

CONSULATE OF MALTA IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA NEWSLETTER

August 2013 FRANK L SCICLUNA - HON CONSUL - FULL OF HISTORY AND CULTURE OF MALTA

Our Newsletter is read all over Australia, United States, Canada, United Kingdom and Malta

We appreciate your comments – many more to come

- Many thanks for the Consulate Newsletter which is always useful for us apart from being interesting. Please keep us on the mailing list. With renewed thanks and kind regards. Harry and Josephine Zammit Cordina
- Thank you so very much for sending me the Consular Newsletter. I really enjoyed reading it, I'm sorry to have missed out on the other previous 6 editions, Yours Faithfully Maera Zahra.
- Thanks for the Newsletter, you doing a good job, one of these days I will send you something to put on about the Maltese Guild, only I need to find the time, it seem that every day 7 days a week I have something to do with Guild's work over all. Joe Briffa
- Thank you so much some interesting reading for us, will help us increase our knowledge of Malta. It was very nice to catch up with you. M. Tabone
- Thank you for your email with the Maltese Consulate Newspaper 7. It is both informative and a pleasure to read. I was very pleased to see the positive possibilities that Malta has in expanding the film industry, whilst having such a talented representative in the Opera department. Most pleasing was the photo of the Prime Minister with our beloved Pope Francis. I take this opportunity to thank you for the time and effort that you put into being our representative. Keep up the great work. Cettina Marsh
- Please keep this up. This is great way for a lot of young people to learn more about the Maltese culture then we parents are able to teach them.
You are doing a good job. Thank you!! Andrew Borg - Manager Borg's Cleaning Services
- The SA Consulate Newsletters are most instructive, informative and educational. Keep it up. Well done. Father G Micallef
- Thank you for sending the newsletter. I thoroughly enjoy reading it. Actually, I have forwarded this edition to my sisters in Melbourne. I hope they enjoy it as much as I did. Madeliene Scicluna



Mananni Sultana 100th birthday celebration held at Xaghra

Published on Thursday, 25, July, 2013 at 16:18 in [Gozo News](http://www.gozonews.com) www.gozonews.com
Mananni Sultana, recently celebrated her 100th birthday at the Xaghra Basilica. Mananni is the Mother of Maria Sultana, a member of the Altos section of the Gozo choir, Chorus Urbanus.

Chorus Urbanus was invited to animate the Mass held to celebrate Mananni's birthday, which was led by HE Bishop Mario Grech, accompanied by a number of Priests. The Mass was attended by

Maria's numerous extended family, as well as the Minister for Gozo, Dr Anton Refalo and the Mayor of Xaghra, Mr Joe Cordina. The Mass was broadcasted live on the internet for the benefit of relatives of Maria who live abroad. The Chorus Urbanus and all its members "wish Mananni Sultana Ad Multos Annos!"

Consulate Newsletter edited by Frank Scicluna – Honorary Consul for Malta in SA

We are happy to act as a repository the latest edition of this newsletter on our website. You can read this publication by clicking the appropriate link on the menu on the left hand side of each page. If you prefer to bookmark the page directly, the link is <http://www.starsandstripesmalta.com/COMISAN.html>.

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Alan C. Bonnici (info@StarsAndStripesMalta.com)

MALTA BORN DOCTOR FINDS VITAMINB1 PATHWAY THAT COULD HOLD MALARIA CLUE



A new anti-malarial drug that stops the malaria parasite from using vitamin B1 is now plausible, researchers say.

Pharmacologist Dr Kevin Saliba, from the Australian National University, and colleagues report their findings in a recent issue of *Nature Communications*.

“We can target the pathways by which the parasite takes up the vitamin and metabolises it,” says Dr Saliba. “These pathways can serve as drug targets.”

Kevin, his proud father told this paper, was born in Malta and studied at St Albert’s College. He continued his studies at the University of Cape Town when the family migrated to South Africa in 1985, at the peak of the “private schools’ turmoil”.

As soon as he obtained his PhD he was recruited by the Australian National University in Canberra, where now he has a lab named after him

(http://biology.anu.edu.au/kevin_saliba/).

He is also a senior lecturer in the faculty of medicine at the same university.

Just like humans, malaria parasites need vitamins to grow and multiply.

Thiamine (vitamin B1) is converted in cells to a cofactor, which then binds a number of enzymes involved in energy production.

Saliba and colleagues wondered whether it might be possible to inhibit this thiamine metabolism pathway.

As a ‘probe drug’ they used an analogue of thiamine, which looks similar to the vitamin but cannot actually be used in energy production. To provide proof of principle they looked at what happens to the pathway involving two enzymes – oxoglutarate dehydrogenase and pyruvate dehydrogenase.

In an invitro experiment, the researchers found that the parasite metabolised the analogue into a cofactor that binds to the enzymes, but they found evidence that the analogue was inhibiting one of the enzymes.

Saliba and colleagues also gave the thiamine analogue to mice infected with malaria and found they lost weight.

“That’s consistent with the drug having some toxicity,” says Dr Saliba.



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HISTORY REPEATS ITSELF MALTESE REFUGEES IN 1916

Maltese Refugees denied entry to Australia

The Advertiser Saturday 14, 2002 page 27



A little known vignette of Australian history, with some remarkable parallels to recent events, happened way back in 1916. Setting off in that year in a French mail boat, the *Gange*, were 214 Maltese men would-be migrants to Australia. At the time, as citizens of Malta, they were also British subjects. They had every reason to expect that they would be admitted.



However, on arrival in Australia after a boat journey of five weeks, they found the political climate less than welcoming. The then prime minister, Billy Hughes (Picture left), was campaigning in favour of the conscription referendum. He was worried that the arrival of this boatload of migrants would fuel the fears of anti-conscriptionists, that while fighting a war overseas their jobs would be taken by such migrants. The Australian Workers Union of the time described the Maltese as "the black menace".

Accordingly, the Australian authorities invoked Section 3(a) of the Immigration (Restriction) Act. That section provided that: "Any person who, when asked to do so by an officer, fails to write out at dictation and sign in the presence of the officer a passage of 50 words in length in a European language directed by the officer is a prohibited immigrant.

The Maltese migrants, who were by then detained under armed guard, were promptly, given a test in the Dutch language - and failed. They were shipped off to the Pacific Island of Noumea.

The parallel so far with Australia's reaction to the arrival of a fresh wave of immigrants arriving by boat more than 80 years later suggests little has changed. But public outcry even during the turmoil of World War I resulted in the eventual return of the Maltese men to Australia.

One of them, Emmanuel Attard, enlisted in two world wars, and like many migrants before and after him contributed to the development of what has become a successful multicultural community.

The migration test provision replaced laws expressly prohibiting by reference to race, such a migration by refs the Victorian 1855 anti-Chinese laws. Racism was also entrenched in the Constitution, which once provided that the reckoning of the numbers of the people of the Commonwealth or of a state shouldn't include Aboriginal natives.

Laws in all states and territories, except Tasmania, now prohibit discrimination on the grounds of race. The most recent report of SA's Equal noted that there Opportunity Commission were 323 complaints relating to race lodged with the commission a significant decline over previous years.



PM anticipates trilateral solution for immigration

Speaking on irregular immigration Prime Minister Joseph Muscat (left) said that he anticipates a trilateral solution. Dr Muscat explained that in the past there have been contacts with Libya's government, as well as with Italy and Greece, and that he expects that these will be fruitful

During an interview on ONE Radio on Sunday morning, PM Muscat said that he had seen "more will than solutions" from Europe's side. On the pushback issue, Dr Muscat said that he had only said that the government was keeping all its options open, and some had assumed that he was referring to the pushback. The Opposition had spun the issue out of proportion and made him look "almost like a murderer". However, Dr Muscat said, while in

his case there had only been an assumption, in the case of the previous PN government, the European Court had just found it guilty of violating the human rights of two immigrants while they were in detention. He now had to work to clear Malta's name, Dr Muscat said.



THE ART OF GANUTELL Ganutell is a Maltese art form of making artificial flowers from wire, thread, and beads.

In his introduction to the book *Ganutell* by Maria Kerr, the Maltese scholar and historian Guido Lanfranco states that in Maltese eighteenth and nineteenth century history, one finds numerous references to ganutell which can be considered to be the Maltese art of making artistic flowers. The word ganutell is derived from the Italian cannotiglio and in fact this craft, which can also be considered to be an art, was "imported" to Malta during the eighteenth century from mainland Europe. The way the craft eventually evolved has made it distinctively Maltese.

This craft had its ups and downs and by the mid-twentieth century a considerable section of the Maltese population hardly knew of the existence of ganutell and only a few had mastered the various techniques of ganutell. The techniques had been

passed on from generation to generation by word of mouth with little or no documentation until it seemed that this craft was destined to be forgotten.

History of Ganutell

Flowers were always used as a means of decoration with artificial flowers being first used in Eastern countries. These Flowers made of different material such as fabric, paper, seashells, wood shavings, ribbons, and silk were mostly used for decorating dresses and hats and years later were mounted to decorate houses and churches. These beautiful mounts, which were kept under glass domes can still be found in private collections and in churches.

In the sixteenth century our ancestors made use of the spiral gold and silver wire called canutiglia, and together with silk thread, glass beads, pearls, gems, and gold and silver wire, made these beautiful flowers called Ganutell. In fact the word Ganutell is derived from the Spanish word canutillo or the Italian word canutiglia.

This craft or better still art was practised in monasteries and apart from the nuns, few indeed were those who really mastered the craft. The knights of St John commissioned nuns and monks to produce beautiful mounts to be given as gifts to Popes and Royalties.

In 1775 mounts were sent to Rome as gifts for the Pope. In 1787, Grand Master De Rohan sent a mount to Catherine of Russia. A very precious mount enjoys pride of place in a small chapel in Lija – Madonna tal-Mirakli Chapel. This was a present to the Virgin Mary from the cousin of Pope Pius IX who took refuge in Malta during the risorgimento. There are many more of these artistic treasures for as time went by even monks in monasteries worked Ganutell.



Because of the second world war the art of ganutell almost came to an end as only a handful continued to practice this art. In 1970 enormous interest was shown in natural flower arranging, indoor plants and dry flower techniques. Attractive as these were, they could never replace Ganutell. The late nineties brought about a sudden revival of the Ganutell flowers.

Rayon floss is spun with silver gold or coloured wire on a wooden spindle. Once the thread is prepared, various petals are worked. These petals can also be trimmed with zig-zag or twisted wire, or decorated with colourful glass beads. Once the required number of petals is complete, the flower is mounted. The required number of flowers to form a bouquet or, to give it its technical name, the mount, must then be made. The mount must obviously be designed beforehand,

giving due regard to colour and form, and when these together with all the necessary leaves and flowers are in the hands of the artist, the end result is sure to be an awe inspiring work of art. The finished mount is usually placed under a glass dome or placed in a box-frame to help preserve it and is normally placed in a prominent place to be admired by family and friends.

Ganutell is presently being also used to make head dresses for weddings and special occasions, wedding and Holy Communion dresses are also being trimmed with ganutell flowers.

Notwithstanding the fact that the flowers are somewhat fragile, they are strongly gaining in popularity and this augurs well for a craft which had practically died out. Ganutell (usually Handcrafted Flowers) is a Maltese method of creating flowers by utilising wire and embroidery floss. Ganutell is an old and unique Maltese Art which has just recently been revived.

Ganutell flower making consists of first and foremost twisting silver or gold plated thin wire with thread. Thin thread of various colours is used to produce different colour schemes. Soon after assembling the wire and thread, this is twisted over a slightly thicker silver/gold plated wire to produce petals. After creating a number of petals, these are assembled around a bead or pearl so that a flower is shaped. Different sizes are produced according to the sizes of the petals twisted. The petals can be made of different patterns. Besides, sequins, beads and small pearls could also be inserted within each petal to offer a richer looking flower.

CARMELITE CHURCH – MDINA



In the first Carmelite settlement on Mount Carmel, the oratory or church was the architectural centre of the Hermitage. While later foundations rarely retained this architectural setup, the church is still the spiritual centre of every Carmelite community. The Friars gather daily in the church for the celebration of the Eucharist and the Liturgy of the Hours (formerly called Divine Office) at different hours of the day. The church is also the place where they minister to God's people, celebrating the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance and preaching. The first Carmelites dedicated their church on

Mt Carmel to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. By doing this, they were in fact choosing her as Patroness of the Order. Their spiritual heirs throughout the centuries continued to dedicate most of their churches to her. The Carmelite Church at Mdina is dedicated to the Annunciation of the Virgin.

The Church was built between 1660 and 1675 and is believed to have been designed by the French military engineer Mederico Blondel des Croisettes (1628-1698). It is one of the most important centralized churches in Maltese Baroque architecture and was the first church to be built in Malta to an elliptical plan.

The Carmelite Church has always played an important role in the city of Mdina. The Cathedral Chapter operated from this church after the earthquake of 1693 which had caused considerable damage to the Cathedral which had to be rebuilt. The Chapter remained here until October 1702 when the new Cathedral was consecrated.

During the French occupation the church was despoiled of its silver in July 1798. The French returned in September to steal the church's precious damask hangings. Maltese rebels immediately locked the doors of the church as the French approached and, it is said, a young boy climbed up to the belfry to sound the alarm. This event sparked off the revolution against the tyranny of the French.

In the church, one can appreciate the extensive restoration projects that have been undertaken, especially the spectacular dome painting and the choir. The church boasts of works by significant painters including, Mattia Preti, Stefano Erardi, Michele Bellanti and Giuseppe Cali. Among the important sculptural works are the ornately carved and gilded wooden frame around the titular painting designed by Pietro Paolo Troisi, and the processional statue of the Virgin of Mount Carmel by the Maltese sculptor Andrea Imbroll. ent hours of the day. The church is also the place where they minister to God's people, celebrating the Eucharist and the Sacrament of Penance and preaching. The first Carmelites dedicated their church on Mt Carmel to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God. By doing this, they were in fact choosing her as Patroness of the Order. Their spiritual heirs throughout the centuries continued to dedicate most of their churches to her. The Carmelite Church at Mdina is dedicated to the Annunciation of the Virgin.



Bizzilla – Maltese Lace

Lacemaking in Malta and Gozo trace their origins back to the 16th century. Needlelace was made following the same style as in Venice. This continued until the 19th century when the economic depression present in the islands nearly led to its extinction. Two people are known to be responsible for introducing and promoting a new lace in these islands in the mid 1800's. Lady Hamilton Chichester sent lacemakers from Genoa to Malta, where the technique of Italian bobbin lace was developed. They used the old needlelace patterns and turned them into ones using bobbins, instead of the slower time-consuming needles.

In Gozo it was the promotion by designer, Dun Guzepp Diacono, that made lacemaking a way of raising the standard of living for local families. It wasn't long after its introduction before the Maltese/Gozo lace developed its own unique style from lace on the continent.

(Photo below) A local resident (Birgu) displaying her lace work, as well as, the traditional Maltese costume the Ghonnella. The Ghonnella is made of cotton or silk and is always black in colour. One of the most recognizable traits of Maltese and Gozitan lace is the creamy, honey coloured, Spanish silk from which most of it is made. Black silk was also used until the 20th century when it declined in fashion so it is harder to find



today. Later linen was also used in some pieces used for household purposes instead of clothing, as it was more durable.

Another distinguishing feature of Maltese/Gozo lace is the 8 pointed Maltese crosses that are worked into most, but not all of this lace. These crosses are done in what lacemakers call whole or cloth stitch.

The last of the most recognizable features are the leaves known as "wheat ears" or "oats". They are plump and rounded in shape compared to the long narrow Bedfordshire lace leaves. Bedfordshire lace, which is sometimes compared to Maltese lace, has some similarities and were probably both developed from the Genosese bobbin lace.

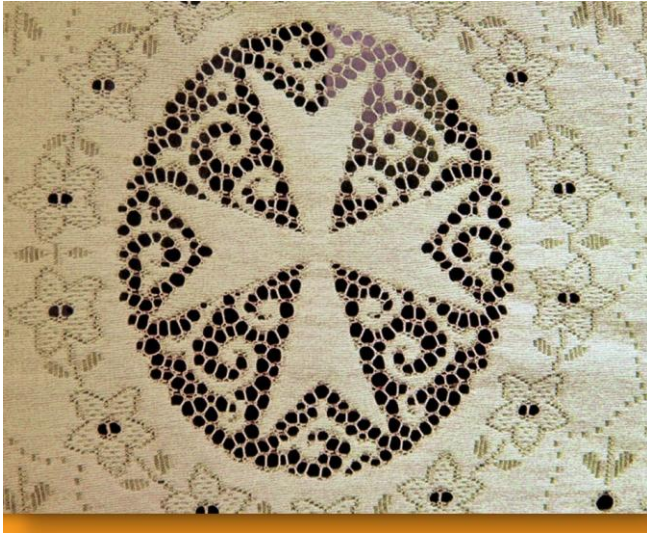
It is interesting to note that larger pieces of real Maltese lace are made by piecing together sections rarely wider than 6 inches. One more thing to look for in assessing Maltese design is the more fluid styles. Genoese lace is more geometric and without the swirls developed in Gozo. Another interesting item that lacemakers might find interesting is that the patterns do not have the pin holes pre-marked as in the closely related Genoese lace.

History of Maltese Lace - In 1839 Thomas McGill, who issued A Handbook, or Guide, for Strangers visiting Malta, wrote that "the females of the Island make also excellent lace; the lace mitts and gloves wrought by the Malta girls are bought by all ladies coming to the island; orders from England are often sent for them on account of their beauty and cheapness. " The 18th century, by which time lace was already a well-established local industry, provides iconographic evidence of its use in various paintings by Francesco Zahra (1710-1773) and Antoine de Favray (1706-1798), representing high dignitaries of the Order of St John, ecclesiastics and Maltese ladies of society.

Agius De Soldanis also records in his dictionary that Malta lace had achieved a high degree of perfection and compared favourably with that produced by Dutch women. Its widespread use for adornment may be inferred from the fact that lace was included with other articles in a bandu or proclamation enacted by Grand Master Ramon Perellos in 1697 aimed at repressing the wearing of gold, silver, jewellery, cloth of gold, silks and other materials of value.

The Maltese word for lace, bizzilla, suggests a comparatively recent origin. In fact its introduction to these islands can date further back than the 16th century, when the art of lace-making, probably introduced into Venice from the East began

to spread in Europe. From Venice the new technique was soon taken up by Genoa, where pillow lace, as distinct from Venetian point lace, developed. Modern Maltese lace is derived directly from Genoese lace.



To quote from Mincoff and Marriage (Pillow Lace, 1907), "This heavier Genoese lace was made from 1625 onwards. Its lineal descendant is modern Maltese, which was introduced into the island by lace workers brought from Genoa in 1833 by Lady Hamilton-Chichester. "Though Genoese's by extraction the industry, flourishing exceedingly in Malta, has developed a character of its own, retaining as essential the Genoese leaf work but very little of its solid tapes, light twists taking their place. Characteristic is also the Maltese cross in the patterns and the cream or black silk in which the lace is usually worked."

From the above one may infer that lace making, a flourishing industry in the 18th century, fell on evil days and was on the decline during the first years of British rule, and therefore, rather than introduce it into Malta, Lady Hamilton-Chichester helped to revive the industry in 1833. It is a fact that this date coincides roughly with a period of considerable revival and expansion. About the same time lace making spread to the whole of

Gozo and became a thriving industry there through the efforts of two priests: Canon Salvatore Bondi (1790-1859) and Fr Joseph Diacono (1847-1924).

Lace figured among the objects sent from Malta to the Exhibition of Industries held in London in 1881. The commercial potential of bobbin lace as developed in Malta led British missionaries to copy and introduce local patterns in the Far East, both in China and India. Patterns were copied first in silk and later in linen and cotton thread.

There is a steady demand for lace by tourists. To ensure the survival of this ancient craft, lace making is taught in Government trade schools for girls, while private bodies such as the Society of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce also hold special evening classes. From time to time exhibitions are held. Besides arousing public awareness of the cultural importance of this aspect of Malta's national heritage, such initiatives also inspire deeper study of the history and techniques of local lace among women's organisations and in academic circles.~~~~~

MALTESE STONE HUT – IL-GIRNA



Nothing typifies the Maltese countryside more than the ubiquitous dry-stone wall that wind their way all over the land dividing the hot, dry soil into tiny parcels, from which the farmer ekes out an existence (*Il-hajt tas-sejjieh*). There, in the middle of it in the countryside of the western and northwestern part of the island lies the "girna", the Maltese stone hut.

The "girna", is a single room erected to meet the needs of farmers and herdsmen. It has a double wall built of undressed stones, which are left unplastered. Internally, its ceiling is shaped like a dome, while the external wall is usually circular, although it can be square or rectangular or, in rare instances, oval-shaped. Its convex-shaped roof is covered with fragments of rotten rock and stone and sometimes with sand and lime, and rarely, with ground pottery (deffun). The Maltese "girna" looks an extremely plain structure; its beauty ties in the skill of

its construction, built as it is with fairly sized stones ably laid next to one another. Since the "giren" are mostly located in the west and north west of Malta, where there are large quantities of loose limestone rocks on the surface, many of them are constructed with such material. The "girna" has one horizontal slab, or else is arched or triangular in form.

There isn't fixed rule that determines the size, height or width of the "gima"; it is probably built according to the needs of the owner and the actual skills the builder. The most beautiful and the largest circular "giren" are to be found in the stretch

of fields and rocky ground between the Red Tower and Cirkewwa, while the largest square ones are to be found at **Ix-Xagħra Il-Hamra**, in the limits of Manikata. Although some Maltese did use the 'giren' for habitation, these structures were originally built to meet the personal needs of farmers and herdsmen and for the raising of live stock. Very often it was necessary for farmers to work fields situated a long way from their farmhouses and they had to have somewhere to shelter during the hot summer hours or during some sudden downpour.

In this shelter or "girna" they used to keep the food and drink they took with them and any small children they could not leave behind. In it they kept their tools, stored potatoes, onions, hay, etc. Some farmers used to dry figs, tomatoes and carobs in the sun on the roof of their "girna". Today, the "giren" are almost completely abandoned because their owners do not have any further use for them. There are still many "giren" in the Maltese countryside, but a large number of them have collapsed or have suffered damage. As such, the future of these primitive structures part of Malta's architectural heritage, is not at all heartening.

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## History of Wine Production in Malta Martin Morana



An archaeological dig in Mgarr ix-Xini, Gozo, has recently shed light on the Mediterranean island's wine producing past. The excavations have reinforced the fact that wine was an important part of the Maltese economy since Classical times. Troughs that are believed to have been used for grape pressing were discovered. The presses embedded in the rock may date to several centuries B.C. and would have been connected to a series of channels that would have allowed the juice collected from the grapes to flow down.

Although wine production in Malta dates back to over two thousand years the evidence for the production of wines is scanty.

It is known from documents that vines were grown in Malta during the mediaeval period, but a lot of wine was imported too. These wines were then mostly imported from Sicily. This was mainly because most of the local grapes harvested were eaten and not pressed into wine. In Malta as in many Mediterranean countries wine was drunk mixed with water.

Indeed the consumption of wine was quite considerable during the centuries. This was mainly so because not only was wine an exciting proposal for the taste buds but it was believed that it had nutritional value. Many physicians also recommended it to their patients as they believed that wine could be beneficial to health due to its antiseptic nature. No wonder people toasted to each others health when drinking wine. In Maltese there is a saying that states that '*L-inbid ħalib ix-xjuħ*', meaning that wine is the milk for older folk. In late mediaeval times imported wine was being taxed as noted in documents from that period. In the 15th century Maltese farmers were complaining that imported wines were ruining their business, a business that contributed to a smaller or larger extent to some one thousand persons.

During the time when the Order of the Knights of St. John ruled the Maltese islands wine was being consumed in great quantities both by the Maltese as well as by the Knights of the Order. Taverns were opening not only in Valletta but also in the towns and villages. More wine was being imported from Spain, Naples, Florence, Sicily and Burgundy to suit the palate of the European aristocratic Knights. It is known that only the German Knights drank wine without diluting it in water. Normally wine was diluted in the ratio of one is to three with water.

During the British period one could count over 120 varieties of grapes before the viticulture was attacked by phylloxera in 1920 which wiped out many vines. Wine found a ready market with the presence of the British sailors. These however, soon turned to spirits like whisky, rum and brandy. The local grape variety, the *Gellewża* (red) and *Girgentina* (white), as well as international varieties including Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah (or Shiraz), Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Moscato were being harvested locally since the 1970s and 80s. In the 20th century some local wine merchants emerged to import wines in greater quantities. Two of these companies eventually started to produce their own wine. Some of the wine they produce is harvested as grapes from well established local farming communities. Other wines are produced from grapes that are cultivated in nearby Italy and then imported to Malta where these are quickly pressed into wine.

Since Malta's entry into the European Union the wine producers are bound by strict rules of conduct that compel them to clearly state which wines are locally grown and which are not. Indeed a DOC Document of Origin of Country must be issued with those wines that claim their entire origin to the Maltese islands. The certification process spans the entire spectrum of production including controls on the grapes being produced by registered farmers, the wine making process



and the final product. The wine is further subject to laboratory analysis and an organoleptic analysis by a professional tasting panel. The official tasting panel appointed is that of the Enoteca di Siena which, since its founding in 1933, has devoted itself to promoting quality wines.

## **MALTA INTERNATIONAL CHOIR FESTIVAL**

The Ministry for Tourism together with the Malta Tourism Authority and Interkultur of Germany would like to announce the 5th edition of the Malta International Choir Festival that will be held between the 31st of October and the 3rd of November. This year Malta will be hosting a record number of approximately 40 choirs from all over Europe.



The Ministry for Tourism has launched a website that will be promoting the choral scene in Malta. The website which can be viewed on [www.maltachoirfest.com](http://www.maltachoirfest.com) provides information on all the well established Maltese choirs together with any forthcoming events. It is also intended to be a point of reference for all music lovers as well as choirs from all over the world to establish direct contact with the local choirs.

The Ministry for Tourism also intends to encourage and offer all possible help for choirs to form an association with

the aim of promoting their common interests and to seek out ways and means to improve performance opportunities.

The Malta International Choir Festival which is held biennially is organised with the participation of Interkultur of Germany, an entity that is specialised on a professional level to organise large scale choir festivals all over the world.



## **Yummy Hobz Biz-Zejt - "Bread with oil"**

No bread compares to the traditional Maltese loaf and I'm sure that many out there agree with me. It's so wholesome and tasty and yet so plain! As in many other places, what was poor man's fare is now rich man's favour. Not that one has to be rich to acquire such food. Many Maltese still eat it as a snack or as part of their supper. Both the stonecutter in the quarry and the farmer in the field, as well the family relaxing by the seaside on a delicious Summer evening, all love to dig their teeth into this tasty meal. It satisfies the taste buds and fills the stomach in the

simplest and most complete way. It is inexpensive and easy to prepare, but it is true that richer foods and faster food have replaced most of what today can be considered as traditional food.

In the past, the manual workers used to take lunch which consisted of half a loaf of our excellent bread, hollowed out and filled with tomatoes, oil, olives, anchovies and accompanied by a glass of wine. They then wrapped it up in a cloth for freshness and then sliced it up with a penknife at the time of eating. It was very filling and practical especially for outdoor workers. This tradition is unfortunately giving way to the more regular sandwich.

When one sometimes pass in front of a bakery the heavenly smell of baking bread evokes memories of when dad used to come from work carrying with him a freshly baked bread still crackling hot. Children used to make a feast with a simple loaf of bread. Mum sliced the bread and we siblings were left free to prepare our **Hobz biz-Zejt** the way we wanted. I was usually allowed to have the round crusty part (il-genba) from which I dug out the middle and filled it up with all the stuff



that I could get hold of. The term 'Hobz tal-Malti' makes me conjure up images of this delicious snack eaten on the sand, watching the sun set, with the salty sea smell lingering on one's skin. Hobz biz-zejt somehow always tastes better eaten at the beach – did you ever realise that? So what exactly is this hobz biz-zejt? If I had to translate this term it would literally mean "Bread with oil" which up to a certain extent is true because

drizzled oil is one of the basic ingredients but it has more than just that. And what goes on in this Hobz biz-Zejt??

The first thing you have to do is to get hold of a fresh Maltese loaf (hobza). The crust should be cracked and crunchy and the middle soft and white. Cut thick slices of bread. Halve a couple of ripe summer tomatoes and rub the cut side over the bread until it gets a reddish hue. If using tomato paste, (kunserva) just spread over the bread. Next dip one side of the bread into a plate of good olive oil. Or else you can drizzle the oil onto the bread. Sprinkle with salt and freshly cracked black pepper. That's the basic recipe. What follows is up to you. You can either have it as it is or else add some of the following ingredients. The other ingredients vary widely, although capers and olives are almost universally included. Here is the list of ingredients I compiled: Butter beans marinated in garlic and oil, olives, marinated vegetables, lettuce, anchovies, tuna, onion slices, peppered cheeselets (gbejniet), capers, marjoram, mint, basil, pickled onions, bigilla, sundried tomatoes, cucumber slices, artichoke hearts and even ham. Yes!! I was told that the Qormi people like having their hobz biz-zejt with ham!

## FIGS, FIGS AND MORE FIGS

It's fig season -- time to sprint to the greengrocer and snap up these small, soft-skinned, pear-shaped fruits. We're talking about fresh figs, of course. Most Australia are far more familiar with figs in the form of gooey, chewy cookie fillings, or the brown, sticky-sweet dried figs you see packed tightly in boxes or laced together with twine.

But fresh and dried figs are as different as grapes and raisins. Cut open, fresh figs look positively exotic -- juicy crimson or yellow flesh packed with minuscule edible seeds.



When the fruit is fresh, the seeds are almost indistinct in texture and flavor from the flesh. When figs are dried, the skin thickens and the seeds become grainy and almost crunchy. There's really nothing exotic about figs. They've been around practically forever and are one of the oldest fruits mentioned in literature.

Cleopatra hid the poisonous asp she used to end her life in a basket of fresh figs. The Bible says Adam and Eve sewed fig leaves together to cover their bodies after the apple incident in Eden. Other Old and New Testament references to this delicacy abound. If you've never eaten a fresh fig, you're not alone. A

lickety-split season -- late June through mid-August and sporadically through the fall -- plus difficulty in transporting figs made this delicate, highly perishable fruit hard to find in our neck of the woods. Improved shipping techniques, however, and a changing ethnic climate are transforming fresh figs into a sought-after commodity.

Figs are native to Asia Minor and specifically to Turkey and the tiny Mediterranean island of Malta. The dark-skinned Smyrna fig was introduced into Mexico by the Spanish in the mid-16th Century. Franciscan monks brought figs to San Diego area missions in the late 1700s. The crop spread to various missions along California's coast and produced the famous dark-purple Mission or black Mission fig. Most figs consumed in the United States still come from California. There are hundreds of fig varieties spread all over the world, especially in countries with warm weather.

Figs don't ripen once picked, so it's important that they be at their peak when harvested. Depending on availability, figs can sell for as much as \$1 a fruit. In season, the price should drop considerably. All depends on the harvest, which this summer is expected to be down because of weather problems in California, local distributors say.



The fruits are extremely fragile, and the skin bruises and tears easily. Choose figs when they're plump and soft to the touch. Eat them within a day or two of purchase. Since the fruit is shipped ripe, it's common, and acceptable, for the base of the fig to tear slightly or become moist and skin around the stem to be slightly shriveled.

Fresh figs are almost always best served simply. Like kiwi, their most interesting and stunning feature is how they look when cut. Figs are seldom chopped or sliced. It's the beauty of the halved or quartered fig that's most appealing. And while some recipes insist figs be peeled, most don't require it because the skin is quite thin. Europeans serve fresh figs at room temperature or warm, never chilled. Traditional accompaniments include cheese, nuts or smoked meats as a first course. When eaten as part of a dessert, a natural partner is cream, whipped, sweetened and sometimes spiked with a fruity liqueur.

You'll find recipes for fresh figs mostly in Mediterranean cookbooks. Since their mild flavor is compatible with so many foods, recipes run the gamut from figs served alone with a fresh custard to figs served with spicy lamb or chicken. Any way you eat them, you'll be participating in a food custom of biblical proportions.



## **JELLYFISH (Bram) IN MALTA**

**It's summer. It's hot. It's officially jellyfish season.** The most common jellyfish in Malta is Pelagia Noctiluca, known as the Mauve Stinger. It is pink and its bell is about 7-10cm in diameter. However their tentacles are hardly seen and can be metres long. There are specimens with tentacles about 3 m long. However their sting, although painful, is not usually fatal, and scars usually fade away after about a week or two. I've also encountered species which look very similar to the Box Jellyfish. I do not know what they actually are, as they are not listed in books of Maltese Marine Species, however they are NOT the box jellyfish, as box jellyfish are the most dangerous

jellyfish and their sting is fatal, however people who were stung by this jellyfish didn't die. The pain is not as bad as that of the Mauve Stinger. However it is advised that you don't dive with your eyes open. These jellyfish and their tentacles are transparent - very difficult to be seen if you are diving with your eyes open. There are now sun screens with an anti jellyfish sting mixed in with it - available at a lot of touristy places but all dive shops have it. Carry a small bottle of surgical spirit/pure alcohol or vinegar with you. If you get stung do not rub it as that spreads the poison. Get something flat (like a piece of card) and scrape along the sting to remove as much of the poison as possible from the skin. Liberally apply anything acidic - vinegar, coke, surgical spirit etc (or even pee on it). The BEST is aloe vera - if you see an aloe vera plant or prickly pear (the inside) just nip a piece off and rub it on (not usually possible or not very easy!). Never put fresh water on it. OR buy a tube of anti histamine cream and carry that with you.

## **FIREWORKS IN MALTA** (Maltavista.net)



A journey of fire!

Fireworks in Malta have a long tradition which is centuries old. Indeed the craft of pyrotechnics in Malta goes back to the time of the Order of the Knights of St John. The Order which was conventual, aristocratic and military used to celebrate the most important feasts by special pyrotechnic displays. Such firework displays were an expression of rejoicing on special occasions, such as the election of a Grand Master or a Pope, as well as on the birth of a prince.

Pyrotechnics must have been inspired by cannon shots and musket fire. The feu de joie which was a salute by the musketeers produced a celebratory welcome to any dignitary. From this developed the

musketterija which today is a series of hundreds of explosions of crackers firing in rapid succession. These are attached to a string placed on the roof top of a church or other large building.

The solfarelli d'aria were a series of colourful weak shots fired in quick succession into the sky, The Jigjifogooh (Italian: gioco di fuoco) is better known as St Catherines wheels (irdieden). This is a mechanized and rotating set of wheels attached to a pole on the ground which provide a rotating movement for the burning gas tubes.

This centuries-old tradition is still very much alive in the crowded calendar of village festas that take place all over Malta and Gozo. Were you to fly to Malta any time between June and mid-September you will be surprised to find that firework displays is taking place practically every weekend starting on Friday.

There are some 35 fireworks factories and double that number of towns and villages where these displays are part of the traditional celebrations of patron saints.

In between these celebrations there occur unfortunately also periods of mourning. This is related to the accidental death of pyro-technicians whose life is cut short by Fireworks in Malta have a long tradition which is centuries old. Indeed the craft of pyrotechnics in Malta goes back to the time of the Order of the Knights of St John. The Order which was conventual, aristocratic and military used to celebrate the most important feasts by special pyrotechnic displays. Such firework displays were an expression of rejoicing on special occasions, such as the election of a Grand Master or a Pope, as well as on the birth of a prince.

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## **Active Anti-birdhunting**



The hunting of birds in springtime is undertaken by registered hunters using shotguns. The licence allows hunters to shoot quail and turtle dove for two weeks in April. In 2013 over 9,487 hunters were given licences to shoot a maximum of 11,000 Turtle Doves and 5,000 Quail between them. Some hunters also target other birds, especially rare and protected species such as Marsh Harrier, Cuckoo and Nightjar.

The birds flying over Malta are heading towards northern Europe to breed. Killing birds in springtime means that they will not be able to breed and so this affects their overall population. The numbers of both Common Quail and European Turtle Dove are declining and so they have been registered as species of conservation concern. This means that hunting them for sport could be very damaging to the ability of these species to survive.

The European Union's Birds Directive forbids spring hunting. Malta was fined following a hearing at the European Court of Justice for allowing spring hunting between 2004 and 2007. The Malta government now allows spring hunting through a derogation of the Birds Directive. While the EU sets very strict conditions spring hunting to take place

The Coalition is lobbying the European Commission to enforce the Birds Directive and so abolish spring hunting on Malta. This includes providing evidence that the derogation that allows spring hunting on Malta is not legally sound as well as showing that the strict conditions that are meant to be applied to hunting in springtime are not properly enforced. Science shows that spring hunting is very damaging to wild bird populations and the protection of birds for their own sake



and the enjoyment of as many people as possible is the core objective of the Coalition. Furthermore, spring hunting is expressly forbidden under EU law and the Coalition considers that the law should be properly applied on Malta.

## Meet the artist – To encourage children in a love for the arts



'Meet the artist' is a new initiative by the Gozo Culture Office "to help instill in children a love for the arts and creativity." Children attending the Don Bosco Oratory Summer Club in Victoria, recently had the opportunity to meet the artist Justin Fazon, who has just concluded an exhibition of his works at the Banca Giuratale Foyer in Victoria.

Justin Falzon is a budding young artist hailing from the Gozitan village of Nadur. His enthusiasm and passion for the arts were the key factors that stole the attention of the participating children, who eagerly penciled their ideas to paper in the presence of Justin himself and surrounded by the works featuring in his exhibition themed 'Skullscapes.' Commenting towards the end of the session, Justin was convinced that such an initiative left the children intrigued about their artistic capabilities, transmitting the environment around

them onto paper and making theirs the world of creativity.

## Consuls asked to propose projects to bring investment to Malta

Malta's consuls overseas are being requested to propose at least one project a year aimed at bringing investment to Malta and exploring opportunities.

Addressing the consuls at Smart City this morning, where they gathered for their biennial conference, Foreign Minister George Vella said the advancement of Malta's economic and cultural interests overseas was topmost of the Government's agenda.



"Now, like never before we need to extend our reach and use all the means at our disposal in order to continue to attract high quality foreign direct investment to our islands. This is our focus and this will be the main focus of my Ministry during this legislature."

Dr Vella told the consuls the government looked at them to enhance Malta's reputation in several areas, including the financial services, maritime and aviation sectors.

"We have successfully retained our position as one of the largest maritime flags in the world... We will not succumb to being a flag of convenience but a serious flag which will continue to contribute to the highest industry standards.

"This Government is fully committed to further enhancing it and continue to develop the services connected to our maritime industry... The same will be done with aviation. Plans are fully on their way to create a national civil aviation authority which will ensure a comprehensive national aviation policy." Dr Vella said the Government wanted to encourage educational institutions.

"This will not only give Malta access to budding experts in the future but also ensure an ever growing international feel to our institutions." Consuls should engage more with the ministry and agencies they met to look at all possibilities of networking and creating opportunities for investment and promotion. "My ministry will be calling upon you to propose at least one project a year aimed at bringing investment to Malta and exploring opportunities... Malta cannot afford to be complacent – we want to be proactive and engage our networks and partners overseas. This is the mission of my ministry and to which I will be giving my full attention," he said.

Visit this site on <http://www.fecca.org.au/mosaic/>



Our Newsletter is on

<http://www.starsandstripesmalta.com/COMISAN.html>

This website works towards the preservation of the common US heritage amongst US citizens living in the Maltese islands

## **MALTESE YOUTH IN BRIZIL WITH POPE FRANCIS**



A delegation of around 100 Maltese people joined in with the crowd of around three million young Christians on Copacabana Beach in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, for the concluding Mass by Pope Francis for the 15th celebration of 'World Youth Day.'

This trip was coordinated by the Kummissjoni Djoesana Zghazagh and led by Auxiliary Bishop Charles J. Scicluna.

The theme for this edition of WYD, "Go and make disciples of all nations" (Matthew 28,19), impels the experience to live the WYD week itself.

In his Homily Pope Francis said: Brother Bishops and Priests, Dear Young Friends, "Go and make disciples of all nations." With these words, Jesus is speaking to each one of us,

saying: "It was wonderful to take part in World Youth Day, to live the faith together with young people from the four corners of the earth, but now you must go, now you must pass on this experience to others." Jesus is calling you to be a disciple with a mission! Today, in the light of the word of God that we have heard, what is the Lord saying to us? Three simple ideas: Go, do not be afraid, and serve.