archaeology, seemed to have not only influenced Mayr’s academic pursuits but also affected the way he argued his ‘archaeological cases’, as clearly expressed in his evidence-driven publications.

From 1889 to 1893, Albert Mayr studied at Munich’s Ludwig-Maximilians Universität, where he was registered as a student of philology. In 1894, Mayr handed in his dissertation on *Die antiken Münzen der Inseln Malta, Gozo and Pantelleria*, in part-fulfilment for the attainment of a doctoral degree. His tutor, Oberhummer, had drawn Mayr’s attention towards Malta and encouraged him to embark on a more thorough study to produce a ‘historic-geographical monograph on Malta’. This encouragement materialised into a monograph published in 1909, *Die Insel Malta im Altertum*, that not only covered the Maltese megalithic culture but also included the Punic and Roman periods. Previously, in 1901, Mayr had published a monograph entitled *Die vorgeschichtlichen Denkmäler von Malta* in which he gave an account of the (then) known prehistoric buildings in Malta, realized that they were much older than the Phoenician period, and tried to assess their context and significance in Mediterranean prehistory.

Apart from these monographs dealing mainly with Maltese prehistory, an even earlier paper by Mayr was his seminal *Zur Geschichte der älteren christlichen Kirche von Malta* published in 1896 in the historical journal *Historisches Jahrbuch*. In this essay on Maltese historiography, Mayr argued for a scientific approach to the writing of the history of the early Christian Church in Malta and to discontinue basing its history on tradition in favour of written or archaeological evidence.

When still a university student, Mayr had his first appointment as a student teacher in 1891. His professional career, which lasted up to 1917, was that of a state-employed school teacher in secondary education. After extended sick leave, he was finally granted early retirement in 1920. Regrettably, Albert Mayr never acquired a position within the established academic circle of Munich, the university and the academy. He nonetheless remained committed to the archaeological research he had started with his doctoral thesis and persevered in his archaeological and historical studies throughout his life. His numerous publications and study tours suggest that, foremost, he was a scholar with a lifelong commitment to Mediterranean archaeology with a special focus on Malta. Albert Mayr’s work has survived through the works of subsequent scholars such as Professor John D. Trump⁴ and Dr David Trump.⁴

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2 Vol. 17, 475-496. For comments on the importance of this essay, see the contribution of Prof. Godfrey Wettiner, infra, p. 19 sqq. For an English translation of this essay, the first-ever to be published, cf. H. Sieger’s translation, infra, p. 23 sqq.


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2 However, in October/November 1962 Professor Lionel Butler, Leverhulme Lecturer in 1962-63 then serving a three month stint at the newly-opened Department of History, delivered an eight-hour public series at the Valletta premises of the University of Malta on ‘The Maltese People and their Rulers 900–1600’, which was very well attended and highly appreciated. The omitted portions of the High Middle Ages, *ie.* post 1090 to 1090, were precisely the ones which relied almost completely for information on what was then regarded as reliable ‘tradition’ or by way of extrapolation from the history of other countries or the whole region.

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3 *Professor Godfrey Wettiner* is a founder-member of the Malta Historical Society. For his profile, see p. 139.

4 Inevitably, the serious writing of medieval and earlier historylaboured under a heavy academic handicap. The models they followed included what was called ‘tradition’ as a source of ‘history’. They were largely impervious to the new serious and increasingly academic type of history followed mainly by contemporary German, French and English historians.
In the present paper, Albert Mayr pointed out that there were two main problems in dealing with ancient and medieval Maltese history, namely, that for about 300 years after St. Paul’s shipwreck there was no written or archaeological evidence of his stay on Malta. Similarly, there was a period of about 200 or 300 years in the High Middle Ages when Christianity on Malta (including Gozo) was not documented in any way.

Understandingly, these conclusions of Albert Mayr did not meet with the approval of Maltese historians. The traditions concerning the Christianization of the island on the arrival of St. Paul continued to find practically universal favour. The idea of continuity of people and language throughout the medieval period from Byzantine times to the arrival of the Order in 1530 with the inevitable progressive development of Maltese under the influence of Arabic remained the standard picture. In such writers as A. A. Caruana, one notices a certain softening of attitude towards Arabs and Islam but his own work is spoiled by his acceptance of much of the fabrications of Giuseppe Vella in the eighteenth century. Professor Andrew Vella rejected the reputed Rogerian origin of the Maltese national flag, but where religion was concerned he followed the normal trend, as did Albert Lacerla, Temi Zammit and numerous other popular writers and authors of school textbooks. On the other hand, Temi Zammit’s own treatment of prehistory of course is unexceptional. Augustus Bartolo actually praised Mayr’s interpretation of Maltese prehistory but followed A. A. Caruana for the rest, including some of the fabrications. A. Bonnici’s History of the Church in Malta in three volumes, intended to be an update of nineteenth century books by Ferris, did not even include Albert Mayr in his bibliography and still gave prominence to outdated seventeenth and eighteenth century national historians. In general, Maltese historians have continued to avoid dealing with the problems posed by Albert Mayr. On palaeo-Christian studies, the ideas of Bellanti need updating. Vincent Borg starts his gigantic survey of the Church in Malta around 800 AD.

3 A. A. Caruana, Frammintu critici della storri Fenice-Caraguzara, Greco-Romanu e Bizantina de l’ele di Malta, Malta 1899.
4 E.g., A. P. Vella, Stoq ma’ Malta; vol. 1, Malta 1974.
5 A. V. Lacerla, The Story of Man in Malta, Malta 1930.
6 T. Zammit, Malta, The Maltese Islands and their History, Malta 1926.
7 History of the Maltese Islands, in Malta and Gibraltar Illustrated, ed. Alliner Macrittr, London 1915, 10-172; references to Albert Mayr on pp. 11, 15, 17 (which published an invaluable little book, since translated into English by H.C. D.H. Prenco Lozis of Bartenberg), 18, etc.
8 Saggio eccletisistica di Malta, Malta 1871; and Descrizione storica delle chiese di Malta e Gozo, Malta 1894.
10 Malta Sacra, Malta 2008-2009.

I had the advantage of being put on my guard in the early 1950s by no less a figure than Joseph Cassar Pullicino when I naïvely blurted out that I had already written a long essay, or ‘project’ as it was called, at St. Michael’s Teachers’ Training College, dealing with the coming of Count Roger. At the time, I did not know that Cassar Pullicino had himself already written an important study of the traditions concerning the coming of Count Roger. He immediately warned me that there was a German historian who had turned much of Maltese history upside down: ‘Hemm professur Germanzi li qalibina t’istorja ta’ Malta ta’ tali flaq.’ A critical glance at Malaterra’s chronicle of the coming of Count Roger soon showed me that the German academic was correct, no Maltese Christians were involved. It changed my whole attitude. From then onwards, ‘Tradition’ was valueless for me as a source of history. My later studies merely confirmed and hardened this conviction.

Round about 1978, my colleague Dr. Dominic Fenech came across an Italian translation of Mayr’s paper and handed it over to me because he was very much aware of my keen interest in the subject. By then, I had also irrevocably returned to my early preoccupation with Maltese medieval history. It was found among the papers of the Society of Maltese History (founded in 1950) as left by Professor Andrew Vella in the departmental library after the stroke which crippled him for the last years of his life. Subsequently, Cassar Pullicino (editor of Melita Historica in 1952-60), remarking: ‘So it has surfaced again’, informed me that it had been handed over to him by Dr. Giuseppe Mifsud Bonnici (later Chief Justice) that he told me that the translation had been commissioned by his late father Dr. Carmelo Mifsud Bonnici, one of the most prominent politicians and men-of-letters in Malta in the inter-war period. This was confirmed to me personally by Dr. Mifsud Bonnici himself.

Cassar Pullicino’s own original paper on the traditions concerning the coming of Count Roger to Malta was re-issued under the editorship of A. T. Luttrell, apparently without any significant changes. In a seminal and hard-hitting paper that was read for him at an International Congress on Norman Sicily held in Palermo in 1972, Luttrell sharply criticised post-Mayr Maltese historians in general who still relied on the work of A. A. Caruana, which he followed in 1975 by the lengthy introduction to his own Medieval Malta Studies on Malta before the Knights.
and a detailed study of the ‘Invention of Tradition’ mainly by a small group of late
sixteenth century Maltese Jesuits, which came out in Melita Historica in 1977.16

In 1984, I at last tackled the Arab period of Maltese medieval history in a
cautious paper in which I emphasised the significance of the events of 870 AD and
bewailed the general lack of evidence on the topic.17 In a revised and lengthened
edition a couple of years later, I expressly acknowledged the influence of Albert
Mayr’s present paper, thus being the first Maltese to have done so publicly and
favourably.18 Of course, I had been spreading the same ideas through my lecturing
at the University and elsewhere for thirty or forty years such that they had become
almost commonplace except in the more extreme centres of conservatism. Back
in 1965, I had already clearly shown my scepticism to the use of ‘tradition’ in
local medieval history in a long and elaborate letter to the Times of Malta.19

Recently, Professor Stanley Fiorini has maintained in the Introduction to
Tristia ex Melitogaudio. Lament in Greek Verse of a XIIth century Exile on Gozo20
that in 870 AD the Byzantine inhabitants of Gozo were granted the status of
dhimmis while the whole of the island of Malta was devastated and depopulated.
In this way, he was apparently trying to save the traditional picture of ethnic
and religious continuity by limiting it to the smaller island of the Maltese archipelago.
It was an idea that ran directly counter to all historical records such as they are,
and cannot be entertained at all. I did my best to snuff it out, successfully. I
believe.21

16 ‘Gimarru Miskita u Gius Francesco Abeles: Tradition and Invention in Maltese Historiography’, Melita
20 J. Russel, S. Fiorini and H. C. R. Vella, Tristia ex Melitogaudio. Lament in Greek Verse of a XIIth-century
Exile on Gozo, Malta 2010.
21 See Review in The Sunday Times by Ugo Mifrid Borni in 16 March 2010, and consequent correspondence
dated 21 March, 4 April, 18 April, 25 April, 2 May, 9 May and 16 May 2010.

**ON THE HISTORY OF THE
OLDER CHRISTIAN CHURCH OF MALTA**

Albert Mayr* translated by Hanna Štöger**

[p. 475] The Arab conquest of Malta in 870 AD not only led to a turning point
in the political history of the island, but also profoundly influenced the population
and culture of the Maltese islands. This essay will trace the development of
the Christian church of Malta up to this specific point in time. Until now it has been
an open question whether Christianity continued under Arab rule. In order to discuss
this issue it will be necessary to examine the situation of the church in Malta
during the period that immediately followed the Norman conquest of the islands.

The first approaches to the earlier, and also the later history of the Church
of Malta, have been provided by Pirro. His work not only contains numerous errors
but also suffers from an uncritical processing of information rooted in the realms
of legends. Nevertheless, what is found in the works of Maltese historians like
Abele, Ciantar, Bex and Ferres, has been largely based on Pirro’s writings.

* A short biography of Albert Mayr is on page 17, supra.
** Hanna Štöger studied as an undergraduate at the University of Malta from where, in 1999, she graduated BA
(Hons) and presented a dissertation entitled Albert Mayr: A Legacy of Pioneer work in Maltese Archaeology.
Hanna then pursued her post-graduate studies at the University of Leiden in The Netherlands where, in 2002,
she graduated MA (cum laude) with a thesis entitled Monumental Entrance of Roman Ostia.
She is presently in the process of presenting her PhD thesis, also at the University of Leiden. Ms Štöger presently holds a
post-doctoral research position at the Faculty of Archaeology of the University of Leiden. Her specialisation is
in Roman Urbanism and analytical approaches to past urban space. Her publications include: ‘Albert Mayr
with Public Associations and Spatial Meaning’, Baduček 6, 347-362, ‘Roman Ostia: Space Syntax
and the Domestication of Space’, in Layers of Perception, Proceedings of the 5th International Conference
and Labyrinths at Roman Ostia: The Spatial Organisation of a Boustrophedon Phenomenon (Space Syntax: Applied
to the Study of Second Century AD `Gold buildings’ at a Roman Port Town’), in Proceedings of the 7th

1 (Mpp.475, 1) Sicilia sacra, Panormi 1638, lib. III. narr. VII (in the following the 3rd edition, published by
Mongione in 1773, will be quoted).
2 (Mpp.475, 2) Abele, della descrizione di Malta. Malta 1647; reprinted and amended in Ciantar, Malta
Illustrata. Malta 1772 (in the following the edition of 1772 will be quoted).
3 (Mpp.475, 3) Malta antica, Roma 1816, lib. VI.
4 (Mpp.475, 4) Descrizione storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo, Malta, 1886.