

MALTESE BLOCKADE MEDALS

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Of Maltese medals of the nineteenth century, those most noteworthy, on account of their perennial historical background, are those which are commonly known as 'Blockade Medals'. The rebellion of the Maltese against the French in 1798 and the heart-rending story of the valour displayed by the insurgents in the following months stand out from all other relevant episodes in the varied and eventful history of the Maltese Islands.

As a result of French designs on Egypt and India, Bonaparte captured Malta from the Knights of St John, who meekly surrendered on 12 June 1798, and were hastily bundled out of the island within a few days. After seizing the treasures and money in the Order's churches and public institutions, Bonaparte sailed to Alexandria, leaving behind a strong garrison of about 5,000 men under the command of General Claude-Henri de Vaubois. The Maltese seem to have, at first, desired a change of government but the subsequent conduct of the French military commanders and the troops, the suspension of civil pensions, the heavy taxation imposed to subsidize the upkeep of the garrison, the reduction of the number of convents to one for each Order, and the restriction of the Bishop's jurisdiction gradually reversed every sympathy towards a republican government. The hindrance of a sale by public auction of gold and silver objects as well as tapestries belonging to convents and churches in Rabat and Mdina on 2 September 1798 sparked off a revolt. In a matter of days, the French troops had to withdraw within the impregnable capital city of Valletta and the fortifications of Cottonera on the other side of the Grand Harbour.

The Maltese quickly convened a National Assembly and acknowledged King Ferdinand IV of Naples and III of Sicily as their sovereign. This decision was favourably received by His Neapolitan Majesty who also promised his aid and protection. At the same time they appealed for help to Admiral Nelson who was then returning to Naples from Alexandria, where he had destroyed the French fleet at the Battle of the Nile. The latter, who maintained that 'any expense should be incurred rather than let Malta remain in the hands of the French', accepted a request by the Maltese to blockade their island by sea. Nelson first sent a Portuguese squadron and later a British one to blockade Malta's harbours and prevent as far as possible the besieged French

garrison from receiving assistance or provisions. For more than fourteen months, the siege was entirely maintained by the Maltese insurgents under the leadership of General Emmanuele Vitale,¹ Canon Francesco Saverio Caruana² and Vincenzo Borg³ assisted by "a lieutenant of the British artillery, five Neapolitan officers, and twenty privates".⁴ In February 1799, at the request of the National Assembly (later renamed *Congresso*) and with the consent of His Neapolitan Majesty, Captain Alexander John Ball RN,⁵ in

- 1 On the commencement of the Maltese revolt against the French, Notary Emmanuele Vitale (1758-1802) was chosen as General in command of the insurgent troops. The people of Żebbuġ and Siggiewi, however, refused to recognize him as such and appointed Canon F.S. Caruana as their commandant. After Captain Alexander John Ball R.N. began to preside over the meetings of the Maltese National Assembly, then renamed *Congresso*, Vitale began to attend the meetings as representative of Mdina, Rabat and Dingli. He was appointed Governor of Gozo on 20 August 1801.
- 2 Canon Francesco Saverio Caruana (1759-1847) was a member of the French Commission of Government. On the rebellion of the Maltese he became General of the forces of Żebbuġ and Siggiewi and subsequently representative of the Maltese Clergy and Capitular Vicar of the troops after the National Assembly was renamed *Congresso*. In recognition of his scholastic merits and of his services during the siege of the French he was appointed Rector of the University of Studies on 28 October 1800. At the age of 73 he was ordained Bishop of Malta and Gozo on 28 February 1831.
- 3 Vincenzo Borg (1767-1837), a cotton merchant known as *Braret*, played a prominent part in the rebellion against the French as a commandant of the forces and as representative of Birkirkara and Lija in the *Congresso*. Borg was very pro-British and at one stage during the siege he informed Ball that 'the overwhelming majority amongst us desire nothing so much as to see the Island under the British'. He eventually fell out with Ball who put him under house-arrest because of his alleged political intrigues. In 1833 he was created a *Cavaliere* in the Order of St Michael and St George (CMG). A bust of Vincenzo Borg donated by the Galea family of Birkirkara to the *Aula Capitolare* of the Basilica of St Helen, shows the 'Blockade' gold medal awarded to this Maltese leader in 1801 and the C.M.G. decoration of 1833.
- 4 William Hardman, *A History of Malta during the Period of the French and British Occupations 1798-1815*, (Longmans Green and Co., 1909) 345.
- 5 After the Battle of the Nile (1 August 1798), Captain (later Sir) Alexander John Ball R.N., on Nelson's orders, undertook the blockade of Malta's harbours, and later, with the approval of the Maltese National Assembly assumed command of the land forces. During the siege of the French in Malta he governed Malta in the name of the King of the Two Sicilies and endeared himself so much to the inhabitants that he later became known as 'The Father of the Maltese'. He was recalled to the Navy in February 1801. After the Treaty of Amiens (25 March 1802) Ball returned to Malta on 10 July 1802 as His British Majesty's Plenipotentiary to the Order of St John to whom the island was

charge of the blockading squadron, assumed overall command of land operations. In the meantime, more than £40,000 in corn and money had been received from Sicily, but this amount was not enough, and the Maltese insurgents were often reduced to the direst extremities. In December 1799, a small British expeditionary force of about 800 men under Brigadier-General Thomas Graham was sent to Malta to assist the Maltese and to take over command of military operations. A contingent of Neapolitan troops arrived in January 1800, whilst a force of 1500 men under Major-General Henry Pigot reached the island in July. The brave French garrison continued to resist the besieging forces but finally, in a starving condition, surrendered on 5 September 1800.

Gold and silver medals were subsequently struck to commemorate the victory over the French after a two-year siege during which about 20,000 Maltese perished through sickness and famine or in battle. These medals are now virtually unobtainable and are the most highly prized of Maltese medals.

Gold Awards

The gold medals were awarded to the leaders of the Maltese for their zeal and courage shown during the defense of their country on the outbreak of the rebellion against the French (2 September 1798) and for offering themselves to represent the inhabitants of their *casali* in the National Assembly. These medals (36mm. in diameter), are extremely simple in design, and consist of two thin gold flans, one for each side of the medal, joined together by a gold raised rim. At the top they have a decorative finement through which passes the loop for suspension. Portraits of General Emmanuele Vitale, Chevalier Giovanni Gafà,⁶ Filippo Castagna⁷ and

to be restored. Ball lobbied the Maltese so that Britain would retain Malta because of her strategic and commercial value. Ball's second term of office on the island was not popular at all for he refused to countenance the reinstatement of the Maltese *Congresso* and exiled 'undesirable persons to Barbary without trial': Donald Sultana, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge in Malta and Sicily* (Barnes Noble, New York, 1969) 15.

6 Giovanni Gafà was the representative of Gharghur in the *Congresso*. A portrait of this Maltese hero wearing a gold medal is to be found in the Parish Church of Gharghur.

7 Filippo Castagna was at first representative of Gudja in the *Congresso* but after the blockade he became Lieutenant for Bormla and Senglea. In a confidential despatch of the Civil Commissioner Charles Cameron (15 November 1801) to the Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, Castagna was described 'as a man of excellent public character, exceedingly popular with every rank of the inhabitants. He distinguished himself at the Siege of Valletta, and in the *Congresso*, both for his

Stanislao Gatt,⁸ show the gold medal worn on the breast and suspended from a riband vertically striped in white and red, the traditional Maltese colours.

The crowned white and red coat of arms of Malta, flanked by palm branches, is engraved on the obverse, whilst the reverse design consists of two palm branches flanked by the motto PATRIA LIBERATA. In addition to the gold medals, the recipients also received a citation or attestation certificate as the gold medals, unlike the silver ones, were issued unnamed. All citations are identical apart from the recipient's name and the town or village which he represented. They are all dated 9 February 1801 and bear the signature of Sir Alexander Ball as well as that of his Maltese secretary Felice Cutajar.⁹ They are written in Italian, the language of the Government, and read as follows:-

Noi Alessandro Giovanni Ball Governatore dell'Isole Malta e Gozo - Atteso il merito di voi e zelo dimostrato nella difesa della Patria li 2 Settembre

courage, moderation, and wisdom. He took Gozo from the French with a handful of troops, and an address which raised him very high in the opinion of the military. He is very warmly attached to His Majesty's Government': Hardman, 419. Castagna was appointed Governor of Gozo on 19 October 1802. A portrait of Castagna by Pietro Paolo Caruana, showing this Maltese leader wearing a gold medal, is in the Cachia Zammit collection. An original riband, originally belonging to Filippo Castagna, was donated to the National Museum by the Cachia Zammit family.

8 During the rule of the Order of St John, the apothecary Stanislao Gatt, held the post of jurat and syndic of the village of Qormi. On the landing of the French in Malta his residence was pillaged by the troops but soon afterwards he was appointed President of the municipality of Qormi. After the rebellion against the French he was elected representative of his village in the Maltese National Assembly and during the blockade he commanded the Qormi battalion. Like many other leading citizens of his village, he also donated money and pledged his own property for the maintenance of his battalion: Ġużé, Cardona, "Stanislao Gatt", *Heritage, An Encyclopedia of Maltese Culture and Civilization* (Midsea Books, Valletta, January 1980) 619-620. A portrait of Gatt wearing his gold medal is in a private collection in Qormi and has been reproduced in the afore-mentioned encyclopedia.

9 Advocate Felice Cutajar took an active part in the siege of the French. He served as Secretary to Captain Ball during the blockade and later as Assistant Secretary and Administrator of Public Property: *Diario, Lunario e Calendario delle Isole di Malta e Gozo per l'anno 1805*, 11. Cutajar's original manuscript in Italian, now in the National Library of Malta, gives a historical account of the French occupation of Malta. A translation in English of Cutajar's narrative has been published in Alfred Zammit Cutajar's book *Biographical Notes on the Ancestry of my Parents* (Printex Ltd., Malta, 1987).

1798 contro i Francesi, ed atteso il vostro coraggio nell'esservi offerto per Rappresentante degli abitanti diper formarne un Congresso ne' tempi piu pericolosi della Rivoluzione; Pertanto vi accordiamo il presente insieme con una medaglia d'oro, affinché serva a voi unitamente con tutta la vostra famiglia di una eterna memoria, e di onorevole considerazione. Dalla Segretaria di Sua Eccellenza li 9 Febbraio 1801'.¹⁰

Vassallo, the Maltese historian, says that the medals were awarded to the Maltese by the British Government.¹¹ There is, however, no evidence that any British medals were awarded to either Maltese or British personnel for their participation in the war against the French in Malta. In fact, the Royal Mint, the British Museum and the National Army Museum in the United Kingdom have no recorded information regarding such awards. Furthermore, the wafer-seal attached to the citations given to recipients of gold medals reads 'Alessandro Giovanni Ball Governatore di Malta e Gozo per S.M.S. [Sua Maestà Siciliana]' and because Ball, under the direction of the Maltese Congress, governed Malta and issued laws and regulations on behalf of His Sicilian Majesty, it should be assumed that the awards were made in King Ferdinand's name and not in that of the British Government.

E.H. Furse, whilst describing a gold and a silver medal repeats Vassallo's assertion that the blockade medals were awarded by the British Government and adds that a gold medal was also given to Captain Alexander John Ball.¹²

10 Translation: Considering your merit, and zeal shown during the defence of your country on 2 September 1798 against the French and considering your courage in offering yourself as Representative of the inhabitants of Casal..... to constitute a Congress during the most dangerous period of the revolt, we award to you this attestation together with a gold medal so that it will be for you and for your family an everlasting memory and honourable testimony'. From the Secretariat of His Excellency, 9 February 1801. (Signed) Alexander John Ball. Felice Cutajar, Secretary to His Excellency.

11 Gio. Ant. Vassallo, *Storia di Malta, raccontata in compendio* (Tipografia di Francesco Cumbo, Malta, 1854) 833.

12 Edouard Henri Furse, *Mémoires Numismatiques de l'Ordre Souverain de Saint-Jean de Jérusalem illustrées avec les Médailles et Monnaies frappées par les Grands Maîtres de l'Ordre* (Forzani C, Imprimeurs du Senat, Editeurs, Rome, 1885) 391. Furse says that the gold medal came from the collection of Count George Sant Fournier and that it was subsequently given to Professor Salvatore Luigi Pisani, M.D., C.M.G., whose magnificent collection of coins and medals was donated to the Maltese

Professor Pisani in his *Medagliere di Malta e Gozo*, a catalogue of his personal collection of coins and medals, lists one gold medal and the silver one awarded to Felice Borg.¹³

In 1897, Major Chesney specifically stated that the gold medals were only awarded to the three leaders of the Maltese insurgents, Vitale, Caruana and Borg.¹⁴ This misinformation has been repeated by other authors,¹⁵ even though Monsignor Alfredo Mifsud, a former Librarian of the National Library of Malta, had, in 1907, assumed that the gold medals were awarded to all the surviving representatives of the Casali in Malta and Gozo.¹⁶ In fact, apart from those presented to Vincenzo Borg, Francesco Saverio Caruana and Emmanuele Vitale, he had found the gold medals given to

nation in 1899: *Malta Government Gazette* (30 July 1909). The silver medal described by Furse had been awarded to Felice Borg (*carabiniere nel tempo del blocco cioè della rivolta della campagna contro i Francesi*) and belonged to Professor Pisani.

- 13 S.L. Pisani, *Medagliere di Malta e Gozo dall'Epoca Fenicia all'attuale Regnante S.M. La Regina Vittoria* (Tipografia di Giov. Muscat, Malta, 1896) 77. Pisani says that the gold medal, presumably that which had been awarded to Filippo Castagna, and which he describes in his catalogue had been given to him by the Cachia Zammit family. It is now one of the three gold 'Blockade' medals in the numismatic collection of the National Museum of Malta.
- 14 A.G. Chesney, *Historical Records of the Maltese Corps of the British Army* (William Clowes & Sons, London 1897) 19.
- 15 Amongst them, G.B. Harker, *History of the Royal Malta Artillery* (Criterion Press, Malta, 1944) 5; A. Samut-Tagliaferro, *History of the Royal Malta Artillery*. vol. i (1800-1939) (Lux Press, Malta, 1976) 29; J.M. Wismayer, *The History of the King's Own Malta Regiment and the Armed Forces of the Order of St John* (Said International Ltd., Malta, 1989) 104-105.
- 16 Alfredo Mifsud, *Origine della Sovranità Inglese su Malta* (Tipografia del Malta, 1907) 379. The following were elected Deputies and Representatives of the People as from 18 February 1799: General Emmanuele Vitale, for Città Vecchia (Mdina), Rabat and Dingli; Notary Pietro Buttigieg for Żebbuġ; Parish Priest Salvatore Curso for Siggiewi; Parish Priest Aloisio Bartolomeo Caraffa for Mqabba; Gregorio Mifsud for Qrendi; Rev. Fr. Fortunato Dalli for Żurrieq; Rev. Fr. Giuseppe Abdilla for Safi; Dr Enrico Xerri for Kirkop; Filippo Castagna for Gudja; Rev. Fr. Pietro Mallia for Għaxaq; Michele Cachia for Żejtun; Agostino Said for Żabbar; Giuseppe Montebello for Tarxien; Rev. Fr. Giuseppe Casha for Luqa; Stanisław Gatt for Qormi; Vincenzo Borg for Birkirkara; Giovanni Gaġġa for Għargħur; Chev. Baron Paolo Parisio Muscati for Naxxar; Parish Priest Felice Calleja for Mosta; Salvatore Gaġġa for Lija; Giuseppe Frendo for Balzan; and Notary Saverio Zarb for Attard: Hardman 191; Testa ii, 488-489).

Giuseppe Frendo of Balzan¹⁷ and to Notary Pietro Buttigieg of Żebbuġ,¹⁸ and traced three other medals in private collections. Furthermore, Mifsud also referred to the citation presented to Michele Cachia of Żejtun¹⁹ and reproduced those given to Stanisław Gatt of Casal Fornaro (Qormi) and to Saverio Zarb of Attard. The author of the present monograph has, in the meantime, traced the citation given to the representative of Mosta, Parish Priest Felice Calleja.²⁰ Dr Testa, the now established expert on the French occupation of Malta, states that Enrico Xerri, the representative of Kirkop, was also the recipient of a gold medal.²¹

I have now been able to establish, with certainty, that the gold medals were awarded to all the representatives of the villages after the surrender of the French. This is confirmed in a petition made by Salvatore Gaġġa, the representative of the village of Lia, which is to be found in the National Archives, Rabat. When Gaġġa had to resign his post in 1809, because of

17 Giuseppe Frendo was the Chief and representative of Balzan.

18 Notary Pietro Buttigieg, the representative of Żebbuġ was not only awarded a gold medal for his distinguished services during the blockade. In 1799, Captain Alexander Ball gave him exclusive rights to work as the sole notary in Żebbuġ (Testa 489-490 and after the war he continued to hold the post of Lieutenant of his village (*Diario, Lunario e Calendario* 1805, 14).

19 "Michele Cachia, military and civil engineer, representative of Casal Żejtun, constructed all the batteries during the siege of Valletta, and contributed money towards the expense of the war. He is famed for his wisdom in counsel, and is the most popular man in the Island, his integrity and talents have acquired him a great reputation and the entire confidence of the people of every description": Mifsud, 249. In recognition of his services during the war he was appointed *Capo Maestro* of Government buildings and one of the *Amministratori de Beni Pubblici*: *Diario, Lunario e Calendario* 1805, 11.

This Maltese patriot was one of the Maltese delegates who in November 1801 proceeded to London to protest against the restoration of Malta to the Order of St John in accordance with the Treaty of Amiens, which never materialized as war between England and France broke out once again in May 1803.

20 E.B. Vella, *Storja tal-Mosta bil-Knisja Tagħha* (Empire Press, Malta, 1930) 102. This citation is in the collection of Dr M. Agius Vadalà who kindly pointed out to me its existence.

21 Enrico Xerri graduated as medical doctor at Salerno and returned to Malta shortly before the uprising of the Maltese against the French. During the blockade of the French garrison he was the representative of Kirkop in the Maltese National Assembly and commandant of the village battalion. Like Vincenzo Borg and Filippo Castagna he also held the post of military inspector of the Maltese battalions (Testa, 523, 737), and after the surrender of the French he was appointed *Capitano di Porto*: *Diario, Lunario e Calendario* 1805, 15.

illness, he was left practically penniless. In his request for a pension, which was eventually granted, he specifically states that for his meritorious services during the blockade, he, like all the representatives of the other villages, had been awarded a gold medal (*riguardo a tali meriti l'Oré [Oratore] e stato dall E. V. [Sir Alexander Ball] garantito con una midaglia (sic) d'oro conforme lo erano nell'altri Rappresentanti ...*).²²

The issue of these medals, after the end of the blockade, is also confirmed by entries in the *Libro Introiti ed Esiti 1800 - 1801 (Accounts, payment of Salaries, pensions etc.)* extant in the National Library of Malta. According to these records, the gold medals cost 1400 *Scudi* which were paid on 13 and 29 January 1801 to the Vicar-General Salvatore Susano who, it appears, undertook to provide these awards.²³

Silver Awards

The silver medals (42mm. in diameter) were awarded to those recruits in the village battalions who distinguished themselves in the sorties against the French, as well as to a few leading inhabitants who contributed substantial funds for the upkeep of the troops or mortgaged their own property for the provision of grain from Sicily. Like the gold ones, they consist of two flans, one for each side of the medals, joined together by a raised rim. At the top they also have a decorative finement, to which is attached an ornate solid silver bow. The obverse displays the motto MALTA AI SUOI DIFENSORI and the date 1800 surmounting two olive branches. The whole design and lettering are embossed. The reverse shows the recipient's name, incusely inscribed over two impressed olive branches identical to those shown on the obverse.

It is clear that a good number of silver medals - exactly how many is not known - were issued. According to official records, Mario Schembri, the Consul for Silversmiths, was paid for 60 medals.²⁴ On two other occasions, 6 October 1800²⁵ and 7 February 1801,²⁶ he handed in more medals.

22 NAR [National Archives, Rabat], *Ordini e Decreti (Gennaio 1808 - Dicembre 1811)*, ff. 72-73.

23 NLM [National Library of Malta], MS. Libr.3, *Libro Introiti ed Esiti (Settembre 1800 - Agosto 1801)*, ff. 26 and 29.

24 *Ibid.*, 1, 16, 17, 19, 27 (*Esiti*).

25 *Ibid.*, 1.

26 *Ibid.*, 32.

However, because the payment made to him on those dates included also the wages of Palace guards, the number cannot be established.

Vassallo²⁷ says that amongst those who were awarded silver medals for their distinguished participation in the siege were the following:

Pietro Paolo Bezzina ²⁸	Francesco Farrugia ²⁹
Salvatore Bonanno ³⁰	Costanzo Morgo ³¹
Luigi Briffa ³²	Giuseppe Musci ³³
Giuseppe Brignone ³⁴	Modesto Sapiano ³⁵

27 Vassallo, 833. It is to be assumed that the recipients listed by this author were awarded silver medals.

28 Pietro Paolo Bezzina was appointed Receiver of Grain on 4 September 1798: Mifsud, 202.

29 During the early French rule Francesco Farrugia was Secretary to the municipality of Siggiewi (Testa, 139) but after the insurrection took an active part in the blockade of the French in Valletta. Farrugia was one of the delegates sent to Naples to solicit the aid of King Ferdinand soon after the uprising of the Maltese: Hardman, 110. However, there were two other soldiers whose names were Francesco Farrugia; one served in the Żabbar battalion, the other in the Tarxien battalion.

30 The Rev. Fr. Salvatore Bonanno was the assistant of Canon F.S. Caruana. On the outbreak of the rebellion against the French he was appointed commandant of the camp at San Giuseppe. It is very unlikely that a silver medal was awarded to him as he died on 7 April 1799: Carmelo Testa, *Maż-Żewġ Nahat tas-Swar: Żmien il-Franċiżi f'Malta*, (Klabb Kotba Maltin, Malta, 1980) 245.

31 On 3 September 1798, the day after the Maltese rose against the French at Rabat, the insurgents, led by Emmanuele Vitale, succeeded in effecting an entrance into Mdina with the help of Costanzo Morgo, known as 'Tal-Kantur', through a secret passage behind the Cathedral: Testa, 228.

32 Luigi Briffa, a native of Żebbuġ, was one of the delegates of the Maltese National Assembly who were sent to solicit the aid of King Ferdinand IV of Naples soon after the insurrection - Mifsud, 204. During the blockade Briffa was appointed first on the board of the *Università dei Grani* and later as portmaster at St Paul's Bay: Mifsud, 280.

33 Giuseppe Musci was one of the inspectors of towers held by the Maltese insurgents during the blockade: Mifsud 202.

34 Notary Giuseppe Brignone acted as Secretary to the municipality of Żebbuġ under the French: Testa, 139. After the Maltese rebellion he served as *cancelliere* of the camp at San Giuseppe (Mifsud, 267) and as Aide-de-Camp to Salvatore Bonanno. Zammit Cutajar, 80.

35 Modesto Sapiano was appointed Chief of the Artillery at the first meeting of the Maltese National Assembly held at Mdina on 4 September 1798: Mifsud, 202.

Lorenzo Bugeja³⁶Andrea Calleja³⁸Angelo Cilia⁴⁰Gaetano Vitale³⁷Alessio Xuereb³⁹Saverio Zarb⁴¹

It is also known that Sergeant Giuseppe Darmanin and Stefano Spiteri, a soldier, both in the village battalion of Żurrieq, were recipients of a silver medal.⁴² E.B. Vella says that Baldassere Attard, Gian Battista Mamo and Giuseppe Bonnici, artillerymen in the Żejtun battalion, were also awarded medals.⁴³ Four silver medals awarded to Paolo Borg,⁴⁴ Giovanni Maria

36 Lorenzo Bugeja, a native of Rabat, acted as Secretary to the Maltese National Assembly on 4 September 1798 (Mifsud, 190) and on the next day he was appointed Inspector of Towers and Batteries in the area of St Paul's Bay (Mifsud, 202; Żammit Cutajar, 80). Bugeja's chronicle of the events leading to the landing of the French and the rebellion of the Maltese is to be found at the National Library of Malta (MS. 269). Another person, whose name was Lorenzo Bugeja and served in the Żejtun battalion, could well be the recipient of this medal. (For a list of Maltese recruits, Cfr. *Abstract of Maltese serving at the surrender of the Island of Malta on the 4th September 1800 and entitled to share Prize Money for the same*, NLM, Libr. MS. 2, f. 19).

37 Notary Gaetano Vitale held the post of Receiver of Grain along with Bezzina: Testa, ii, 247. After the surrender of the French, Vitale was appointed chancellor and archivist of the magistracy of Mdina: *Diario, Lunario e Calendario 1805*, 11.

38 Andrea Calleja was the leader of a group of Maltese insurgents from the Birkirkara battalion who rowed across the Grand Harbour on 12 January 1799 during the unsuccessful attempt to enter Valletta. The insurgents were accidentally discovered in the quarantine stores at Marsamxett and in the mêlée that followed a number of them lost their lives or were taken prisoners. Calleja, however, managed to escape and later in the siege took an active part in the fight against the French as commandant of one of the Birkirkara battalions in charge of the Ġħargħar battery: Vassallo, 833. Another Andrea Calleja, who was a soldier in the Żabbar battalion, might have been the recipient of this silver medal: NLM, Libr. MS.2, f.19).

39 Alessio Xuereb acted as courier of messages between the military camps: Mifsud, 202.

40 Andrea Cilia was Chief of the battalion at Tas-Samra: Hardman 416.

41 Saverio Zarb was a soldier in the Żabbar Battalion: NLM, Libr. MS.2, f.19.

42 Mifsud, 279; The award of a silver medal to Stefano Spiteri is confirmed by Joseph Galea: 8.

43 E.B. Vella, *Storja taż-Żejtun u Marsaxlokk* (Empire Press, Malta, 1927) 105.

44 Paolo Borg was a medical doctor and one of the leading inhabitants of Birkirkara who contributed funds towards the upkeep of the battalions of that village by the hypothecation of their personal property to obtain provisions from Sicily I.E.B. Vella, *Storja ta' Birkirkara bil-Kollegġjatatagħha* (Empire Press, Malta, 1934) 292 - 293. Borg's silver medal was bequeathed to the National Museum of Malta by Magistrate Dr Edgar Parnis

Cassar,⁴⁵ Felice Borg⁴⁶ and Andrea Attard,⁴⁷ are to be found in the numismatic collection of the Malta National Museum.

It is unfortunate that no official full list of recipients of these 'Blockade' medals has been traced and that only five gold medals and five silver ones are known to exist either in the Malta National Museum or in private collections. It is a great pity that so many of them have either been lost or found their way to the melting pot of the local silversmiths.

These awards have a stirring human story behind them and will forever remain a living proof of the valour of our ancestors, confirmed at one stage of the war against the French by a spirited address to the Maltese by Brigadier-General Thomas Graham (later General Lord Lynedoch) who, in April 1800, raised the Maltese Light Infantry (*I Cacciatori Maltesi*).⁴⁸ On 19 June of that year, in an appeal to raise more companies of armed peasants, Graham asserted: "Brave Maltese - You have rendered yourselves interesting and conspicuous to the world. History affords no more striking example....without arms, without the resources of war, you broke asunder your chains. Your patriotism, courage and religion supplied all deficiencies...."⁴⁹

in 1939: *Report of the working of the Museum Department 1922-23*, p. x. It cannot, as yet, be ascertained that Dr Paolo Borg was the recipient of this silver medal as there were two others whose name was Paolo Borg. Both served in the Birkirkara Battalion; one was an officer, the other a soldier: MS. NLM, Libr. MS.2, f.71.

45 Giovanni Maria Cassar could well be one of the priests who, like Dr Paolo Borg, mortgaged their own property to procure provisions for the insurgents enrolled in the Birkirkara battalions - Vella (1934), 293. His medal was also bequeathed to the National Museum of Malta by Magistrate Dr Parnis.

46 Professor Pisani simply says that Felice Borg came from the village of Żebbuġ: Pisani, 77. However, it has been officially recorded that Borg was a member of the Żabbar battalion: Joseph Galea, "The Maltese Militia of 1800", *The Armed Forces of Malta Journal*, 27, (1977) 7.

47 Andrea Attard was a soldier in the Mosta battalion: NLM, Libr. MS. 2, f 37

48 Samut-Tagliaferro, 13-14.

49 *Graham's Appeal to Brave Maltese* reproduced in Cobbett's Annual Register (January - June 1803, col. 774).