

Charles Dalli  
***A Muslim Society under Christian Rule***

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### [p.37] A Muslim Society under Christian Rule

C. Dalli

Unlike long-term Muslim political resistance in the Iberian peninsula, the socio-political order established by Islam in the central Mediterranean was rapidly and systematically overcome by military conquest. The military and political take-over of Sicily, the logical consequence of Norman establishment in southern Italy, was accomplished in the three decades after 1060; by early 1091, the whole of the island recognized Roger I, count of Sicily, as its overlord.<sup>1</sup> Muslim subjection and submission to Christian government in Sicily was a major fact in that island's twelfth-century history. Behind the multicultural appearance of a *populo dotata trilingui*, there lay the new reality of Latin Christian rule.<sup>2</sup> Circumscribed, as it was, by the need to appease the substantial Muslim subject population, as well as to patronize the activities of Greek Christianity on the island, the Norman court capitalized on this ethnic and linguistic variety, but did not depend on it. Its real achievement was to have built a massive political and economic base for central government, linking a substantial number of local communities into the royal administrative network.<sup>3</sup> Conquerors and conquered formed a partnership which proved vital for the new political order which had been created, the former deeply conscious of their shortcomings in human resources, the latter awakened to the advantages, if not necessity, of Latin Christian rule.

This paper reviews the available evidence on the Muslim population subjected to Christian rule on Malta and Gozo in the period 1091-1240s.<sup>4</sup> The official documentation is basically restricted to a diploma from 1198<sup>5</sup> and the report of the administrator of royal finances in the islands some time after 1240;<sup>6</sup> this scanty evidence may be supplemented by Geoffrey Malaterra's semi-official narrative on the events of 1091,<sup>7</sup> as well as references to the islands from a limited number of literary sources including chronicles, travel accounts, and geographical works.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to preceding studies, which have interpreted the 150-year period mainly as a continuation from Muslim times, minimalizing the effects of Latin Christian domination, I put forward the argument for a *fundamental change* in the character of the local Muslim community. A reinterpretation of the evidence relayed to the royal court by Giliberto Abbate is presented. This exercise is based on three distinct assumptions. First, I take the view that the period should be considered on its own terms, albeit within the wider framework of historical continuity and change. Second, the local evidence is not collated in isolation, but discussed in a regional context; this central Mediterranean perspective is essential if our treatment of the evidence is not to be overtaken by the belief in Maltese historical distinctiveness stemming [p.38] from insularity. Third, the present work attempts to steer the discussion away from ethnocultural explanations of local 'sub-Muslim times,' which are frequently the result of historical hindsight, or the projection of late medieval and early modern realities back to the high middle ages.

Several aspects of high medieval Sicilian history, which form the background to events and developments in the Maltese islands, have been reviewed. Key features of the new Latin Christian state resulted, at least in part, from the way in which the original territories under Norman rule grew into a multi-regional kingdom.<sup>9</sup> At the same time, the Norman conquest made available to Latin Christendom the kingdom's strategically located seaports and their trade, as well as its agriculture and substantial peasant population.<sup>10</sup> In the mid-twelfth century the island was also used as a springboard for further expansion; a short-lived

'Norman kingdom of Africa' reduced the main seaports of Ifrīqiya to tributary status, and enabled the rulers in Palermo to establish their mastery over the central Mediterranean.<sup>11</sup>

Nonetheless, the traditional picture of multicultural coexistence has been fundamentally modified by recent works. Beyond the projected orientalism of the royal palace, the view of a successful multicultural society does little justice to the complex social realities over which the Norman sovereigns presided. Muslim and Jewish minorities, who would increasingly share the same fate under Latin Christian rule, were considered to be royal property. This attitude would be applied at its full extent, in the Sicilian context, by Frederick II in the last three decades of his reign.<sup>12</sup> Beyond the military process of conquest and occupation, there emerged the reality of subjection; that imposed on the Muslim population in Sicily reveals a multifaceted social and cultural dynamic, in which Greek Christian agencies were a powerful means of integrating the conquered subject communities into the new society taking shape. Ironically, within the folds of Christianity, the revitalized Greek sectors were eventually marginalized themselves.<sup>13</sup>

The loss of Norman Ifrīqiya by 1160 was one symptom of a general and long-term social upheaval that shook the Latin Christian state built by the two Rogers from its foundations. Men from the newly-founded 'Lombard' towns expelled the Muslims from eastern Sicily; this accelerated the enclavement of the *mudéjar* population. Anti-Muslim rioting from 1160s undermined the stable, if fragile and unequal, coexistence of earlier decades, while pressure from Latin Christian barons and ecclesiastical lords like the Church of Monreale drove the Muslim population into enclaves.<sup>14</sup> The conquered Muslim population had dwindled into small, fragmented, and isolated communities. The Muslim traveller who visited Sicily in the early 1180s, Ibn Jubayr, was informed that upon conversion of a Muslim person to Christianity, a social barrier would separate him or her from the rest of the family, a factor exploited by young people to free themselves from parental authority: 'there will be for the father no way of approaching his son, or the mother her daughter.'<sup>15</sup>

By 1194, Sicilian Islam had been reduced to little more than a provider of servile manpower.<sup>16</sup> The extension of ecclesiastical overlordship over the Muslim communities of western Sicily (especially in the case of the Church of Monreale, in 1180) aroused Muslim resistance; the anti-Muslim pogrom of 1189-90 created a 'traumatic rupture with the past.' In the 1190s, in the midst of large-scale *perturbationes*, Muslim rebels withdrew to mountain top fortresses like Jato, Entella, Platani, and Celso, from where they raided the countryside and sacked towns like Agrigento. While German warleaders and Genoese pirates seized control of different [p.39] parts of Sicily, Muhammad ibn 'Abbād, a Muslim of noble descent, became *amir al-muslimin*, or recognized leader of Sicilian Islam. A 'state within the state' was set up; the Muslim prince organized a network of castles garrisoned by Muslim troops, sent emissaries like a real ruler, governed the rebel population under the title of legitimacy, and even minted his own silver coinage.<sup>17</sup> These astonishing developments indicate a complete change in mentality, from decades of submissiveness to open political and military resistance; a climate of visceral animosity overtook the *Regno*, and hatreds which had festered on both sides now exploded in violence.

The Muslim rebel state was crushed upon the return of a grown-up Frederick II to his island kingdom from 1220 onwards; the royal objective was nothing less than 'exterminating' Islam from Sicily.<sup>18</sup> In 1224, the crown initiated the forced resettlement of Muslims at the Apulian settlement of Lucera, which was transformed into a 'garrison town'; in later years Frederick stated that the isolation of the Muslim community in Apulia would accelerate its conversion to Christianity. The Muslim deportees who formed the Luceran population (estimated between fifteen and thirty thousand in all) stood in great contrast to the quarter of a million Muslims said to have been subjected to Latin Christian rule in eleventh-century Sicily.<sup>19</sup>

The process of annihilation continued right up to the last years of Frederick's reign, and the drain in manpower was reversed mainly through Latin Christian colonization, some of it through the use of penal settlement, from the Italian peninsula and elsewhere. State intervention from the 1220s onwards took the form of veritable ethnic cleansing, through the forced reallocation of Muslims to Lucera. This was completed by about 1246, when the last Muslim insurrection was stamped out and the Muslim strongholds of Jato and Entella were destroyed. The transfer of the uprooted Muslim population to the Italian mainland deprived that minority of the historical and physical framework within which it had evolved, while it enabled the state to reduce the substantial losses in manpower caused by decades of military confrontation and flight.<sup>20</sup>

As is frequently the case with other local communities in the *Regno*, the reconstruction of the key political, social, and economic characteristics of the Maltese islands in the period under review, and indeed until the late fourteenth century, suffers from a fundamental lack of information. This lack of primary sources severely limits the historian's field of action. Contributions by Godfrey Wettinger, Anthony Luttrell, and Mario Buhagiar to date have reviewed and reconstructed in outline the main features of the period in local history, from the handful of documentary sources available.<sup>21</sup> Although much positive discussion has been stimulated by the local publication, by Joseph Brincat, of the relevant passage from al-Himyarī's work on Malta,<sup>22</sup> the text stops short of the island's history under Norman rule, in spite of its late medieval composition. The superstructure of Norman myths, which had accumulated from early modern times, has been removed and the invented traditions which had formed the staple accounts of the Maltese high middle ages are now discarded as completely untenable.<sup>23</sup> The argument, first put forward by Albert Mayr,<sup>24</sup> of a fundamental break in the history of Christianity on the islands from the late ninth to the twelfth centuries, has now been upheld as the only plausible interpretation of the available data. The unearthing of new evidence by medieval archaeologists on the islands' material culture, land-use patterns, and so on promise to enable different perspectives on the period, shifting the emphasis from [p.40] the present religious-cultural one.<sup>25</sup> This culture-based interpretation of the period is perfectly understandable, in view of the whole Maltese historiographic experience. After Mayr's isolated stance, it was only in the last quarter-century that the full social, religious, and cultural implications of the islands' Muslim past were realized.

A reassessment of the available documentary indications on the period,<sup>26</sup> discussed at length in the above-mentioned contributions, must certainly confirm several conclusions reached in this last quarter-century. Al-Qazwīnī, a thirteenth-century writer, reconstructed events of the mid-eleventh century on Malta.<sup>27</sup> A Christian, apparently Byzantine, fleet attacked Malta in the Muslim year 440 (1048-49) and was on the point of taking the island. The Muslims in the *madīna* were forced dramatically to come to terms with the substantial slave population in their possession (who were said to be more numerous than themselves), warning them that they will die if the *Rūm* are victorious; the slaves were promised their liberty, and a share in their masters' wealth, in return for their aid in repelling the invaders. Al-Himyarī provided a longer version of the story, which he dated to 445 (1053-54);<sup>28</sup> this in view of the Muslim expedition to Malta described by him as happening in 1048-49, in which the town of Malta was rebuilt and a population settled there. This writer supplies a figure on the size of the Muslim community in the *madīna*; he claims that, at the time of the invasion, the defenders could muster no more than 400 adult male fighters (implying a free population of less than 2,000 individuals). He adds, significantly, that the attackers refused to grant the besieged community the *amān* (or safeconduct)<sup>29</sup> 'except for women and belongings' (it is unclear whether 'things owned,' or *amwāl* included the slaves).

These mid-eleventh-century events have been studied in detail elsewhere.<sup>30</sup> It seems worthwhile, however, to add a note to the remarks already expressed by different authors on

the same subject. Al-Himyarī provides a vital clue to the picture: the masters induce their ‘*abīd* to accept terms by offering them also ‘the hand of their daughters.’ This detail needs to be stressed, because it would imply that liberty meant social integration rather than departure from the island (in contrast with the behaviour of the *captivi christiani* released by the Normans in 1091). The Muslims assumed that the ‘*abīd* might decide to make use of the *amān* (if this safe-conduct did extend to them), or join forces with the invaders; using *oratio recta*, the two authors dramatize the appeal by the masters to their slaves, warning them about the consequences of a Christian victory (death, according to al-Qazwīnī; eternal captivity, according to al-Himyarī). That the hypothetically non-Muslim slave community agreed to fight for its masters against the Christian invaders need not have reflected its religious identity. Nonetheless, one has to underline the presence of unknown factors (such as native origin, or long-term attachment to the island) making it plausible for the slave community, hitherto excluded from intermarriage with the ‘Muslims,’ to stay on rather than return to a country of origin. Moreover, the negotiation of terms by the Muslims with their slaves implies that the latter were regarded as a community sharing identical socio-economic constraints, with a leadership at its head able to exploit the emergency of enemy landing to obtain a long-desired social and economic integration. The masters are defined throughout as Muslims, that is, in terms of their religious affiliations; on the other hand, the ‘*abīd* are defined only by their slave status, leaving their ethnic, linguistic, or, indeed, religious identities obscure. Although caution on this point, as on the others, is required, it seems strange that [p.41] one particular social group should be labelled ‘Muslim’ unless a sector of the population was not Muslim.

The invasion of Malta by a Christian fleet in 1048-49 (or 1053-54) is a good decade removed from the large-scale Byzantine offensive under Admiral George Maniakes to conquer Sicily.<sup>31</sup> It is equally difficult to explain the Muslim expedition and settlement on Malta described by al-Himyarī; possibly, it is related to the flight of people from North Africa in the wake of the Hilali invasions from 1052,<sup>32</sup> but the chronological dissonance seems unresolvable. It is equally difficult to relate the events on Malta to developments in Sicilian Islam, in view of the near-total anarchy reigning there; it is possible that behind the story there lies an episode of Sicilian Muslim factional conflict, characteristic of the period, attracting an invading Christian force.<sup>33</sup> The Muslim defenders on Malta must have disposed of a sizeable fleet to break the enemy blockade; that the island served as a base for Muslim war at sea or privateering against Christian shores would also be signalled by the *captivi christiani* mentioned in 1091. In mid-1071 the Normans let the word pass that they were preparing an attack on Malta; according to Malaterra, this was intended to divert the defenders’ attentions away from eastern Sicily. In fact, Roger captured Catania at that time, making a valuable seaport available to the Norman offensive. It is equally significant that Malta should have been earmarked for this diversion; in one historian’s words, this tactic ‘must surely have been aimed not just at wrong-footing the Sicilian Muslims but also at diverting the attention of the Zirids.’<sup>34</sup>

The Norman attack on the Maltese islands in 1091 would help safeguard the southern flank of Sicily, whose conquest was brought to completion early that year with the fall of the Muslim fortress at Noto. The collapse of Muslim resistance at Syracuse in 1086, and the renewal of good diplomatic and commercial relations between the Normans and the Zirid masters of Ifrīqiya that same year, had made this outcome virtually inevitable. In the spring of 1091 the Normans prepared a fleet to attack Malta and Gozo; the count insisted on taking personal command of the expedition, and made sure that the departure of the fleet for Malta would not be lacking in impressive ceremony. This served to underline the symbolic meaning of the Norman expedition; having completed their conquest of Sicily, the Normans were now prepared to extend Latin Christianity beyond the seas.<sup>35</sup>

The Norman force disembarked and routed the opposition of the islanders; the town was besieged and soldiers were sent around the island, no doubt to plunder and force the inhabitants into submission. The *gaitus* or Muslim governor of the town and island of Malta (*qui urbi et insulae principabatur*), accompanied by a number of citizens said by Malaterra to be unaccustomed to warfare, and frightened by the presence of the enemy, asked for terms and offered their capitulation. The count insisted that they surrender the large number of Christian captives held inside the town (*captivos christianos, quorum plurimam multitudinem infra urbem tenebant*), together with all their horses, mules, and weapons; these they offered together with a large indemnity (*infinita pecunia*). An arrangement was made for the annual payment of tribute to the count. They sealed this pact by taking an oath recognizing Roger as their overlord (*comiti confoederati sunt*). The freed Christians were taken on board the count's ship; they sailed away with the fleet, which first made a stop at Gozo, attacking and devastating that island, which was likewise annexed to the Norman domains. Roger offered to build the Christians he had liberated in Malta a free town in Sicily, but they declined this [p.42] offer, choosing instead to go each his own way back to their country of origin.

It is clear from Malaterra's account that the Norman intervention in Malta and Gozo in 1091 cannot be reduced to a raid or *razzia*. In spite of recent conclusions that the Norman intervention of 1091 'was not really a conquest,' the presence of the count in personal command, the short siege of the *madīna*, the demilitarization of the town, and the reduction of the community to tributary status (granting them what would have been called, in Muslim terms, the *amān* in return for paying the tribute), underline the serious and long-term objectives of Count Roger's action in 1091. The attack against Malta and Gozo was certainly seen by the Normans themselves as nothing less than conquest. Indeed, the Maltese episode has been cited, very recently, as evidence that the old count 'wished to be seen as the conqueror, the man who reclaimed places for Christianity in person.'<sup>36</sup>

Whether the Normans were able to safeguard their achievement and hold on to their conquest in the years after 1091, is altogether a different question; it does not alter the political character of 1091, which extended Norman overlordship to the Maltese islands. The demilitarization of the local population would logically imply the adoption of measures by the Norman overlords to preserve this achievement, such as maintaining a garrison and a naval presence, at least to deter any attempt at military intervention from North Africa; unfortunately there is a complete lack of information on the years between 1091 and 1127, when Roger's son, the future King Roger II, had to lead another Norman conquest of Malta. Malaterra and the other writers who chronicled the deeds of the Norman leaders are expectedly silent on this point, as they invariably are in the case of so many other local communities subjected to the count's overlordship.

A careful consideration of the strategies used by Count Roger in the military conquest of Sicily should confirm this perspective on 1091. A substantial number of local communities around Sicily were forced to offer their surrender and ask for terms, in precisely the same manner that this happened on Malta, realizing at some stage or other that they could no longer hope to resist the Norman onslaught. Few pitched battles were fought during the 31-year conquest; most Muslim towns and fortified positions were forced to come to terms through naval and land blockades, sieges, and the devastation of their countryside. The capitulation agreement and reduction of local communities to tributary status was indeed the mechanism of conquest, not an alternative to it.<sup>37</sup> It was a widely used device in both the Sicilian and Iberian cases, recalling its successful application (in reverse order) during the centuries of Muslim conquests. It transformed the subjected populations of the towns and their hinterlands into *mudéjar* communities (from the Arabic *mudayyan*, 'he who pays the tribute' or 'he who stays behind').<sup>38</sup> The transformation of subject people into 'communities of the pact' was a highly practical solution to the challenges facing Latin Christian conquerors, not least the

need to control vast new territories with severely limited resources, utilizing forces vastly outnumbered by their Muslim subjects.<sup>39</sup> It was also an efficient means of ensuring control at community level, considering that the local leadership would be substantially retained, in terms of this new arrangement, to mediate with the new central government, and be accountable to it for any infringement of the conditions. Its main components were political subjection, the regular payment of tribute, and disarmament, in exchange for the promise of protection by the new Christian overlord of human life and personal property. As has been argued convincingly, these features strongly resemble those of the Muslim juridical [p.43] category of *ahl al-dhimma* (or ‘people of the covenant’).<sup>40</sup> The traditional means adopted by Muslim conquerors to subject the population were now being applied against a conquered Muslim society.

Previous contributors have already recognized how the Muslim population of Malta was reduced to a ‘community of the pact.’ Unfortunately, however, the insistence on the Muslim character of the Maltese islands throughout the twelfth century has detracted from an evaluation of the new conditions facing Muslims under Latin Christian overlordship; in other words, the fact that a *mudéjar* society had come into being after 1091.

The military intervention by Roger II in 1127 against Malta has frequently led scholars to question the historical significance of 1091. It is plausible that the expedition against Malta and the other islands in 1127 was intended as a reassertion of princely authority in a rebel area; the reconquest of southern Italian territories was launched towards the end of that same year. Furthermore, it is worth comparing Roger II’s occupation of Malta in 1127, with that of the island of Djerba eight years later. The Norman invasion of the North African island was justified as retaliation for piratical activities based there; in effect, ‘Norman rule on the Sicilian model was established for the first time in Ifrīqiya.’<sup>41</sup> The expedition against the Djerbans, led by George of Antioch in the autumn of 1135, led to the rapid conquest of the island and the establishment of a governor (*amil*). The Djerbans were granted the *amān* in return for their tribute; the Fatimid caliph recognized Roger’s ‘right’ to subject the island to his rule ‘because of the hostility of its inhabitants and because they had abandoned the ways and paths of righteousness ... Those who are in such a condition deserve that mercy be withheld from them. It is fitting that God suddenly remove them from His protection.’<sup>42</sup> This last remark provides us with an insight into the Muslim attitude towards the alienation of Muslim communities from *dar al-Islam*, and their subjection to Christian kings.

Roger’s island conquests (like Malta, Djerba, and Corfu) were intimately linked to the assertion of Norman naval power in the central Mediterranean, including the elimination of prominent pirate bases. The expansion of Norman influence in North Africa has received extensive coverage;<sup>43</sup> decades of commercial and political infiltration were behind the setting up, from the late 1140s, of the short-lived Norman dominion there, with Roger styling himself Malik Ifrīqiya (king of Africa). Four years before Roger’s occupation of Malta in 1127, a Sicilian fleet had attacked Mahdia, while the Zirid ruler of Ifrīqiya sought the protection of Fatimid Egypt. Malta had a subject population (*ahl al-dhimma*) which might have been accused of breaking the *amān* granted by their Norman overlord, Roger’s father and namesake. Whatever the case, it is unlikely that Norman overlordship over Malta was interrupted without the external agency of Muslim power in North Africa. The occupation of Djerba in 1135 was followed up by establishing a network of Norman-ruled towns in Ifrīqiya (mainly Tripoli, Gabès, Mahdia, Sousse, and Sfax), and the imposition of tributary status on their communities and hinterlands.<sup>44</sup> Like the population on Malta from 1091 (and following 1127), and that on Djerba, these North African subjects were transformed into *ahl al-dhimma*. They suffered a permanent status of subjection to which many of their co-religionists would have preferred a ready death, at least according to twelfth-century Muslim juridical opinions.<sup>45</sup>

Many points will necessarily remain unexplained for lack of fundamental information, such as what caused the ‘reconquest’ of the islands by Roger II in 1127 to take place. The event was recorded laconically by Alexander of Teleso as an invasion and occupation of the islands [p.44] around Sicily, including Malta. Modern conclusions that this was ‘the more definitive conquest’ seem to be based solely on hindsight. An explanation may perhaps be sought, not in what the Normans failed to do on the island, but in Roger’s wider regional ambitions, making his action in Malta noticeable to Arab chroniclers. A ‘local’ explanation, such as an infringement of the original pact by the locals, seems insufficient; failure to pay tribute would hardly have necessitated Roger’s personal presence at an ‘unimportant place’<sup>46</sup> like Malta. In the wake of the war which broke out between the Norman kingdom and the Zirid emirate of North Africa in 1117-18, the renewal of the treaty between the two sides did not prevent the Norman fleet from attempting to occupy al-Mahdiyyah. There may have been a link between this failed attempt at establishing a Latin Christian foothold in North Africa, and the need to intervene directly in the Maltese islands.

In contrast to the scarcely inhabited Aeolian islands, where a Latin Christian presence was encouraged from the 1090s, particularly through the agency of the abbey of St Bartholomew of Patti,<sup>47</sup> the first concrete evidence of an organized Christian community on Malta emerges from the period of Roger II (1127 or 1130-54). The long-surviving cultural continuities from pre-1091 should not be assessed at face value. There is no reason whatsoever to doubt the conclusion reached in earlier studies, namely that the population on Malta and Gozo in the twelfth century remained substantially Muslim.<sup>48</sup> However, the changed context for Muslim life outside *dar al-Islam* has to be stressed. Deprived permanently of the protection of a Muslim sovereign, the disarmed community was transformed into an *ahl al-dhimma*; after 1127, if not from 1091, the reality of Latin Christian domination by itself altered the fundamental context within which the subjected community was allowed to survive.<sup>49</sup>

One of the perplexing aspects of the period, discussed at length by the various contributions, is the belated sign of institutional development of a Christian society in the Maltese islands.<sup>50</sup> A Christian nucleus, possibly including early native converts, was recorded from the time of Roger II.<sup>51</sup> In 1156 Pope Adrian IV elevated the episcopal see of Palermo into an archbishopric, transferring the bishoprics of Agrigento, Mazara, and Malta under its jurisdiction. This would imply that the institutional exercise of erecting a Maltese Church was under way, if not already completed; it is impossible to assess the extent to which this development reflected realities in Malta and Gozo, with their substantial *mudéjar* populations.

The suggestion that the diocese was created *in partibus infidelium*<sup>52</sup> is not entirely correct, considering that the islands were Norman dependencies. The endowment of the Maltese Church with estates in Sicily need not be interpreted as lack of access to the islands and their populations. Powerful ecclesiastical institutions received extensive gifts of land in Muslim-inhabited areas, sometimes comprising whole villages of Muslim serfs; the case of the archbishopric of Monreale, within whose estates in western Sicily there existed a substantial Muslim population, illustrates the economic benefits that could be drawn from the grant of Muslim peasant communities to leading religious establishments. The interpretation of an absentee Maltese Church seems to miss a main point about the development of an institutional Latin Christian presence; namely, that this is not to be equated with pastoral work to convert the native population to Christianity, but should be viewed primarily as an ecclesiastical entity designed to ensure a substantial regular income for royal councillors (and therefore, naturally resident in Sicily). It is precisely in this role that John, bishop of Malta, features in the documents from 1168 to around 1212. Interestingly, the references to a Maltese bishop at [p.45] court commence in the reign of William II (1166-89), during which the islands were administered as part of the royal demesne (or so it was said, in 1198).<sup>53</sup> As was



the case with the royal administrative picture taking shape in Sicily at a general level, this inclusion of Malta and Gozo among the crown lands would force the central government to ensure a level of income from the Maltese islands sufficient to meet administrative and military expenses there.

At the same time, the lack of documentation makes it equally difficult to uphold the hypothesis of a Greek monastic network actively proselytizing among the native Muslim population on Malta and Gozo.<sup>54</sup> The notion that the considerable number of *deyr* toponyms refer to Greek-type monastic establishments that bridged the gap between Latin Christianity and Islam, has the merit of extending to the Maltese context a remarkable thesis developed within the wider Sicilian framework. On the other hand, the only documented Greek presence up to 1200 seems to be that of an exiled poet who spent some five years on Malta after 1135, during which period he had ample opportunity to come to detest the ‘children of Hagar.’<sup>55</sup> The search for evidence of Christian pastoral work targeting Muslim peasants as potential converts is inspired by the need to explain the eventual conversion of at least part of the *mudéjar* population to Christianity. The royal government does not seem to have applied its own weight in favour of Christian agencies carrying out these pastoral activities in Sicily in a consistent manner. One thing is certain; in emphasizing the ‘plight’ of the Muslim subjects, the recent literature does not enlist Christian religious pressure as a main factor. The emphasis is laid mostly on the economic burdens (including payment of the tax on produce, and the poll tax) and the social consequences of belonging to a politically subjected race, compounded by hereditary villanization or enserfment. It was these socio-economic disadvantages, rather than religious proselytizing, which were making multicultural coexistence in Sicily increasingly unequal. At times, it was the state itself which shielded the *mudéjar* communities from the religious zeal of Christian preachers, conscious no doubt of the financial losses to the royal fisc which conversion might entail.

An official document of 1198, a Latin diploma with an Arabic appendix (which addendum has not apparently survived) issued from the chancery of the Empress Constance and her son Frederick, attests to the existence of a Christian community on Malta under Roger II; promising the islanders a permanent place in the royal demesne, it also expresses gratitude for the loyalty they had exhibited towards the crown, against the Genoese count of Malta, Willelmus Grasso. As a reward, the crown repealed an annual payment which had been imposed by Roger II on the Christian community of the island. Following a clash between Christians and Muslims, which had led to the death of a member of the Muslim community, the royal court had ordered an annual payment by the Christians of Malta. This may have been intended as a demonstration of royal protection towards Muslims, and a measure to appease the subject Muslim community. An equally plausible explanation may be sought in the customary legislation guiding compensation for loss of life; according to this view, the royal court established annual reparation covering the loss of one of its Muslim subjects.

What is particularly striking in this isolated reference to the internal situation on Malta and Gozo prior to 1154 is the vertical organization of the two distinct ethnic communities along opposed religious affiliation. The shouldering of responsibility for this death by the Christians on Malta, in a collective manner, would imply that it was an instance of inter-community [p.46] strife. The lack of documentation makes it impossible to state whether this was an isolated incident; at the same time, it is significant that the repeal of the obligation, around half a century later, mentioned only that single, 50-year old fact. The burden imposed on the Christian community may also have served to discourage further ethnic violence. Last but not least, the intervention of the royal court at local level accentuated the role played by the crown, which had vested interests in maintaining public order, in directing relations between the communities.

As has been pointed out, the Norman *Regno* was but one product of the wider Latin Christian expansion across the Mediterranean world. This multifaceted process extended from military conquest and political subjection, to the extension of the characteristic institutions of Latin Christian society (feudal, ecclesiastical, municipal, and so on) to the new territorial possessions. The political penetration of Islam proceeded hand in hand with the extension of the Latin commercial spheres of influence. Beyond the impressive achievements of mercantile communities like those of Amalfi, Gaeta, Salerno, and Messina, which were incorporated in the *Regno*, there stood also the interests of the north Italian centres like Genoa, Pisa, and Venice; the Norman treaty with Genoa became the cornerstone of the privileged role played by Ligurian merchants in Sicilian trade.<sup>56</sup> Similarly, the Norman control over North African seaports facilitated Latin Christian trade there, not least to the benefit of the royal fisc. Both Genoese and Pisan merchants must have reached the Maltese islands on their way to the north African markets; the mention of Maltese cotton in Genoa in 1164 signals a role played by the island as a supplier of a primary material in its own right, while the capture of a Tunisian ship by a Pisan captain in the Maltese harbour in 1184 would indicate the use of local port facilities by Latin Christian and Muslim shipping at the same time.<sup>57</sup> The possession of Malta and Gozo as a county by the Genoese pirates Wilelmus Grasso and his son-in-law Arrigo, nicknamed ‘Pescatore,’ indicates a link with the wider activities and ambitions of that city or its private citizens.<sup>58</sup>

The survival of a large *mudéjar* population on Malta and Gozo, with their language, religion, and culture, seemed to defy the process of integration into Latin Christianity. A German ambassador to Saladin recalled this impression around 1175, stating that Malta was ‘inhabited by Saracens.’ The islands formed part of an extensive string of Muslim-inhabited territories across the Mediterranean world which, from the eleventh century to the thirteenth, were subjected to Latin Christian rule; the degree of assimilation in these subject communities, which originally must have comprised more than half-a-million Muslims under Christian rule, varied from place to place.<sup>59</sup> The crowns that had participated in creating a subject Islam would not give up easily their control over this ‘royal treasure’;<sup>60</sup> on the other hand, their desire to be seen as Christian warriors often led Christian kings to support drives to ‘persuade’ (if not force) their Muslim subjects to embrace Christianity. Occasionally, the crown would be twice the loser, because besides depriving itself of Muslim contributions like poll-taxes, forced labour and payments in kind, it would have to create financial incentives for conversion; making up for this, the royal image would be enhanced in Christian public opinion. At the end of the day, conversion was to be preferred to the other two routes of extermination or expulsion, which would deprive the new Latin Christian states of valuable manpower; the emigration of community leaders, intellectuals and even skilled workers from subject Muslim communities in Sicily caused a ‘brain drain’ which was not easily reversed.<sup>61</sup>

**[p.47: for ilustration see end of this article]** Several of these conflicting factors must have been at play in the Maltese context, where the remarkable survival of *mudéjar* Islam in substantial numbers up to the 1240s, if not later, seemed to play a decisive role in the islands’ economy. Twelfth-century Malta was reported to abound in ‘pastures, flocks, fruit, and honey’; its shipping reached southern Sicilian seaports **[p.48]** to carry out commercial exchanges.<sup>62</sup> Maltese agriculture was, very probably, extensively restructured in Muslim times; the *rahal* may have become the basic unit of agricultural land with a family, or a number of families, attached to it.<sup>63</sup> It is unclear whether it represented a standard land measurement in the Sicilian context, as in the Balearic islands; in the *Repartimiento* of Majorca, a *rahal* was normally the equivalent of four jovates of land (amounting to 49 hectares, almost the size of a Sicilian *paricola*).<sup>64</sup> At the same time, pastoralism must have been an important sector in the islands’ economy; mid-fifteenth-century statements by the

Maltese municipal government that common grazing lands had been public property for more than 300 years are worthy of note.<sup>65</sup> The islands' late medieval toponymy, which was overwhelmingly Arabic in origin, may be traced back to this *mudéjar* period of their history, if not earlier; these include a wide range of topographical features, as well as a substantial number of *rahal* place-names. It seems likely that the distribution of these *rahal* toponyms was a fair reflection of human settlement pattern on high medieval Malta (but not on Gozo, where no reliable evidence for *rahal*-prefixed settlements has emerged).<sup>66</sup> Some of the names 'fossilized' in this toponymy possibly recall members of old Muslim land-owning families, or high medieval Christian settlers who acquired private estates; in the majority of cases, the *rahal* is coupled with an Arabic or Latin Christian personal name.<sup>67</sup>

In 1198 the inhabitants of Malta *tam Christiani quam Sarraceni* were thanked by Constance for siding with the royal cause against Willemus Grasso. This did not prevent the count of Malta from preserving his title and, after 1203 it was his son-in-law Arrigo, or Henry, who succeeded him. The Mediterranean activities and ambitions of Count Arrigo have been reconstructed in detail;<sup>68</sup> it is clear that the Genoese adventurer made use of his island base, and 300 *iuvenes maltenses* participated in his campaign in Syria in 1205. His most spectacular project, which seemed to take shape for a few years after 1206, was to establish himself as lord of Crete. Soon after being appointed admiral of Sicily, in 1221, he was blamed for the failure of the naval expedition to aid Damietta; as has been suggested, Arrigo may have lost Malta in 1222. A year later, he had been reinstated in royal favour, but not, apparently, in the full rights he had previously enjoyed in the Maltese islands; one of his first tasks upon his comeback was to help suppress the Muslim rebels in Sicily. By 1232 his son Nicoloso had 'succeeded' him as count of Malta. In 1239-40 Paulino de Malta was administering the islands for the crown; this royal governor, whose family name (de Malta) suggests membership of the comital kin-group, had been rewarded in 1235 with a feudal grant. He seems to have died in office, and was apparently succeeded by Giliberto Abbate, who was responsible for sending the detailed report on the royal administration in the Maltese islands some time after 1240. Genoese claims over Malta would be vindicated in the late 1250s when Count Nicoloso and a number of allies seized the Maltese *castrum*; in a treaty signed with the commune of Genoa, King Manfred was forced to acknowledge Genoese rights over Malta.<sup>69</sup>

The restoration of royal authority in the Maltese islands in the 1220s coincided with the Muslim wars in western Sicily, and the beginning of mass deportations from 1223 onwards, as outlined above. The changed religious and intellectual climate of the early thirteenth century suggested one main course of action to a grown-up Frederick II, whose desire to emulate his Norman predecessors was tempered by the need to assert his leadership at the helm of Latin Christianity; the long-term objective of the royal court now became that of uprooting Islam from the island. The tactics to be used by the royal government included [p.49] expulsion and deportation; the exterminatory effects did not fall short of modern ethnic cleansing. Frederick was thus determined to end the Muslim chapter in Sicilian history. (At about the same time, the Catalan-Aragonese crown was waiting to embark on a series of conquests in the western Mediterranean – starting off with the conquest of Majorca in 1229 – which would multiply its subject population, and extend its power over hundreds of thousands of Muslims.)

The temporary fall of Count Arrigo out of royal favour, in 1222, gave the crown the 'opportunity' to step in and re-establish its control in the Maltese islands. The devolution of the islands to the crown had serious implications for the Muslim inhabitants; in effect, it could not have come at a worse moment in time for them. Annexation to the royal demesne automatically meant that the *mudéjar* community on Malta and Gozo once again became royal property, at a time when the state was waging an internal war against their Sicilian

counterparts, and was about to commence the mass deportations. As has been argued recently, the expulsion of Muslims from Malta by ‘the tyrant of Sicily,’ described by Ibn Khaldun to have happened in 1249, should be relocated to the period 1221-25, very probably 1223-24.<sup>70</sup> Frederick reached an agreement with the sultan of Tunis over the fate of the Muslim community on Pantelleria in 1221; Sicilian forces attacked Djerba and the Kerkenna islands in 1223. As has been suggested, it seems likely that Muslims were deported from Malta around that time. In May 1224 Frederick is said to have ordered (possibly with the assistance of Count Arrigo) the deportation of the rebel population of Celano, in the Abruzzi, to Malta. Those Celanesi held in Sicilian captivity seem to have been liberated in 1227. It is certain that at least some of these deportees reached Malta; it is unclear, however, whether they were in substantial numbers to affect the ethnic composition of the islands, and whether they all shared the fate of that man from Celano, mentioned by his son in a petition to the Holy See, who spent long years in a Maltese prison cell, where he died still in chains.<sup>71</sup>

At the same time, it seems unlikely that the Angevin royal document, from May 1271, ordering the castellan of Malta and Gozo to permit the *homines insularum Malte et Gaudisii* to enjoy possession of properties in the said islands *de possessionibus quondam Sarracenorum de ipsis insulis eiectorum*, refers to the expulsions which had taken place nearly half a century before.<sup>72</sup> The order to the newly-appointed castellan, which also extended to other properties that had devolved to the crown *per excadenciam*, seems to have been issued in response to a petition from Malta; the letter is entitled *pro hominibus Malte*. It seems improbable that the Christians on Malta and Gozo should have waited for 50 years before finally laying their hands (against payment of an annual census to the crown) on these lands; some 30 years before, Giliberto Abbate had reported how many *rationes et jura* belonging to the royal demesne had been seized by the inhabitants. Unless the royal document of 1271 was simply regularizing an extremely long-standing state of affairs (in which case, it would become possible to connect this order from 1271 to events in the 1220s), a further expulsion of Muslims needs to be considered at some moment before 1271, possibly as late as the establishment of Angevin rule.

Few documents concerning medieval Malta match the royal reply to Giliberto Abbate’s report, produced some time after 1240, which has survived in the famous *Excerpta Massiliensia*.<sup>73</sup> Its importance in the wider Sicilian context (in spite of its acknowledged shortcomings) derives from the lack of similar contemporary documents with extensive social [p.50] and economic details on local communities. From a Maltese perspective, it provides the key to reconstructing, at least in outline, the islands’ history in the mid-thirteenth century. A measure of its importance lies in the long-standing debate on the correct interpretation of the ‘population figures’ it reports; indeed, this seems to have taken the lion’s share of the discussion, while other vital clues to the islands’ social and economic life were overlooked.<sup>74</sup> The recent new edition of the document enters important changes from the older version, noticeably in relation to the *gisìa*, a tax of Muslim origin that was paid on both Malta and Gozo, as well as in Sicily. Nonetheless, one purpose behind the present exercise is to question some of the modifications (as well as some of the conclusions) that have been expressed.

The reinterpretation which was recently suggested by Luttrell depends on (1) the (now customary) interpolation of ‘thousand’ (*mille*) in the figure of 47 Christian families on Malta, mentioned in the text; (2) the assumption that ‘there were no Christian *villani curie*’; and (3) a new reading of ‘two ambiguous passages,’ namely the entry in the first paragraph (where royal incomes from Malta are listed), *Gisie quingentorum quadraginta villanorum curie tarenos duomilia quingentos sedecim* (said ‘most likely to mean’ ‘540 *villani curie* (on Malta) who paid the *gisìa* tax of 2,516 *tarenì*); and a parallel entry in the second paragraph (concerning royal incomes on Gozo), *Gisie tarenos centum quadraginta quinque. Villanorum curie tarenos quingentos octoginta quatuor* (which is being suggested to mean ‘in Gozo 145

*villani curie* paid the *gisia* tax of 584 *tarenì*). In other words, in both cases, the amount mentioned immediately after the word *gisia* has been interpreted to refer to the number of *gisia*-paying *villani curie*, or crown serfs.<sup>75</sup>

It is presently argued that such an interpretation overlooks the clear distinction between the two payments (namely, the *gisia*, as distinct from the payment by *villani curie*), as entered in the paragraph on Gozo; that ‘145 *tarenì*’ is a money figure, and not a head count, should be absolutely clear. As has been acknowledged, the entry is distinguished from the one after it (concerning the payment by *villani curie*) even by the use of punctuation. It seems illogical to amend the Gozo entry (which cannot be challenged grammatically or paleographically) simply because of the defective manner in which the income (or incomes) was (or were) recorded in the Maltese case. The alternative approach, presently suggested, views the Malta entry as defective, while preserving the Gozo entry intact. In other words, the scribal error will have consisted in dropping the word ‘*tarenos*’ before the ‘540’ figure, making it look (in the genitive case) like a head count.

There is no reason to believe that the income from the unfree population should have been represented by one single tax. The document mentions the annual payment in kind made by the *villani sarraceni curie* of one-fourth of their victuals (akin to the Muslim *kharag* or tax on produce); it is possible that the incomes from *villani curie* listed in the first two paragraphs quantified this annual produce, but it may also have been a separate payment in cash. Moreover, there is no reason to assume for the Maltese islands a milder fiscal regime than that which had existed in Sicily, where the serf population was concerned. The two figures concerned, 2,516 and 584 *tarenì*, add up to the round figure of 3,100 *tarenì*: the total figure of 3,100 *tarenì* is very close to the total Muslim population obtainable if one adds the 681 families on Malta to the 155 families on Gozo (836 families) and uses a rough multiplier of four (3,344 individuals). In other words, it works out in the payment of one *tarenò per caput* by each Muslim serf, without age or gender based distinctions. Moreover, the ratio [p.51] between the numbers of Muslim families given on Malta and Gozo (836 to 155, or 4.39) is nearly identical to that obtaining between the payments by *villani curie* (2,516 to 584, or 4.31). This makes it almost certain that the payments (of 2,516 and 584 *tarenì*) were made by the Muslim crown serfs on both islands, on the basis of a headcount, which is definitely not given in the document in the case of Gozo (and in all probability neither in Malta’s case, the 540 figure having been mistakenly copied as a total number of payers, instead of as a money figure).

At the time of Giliberto Abbate’s report, it seems that the *gisia*, originally a Muslim poll tax, had become a Jewish payment.<sup>76</sup> It is true that Muslim serfs paid this tax as well, in Norman Sicily and until the deportations of the 1220s; in the present context, however, it seems unlikely that the *gisia* was a Muslim payment, considering that other payments in kind and in cash by the (Muslim) *villani curie* are listed in the document. The figure for Gozo (145 *tarenì*) seems too low to have been paid by the substantial Muslim population (155 families, or some 620 individuals). It seems more reasonable to consider the *gisia* as a Jewish payment; the Jewish community of 33 families would otherwise be unaccounted for in the incomes list. This would be strange, considering that all the Jewish communities in the *Regno* are known to have paid the *gisia*, being considered as royal property (*servi Camere Regie*). Indeed, by applying a hypothetical rate of six *tarenì per caput*, one obtains 90 Jews on Malta paying 540 *tarenì*, and 24 Jews on Gozo paying 145 *tarenì*; while a rate of five *tarenì* gives 108 Jews on Malta and 29 on Gozo. One should keep in mind that the *gisia* was a poll tax; it was, therefore, calculated *per caput* and not in a hearth-based manner. This would explain the difference between the ratio of families between the two islands (25 to 8, or 3.1) and that between the respective *gisia* payments (540 to 145, or 3.7). Applying the rates of six or five *tarenì* per Jewish head, one obtains 90 or 108 individuals distributed in 25 Jewish families on

Malta, as opposed to 24 or 29 individuals in 8 Jewish families on Gozo. The rate of five *tareni per caput* is probably the more realistic one, producing a family ratio a little over four members per household.

As has been seen, the interpretation of the *gisia* as a Jewish tax hinges on the need to account for the fiscal burden shouldered by the Jewish communities in Malta and Gozo at that time. There can be no doubt that the Jews were crown property; this entailed a fiscal commitment to the royal government. It is being assumed that the Jews, being *servi Camere Regie*, carried a distinct fiscal burden from their unfree Muslim counterparts, with a distinct payment (the *gisia*) from that of the *villani*. Nonetheless, it is important not to lose sight of the wider picture. Is it possible that villanal conditions differed along religious affiliation in mid-thirteenth-century Malta? It seems unlikely that twelfth-century juridical distinctions between different types of Muslim *villani* (the *hursh* versus the *muls*) had been retained by the mid-thirteenth century on Malta and Gozo; but a similar assimilation between the conditions of Muslim and Christian serf cannot be safely assumed. On the contrary, *prima facie* it seems likely that better conditions would be faced by those Muslim *villani* who embraced Christianity, at least as an incentive for conversion.

Unlike the 'classical' model of European feudal society, in the Sicilian context the Muslim serfs (whether *hursh* or *muls*) were not normally burdened with labour services.<sup>77</sup> In the Sicilian countryside, especially that of the Val Demone, it was typically the Greek Christian *villani* who were burdened with labour services by their lords (including the crown), while [p.52] their Muslim counterparts would shoulder substantial payments, in cash and in kind. As has been noted, an indication of past labour services (not included in the Giliberto Abbate report) is given in the Angevin documents, which mention swine herding (1270) and the repair, arming, and maintenance of a light vessel or *sagittia* for the islands' defence (1271).<sup>78</sup> One needs to seek an explanation for this insistence by the Angevin government that services traditionally rendered to the crown should (once again) be fulfilled, in view of the absence of Muslim serfs from the islands in Angevin times, and their normal burden of produce in kind rather than labour services. The conversion of Muslim serfs to Christianity, and their assimilation with the local Christian serf population (a process apparently completed, if at face value, by the 1270s at the latest), makes it understandable that the state would want to enforce labour services rather than revive the old Muslim payments. In fact it should be noted that the Angevin government mentioned services, rather than payments (in cash or in kind); plausibly it assumed that the descendants of the Christian *villani* could be forced to resume their old obligations.

A document issued in May 1271 explicitly stated this idea of making serfdom (or its descendants) once again a provider of manpower to the crown in the Maltese islands;<sup>79</sup> it ordered Bertrand de Real, the Angevin castellan of the islands, and master procurator of royal finances, to review all the *curia*'s rights and incomes in Malta and Gozo, carrying out an exercise similar to the comprehensive one done by Giliberto Abbate for Frederick II, 30 years before. The Angevin *curia* noted that the *quaternos* of a former procurator of the islands, Nicola Cavyil (who probably worked for Manfred), register the existence of *certe familie servorum nostrorum in eisdem insulis*, which serfs had regularly been charged with carrying out *massariis et aliis serviciis nostris*. The castellan was instructed to draw up a full list of these serfs or their descendants, with their names and surnames, sex and age, noting the particular *serviciis et utilitatibus* to which they were deputed; the crown insisted that it would not tolerate *servi steriles*. That Angevin officials were applying undue pressure on the population at this time seems beyond reasonable doubt. In November 1272, apparently following a petition *ex parte universorum hominum insularum Malte et Gaudisii*, the *curia* ordered Bertrand de Real to stop harassing local property owners in their free possession; several had been forced to abandon their lands and take to flight.<sup>80</sup>

The royal reply to Abbate's report does not give any details on labour services by the serfs, concentrating instead on the *curia*'s incomes in cash and kind, spent for the upkeep of its employees (mainly the *servientes* in the castles, and their families; as well as the agricultural employees in its *paricolae*, orchards, and gardens) and its slaves. It seems possible that Abbate's report originally included other information which was not summarized in the reply; he did ask the *curia* for authorization to proceed against those who had seized royal *raciones et iura*. At the same time, the authority granted to Abbate, who could determine whether the inhabitants were to retain their own *mores et constituciones*, or be made to live according to those in force in Sicily, was remarkably wide-ranging. The state was prepared to overrule local customary and legal peculiarities, if these undermined its financial and political interests.

The different set of written and customary laws within which the local Maltese communities functioned, need not have produced substantial variations in the conditions of the Muslim and Jewish subjects, whose obligations towards the crown, being royal property, would have to be fulfilled anyway. On the other hand, a different juridical framework might certainly [p.53] affect the ability of the crown, and the methods used, to ensure the collection of its gabelles and the way to proceed against those who had appropriated royal rights. Similarly, different local customs might be invoked, affecting its ability to control Christian peasants who had servile obligations to fulfil, from defaulting. In fact, this subject of different *mores et constituciones* in the islands, is brought up, in the penultimate paragraph, in reply to a *consultatio* by Giliberto, which simultaneously tackled the problem of dissipation of royal rights in private hands. As a royal official, Abbate was instructed to consider first and foremost *comodum curie nostre*; this advice was repeated in the last paragraph, invoking a 'social pact' between the crown and its faithful subjects according to which the royal safeguard of private property must be reciprocated by full private recognition of royal demesial rights.

One last (major) point needs to be tackled, the issue of total population figures mentioned in the Abbate report. The arithmetical discrepancies in the document have frequently been pointed out,<sup>81</sup> not least in the adding up of the respective incomes to produce the total amount of *tarenì* collected from the islands (305 *tarenì* are undeclared in the total; this discrepancy would widen to 380 *tarenì* if the *gisìa* and the tax paid by *villani curie* were to be considered as one and the same thing). The numbers of families as carried in the document show 47 Christian, 681 Saracen, and 25 Jewish families on Malta; and 203 Christian, 155 Muslim, and 33 Jewish families on Gozo. Many past contributors (though not all) have chosen to amend the figure for Christian families, from 47 to 1,047, by presuming that the word *mille* had gone missing from the text. One scholar has simply changed *quadraginta* into *quadringentas*,<sup>82</sup> while another reported 2,119 households citing the document;<sup>83</sup> in both cases, the reader is left without an explanation. These methods seem completely arbitrary. Nonetheless, one does have to explain the mention of only 47 Christian families on Malta shortly after 1240; this cannot have been the total figure of Christian households, because the document itself mentions 70 *servientes* employed in the *castrum* who had wives.

Actually, the problem is compounded by the assumption that the numbers of families reported by Abbate should have reflected total population figures. This was not necessarily the case; as has been acknowledged, the document was primarily a 'bureaucratic' one. It concerned the proper management of royal finances in the Maltese islands. The context makes it likely that Abbate would be interested in reporting the numbers of families who owed servile dues (in cash, kind, and labour services) to the crown; this would explain the large number of Muslim families (three-fourths of the total), as against the remaining number of Christian households noted. It would also help explain the disparity between the 203 Christian



families on Gozo and the 47 mentioned on Malta. From this perspective, by the 1240s, only a few Christian families on the larger island had failed to unbind themselves from their villanage conditions (recalling, once more, Abbate's complaint about irregularities). This would also explain the efforts made by the Angevin regime, in the early 1270s, to re-establish its old demesne rights over the (Christian) population. As is well known, Angevin fiscal policy claimed to emulate legitimately the practices of the Hohenstaufen administration it had destroyed; at one point the court at Naples claimed that royal income from the Maltese islands in the past had amounted to more than 1,000 *unciae per annum*. Unfortunately no more details were given; but the statement certainly helped underline the Angevin approach, which would leave no stone unturned (or no old account book unopened) to maximize royal revenues.

[p.54] In 1975, it was stated that 'Malta was never really Norman at all,'<sup>84</sup> This statement summed up, in a nutshell, an attitude which has coloured the leading interpretation of the period ever since. The present contribution has taken a radically different view. The coming into being of a subject Muslim community was the direct product of Norman conquest; the evolution of a *mudéjar* society, which reproduced itself through the survival of successive generations up to the mid-thirteenth century, underlines the real forms Latin Christian conquest took in the Maltese islands.

[illustr. p.47]



*Tombstone recording the death of Maimuna, daughter of Hasan Ibn 'Ali al-Hadli from Gabes of Sousse, on Thursday 16 Shaban 596 (21 March 1174); allegedly of Gozitan provenance, it was donated by Marchese Depiro to the Royal Malta Library in 1845.*

[By Charles Dalli]

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[p.54, cont'd]



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## [p.55]

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