i quali me ne ricordo

Introdotta ed entrata che fù la detta Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana in Malta sebbene tutta a conservarsi e difendersi dal Turco, inimico dichiarato, fortificandola in tale guisa, che può ben oggi considerarsi Malta essere tutta quanta una sola Fortezza con spese immense, ma ancora che occupata continovamente alla vera disciplina della milizia, alle armi, alle scorrerie, alle guerre, ad aggiulare i Prencipi cristiani, e sempre in difesa della Religione Cristiana, tutta fiata pensava parimente allo studio delle scienze, e delle belle arti, onde doppo aver molto pensato, e ripensato s’è risoluto dalla stessa Religione Gerosolimitana di stabilirvi in proprio convento una Biblioteca, per il di cui mezzo, e col commodo de’ libri avessero i Signori Cavaglieri in che occuparsi ed insieme impararsi dalle penne degli eruditi Scrittori, come diportarsi colla spada nelle guerre, ed altri


11 Impressa in Malta al 1764 e pubblicata al 1767. Le ultime due parti arrivaranno sino al 1750 in 4° che si desiderano, e si aspettano.

12 26 ottobre 1530.
essays on de soldanis


13 Chi è curioso di essere inteso degli ordini date dal Venerando Consiglio per esser questa Biblioteca perpetuamente stabilita e conservatasi legga i Decreti del medesimo emanati li 22 marzo 1649, li 25 maggio 1675 e li 3 marzo 1704.

14 [Propriamente alla Sala Libro Decreti segnato Lettera A c. 30. P: crossed out]. Propriamente alla Sala dell’appartamento dell’annuale Predicatore di san Giovanni per l’Avvento e Quaresima, fornita con armari e schiaffali, serrati con gradi di fil di ferro. Il Bibliotecario era destinato dal corpo della Veneranda Assemblea, i libri s’imprestavano ai Signori Cavaglieri con impegno sino alla restituzione. Poco à poco mancanti, o perché rubbati, o verminati, poscia tali quali esistevano venduti in subasta nello stesso luogo per scudi quattrocento cinquanta, ed incorporati con questa Biblioteca, della quale vado scrivendo la sua notizia.

15 Libro de Decreti segnato A.c. 30.

16 Ibid. c. 97.
confusi, vennero dal tarlo quasi consumati, onde com’il tempo potrebbe maggiormente danneggiarli, ed il sudetto Inventario riuscirebbe di spesa inutile per la quantità di quasi tre mila volumi, che ve ne sono, perciòche sarebbe bene prendere quelle deliberazioni che stimate adatte per liberarli da un danno maggiore, e conservare quelli, che potrebbero essere di uso, ove saranno destinati dalle Signorie Vostre Illustrißime, ai quali mi sottopongo per ricevere, ed eseguire qualunque deliberazione, che sarà fatta, e nel confermarmi me ne protesto osseq.te = Delle Signorie Vostre Illustrißime = Dalla Biblioteca 18 settembre 1763. = Umilissimo, devotissimo, ed obligatissimo Servitore e Religioso = Fr. J. B. Gras = ai Venerandi Procuratori del Commun Tesoro, Luogotenente del Gran Commendatore, e Conservator Conventuale = Considerata la sudetta relazione il Sacerdote Fra Gio. Battista Gras Bibliotecario della nostra Maggior Chiesa Conventuale di San Giovanni consegna tutti i libri dell’enunciata Biblioteca al Venerando Bālì de Tencin commissario da noi a cio deputato, perche ne incorpori quelli che si troveranno in buon stato nella nuova Biblioteca, e tutti gli altri patiti per il tarlo, o dupplicati si vendino a profitto della medesima con darne à suo tempo il corrispondente discarrico in Tesoro, etc. Dato nella Veneranda Cammera li 20 settembre 1763 = Fra Silvio Vincentini Segretario del Tesoro =.

Anche dal Gran Maestro Lascaris stabilito in convento un Maestro Lettore delle Matematiche ad uso de’ Signori Cavaglieri ed altri abitatori di Malta, perche ognuno avesse il bel commodo d’impararle, incarricato il colleggio della Compagnia di Gesù di por- [f. 5] tare un soggetto abile à tal impiego, e sino da allora fu aperta la Scuola di Matematica,17 ed occupato da valenti soggetti come dal Padre Atanasio

17 Come si vede in atti del fù. magnifico notajo Pietro Vella sotto li 21 Marzo 1635.
Kirkerio ed altri, ed oggi lodevolmente occupato dal Padre La Maddalene.


**Quisquis in hoc spatio conclusa volumina lustras et Lucae frueris munere, siste gradum.**

Aspice, quos animat solers prudentia vultus,


haec nativa fuit Praesulis effigies.
Qui ut moriens Fratres etiam post fata doceret
Illis scriptorum munera docta dedit.

La bona memoria dell’Eminentissimo Cardinal Portocarrero, già cavaliere professo dell’Ordine di Malta, come sapeva che nel suo convento, non vi era pubblica Biblioteca, vi pensò seriamente a stabilire la sua e lasciarla alla Religione ad uso de Signori Cavalieri, Maltesi, ed abitatori con una epulente fondazione perpetua, per [f. 6] essere questa mantenuta e col tempo accresciuta, per mantenere un Bibliotecario ed altri ministri e servienti necessarj al suo bisogno e servigio.20 Communicò il suo

20 Questo degno Porporato, mai bastevolmente lodato, nato in Madrid li 2 Aprile 1683 à Malta giunto, ricevuto dalla Religione Gerosolimitana nella Veneranda Lingua di Castiglia e Portogallo in qualita di Cavaliere, fece le sue caravane, poi la sua regolare professione nella chiesa di San Ignazio della Compagnia di Gesù, celebratagli la messa dal sacerdote poi vescovo di Malta Alferan. Egli fu conte di Palma, marchese di Montechiaro ed Almenara, divenuto Grande di Spagna, Generale di Cavaleria, Gentiluomo di Camera, ed intimo Consigliere di Stato di Sua Maestà Cesarea, deputato per Vicirè di Sicilia e di Napoli, ma doppo lungo governo, anzi quasi satollo delle più Eminentie e Gloriosi Impieghi, che da il Mondo, quali onoratamente, e gloriosissima amministrò con mille applausi e benedizioni, mutato pensiere fece nuova resoluzione di abbandonare il Mondo ed abbracciare lo stato ecclesiastico, e nello stesso tempo cacciò via la spada e prese il collare, fatto Sacerdote con breve Apostolico, senza perdere il grado di Cavaliere di Malta con altre prerogative, come avea fatto il Cardinale Arias, anché cavaliere professo dello stess’Ordine di Malta, divenne Prelato, Patriarca, creato poscia Cardinale di Santa Chiesa da Benedetto Papa XIV li 9 settembre 1743, destinato ministro Plenipotenziario del Re delle Spagne nella Corte di Roma, dove visse, e morì l’anno [blank] sempre portava in vita la croce ottogana di tela bianca nel petto, e nel sagrifizio della Messa privata, e cantata mai lasciò la colletta = pro Religione nostra =. Egli fu il primo Cardinale Gran Croce dell’Ordine Gerosolimitano, che sulla mozzetta, e cappamagna portava la Gran Croce ottogana di tela bianca, e ciò in vigore di una lettera di Benedetto Papa XIV diretta à questo Eminentissimo Cardinale segnata li 13 ottobre 1745. Fondò una Commenda oggi chiamata di Malta in Roma, in Malta di Roma [sic] con capitali, che fruttano scudi annuali maltesi duemila e quattrocento a favore de Signori Cavalieri Gerosolimitani, nominando egli per il primo
progetto al Venerando [f. 6v] Bälì de Tencin, da lui ben conosciuto in Roma in qualità di [f. 7] Ambasciatore della Sagra Religione presso Benedetto Papa XIV, come cavaliere proprio per porre in esecuzione un si desiderato progetto. Le cose proposte dal detto Eminentissimo Portocarrero furono abbracciate, incaminate, terminate col carteggio, ma prima che fossero arrivate a Roma le ultime risposte del Venerando Bälì de Tencin, una morte quasi improvvisa prese al Cielo l’anima del Cardinale per un felice riposo; ed ecco perduta ogni speranza di vedere in Malta stabilita una Biblioteca, composta di scelti libri, raccolta con somma spesa, ed in tanti anni da più luoghi dell’Europa, ed acquistata finalmente dalla sua Religione Gerosolimitana come erede universale per sua disposizione Testamentaria.

commendatore il Bälì Aguilera durante la sua vita, come l’ha goduta, che poscia venisse smutita nella sua veneranda Lingua di Castiglia e Portogallo, poscia all’altre venerande Lingue principiando dalla Lingua di Provenza ed altre secondo le loro anzianità. Questa commenda di Roma, come le altre commende viene provenuta dalli Eminentissimi Gran Maestri essendo in grazia in quella Lingua, dove dovrà smutirsi. Grata la Sagra Religione ad un si degno Benefattore, tutte le Lingue unitamente nella Chiesa conventuale di San Giovanni gli celebrarono i funerali colla cappella ardente pomposamente, con ornamenti lugubri, ed iscrizioni, che indicavano le sue eroiche azioni in tutti gli Uffizi da lui esercitati, e ritenne ciascuna lingua nella Sala il suo Ritratto, tirato dal celebre Favrav Fraserviente d’Armi in questa Religione di Malta, per non perderlo di vista e memoria, e per ordine del Ven.do Commun Tesoro nella chiesa del Gran Priorato di Roma, posta in Monte Aventino, ove il Porporato per sua disposizione fu sepolto, vi si alzò un magnifico mausoleo di scelto marmo dove apparisce il Cardinale in mezzo busto lavorato à mosaico, monumento reso in Roma, tra le più singolari, che porterà sempre gloria al Porporato, onore alla Religione, di cui parlerà ogni secolo futuro. Leggasi la dedicatoria de vari componimenti in sua lode, raccolti da Gregorio Grimaldi. Napoli da Felice Mosca 1728, in 4º. La Dedicatoria del Padre Giuseppe Sorrubia alla Chronica de La Seraphica Religione del glorioso Patriarcha S. Francesco de Assisi Tom. 9, Roma 1756 en la officina de Generoso Salomoni.

Avea l’ispezione e la cura della Biblioteca l’erudito Signor Abate Molossi.

Allora che il detto Balì de Tencin vi pensava seriamente alla perdita che fece la religione di questa Biblioteca, studiava la via, ed il modo per riaquistarla, portarla da Roma, e piantarla una volta per sempre in Convento a publico uso; Le disposizioni già prese, l’affare ed il progetto ben regolato, ogni cosa già trasmessa in Roma al Porporato, il proprio genio di avere libri, e libri scelti, di rendere servigio alla sua Religione, ed insieme al publico, furon gli forte stimolo a mio credere di acquistarla e comprarla ma senza potervi risolvere, quantunque si ritrovava tra i cavalieri il più ricco Gran Croce del suo tempo, [f. 8] comunicando ciò ad alcuni suoi intimi cavalieri amici più
volte, finalmente fu incoraggito da certuni\textsuperscript{23} di comprarla, e che unindola colla sua particolare di casa\textsuperscript{24} riuscirebbe una delle più belle Biblioteche d’Italia, assai più se vi unisse la sua il Signor Luogotenente del Maresciallo Santejay\textsuperscript{25} [f. 8v]

\begin{itemize}
\item [23] Tra questi Signori si è distinto il Signor Commendatore Fra Silvio Vincentini, attuale Segretario del Commun Tesoro, particolare Benefattore di questa Biblioteca.
\item [24] Teneva a proprio uso in casa di sua ordinaria abitazione una doviziosa Biblioteca di Libri della più ricercate edizioni, tutti legati alla francese, nella quale si ritrovavano molti volumi manoscritti, cresciuta non poco dopo la morte del Cardinale suo zio paterno, della quale in vita si è spogliato, e tutta data a questa Biblioteca.
e che potrebbe alzarla in Malta, e sarebbe senza dubbio un monumento e singolare pregio, che al Corpo della Sagra Religione, ed alla Città di Malta mancava, e subito senza ad altro pensarvi risolse, e comprolla dal Venerando Commun Tesoro e nel [f. 9] medisimo tempo diede una generosamente alla Sagra Religione per essere applicata al pubblico uso come si riconosce dalla domanda da lui fatta alla Cammera del Commun Tesoro, e sua accettazione che fu nella forma seguente = Illustriissimi Signori = Il Balì de Tencin si da l’onore di esporre umilmente alla Signorie loro Illustriissime, che avendo egli pensiere di stabilire in Convento una Libreria pubblica, desiderarebbe acquistare per tale oggetto i libri lasciati dal fù Eminentissimo Portocarrero, ed indicati nel Catalogo trasmesso alle Signorie Loro Illustriissime, e ciò mediante le qui sotto riferite condizioni.

1° Si rimetteranno qui al mentovato Balì gli accennati Libri contenuti nel Catalogo con le scanzie inserite nel medesimo, e l’Instrumenti di Matematica secondo la nota che ne sarà fatta.

2° Si oblige di pagare per il tutto la somma di settemila scudi di questa moneta di rame in sette pagamenti di mille scudi per ciaschedun’anno, il primo de quali per farne uso, ed egli generosamente dava loro il commodo di leggerli ed imprestarsegli, ed era in somma la sua casa diventata una Accademia de Letterati, da tutte così conosciuta, ed a tutti sempre la porta aperta. Tra molti che vi andavano alla detta Biblioteca per ordinarie di sera in ora stabilita senza mai mancarvi può annoverarsi il Signor Cavaliere de Guast le Cadet, il quale per avere in memoria gli erudite compagni fece tirare in tela i loro Ritratti, e vengono tutti in propria casa alla stanza del suo studio, principiando da quello del Signor Commendatore Santejay.

26 Per la somma di scudi settemila, moneta di Malta, de quali arrivò in vita pagare a conto al Venerando Commun Tesoro scudi 5000, cioè:
- scudi 1000 li 4 Maggio 1762
- scudi 1000 li 4 Maggio 1763
- scudi 1000 li 19 Maggio 1764
- scudi 1000 li 2 Maggio 1765
- scudi 1000 li 29 Aprile 1766
- scudi 5000.
caderà al primo de’ Gennaro 1762 e di anno in anno l’istesso giorno sino al compimento della sopradetti settemila scudi, riservandosi però di non essere mai debitore al Tesoro, che del pagamento maturato, cioè al primo Gennaro 1762 di soli mille scudi, ed al primo Gennaro 1763 d’altri mille scudi, e così di anno in anno senza ch’il di lui spoglio fosse obligato à pagare quelle somme che non sarebbero maturate se Iddio le chiamasse a se prima dell’intiero pagamento.

3° Darrà alla Religione nel memoriale [momento in the original contract] istesso della concessione della Veneranda Cammera la totalità dei libri comprati, e conte- [f. 9v] nuti nel Catalogo, rimanendo inalienabili, e ritenendoli in deposito con averne l’uso, mentre viverà con la facoltà d’impiegarli al sopracennato stabilimento pubblico, ogni qualvolta verrà approvato dal Gran Maestro e dalla Religione.

4° Quando in morte del Balio depositario si trovarebbero mancanti alcuni libri, di quelli espressi nel Catalogo, sarà egli debitore del prezzo dei medesimi secondo la stima fatta nell’istesso Catalogo = Li Venerandi Procuratori del Commun Tesoro, Luogotenente del Gran Commendatore, e Conservatore Conventuale = Accettiamo il prezzo dal Venerando oratore offerto per lo acquisto della enunziata Biblioteca, ed Instrumenti Matematici, con tutti i patti e condizioni nella sudetta supplica espressi, e se ne stipoli il contratto = Dato nella Veneranda Cammera li 25 Ottobre 1760 = Vincentini Segretario del Commun Tesoro.27

E trasportata in conseguenza la Biblioteca da Roma à Malta sulle Galere della sua Religione in tante casse, intonacate tutte di noce, le quali formavano industriosamente

la libreria del Porporato Portocarrero, ed oggi quella della Sala o’sia Stanza IV di questa Biblioteca. Azione che in ogni futuro tempo recerà gloria al Bali de Tencin, poiché si è contentato comprarla, pagarla, e non ritenere che il solo mero usufrutto a vita sua durante!

Giunta à Malta la comprata Biblioteca il riferito Bali subito la fece porre ad una commoda casa, situata nel mezzo [f. 10] del Convento o’sia Città Valletta propriamente alla Piazza de Cavalieri, casa volgarmente chiamata Forfantone28 ove ritrovasi presentemente collocata, e vi pose subito mano per porre in buon’ordine i libri ad alzarvi le casse, schiaffali e ad ogni spesa altra necessaria si per la pigione della Casa, come per mantenere quei che servivano, e senza cessa lavoravano. Mandò intanto a prendere l’opportuna licenza dalla Santa Sede Apostolica, per poter tenere in Biblioteca ogni sorte di Libri proibiti, ed ottenuta li 18 novembre 1761, e qui registrarò copia del memoriale che in questa Biblioteca leggesi originalmente, ed è del tenor seguente, in cui scuoprasi la bella idea ed il fine del Fondatore.

Eminentissimi e Reverendissimi Signori

Il Balì Fra Luigi de Tencin già Ambasciatore della sua Religione alla Santa Sede, umilmente rappresenta all’Eminenze Vostre che avendo comprata la Biblioteca della chiara memoria del Cardinale Portocarrero, l’ha unita ad altra quantità di libri, ed ha fatte tutte le opportune disposizioni per renderne in perpetuo publico l’uso ad oggetto di ritirar dall’ [f. 10v] ozio i cavalieri ed a beneficio del clero, a cui manca quest’ajuto per istruirsi ne’ proprj

28 Venne questa Casa così comunemente chiamata da tutti, poiché in essa per longa serie d’anni si teneva guoco publico, ma adesso che mutò il guoco delle carte in guoco de’ migliori carte viene chiamata Casa della Biblioteca. Entravano altre volte i dilettanti di guoco oggi i dilettanti de libri, i quali si osservano instancabili, perchè mai anno mancato d’intervenirvi a leggere.
ESSAYS ON DE SOLDANIS


La Veneranda Cammera del Commun Tesoro considerando, e vedendo il benefizie, che faceva il fù Balì de Tencin à tutta la Reli-[f. 11] gione ed a Malta per aumentare la Biblioteca, e render al Balì cosa grata ordinò che il corpo o’sia la Biblioteca fosse a questa nuova unita29 ed anche a tutti li Signori Ricevitori che in Europa, che quando acquisteranno libri a nome dell’Ordine de’ spogli di tutti i Gerosolimitani, si mandassero a Malta a’ pro di questa nuova Biblioteca con una lettera circolare segnata li 23 novembre 1760, e si è

29 Sotto li 23 novembre 1760.
osservato l’ordine puntualmente sino al giorno d’oggi, dalli quali libri si trattengono quelle opere che non vi sono, ed i dupliciti si pongono alla vendita a beneficio di questa Biblioteca, che la rendono assai più copiosa e doviziosa, ecco la copia di detta Lettera estratta dall’originale, che fù mandata in Spagna, Francia, Alemagna, e Portogallo = Sebbene le Biblioteche, e qualunque altra minor raccolta de’ libri dei vostri Religiosi dovevano aver sempre fatto un frutto di spoglio, l’Esperienza nondimeno ci fece, e ci fa conoscere, che mentre qui si raccogliono con giusta attenzione i libri dei Religiosi, che mojono, nissuno avviso però mai venne a questa Veneranda Camera, ne alcuna partita entrò mai per spoglio a favor del Commun Tesoro dei Libri di tanti, e tanti Religiosi, che cessarono di vivere fuori di convento: Volendo pertanto dare un convenevole riparo a un disordine di tale natura come ci occorre l’obligo, ci siamo determinati di fare il presente circolare dispaccio, con il quale significhiamo a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima esser preciso da ora in avanti, che nella [f. 11v] morte di ciaschedun Religioso Ella, o il Procuratore del Commun Tesoro, che sarà spedito, o pure in altro modo incaricato di fare il di lui spoglio abbia speciale cura di rendersi padrone di tutti quei libri, che troverà appartenenti al Defonto, de’ quali ci manderà Vostra Signoria Illustrissima una nota esatta, trascrivendo in essa tutto il fronispicio del libro, e del primo Tomo, se l’opera contenesse più d’un volume dalla prima sin’all’ultima parola, ad effetto di sapere il nome dell’Autore, la materia che tratta, e la sua edizione: Descrivendo la forma del libro in foglio, o’ in quarto, in ottavo, o’ in dodici. In carta grande, o’ piccola, che suole accrescere, e rispettivamente diminuire il preggio del Libro, senza tacere lo stato in cui si trova, essendoci necessarie tutte le predette notizie per poter successivamente risolvere e ordinare nella risposta, che le faremo, o’ la vendita a
conto nostro, o il trasporto in Convento dove attualmente si pensa allo Stabilimento di una nostra Biblioteca per uso, e commodo del Publico. Si compiacerà inoltre Vostra Signoria Illustissima pensare alla sicurezza, e alla buona conservazione dei Libri ereditati acciò non corran pericolo di smarrimento, o’ di detrimento, sino al ritorno della nostra risoluzione intorno al di loro destino, e ratifichiamo per fine a Vostra Signoria Illustissima La nost’ osservazione, etc. Vincentini Segretario del Commun Tesoro.  

Anche Sua Maestà Cristianissima Lodovico XV Re di Francia informato e contento di quest’opera tanto utile e vantagiosa a’ questa Sagra Religione quale teneramente ama e protegge, s’è benignamente [f. 12] compiacciuto concedere a questa nuova Biblioteca inperpetuo un Esemplare di qualunque opera che sarà impressa nella sua Tipografia Regia di Parigi, avendo principiato fare il gratuito dono l’anno in cui s’è fondata vale a dire 1761, ed oggi si contano non pochi volumi ligati alla Regia, i quali non sono il meno suo ornamento, e decoro. Memoria che sempre farà gloria a questa Sagra Religione, ed onore al Balì de Tencin, il quale seppe trovare la via per entrarvi ed ottenere si segnalato privilegio da questo ben amato Monarca.

In siffatta maniera venne questa nuova Biblioteca progettata, fondata, alzata, aumentata, ed aperta sempre illustre e dalla cura e dall’unione di molte Biblioteche,  

onde aperta la prima volta appare non bambina, ma già grande, giache era ripiena di diciottomila volumi di Lingua Latina, Italiana, Francese, Spagnuola, Portoghese, e Tedesca,

30 Libro delle deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera segnato a.c. 121.
31 Colla Biblioteca del Cardinal Portocarrero, andò unita quella del fù Balì de Tencin, nella quale erasi parte di quella del suo zio Cardinale Tencin; L’altra del Signor Luogotenente Santejay, del Commendatore Almeida, del Balì Dueñas.
32 Ai 17 novembre 1766.
senza contare i molti volumi manoscritti.\textsuperscript{33} di Lingua Turca, Araba, Persiana, Coptica, antica Provenzale, che si ritrovano tutti collocati alla Stanza I.

[f. 12v] La Veneranda Cammera del Commun Tesoro veggendo che questa Biblioteca come da tutti veduta ed ammirata,\textsuperscript{34} ed acquistava da giorno in giorno maggior credito e fama più lodevole, venne a por mano, e a dar gli ordini opportuni per lo stabilimento di questa nuova Biblioteca, avendo prima fatte le più vive istanze molti de Signori Cavalieri che aveano tutta la premura di vederla aperta, ed approfittarsene del commodo di questa Biblioteca, quindi ai 6 del mese di novembre 1766 deliberò, che tutti i libri che in detta Biblioteca ritrovavansi dupliciti si vendessero, e vi nominò per Commissario della Biblioteca per poter dare gli ordini opportuni in quello sarà necessario si per la vendita, come per la conservazione della Libraria il Signor Commendatore de Valabrez, [f. 13] Cavaliere informatissimo de' libri, che trattano in ogni genere di scienze, onde qui rapportarò questa deliberazione cavata dall'originale: = Li Venerandi Procuratori del Comun Tesoro, Luogotenente del

\textsuperscript{33} Ve ne sono molti che mandò a questa Biblioteca il Balì de Tencin in vita e dopo morte, altri che si sono ritrovati nello spoglio del S.r Luogotenente Santejay, e dati in dono a questa Biblioteca dal Signor Commendatore Vincentini, Segretario del Tesoro lì 2 maggio 1766.

\textsuperscript{34} Di questa Biblioteca un giorno visitata, veduta, e minutamente osservata per proprio piacere da Monsignor Durini, allora Inquisitore in Malta, oggi Nunzio Apostolico in Pologna, rimase così contento in vederla, che mai disse, sperava di ritrovare in Malta quella quantità e qualità de libri, ne quella disposizione, colla quale stavano collocati, ne quell'arte per rinvenire subitamente i libri appena cercati come di molti ne fece la pruova. Ritirato che fù a suo Palazzo nel Borgo o'sia Città Vittoriosa, e raccolte a se le ore disoccupate e più edatte, com'egli veramente è un gran Poeta prese nella sua vena la penna, e vi stese centinaja, e centinaja diversi Esametri, e Pentametri in latino ben elegante, i quali indicavano la storia totale di questa Biblioteca, degno trattato della sua dotta e dolce pena, portati poesia in versi italiani scolti eruditamente dal Signor Abbate de Sanctis, suo Segretario. S'è compiacciuto il dotto Prelato di leggermi la maggior parte di detti versi, qui desiderati per registrarle a gloria del Fondatore, e del ben degno loro Autore.

In virtù di questa deliberazione questo Signor Comissario Commendatore de Valabre, pose in esecuzione la vendita de’ libri dupPLICATE, ed inutili a questa Biblioteca, che principiò ai 17 del detto mese di Novembre 1766 quale
Continuerà fintanto, che si ritrovano in questo luogo simili libri, e secondo l'apparenza mai mancaranno o molti o pochi libri per la vendita.

Il Regolamento de' libri in questa Biblioteca è fatto secondo il genio e comando di chi la comprò, e la dìde alla Religione, e benche sono stati uomini di vaglia, che vi anno trattato sopra il modo di fabbri-[f. 14] care e collocare i libri nelle Biblioteche, qui a grandezza cioè in folio di per sè, così in 4°, &cc. ma quanto si potrebbe da certuni desiderate diversamente, lo rinverranno diversamente ne' Catalogi de' Libri formati ad uso di questa Biblioteca nello spazio di quattr'anni, de' quali ora si farà parola per averne la intera cognizione loro.

I studiosi e dilettanti, che vorranno trarre dalla Biblioteca il frutto, nelle Tavole della Sala, luogo per lo studio pubblico, troveranno a loro uso due volumi in folio chiamati il Catalogo de' Cognomi dell'Autori, posti in forma et ordine di Alfabeto, et infine i cognomi dell'Autori di opere manoscritte.

35 Sono collocati nell'ultima stanza della Biblioteca. La vendita sarà nellì sabbati di tutto l'anno, non impediti. La materia è divisa in tanti quinternetti di carta col titolo dell'opera, grandezza, e prezzo, e marca ov'è collocato. Chi vuol comprare può vedere l'opera, che dalla marca sarà indicata, il Guardiano la porge. Se piace si paga prima in mano del Bibliotecario, e si prende. A chi non piace si rimette a suo luogo.

36 Gabriele Naudeo, Avis pour dresser une Bibliotheque, a Paris, 1644; Teofilo Spinzelio, Sacra Bibliothecarum illustrium arcana redecta, Augusta Vindelicorum, 1668; Cristiano Koch, Schediasma de ordinanda Bibliotheca, Lipsiae, 1713; Giovanni Davide Koclero, Syloge aliquot scriptorum de bene ordinanda, et ornanda Bibliotheca, Francfurti, 1728. E ve ne sono degli altri autori rapportati dal signor Schiavo, Ragionamento, pag. 41. degne di essere lette sono le opere di Matteo Nicolò Kortolto, Parnenesis de Bibliothecis maxime publicis utiliter adeundis, Gressae Hassor, 1716; di Cristiano Gotlebio Budero, De Bibliothecis publicis ad usum legatio, Jenae, 1723; del P. Claudio Clemente, Bibliothecae tam publicae quam privata extractio; del Padre Valoix, Discours sur les Biblioteques publiques, Bresae, 1751.
Anche rinverranno altri volumi sei di ugual grandezza, [f. 14v] chiamati il Catalogo delle materie, ligati tutte in cartapepera, e comprendono pagine 5,218. Il primo v’ha un Indice universale di tutte quelle materie che trattano i libri, chiamando il folio, per ivi trovare le opere, e tutte segnate separatamente per trovarle a propria nicchia, che ricercate, il Guardiano le porta prontamente.

In fine del sesto Volume si ritrovano apparte le opere, che trattano, e parlano sulla Religione Gerosolimitana, sopra la Sicilia, e Malta, meritava questa materia aver luogo distinto, perche come più usuale, separarla dal caos di altre tante divise, e numerose materie.

Finalmente si ritrova con questi Catalogi un’altro in folio picciolo, anche ligato in cartapepera intitolato Index Alphabeticus Catalogorum, questo abbraccia quanto espone l’Indice universale delle materie steso al primo volume del Catalogo delle materie, ma in modo Alfabetico, per avviare la confusione di leggere tutto l’Indice universale, con qualche giunta di materia curiosa, questo chiama il folio deli sei volumi ultimi.

Sono poi stabilite le ore dello studio publico, nella mattina dalle ore otto sino le ore undici, nella sera all’Inverno dalle ore due, ed all’Estate dalle ore tre sino alle ore cinque per tutto l’anno, eccettuate li giorni del Vennerdì ch’è vacanza, e del Sabbato, giorno, nel quale si vendono i libri duplicati nella stessa Libreria. Per le vacanze dell’Estate, e per quelle altre giornate necessante all’indigenza del luogo indicarà una Tabella posta al Capo delle [f. 15] scale col Vacat.

Opera principiata col contento del Corpo della Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana, con applauso di tutta Malta, il fervore dimostrato in questo tempo si deve sperare che andrà crescendo coll’anni, e con ugual’frutto. Il Signor
Cavaliere Laberuviere\textsuperscript{37} se fosse ancora in vita non si sarebbe voluto che in Malta \textit{mancava una Biblioteca publica} per trarre Lumi bastevoli, per materia della sua ideata opera sono prese per altro a tempo le misure per rimanere questa nuova biblioteca stabilita e conservata, il tutto coll'approvazione del Serenissimo Principe felicemente Regnante Fra Don Emmanuele Pinto, e se chi scrive non sbaglia in poco tempo dovrà annoverarsi tra le più cospicue, seppur non si conta da' oggi, d'Europa, e verificarsi di essa quanto scrisse Claudiano\textsuperscript{38} = nascentes stabunt per saecula Libri =.

\textsuperscript{37} Pensava questo formare da pianta la \textit{Storia della Religione Gerosolimitana}, ed in Roma publicò la sua Idea, col \textit{Prospectus}, che stampato rappresentò a Benedetto Papa XIV, assicurando che avrebbe tolta via la profluvità del Bosio, e la non sincerità del Vertot. Morto in Roma novizio e giovine prima di aver posta la mano ad un opera tanto desiderata.

\textsuperscript{38} De Consulat. Manlis Theodoreti.
DE SOLDANIS: A BIBLIOGRAPHY*

Joseph Cassar Pullicino

Published Works

1750

* Della Lingua Punica presentemente usata da Maltesi, ovvero Nuovi Documenti li quali possono servire di lume all’antica Lingua Etrusca, stesi in due dissertazioni... Roma, 199p. 
Contains also: Nuova Scuola di Grammatica per agevolmente apprendere la lingua Punica-Maltese... pp. 65-117; and Idea d’un Dizionario della lingua Punica-Maltese... pp. 118-99. 
Revue de l’ouvrage Della Lingua Punica dans le Journal Etranger, Paris, 1754 (June-July) vol. II, pp. 234 et seq. – incomplete copy in NLM Libr. 142 iii, f. 32r. 
A facsimile edition was published in 2007 by Joe Zammit Ciantar.

1751

* Mustafà Bassà di Rodi schiavo in Malta osia la di lui Congiura all’occupazione di Malta, descritta da Michele Acciard, Napoli. Col ritratto del Bassà. 

C. Vassallo (Catalogo dei libri esistenti nella Pubblica Biblioteca di Malta compiuto per ordine di Materie – Storia, 1844, p. 75) writes:

* This bibliography first appeared in Gio Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis: 1712-1770 (Malta, 1996). With the help of Carmel G. Bonavia, it is being republished with updated references.
‘Molto acremente si lagna il nostro Agius, in una sua memoria mss. del furto commessogli dall’Acciardi del mss. portante lo stesso titolo. A quel che sembra l’Acciardi ha voluto far il bello colla roba di altri, dandole soltanto una ripulitura.’

NLM Libr. 341 contains the text of this work. G. A. Ciantar Malta Illustrata, Lib. IV, Not. IV, Malta, 1780 (p. 591) lists this work with de Soldanis’ publications saying: ‘la quale operetta per la maggior parte fu composta dal nostro Canonico, e poi ripolita, accresciuta, e pubblicata da Michele Acciardo Pisano; le cose dal quale aggiunte recarono qualche persecuzione al nostro Canonico credutone l’autore.’

NLM Libr. 18 contains ‘Lettera Scritta [in data 17 maggio 1751] da Salvatore Borgia Accademico Cortonense Al Dotto Signor Canonico Francesco Agius In rapporto al furto letterario fattogli dall’Acciard’ (pp. 469-76).

1754?


C. Vassallo lists two copies of this publication, one in NLM Misc. 212 and another in Misc. 243 (Indice delle Miscellanee che si conservano nella Pubblica Biblioteca di Malta, 1857).

1756

‘Suite de la dissertation de M. l’Abbè Agius De Soldanis, sur l’origine de la langue Punique-Maltaise’, Suite de la clef ou Journal Historique sur les Matieres du Temps contenant quelques nouvelles de Littérature et autres remarques curieuses – September 1756, Tome LXXX (NLm Misc. 276 (item 11)).

langue que les havitans originaires de l’isle de Malte parlent aujourd’hui, est l’ancienne Langue Punique’.


[Lettera da Malta in data 6 Marzo 1756], Memorie per servire alla storia letteraria di Sicilia, Tomo Primo, Parte IV. Per il mese di Aprile 1756. Palermo, nella stamperia de’ Santi Apostoli...

1757


C. Vassallo (Catalogo, p. 50) writes: ‘poi tradotto in Italiano e pubblicato in Venezia nel 1758.’

NLM Libr. 146 iii, ff. 147r-210r is a copy of this work.


NLM Libr. 142 iii, ff. 213r-302r is a copy of this publication.

For comments on this work see ‘Avvertimenti dell’Abate Triesti sull’Annone Cartaginese’ del Canonico Agius (NLM Libr. 142 v, pp. 449-51) and ‘Giudizio dato dal Dr. Ignazio Saverio Mifsud sopra l’opera Annone Cartaginese dell’Agius’ (NLM Libr. 142 iii, ff. 46r-57r).


Lettera intorno al Convento ed alla Chiesa di S. Agostino del Gozo Ciantar (Malta Illustrata, p. 591) lists this Letter with de Soldanis’ publications, adding that it was ‘inserita nel Monachismo del P. M. F. Bonaventura Attardi’.

Lettera sopra la fondazione ed esistenza della Chiesa e Convento de’ RR Padri Cappuccini del Gozo di Malta, scritta dal Canonico Agius de Soldanis, diretta al Sacerdote D. Ignazio Saverio
Mifsud. Malta, 1759, 28p. (NLM Misc. 243 (item 10)).
The manuscript of this Letter, dated 20 December 1752, is included in NLM Libr. 20, pp. 164-93. The same text appears in NLM Libr. 155, ff. 102r-105r.

1764
Included in the Appendice alla Biblioteca Maltese with other material ‘comunicato all’Avvocato Mifsud in decorso della Stampa’ – hence different year (1766) shown in the Appendix.

Works left unpublished at the National Library

Libr. 1

Libr. 77
Pensieri Mariali... dedicati e composti dal Chierico Francesco Agius Gozitano. Malta 1730. [xiii] + 96p.
The author calls these Marian Thoughts ‘i primi parti della rozzezza del mio tenue ingegno’ and explains to the readers that ‘in questo libricciolo non incontrerete discorsi, la di cui lettura richioggia molt’applicatione, mà sono semplici pensieri, quali possonsi esser letti in un men di nulla…’

Libr. 105
Libr. 10 also contains a Vita di Monsignor Fr. Melchior Alpheran de Bussan.

Libr. 142 i
Apoltegmi e Proverbi Maltesi, raccolti e spiegati in lingua Italiana dal Canonico Agius (pp. 1-99).
C. Vassallo (p. 48) writes: ‘Sono disposti per ordine alfabetico: peccato che ne manchi tutta la lettera A.’
This modest collection of 387 proverbs was edited by Giovanni Curmi and appeared in Malta Letteraria (May-December 1928).

Libr. 142 ii
Simolacro d’Ercole, dagli antico-Fenici-Maltesi adorato nel suo Tempio di Marsascirocco in Malta – Illustrato dal Canonico Francesco Agius De Soldanis Bibliotecario 1769 (ff. 1-10).
On back of title page one reads: ‘Dissertazione sopra la statua d’Ercole che si ritrova nel Museo della Biblioteca di Malta fatta dal Canonico Agius e recitata da G. A. Navarro nella Conferenza letteraria di Malta li 13 del... (sic) 1769’.
C. Vassallo (Catalogo, p. 49) comments that ‘questa bella statua o Greca o Romana che si voglia, e che erroneamente l’Agius pretende Fenicia, trovasi nel Museo di questa Biblioteca.’
Detti rimarchevoli, a newly discovered autograph by de Soldanis amongst the papers of Fortunato Panzavecchia.
ACM, Pan 34, ff. 237-240.
Appendix copiosissimus ad Hierolexicon clarissimi Magri (pp. 180-277).
Aliae additiones in Hierolexicon ejusdem Magri opera Can. Agius (pp. 363-516).

Libr. 142 iii
Avis au Lecteur du Journal Étranger de Paris (1754) donné par le chanoine François Agius de Soldanis (ff. 34r-46r).

Libr. 142 iv
Memoria del Canonico Agius contro Michele Acciard sulle notizie storiche della Congiura ordita da Mustafà Bassà di Rodi. Segue una Risposta Apologetica dell’Acciard alia memoria dell’Agius, ed una Lettera di Stefano Borgia sullo stesso argomento (pp. 337-96).

Libr. 142 v
Se San Corrado Siciliano fosse mai passato in Malta? (pp. 39-40)

Se Sant’Agata fosse mai in Malta? (pp. 41-42).
Reproduced in part, with comments, in G. Cassar Pullicino, op. cit., p. 12.

Statuti et Ordinazioni della Sodalità della Buona Morte sott’il titolo del Ssmo. Crocefisso per il suo buon governo, eretta nell’altare del glorioso S. Giuseppe della S. Parrocchiale Chiesa di casal Sannat del Gozo li 7 giugno 1760 (pp. 113-17).

Spiegazione della iscrizione del tempio di Apolline scoperta nel 1747 circa nella Medina (pp. 244-65).
See also Osservazioni sopra l’iscrizione scoperta nel 1747 (NLM Libr. 142 vi, pp. 531-70).

C. Vassallo (Catalogo, p. 51) writes: ‘Questa dissertazione è del Canonico Agius; un’altra ne aveva fatto il nostro Ciantar pubblicata in Napoli nel 1749, col titolo De antiqua inscriptione nuper effossa.’
Libr. 155 also contains ‘Alcuni cenni di spiegazione sulla inscrizione ad Apolline, scritta da Stefano Borgia.’

Lettera [in data 2 agosto 1752] del Canonico Agius al Dr Michelangelo Grima sulle glossopietre (pp. 274-84).

C. Vassallo (Catalogo, p. 51) advises us to turn to the copy in more readable form, in Libr. 142 vi, pp. 1-18.

Notizie ecclesiastiche per l’anno 1734 (pp. 288-305).

A few extracts were published by G. Cassar Pullicino in Studi di Tradizioni Popolari Maltesi, 1989, pp. 6-8.

Progetto di un conservatorio di ragazze nel Gozo (pp. 360-63).

Spiegazione [del Canonico Agius] di alcuni nomi Arabi dati ad alcune città e luoghi rimasti ancora in Sicilia (pp. 455-86).

Notizie dell’illustriissimi Venerandi Balì Dericard e Chambray (pp. 487-93; 529-66).

Libr. 142 vi

Giornale di ciò che accadde in Malta e Gozo dal 7 gennaio al 29 dicembre 1733 (pp. 281-321).

Osservazioni sopra l’iscrizione scoperta nel 1747 (pp. 531-70).

Libr. 143

Damma tal Kliem Kartaginis mscerred fel fom tal Maltin u Ghaucin, maghmula mel Kanoniku Gianfrangesku Agius Sultana Ghaucic. 4 vols.


The Damma has formed the basis for three theses for the degree of M.A. and two theses for the degree of B.A. Hons.
ESSAYS ON DE SOLDANIS

Libr. 144

Nuova Scuola dell’antica lingua punica scoperta nel moderno parlare Maltese e Gozitano

C. Vassallo (Catalogo, p. 53) adds the following information: ‘Non è da confondersi colla sua Nuova Scuola della lingua Punica pubblicata in Roma dalla Tipografia Salomoni nel 1750, la quale è divisa in due dissertazioni, in una Grammatica ed in un dizionario Punico-Maltese. Questo manoscritto ne è affatto diverso: è diviso in 44 Lezioni, ed ha in fine delle frasi familiari, dei dialoghi, ed un breve catechismo con alcune preci in Maltese ed Italiano’.

The ‘Dialoghi’ mentioned by Vassallo were published, with an introductory study, by Ġ. Cassar Pullicino in Il-Malti (Settembru 1947, pp. 99-125) and translated into English by D. R. Marshall in Journal of Maltese Studies 6, 1971, pp. 1-33.

Libr. 145

Il Gozo antico-moderno e sacro-profano, Isola Mediterranea adiacente a Malta Africana, consagrato all’eroiche virtù dell’Illustrissimo e Reverendissimo Monsignore Fra Don Paolo Alpheran de Bussan Vescovo di Malta e Gozo... dal Sacerdote Gio: Pietro Francesco Agius Canonico dell’Insigne Chiesa Collegiata e Matrice del Gozo, 1746.

Besides NLM Libr. 145, other four copies are known to exist: the rough copy is in the Capuchin convent in Floriana; the other three copies are in the National Library in Valletta, in the Gozo Library and in a private collection in Gozo. See The Times, 31 March 1998, p. 52.

About NLM Libr. 145, C. Vassallo (Catalogo, p. 54) notes: ‘Questa interessante ed unica storia dell’isola sorella fu dall’Agius dedicata al benemerito Alpheran Vescovo di Malta nel 1746, ma non fu mai pubblicata’.

of both volumes was published as one volume in 1999. An English translation based on the Maltese version, by Fr Anthony Mercieca, *Gozo: Ancient and Modern*, was published also in 1999.

The map of Gozo in this volume was stolen (see N. Fenech, ‘Rare antique map of Gozo believed stolen from National Library book’, *The Times*, 31 March 1998, p. 52) and recovered. It was sent back to the National Library; it was received on 10 August 2000 and, after its restoration, was put back in NLM Libr. 145 (Philip Borg, Director of Libraries, personal communication to the editor).


Libr. 155
*Brevi cenni della vita di Mons. Alpheran Vescovo di Malta* (ff. 199r-204r).

Libr. 259
*Collectanea ordine alfabetico digesta a Can. D. Francesco Agius*

**Works left unpublished in foreign libraries and in private collections**

*Notizie sopra l’Origine ed Avanzi della Biblioteca della Sagra Religione Gerosolimitana, eretta in Malta al 1761, ed aperta al 1766*

See William Zammit’s paper in this volume.

*Arme Gentilizie delle Famiglie Maltesi e Gozzitane ed alcune altre; Raccolti dal Dottor Canonico Don Gio. Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis*

Albert Ganado collection
Works Presumed Lost

Deliberationes Capitulares Insignis Ecclesiae Collegiatae insulae Gaulos ab anno 1673 usque ad annum... (sic) quibus variae observationes, et quaedam anecdota exhibentur, ad ipsammet spectantia

Itinerario Italico del 1757 e 1758, descritto dal Canonico Gio Pietro Francesco Agius

There can be no doubt about the existence of this manuscript. Agius refers to it in his ‘Lettera Responsiva... sopra i Bordoni’ included in I. S. Mifsud’s *Biblioteca Maltese* (1764, p. 386), saying: ‘Nel mio Itinerario Italico del 1757 e 1758, mss. fog. 172, passando per Bologna ai 23 Ottobre 1756 ho scritto quello che ho veduto nella Chiesa Cattedrale ai SS. Apostoli Pier Paolo dedicata...’

I. S. Mifsud noted in his diary (NLM Libr. 13, f. 170) under the date 5 October 1759: ‘Avendo lo scrittore in tutti detti giorni di dimora fatta nel Gozo, letto l’Itinerario ben lungo del Signor Canonico Agius del viaggio da lui fatto per l’Italia nel 1757 e 1758, compreso in un libro Mss in foglio, di carte scritte 568 col titolo Itinerario Italico del 1757 e 1758...’

G. A. Ciantar (*Malta Illustrata*, Libro IV, Not. IV, 1780, p. 591) lists the Itinerario among the manuscripts left by de Soldanis, adding that its author had left it to Rev. S. Ab. Gianant. C. Beretta. This prelate could have been the Mons. Barretta ‘raccomandato dal Balì Caraviglia per vedere Malta’ who came to Malta from Naples on 21 June 1763 ‘e fu subito coltivato dal detto Canonico Agius che l’aveva conosciuto in Roma’ (NLM Libr. 14, p. 100).
See also de Soldanis’ testament dated 14 April 1768, in this volume, 43.
Related Material

Libr. 146
Tre volumi di lettere scritte al Canonico Agius parte di natura privata, e parte che han riferenza alle opere sue letterarie
C. Vassallo (Catalogo, p. 54) states that ‘il terzo tomo comprende le lettere del Cav. Turgot, di De Galibert, del Bali Dericard e dell’Abate Mandoux, scritte in lingua Francese.’

Libr. 155
Molte lettere dirette da ragguardevoli personaggi al Canonico Agius.

Misc. 243 (item 7)

Libr. 358
Biografia del Canonico Don Francesco Agius de Soldanis
A note dated 6 March 1891 at the end of this biographical sketch states that it was copied from a manuscript existing in the Gozo Public Library.

University Theses

1974
1978
Toponymic terms registered by de Soldanis have been utilized for this thesis.

1984

2009

**Articles, etc. on de Soldanis (in chronological order)**

1752
*Novelle Letterarie No. 17* [in cui si fa parola dell’opera del Canonico Agius sulla Lingua Punica] Firenze, 28 aprile 1752 (NL M Misc. 250 (item 2)).

1780

1810


1945
‘[Vassalli and De Soldanis]’ – Controversy re appellation
‘Father of Maltese Literature’ between J. Cassar Pullicino, Jos. Galea, Erin Serracino Inglott and Agostino Levanzin, Times of Malta (8 October 1945 – 1 August 1946 passim).

1947

1958

1962
Ġ. Cassar Pullicino, ‘Id-Dizzjunarju ta’ De Soldanis’, Kitba u Kittieba tal-Malti i, pp. 82-90.

1964

1966
J. Cassar Pullicino, ‘Notes for a History of Maltese Costume’, Maltese Folklore Review i, nos. 3-4, pp. 149-216.

1970

1971

1977

1980

1982
ESSAYS ON DE SOLDANIS

1983

1988

1989

1992

1994

1995
1996

A. Cassola, *Il Mezzo Vocabolario Maltese-Italiano del '700.*


1998


2000

L. Cachia, *Ħabbew l-Ilsien Malti*, pp. 50-54.


2003


A. Ganado, ‘Bibliographical Notes on Melitensia – 1’, *Melita Historica* xiii, no. 4, pp. 365-68.

2004

2006


2008
