

# ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN STUDIES

SUPPLEMENT 54

## THE LURE OF THE ANTIQUE

Essays on Malta and Mediterranean Archaeology in  
Honour of Anthony Bonanno

Edited by

Nicholas C. VELLA, Anthony J. FREND  
and Horatio C.R. VELLA



PEETERS

2018

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Anthony BONANNO

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## INTRODUCTION



*‘INVESTIGATOR ANTIQUITATIS’:*  
HONOURING THE ACADEMIC LEGACY OF  
ANTHONY BONANNO

Nicholas C. VELLA, Anthony J. FRENDON and Horatio C. R. VELLA

This volume celebrates Anthony Bonanno, the person who has dedicated his life to archaeology and to the institution where he has worked, and continues to do so in his seventy-first year. To write a short appreciation of Anthony Bonanno is both a great honour and a daunting prospect, for it is hard to write about the archaeology in and of Malta over the last fifty years without reference to his work, his teaching, and his efforts to develop archaeology academically at the University of Malta.

Tony – as he is known to his friends, colleagues and acquaintances – grew up in Żejtun, Malta. He joined the Bachelor of Arts course at the Royal University of Malta in 1963, at the age of 16, having completed his secondary schooling at De La Salle College. He came to the Classics indirectly, having to study Latin in order to enroll on the Bachelor’s programme, with French and Italian as main subjects. He registered as a provisional student and studied Latin privately first, followed by ancient Greek subsequently. In this he was helped by a priest from his home town, Revd Salvino Galea, and Revd Dr Joseph Busuttill, a classical specialist of quite some standing.

In 1968 Tony obtained his degree with Honours. It was Mgr Edward Coleiro, the Professor of Latin and the Head of the Department of Classics at the University of Malta, and foremost expert on Vergil, who believed that archaeology should be an integral part of the Bachelor’s programme (Fig. 1a). Seeing the blow that Latin had received as a result of Vatican Council’s decision to replace it with vernacular languages for liturgical purposes, Coleiro advised Tony to seek further studies in archaeology at the University of Palermo. With this institution an agreement had been entered, on Coleiro’s initiative, to conduct archaeological excavations in Malta, in particular through the work of Dr Rita Virzi. Bonanno obtained a state scholarship which enabled him to read for a *Laurea in Lettere* specialising in Classical Archaeology (*Indirizzo Classico*). Level headed, as fellow student and friend Nunzio Allegro would recall to us in conversation years later, Tony kept his distance from the student revolutions and university sit-ins that took Italy by storm in order to complete his degree on time. He took part in the annual excavation campaigns of the University’s Istituto di Archeologia e Storia dell’Arte Antica at the site of the ancient Greek city of Himera, on the north coast of Sicily, under the direction of the dynamic Prof. Nicola Bonacasa. With Tony were a group of students with whom he travelled to attend conferences in Tunisia and Algeria. Many went on to have distinguished academic careers, not least one contributor to this volume (Belvedere) (Fig. 1b, 2a).

These were formative years during which Tony acquired the traditional grounding in Classics, which was to prove so important in his later research and career generally. They



a.



b.

**Fig. 1.** a – A group of students from the Bachelor's programme visiting the Roman bathing complex at Ghajn Tuffieħa with Mgr Coleiro (centre) and Revd Dr Busuttil (to Coleiro's right) in April 1965. Tony Bonanno is crouching behind Coleiro (photograph reproduced by courtesy of Geraldine Sciberras); b – Tony Bonanno (centre) with a group of fellow students from Palermo in Algeria, 1969, including Nunzio Allegro (to his right) and Oscar Belvedere (photograph reproduced by courtesy of Nunzio Allegro).

were also happy years when lasting friendships were forged – aided, it would seem, not only by Tony's generous and humane character, but also by his purchasing an old Fiat 500 which allowed a degree of mobility to those fellow students who would fit inside it. Under Bonacasa's supervision, Bonanno went on to write and defend a thesis on Greek and Roman sculpture in Malta's main museum and collections. After his stint in Palermo, Tony returned to Malta where he passed public examinations for the post of Assistant Curator at the Museums Department. He renounced the position to take up the post of Assistant Lecturer in Coleiro's department where he started teaching Classical art and archaeology within the newly founded courses on the History of Mediterranean Civilization and Classical Culture and Civilization.

A requirement of the post Tony held at the university was that post-graduate studies had to be pursued for promotion. The traditional route followed by the majority of Maltese was to do so in Italy (obtaining a '*specializzazione*', or in the UK, reading for a PhD). Going against the suggestion of Coleiro, who favoured Italy as a clear sign that dependence on Britain needed to be curtailed, Tony opted for a PhD after having received support from the Anglophile rector, Prof. Edwin Borg Costanzi. After all, in opting for England, he was following in the footsteps of the four resident Classicists in the department who had all obtained their doctorate from the University of London. A few days after he married Mary Rose Galea in December 1971, Tony enrolled at the foremost tertiary institution for archaeological education – the Institute of Archaeology in London. There, he met two of our contributors to this volume (Frank Sear and Caroline Williams). In London, Tony worked under the supervision of Donald Strong until the latter's sudden death in 1973 meant that he was then supervised by Richard Reece, a budding scholar of Romano-British coins who had been to Malta to work on the numismatic collection at the National Museum of Archaeology in 1969 and 1970. This was to be the beginning of a fruitful collaboration between the two and of a relationship that helped several of Tony's students who embarked on graduate studies in the United Kingdom and who found in Richard a source of genuine interest in their studies and generous support during their stay.

Bonanno went on to obtain his doctorate in the Archaeology of the Roman Provinces in 1975, having defended his thesis on portraits and other heads on Roman historical reliefs up to the Severan age, published the following year as the sixth monograph in the British Archaeological Reports series. During his studies in London, Tony travelled to Libya more than once to take part in the full-scale excavations that the UK-based Society of Libyan Studies was carrying out jointly with the Libyan Department of Antiquities at a newly discovered site in Benghazi. This was Berenike, a Hellenistic/Roman city named after the wife of Ptolemy III. There Tony was responsible for the cataloguing of finds, especially the sculpture and terracottas which he published in the final report. This hands-on work is something that Tony was to enjoy doing whenever the opportunity came his way several years later. He still does, in fact, and has encouraged many students to do likewise. Not happy to embrace the theoretical debates that took British archaeology by storm in the late seventies and eighties simply for the sake of keeping up with the times, Tony was, and remains, a quintessentially rational and empirical thinker.

Back at the University of Malta, Bonanno was promoted to Lecturer the year he completed his doctorate, and he was able to teach archaeology, mostly to students enrolled on evening degree programmes, besides teaching Greek and Latin texts, in the original and in translation. The political situation in Malta in the increasingly challenging years of the late 1970s and early 1980s hindered any attempts to promote the discipline of archaeology at the university. Matters came to a head in 1979 when the humanities and the sciences came under fire by the government led by the controversial Dom Mintoff, and both faculties were suppressed altogether. Some members of the academic staff, colleagues of Bonanno, decided to leave the island altogether. Others, like Tony, by now father of two young daughters, decided to stay on (Fig. 2c). Tony's appointment was transferred to the Faculty of Education where he taught archaeology, ancient history and art. In addition, between 1982 and 1984, at the behest of the Minister of Education who thought that some academics had a poor teaching load, he was required to spend three days a week at the National Library of Malta. This time, spent with his colleagues, the historian Godfrey Wettinger and the classicist Revd Nicholas Debono Montebello, was particularly fruitful and resulted not only in his obtaining a good knowledge of the antiquarian literature about the Maltese islands, but also leading to the discovery of some seventeenth-century documents of note. One of these, the will of the Vice-Chancellor of the Order of St John, Giovanni Francesco Abela, has inspired one of the contributions to this volume (Grima).

Despite the challenging times, for which Tony took a formal stand by running for the 1981 general elections on the ticket of the party in opposition in the notoriously Labour stronghold of the third district, his activities in Malta continued unabated. In 1977, he joined forces with Anthony Luttrell who had just completed his term as lecturer in the Department of History at the University of Malta, and Tom Blagg, one of Britain's foremost experts on Roman architectural sculpture, to carry out important stratigraphic excavations around and inside the late medieval church of the Annunciation at Ħal Millieri on the outskirts of Żurriq in south-central Malta (Fig. 2b). Their efforts were subsequently published by the University of Malta and the archaeological report remains, to this day, the only one on a Maltese medieval site to have been published. Tony was also involved in a field-walking survey, the first of its kind in Malta, around Ħas-Saptan in an effort to locate an abandoned medieval village, and in 1986 he carried out small-scale excavations inside another chapel, San Ċir in the Rabat countryside. He was also advisor to a team of American archaeologists from the University of California, Los Angeles, who undertook excavations in the open area opposite the museum of Roman antiquities in Rabat between 1983 and 1984.

Tony's career was to take an exciting turn in the mid-1980s when he started to be intrigued by Malta's prehistoric antiquities. During those two years of attachment to the National Library, the daily encounters with Wettinger who had by now become Malta's leading social and economic historian of the Middle Ages, and the fruitful and stimulating discussions between them, led Tony to extend his research into Malta's prehistory with a paper, published in 1986, advocating a socio-economic approach to the period associated with the megalithic temples. Meanwhile, the opportunity arose in 1985 to host a first international conference on the archaeology of the Mediterranean dedicated to 'Archaeology and

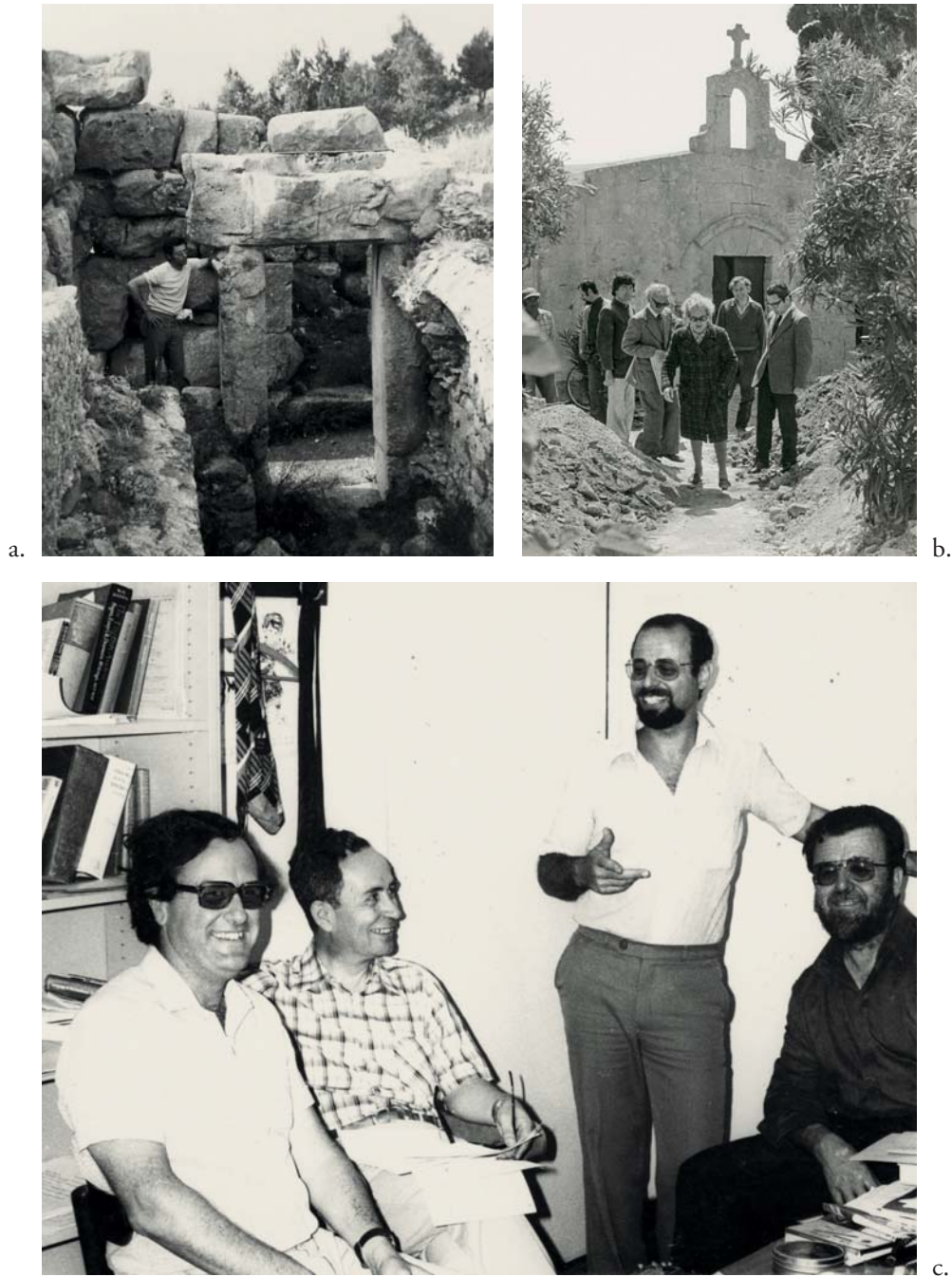


Fig. 2. a – Tony Bonanno photographed near the so-called ‘Temple of Diana’ at Cefalù, 1970 (photograph reproduced by courtesy of Nunzio Allegro); b – Tony Bonanno (second from left) with Tom Blagg (third from left) and Anthony Luttrell (framed by door) at Ħal Millieri, 1977, during a visit to the excavation by the Hon. Minister of Culture, Agatha Barbara, accompanied by Dr Tancred Gouder (Curator of the National Museum of Archaeology; right) and Francis Mallia (Director of the Museums Department; photograph from the Tom Blagg Collection, Archives and Special Collections, University of Malta Library reproduced with permission); c – Tony Bonanno (standing) with colleagues in an office in the Msida campus of the University of Malta, June 1981: from left to right, Peter Vassallo (English), the late Godfrey Wettinger (History) and the late Rev. Alphonse Sammut (Italian) – photograph taken by Oliver Friggieri (Maltese) (from the personal collection of Anthony Bonanno).

Fertility Cult’ at the University of Malta to which one of the editors, Horatio Vella, attended from Zimbabwe and to which proceedings he contributed a paper. It was during this academic gathering, which Tony convened, that initial discussions were held between the University, the Museums Department led by Tancred Gouder, and Colin Renfrew from the University of Cambridge. The idea was to put together a collaborative research project with which to answer many of the unsettled questions relating to the Temple period, using the latest scientific techniques and modern methods of excavation. Above all, interpretation was to be context-driven which, for a Classicist like Tony, trained to study textual sources rigorously in order to explain context and discover meaning, made perfect sense. It was Tony’s wish that such a project would not only bring a stimulating research programme to Malta, but would also be a good place where students could be trained and interact with peers. His wish came true. The project went on to achieve its goals between 1987 and 1994, and the results were published on completion of the fieldwork at the prehistoric funerary subterranean site of the Brochtorff Circle in Xagħra, Gozo – producing exceptional figurative representations about which Tony has written on several occasions and that still inspire many researchers, including the field directors of the project, the husband and wife team who are amongst the contributors to this volume (Malone and Stoddart; see also Sultana).

As for the wish to have Maltese students trained on the project, the move could not have been more timely, for a degree in Archaeology at the University was in the offing. This was made possible the same year the project started. Indeed, the situation at the University of Malta improved in 1987 with a change in government, when the faculties of arts and sciences were reinstated. Tony could return to the Faculty of Arts, and immediately took the initiative to launch a Bachelor’s degree in Archaeology and extended this discipline to the remits of the Department of Classics in 1990. He also lobbied to have additional lecturing staff, resulting in the appointment in 1989 of two of us – one an *alumnus* in Classics who had been teaching Latin and Greek at the University of Zimbabwe (Horatio C. R. Vella) and the other a scholar of Near Eastern archaeology (Anthony J. Frendo). Tony also worked hard to move the department to dedicated premises on the University campus in 1992, choosing to have an early nineteenth-century farmhouse located on the edge of the campus refurbished for the purpose, facilitating not only the teaching and the practical classes, but also the research associated with materials collected during fieldwork. By 1996, the Department was ready to carry out its own field excavation project at the multi-period site of Tas-Silġ – a cautious decision that was embraced by many who thought that it was high time that such an important archaeological site be given the attention it deserved.

After this, Tony followed the whole administrative *cursus* of those who strongly believe in their Alma Mater even if this often comes at the expense of research: sitting on and chairing many academic committees, boards of study and institute governing boards, heading the department of Classics and Archaeology for many years (1988–1996, 1999–2011), becoming Dean of the Faculty of Arts (1990–1992), and member of Council (1987–1992). To the positions he occupied, and ones that he still does, Tony invariably brings not only a sense of serious purpose and gravitas, but also the thoroughness and precision of his training in the Classics. This is seen especially in the way meetings are conducted and a faithful record of

the proceedings kept, observing rules and regulations to the letter, but never failing to look at issues or problems holistically especially when student well-being is at stake. In addition to his expertise, such qualities have also been appreciated outside the University of Malta when Tony was invited to sit on various committees: member of the Maltese National Commission for UNESCO (1988–1996), member (1988–1990) and later chairman (1990–1992) of the committee to advise the Minister of Education on the setting up of a Maritime Museum, chairman of the Advisory Management Board of the Maritime Museum (1992–1994), member of the governing board of the Planning Authority (1992–1998), member of the Technical Experts Committee for the monitoring of the Mnajdra, Ħaġar Qim and Ġgantija temples, member of the Mdina Rehabilitation Committee (2000–2002), member of the Board of Directors of Heritage Malta (2004–2011), and a member of the Scientific Committee for the Conservation of the Megalithic Temples (since 2004).

Anthony Bonanno's record as a scholar speaks for itself, and this fact was recognised internationally in various ways, not least by his being asked to lecture at a number of universities and being appointed on the advisory editorial board of several journals (*Mediterranean Archaeology and Archaeometry*, *Archeologia Viva*, *Mare Internum*, *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*). Tony was also elected a corresponding member of the Istitutum Archaeologicum Germanicum in 2010 and of the Archaeological Institute of America the following year. He was elected Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of London in 2002 in recognition of his outstanding contribution to archaeology, and was elected Visiting Scholar at Wolfson College, Oxford, during a sabbatical year in 2005. The books and articles that Tony has written and the projects he has undertaken in collaboration with fellow scholars and former students also indicate his openness to cooperation at all levels. The KASA project, undertaken between 2004 and 2006 with colleagues from Sicily (three of whom have contributed to this volume: Buscemi, Militello, Tanasi) and funded by the European Union's inter-regional funds, stands out for the amount of research that was produced and published, especially by several early-stage researchers who went on to become experts in their field. Moreover, Tony's commitment to reach wide audiences has been commendable, resulting over the year in numerous popular publications for leading archaeology and travel magazines. Furthermore, in 2001 and 2004 he wrote two monographs in Maltese, one on prehistory and the other a co-authored publication on archaeology, filling a much felt void in authoritative publications in the vernacular. He returned to the same genre of writing in 2005 when he worked with photographer Daniel Cilia and published a monograph on ancient Malta. More recently, he has embarked on a project in collaboration with Heritage Malta to produce an on-line cumulative catalogue of Graeco-Roman sculpture in order to enhance public visibility of one class of artefacts in the national collections. As for the famous annual tours abroad, which he has organised and led since 1990 for specialists and non-specialists alike, we direct our readers to the writings gathered as an Epilogue in this volume. They reveal aspects of Tony's otherwise reserved character few get a chance to experience and cherish (Fig. 3).

Outside the University of Malta, Tony has been particularly active in two voluntary organisations, namely Din l-Art Ħelwa and The Archaeological Society Malta, presiding over the former between 1999 and 2001 and over the latter between 2010 and 2014, serving



Fig. 3. Away from the humdrum of administration; enjoying a tour of eastern Sicily (with colleagues Timmy Gambin, Chris Gemmell and Nicholas Vella), January 2012 (photographed reproduced by courtesy of Timmy Gambin).

on the committees of both for many years. His sound advice has stood both organisations in good stead, not least when decisions had to be taken on controversial issues related to the conservation and protection of cultural heritage sites. One – the decision not to detach late fifteenth-century frescoes from the Church of the Annunciation at Ħal Millieri – stands out. His argument that preserving the mural paintings in their context was far more important than any other aesthetic considerations won the day.

The title of this *Festschrift* is inspired by our honorand's passion for a knowledge of the past understood broadly in the Latin sense of *antiquitates*, encapsulated in Varro's writings as an ordered corpus of knowledge about the past, including human origins – as Tony himself never fails to remind his undergraduate students. All the essays gathered here are a reflection of the search for order, significance and meaning – qualities that Tony has always sought to achieve in his work as a true '*investigator antiquitatis*' – whether the data consist of the tiniest of snails or the most megalithic of prehistoric buildings. Moreover, they are a reflection of Tony's multi-faceted interests, bridging prehistory and history.

We have gathered the contributions into four sections. The first is dedicated to three papers that relate to the reception of the antique, narratives inspired by a dragon, a griffin, and an inscription respectively (Grima; Buhagiar; Serracino). The second section gathers

five papers, three of which tackle the environment – past (Hunt and Schembri; Schembri, Fenech and Terribile) and present (Cassar) – while another paper deals with museum communication (Stroud), and the last one is about a modern Maltese presence in south-east Sicily (Mallia). The third and fourth parts include papers that fall into the two chronological divisions that span Tony's scholarly production: prehistoric and classical. The prehistoric section considers a variety of issues that go from Malta's Temple period to the Bronze Age, from a broad consideration of figurative representations recovered from Malta's temple sites (Sultana) to a detailed study of the significance of head hair on the same imagery (Stoddart and Malone). One paper looks at the tool marks present at the Ħal Saflieni funerary complex (Cardona and Zammit) and another one returns to the issue of object decontextualization for the bone assemblage from the Tarxien temples (Attard Mallia). Two contributions deal with the Bronze Age of the Maltese Islands, with one attempting a definition of the Borg in-Nadur archaeological *facies* (Tanasi) and the other one about a reconsideration of the function of one of the most characteristic pottery vessels from that same *facies* (Sagona). The last paper in the section is a review of textile production in Copper Age Sicily (Militello). The fourth and last section deals with contributions that fall within the scope of the Classical world, understood widely to embrace various themes: Phoenician-Punic ethnic identity (Frendo), transport amphorae in the Mediterranean (Bechtold), and olive oil production technology (Anastasi and Vella). Others deal with site-specific investigations on the basis of which themes are discussed: from Agrigento (Buscemi) to Termini Imerese (Belvedere and Forgia) to Taormina and Cyrene (Sear), and Qumran (Mizzi). In addition, one contribution deals with a Roman miniature terracotta portrait bust (Williams and Williams) and another considers the gods' manipulation of women's actions in ancient epic (Vella).

Close to retirement, Tony continues to write, lecture and to supervise undergraduates and graduates alike, and is keen to take on new collaborative ventures especially as departmental excavations which he has co-directed in more recent years (Tas-Silġ 1996–2004, Għar ix-Xiħ 2005–2010, Malta Survey Project 2008–2010, Żejtun Roman Villa 2006–ongoing) are slowly being wrapped up and preliminary and final reports published. On behalf of the contributors to this volume, and the many other friends and colleagues who expressed their support for this venture from the very start, we present this *Festschrift* to Tony as a token of friendship and appreciation for his contribution to archaeology for half a century.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The idea of having a collection of essays to celebrate Anthony Bonanno's life-long contribution to archaeology came to Horatio C. R. Vella at a dinner party celebrating Tony's sixty-fifth birthday. Given the complications of coordinating the numerous contributions received, and ensuring that all were peer reviewed anonymously, the delivery of the volume has been a laboured undertaking. We are grateful to all the contributors who have been loyal supporters of this initiative from the very start, and patiently awaited the final result

as the years slipped by. We are also grateful to those who contributed personal energy to make the final volume possible, not least Katrin Fenech and Ann Gingell-Littlejohn who assisted with the copy editing and proof-reading respectively. Carmel Serracino provided useful insights and snippets of information, gathered as part of his doctorate on the history of Classics in Malta, used in this introductory note. Claudia Sagona took on the brunt of ensuring that all the contributions were in order when she received them in July 2017 during what was a most difficult time following the demise of her husband, Antonio – a friend to many of the Maltese contributors, not least of our honorand – and who was all too happy in 2015 to accept the volume in the series which he co-edited with his wife Claudia. We also express our gratitude to the new editors of the ANES monograph series, Abby Robinson and Andrew Jamieson, and at Peeters, we thank the whole publication team for seeing the volume through with the usual eye for detail. We hope that everyone will be pleased with the final result.

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ANTHONY BONANNO – LIST OF PUBLICATIONS, 1971–2017

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1971

“Erba’ Ritratti Cirenajci fil-‘Villa Rumana’ tar-Rabat,” *Arti* (Malta) 1: 8–10.

1976

*Portraits and other Heads on Roman Historical Relief up to the Age of Septimius Severus.*  
Oxford: British Archaeological Reports.

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“Another funerary portrait from Cyrenaica in the British Museum,” *The Society for Libyan Studies, Seventh Annual Report* (1975–1976): 27–30.

1977

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“L’habitat maltese in età romana,” *Kokalos* 22–23 (1976–1977): 385–395.

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1978

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## RECEPTION OF THE ANTIQUE



## ABELA'S CABINET OF ANTIQUITIES REVISITED: COLLECTING, KNOWLEDGE AND PATRONAGE IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY MALTA

Reuben GRIMA

Any observant visitor entering the former Conventual Church of the Order of St John in Valletta will notice three coats of arms above the doorway, commemorating the leading patrons of the building of the church in the 1570s.<sup>1</sup> The coat of arms of Pope Gregory XIII is in the centre, flanked to the left by that of the Order, and to the right by that of Grand Master Jean de la Cassiere. The keen-sighted will also notice that high on the corners of the belfries, gargoyles carved in the shape of lions' heads gaze out over the city, echoing the rampant lion in La Cassiere's coat of arms. Another zoomorphic reference in the church's façade, however, escapes most visitors nowadays. The two massive central corbels supporting the balcony directly above the same coats of arms are carved with an elegant and unusual motif made up of a series of converging volutes, reminiscent of the webbed wing of a bat or a flying fish<sup>2</sup> (Fig. 1). The significance of this motif was practically forgotten when, several centuries later, during Valletta's postwar reconstruction, it was echoed in a simpler, scaled-down version on the corbels on the apartment blocks just across St John's Square. A clue to the origin of this motif lies between the corbels themselves, in the coat of arms of Gregory XIII, which displays a rising and winged dragon with a truncated tail. The figure of the dragon follows the prevailing conventions for the representation of these mythical monsters. The motif on the corbels shows an unmistakable similarity to the webbed wings on contemporary representations of dragons (Fig. 2),<sup>3</sup> leaving little doubt that it was a direct reference to the coat of arms of Gregory XIII, completing the scheme of heraldic references on the church's façade.

Cardinal Ugo Buoncompagni was elected to the papacy to become Gregory XIII in May 1572, seven months after the battle of Lepanto, and barely four months after La Cassiere was elected Grand Master of the Order of Saint John. At the same time as Buoncompagni's

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Prof. Nicholas Vella, Dr Joan Abela and Ms Isabella Camilleri at the Notarial Archives, and Ms Maroma Camilleri at the National Library for their invaluable assistance in tracing several of the sources used here.

<sup>2</sup> A similar motif may be observed on balcony corbels elsewhere in Valletta, at the rear of the former chancery of the Order, where Archbishop Street meets Strait Street, on the façade of a house at 206–208 Republic Street, and of another property at 18, Saint Ursula Street. A variation on the same theme appears below the windows of Casa Scaglia, on the corner between South Street and Mikiel Anton Vassalli Street. All these examples appear to post-date, and may well have been inspired by, the example at St John's.

<sup>3</sup> Aldrovandi 1640, pp. 419, 420, 422, 423. The example on p. 420 is particularly close to the motif on the corbels. See also Caprotti 2004, pp. 139–149. Another example worth noting is an ink drawing that includes a pair of winged dragons on the title page of the index of Notary Michele Attard for the years 1647 and 1648, held at the Notarial Archives in Saint Christopher Street (it is worth recalling here that Gian Francesco Abela's *Descrittione di Malta* first appeared in 1647).

