

MEDIEVAL MALTA

STUDIES ON MALTA BEFORE THE KNIGHTS

Anthony T. Luttrell (Fellow, University of Oxford)

Assistant Lecturer in Medieval History

at The British School at Rome 1975

P. & P. Farrer (Director, Early Centre for Research in History, University of London)

Director of Studies in History at the University of London

John Charles Patterson (Fellow, University of Oxford)

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

Edited by

ANTHONY T. LUTTRELL

Dean, Faculty of Divinity and Canon Law, Cambridge

Early Centre of Studies in History and Archaeology, University of London

Thomas Brown (Fellow, University of Oxford)

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

Marie H. Smith (Fellow, University of Oxford)

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

Charles W. Wright (Fellow, University of Oxford)

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

John W. E. Hill (Fellow, University of Oxford)

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

John W. E. Hill

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

John W. E. Hill

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

John W. E. Hill

Assistant Lecturer in History at the University of Oxford

THE BRITISH SCHOOL AT ROME

LONDON

1975

Printed in Great Britain by the University Press, Cambridge

STUDIES ON MALTA BEFORE THE KNIGHTS MEDIEVAL MALTA

© The British School at Rome 1975



Printed by Heffers Printers Ltd Cambridge England

CONTENTS

<i>Editorial Preface</i>	page vii
<i>List of Text Figures</i>	ix
<i>List of Plates</i>	xi
ANTHONY T. LUTTRELL (<i>Royal University of Malta</i>)	
Approaches to Medieval Malta	i
T. S. BROWN (<i>Dumbarton Oaks Center for Byzantine Studies, Washington</i>)	
Byzantine Malta: a Discussion of the Sources	71
MICHELANGELO CAGIANO DE AZEVEDO (<i>Università del Sacro Cuore, Milan</i>)	
Medieval Buildings Excavated at Tas-Silġ and San Pawl Milqi in Malta	88
JOSEPH CASSAR PULLICINO (<i>Editor: Maltese Folklore Review</i>)	
Norman Legends in Malta	96
DAVID ABULAFIA (<i>Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge</i>)	
Henry Count of Malta and his Mediterranean Activities: 1203-1230	104
HENRI BRESO (<i>École Française de Rome</i>)	
The 'Secrezia' and the Royal Patrimony in Malta: 1240-1450	126
MARIO BUHAGIAR (<i>National Museum, Valletta</i>)	
Medieval Churches in Malta	163
GODFREY WETTINGER (<i>Royal University of Malta</i>)	
The Lost Villages and Hamlets of Malta	181
JOHN WARD-PERKINS (<i>formerly British School at Rome</i>)	
Medieval and Early Renaissance Architecture in Malta	217
Plates 1-8	after page 64
9-18	after page 176
19-24	after page 220
<i>Index of Places and Persons</i>	224

the 'Italian state' in such a way as to include in it the Kingdom of Naples.³⁸⁵ The contemporary inscription on the Castelnuovo at Naples described Alfonso V as *Rex Hispanus, Siculus, Italicus*. Malta and Gozo formed a distant and special part of the Sicilian kingdom, within which they preserved many of their own ways of life and speech and thought; they were neither Spanish nor Italian.

³⁸⁵ F. Chabod, *Machiavelli and the Renaissance* (London, 1958), 71-76 *et passim*; see also D. Hay, 'The Italian View of Renaissance Italy', *Florilegium Historicum: Essays presented to Wallace K. Fergusson* (Toronto, 1971).

BYZANTINE MALTA: A DISCUSSION OF THE SOURCES*

T. S. BROWN

THIS study of Byzantine Malta has no claim to comprehensiveness. It provides no analysis of the often ambiguous evidence supplied by archaeological, epigraphic, numismatic and place-name material which any definitive treatment would have to take into account.¹ Such a study would be rewarding, provided that it complemented the rather meagre sources for the island's history with an incisive view of the wider developments to which Malta was exposed, that is of the considerable influx of Greek-speaking settlers and Hellenic culture into the Central Mediterranean,² of the administrative changes introduced in Byzantine possessions such as Sicily,³ and of the feverish naval activity in the area which followed the rise of Islam.⁴ The present, more humble, aim is to survey the written texts and to correct certain misinterpretations in the light of more recent research and using the best available editions of the texts. The numerous Greek and Latin sources which refer to St. Paul's visit to the island, describe how it was populated by the sons of Ham, or repeat the commonplace classical allusions to Maltese dogs are, however, ignored; they have little or no bearing on the Byzantine period, and have already been diligently listed.⁵

This study commences in 533, when Procopius supplies the first unequivocal, datable reference to medieval Malta. For the preceding century there are no specific references, and it can only be inferred from a passage of Victor Bishop of Vita in North Africa, who wrote at the end of the fifth century, that the islands were conquered by the Vandals of North Africa and later handed over to Odoacer, the barbarian King of Italy.

* The research for this article was a by-product of work undertaken for the degree of Ph.D. in the University of Nottingham, and with the financial support of the Scottish Education Department and the British School at Rome. Just as it was going to press, it was discovered that Byzantine Malta was also being treated by Professor Agostino Pertusi, who kindly discussed the subject with the author.

¹ For the archaeological and other evidence, some of which apparently points to an essential continuity of occupation on Roman sites down to the Muslim conquest, *supra*, 21-23. The author intends to publish the sizeable number of Byzantine coins in Malta in a future article.

² A. Pertusi, 'Bisanzio e l'irradiazione della sua civiltà', in *XI Settimana di Studio del Centro Italiano di Studi sull'alto medioevo* (Spoleto, 1964), 96-101 *et passim*; see also P. Charanis, 'On the Question of the Hellenization of Sicily and Southern Italy during the Middle Ages', *American Historical Review*, lii (1946).

³ W. Ensslin, 'Zur Verwaltung Siziliens vom Ende des weströmischen Reiches bis zum Beginn der Themenverfassung', *Atti del VIII Congresso Internazionale di Studi Bizantini* (Rome, 1951); S. Borsari, 'L'amministrazione del tema di Sicilia', *Rivista Storica Italiana*, lxvi (1954); V. von Falkenhausen, *Untersuchungen über die byzantinische Herrschaft in Süditalien* (Wiesbaden, 1967).

⁴ A. Lewis, *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean A.D. 500-1100* (Princeton, 1951); E. Eickhoff, *Seekrieg und Seepolitik zwischen Islam und Abendland* (Berlin, 1966); H. Ahrweiler, *Byzance et la Mer: la marine de guerre, la politique et les institutions maritimes de Byzance aux VIIe-XVe siècles* (Paris, 1966).

⁵ G. Busuttill, 'Fonti greche per la storia delle isole maltesi', *Missione Archeologica Italiana a Malta: Rapporto preliminare della Campagna 1968* (Rome, 1969), 15-26, giving the Greek texts without translation or commentary. For a discussion of the references to Gozo in classical, Byzantine, Arabic and Western medieval texts, *idem*, 'Gaudos', *Orbis: Bulletin international de documentation linguistique*, xx (1971).

Victor Vitensis, *Historia Persecutionis Africae Provinciae*.⁶

Post cuius (sc. Valentiniani) mortem totius Africae ambitum obtinuit (Geisericus), nec non et insulas maximas Sardiniam, Siciliam, Corsicam, Ebusum, Maioricam, Minoricam vel alias multas superbia sibi consueta defendit. Quarum unam illarum id est Siciliam Oduacro Italiae regi postmodum tributario iure concessit; ex qua eis Oduacar singulis quibusque temporibus ut dominis tributa dependit, aliquam tamen sibi reservantibus partem.

It seems plausible that Malta, along with Sicily, remained in Vandal hands from about 455 to 476, was granted to Odoacer in return for tribute, and then passed to the Ostrogothic king Theodoric soon after his defeat of Odoacer in 493.⁷ To judge from the archaeological evidence, these 'barbarians' caused no obvious break in the Roman life of Malta and Gozo. Amari associated a donation of property worth 200 *solidi* made by Odoacer in 489 with Malta,⁸ but the papyrus in which this grant occurs clearly shows that it referred to the Dalmatian island of Meleda, the modern Miljet.⁹

There seems to be no evidence whatsoever for a bishop in Malta before 553. Attempts to identify as Maltese the Bishops of Mila in Numidia who attended African synods¹⁰ or those of Melitene in Armenia who attended the Council of Ephesus in 431 and the pseudo-synod of Rome of 501¹¹ have been decisively rejected.¹² An exhaustive study of the African episcopate has produced no record of the attendance of a Bishop of Malta at any council in Africa.¹³ Nor does the island figure in a *notitia* of bishops of the African church compiled around 484,¹⁴ but it does not necessarily follow that Malta had no bishop in the Vandal period.¹⁵ Sicily, and in all probability Malta, had been handed over to Odoacer about six years before,¹⁶ and no Sicilian see figured in the *notitia*. The relationship of the Maltese church to the *ecclesia Africana* has been misunderstood. Generally the African church remained confined to the six civil provinces of the African mainland,¹⁷ but during the Vandal domination it seems to have extended to the other areas

⁶ I, 13-14, ed. M. Petschenig, in *Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum* [henceforth *Corpus*], vii (Bonn, 1881), 7.

⁷ The hypothesis of A. A. Caruana, *Frammento Critico della Storia Fenicio-Cartaginese, Greco-Romana e Bisantina, Musulmana e Normanna-Aragonese delle Isole di Malta* (Malta, 1899), 317. Cf. the intricate, and perhaps rather forced, argument of F. Giunta, *Genesio e la Sicilia* (Palermo, 1958), 58, 71, that Sicily was the object of Vandal 'incursions' and 'penetration' rather than a proper conquest, and that it lacked any legitimate government, either Roman or Vandal, until 476.

⁸ M. Amari, *Storia dei Musulmani di Sicilia*, 3 vols. (2nd ed: Catania, 1933-1939), i, 115.

⁹ In *provincia Dalmatarum insulam Melitam*: text in J.-O. Tjäder, *Die nichtliterarischen lateinischen Papyri aus Ägypten: 445-700*, i (Lund, 1955), 288 (pap. 10-11, section I, line 12). Meleda also occurred in another, lost, papyrus of the second half of the 6th century: G. Marini, *I papiri diplomatici* (Rome, 1805), 121 no. lxxviii.

¹⁰ R. Pirri, *Sicilia Sacra*, ii (Palermo, 1733), 904.

¹¹ G. Cappelletti, *Le Chiese d'Italia, dalla loro origine sino ai nostri giorni*, xxi (Venice, 1870), 650.

¹² F. Lanzoni, *Le diocesi d'Italia dalle origini al principio del secolo VII = Studi e Testi*, xxxv (Faenza, 1927), 653-654; R. Cantarella, 'In margine al centenario efesino: un vescovo di Malta a Efeso?', *Archivum Melitense*, viii (1931).

¹³ J.-L. Maier, *L'épiscopat de l'Afrique romaine, vandale et byzantine* (Rome, 1973).

¹⁴ *Notitia provinciarum et civitatum Africae*, ed. M. Petschenig, in *Corpus*, vii, 117-134; on the dating and circumstances of its compilation, C. Courtois, *Victor de Vita et son oeuvre* (Algiers, 1954), 91-100.

¹⁵ A. Mayr, 'Zur Geschichte der älteren christlichen Kirche von Malta', *Historisches Jahrbuch*, xvii (1896) 483, came to this erroneous conclusion.

¹⁶ Chronology in C. Courtois, *Les Vandales et l'Afrique* (Paris, 1955), 192.

¹⁷ Maier, 9.

conquered by the Vandals, such as Corsica, Sardinia and the Balearic Islands.¹⁸ It is highly probable, therefore, that Sicily and Malta were incorporated into the African church during the short period of Vandal rule, but since no episcopal lists of that period survive from Africa there can be no conclusive judgement as to whether Malta belonged to the *ecclesia Africana*, or whether it then possessed a bishop.

The first, tantalizingly brief, reference in Procopius describes the Byzantine general Belisarius as 'touching at' Gozo and Malta in 533 while his expeditionary force was sailing from Caucana in Sicily to North Africa in order to overthrow the Vandal kingdom.¹⁹

Procopius, *Bellum Vandalicum*: (20)

But when the servant had come before him and told him the whole story, Belisarius rejoiced greatly, heaped praise upon Procopius and gave orders for the departure to be signalled by trumpets. Having set sail quickly, they touched at (*προσέσχον*) the islands of Gozo and Malta, which separate the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian Seas.²¹ There a strong east wind arose for them and carried the ships the following day to that part of the African coast which the Romans call in their own tongue 'Head of the Shallows'.

The Greek verb used can mean either 'landed at' or merely 'approached'. The passage does not show that Belisarius conquered the island for the empire, nor is it likely that Malta was already Byzantine, for the Byzantines went to the lengths of obtaining permission from the Goths to use Sicily as a base for launching their expedition against Africa, which they would hardly have done had the excellent harbour of Malta been at their disposal. This is confirmed by the omission of the island in the *Synekdemos* of Hierocles, a list of the cities belonging to the empire compiled in 527/8.²² Most probably Malta, like Sicily, was still under Ostrogothic domination and only passed to the Byzantines around the time of their conquest of Sicily in 535.

Procopius' second reference suggests that Malta was certainly in Byzantine hands by 544, although it does not specifically mention the island:

Procopius, *Bellum Gothicum*: 23

Some of the surviving Libyans fled to the (fortified) cities, others to Sicily and the other islands.

This flight was a response to the devastation caused by the Berbers in Libya as a reprisal for the imperial recapture of Hadrumentum or Susa. Procopius gives no clue as to whether the migration was permanent.²⁴

¹⁸ This is suggested by the inclusion of bishops from these areas in the *notitia* of c. 484 and by the banishment of numerous African bishops to Sardinia by King Thrasamund for twenty years, during which time they held a church council; cf. Courtois, *Vandales*, 189, 303. The view of Maier, 483, that the African church always comprised only the six mainland provinces seems too rigid.

¹⁹ For the background, E. Stein, *Histoire du Bas-Empire*, ii (Paris-Brussels-Amsterdam, 1949), 314-315.

²⁰ I, 14, 15-16; ed. J. Haury, revised G. Wirth, i (Leipzig, 1962), 375; ed. H. Dewing, *History of the Wars*, ii (London, 1916), 130; ed. W. Dindorf, i (Bonn, 1833), 372; Busuttil, 17 no. 11a.

²¹ In Byzantine writings 'Adriatic' embraced the present-day Ionian Sea, as here: O. Bertolini, 'Quale fu il vero obiettivo assegnato in Italia da Leone III 'Isaurico' all'armata di Manes, stratego dei Cibyrreoti?', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, ii (1967) = *Polychordia: Festschrift Franz Dölger*, ii, 46-48 and n. 95.

²² *Le Synekdomos d'Hieroklès et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre*, ed. E. Honigsmann = *Corpus Bruxellense Historiae Byzantinae, Forma Imperii Byzantini*, fasc. i (Brussels, 1939), 2.

²³ II, 24, 28; ed. Haury, i, 529; ed. Dewing, ii, 414; ed. Dindorf, i, 512; Busuttil, 18 no. 12.

²⁴ For the background, C. Dichl, *L'Afrique byzantine*, i (Paris, 1896), 348.

Procopius' third reference, again cursory and incidental, gives little help:

Procopius, *Bellum Gothicum*:²⁵

But one ship, that on which Artabanes himself was sailing, had its mast broken off in the heavy sea. Although it had got into such a dangerous position, it was carried by the surge and followed the swell until it reached the island called Melita. And so it came about that Artabanes was unexpectedly saved.

This episode occurred in 550 during the voyage of the general Artabanes from Cephalonia off the mainland of Greece to take up his post as commander of the Byzantine forces in Sicily, after a storm had risen up when the ships were off the Calabrian coast.²⁶ Despite suggestions that Artabanes reached Meleda rather than Malta, both the manuscript tradition and geographical probability favour Malta.²⁷

Most of the other Greek references to Malta from the Justinianic period are recorded by Busuttil,²⁸ but they tell nothing of the island's history. Two anonymous epigrams in the *Greek Anthology*²⁹ describe a temple dedicated by the Consul Theodorus in honour of the Emperor Justin I and his adopted son Justinian in a place called, according to Paton and Busuttil, Μελέτη;³⁰ but the correct reading is Μελέτη, apparently an oratory in Constantinople to which the emperor retired for meditation.³¹ The Latin sources are equally uninformative. Busuttil pointed out that the sixth-century writer Arator called Malta a *statio* or place of call for ships,³² but this reference occurs in an account of St. Paul's shipwreck there and cannot be used as evidence that Malta was a *statio* in the strict naval sense in the sixth century.³³

It seems probable that a bishopric was set up in Malta for the first time in the wake of the Byzantine conquest. A *Iulianus episcopus Melitensis* subscribed the *Constitutum de Tribus Capitulis* of Pope Vigilius in 553, but there is ambiguity in the names in the different manuscripts, and there can be no certainty as to the bishop's name or as to his association with Malta.³⁴ The first unequivocal references

²⁵ III. 40. 17: ed. Haury, ii (Leipzig, 1963), 479; ed. Dewing, v. 42-44; ed. Dindorf, ii. 452; Busuttil, 18 no. 11b.

²⁶ J. Bury, *History of the Later Roman Empire*, ii (London, 1923), 255, gives the background.

²⁷ Dewing, v. 45 note, suggests Meleda, but Haury rightly prefers Μελέτη, the commonest form for Malta; the common Greek form for Meleda is Μέλερα. The route of Artabanes makes a diversion to Malta more likely, but it should be remembered that when the storm blew up the ship was off the coast of 'Calabria', and that in the 6th century that name referred to the Terra d'Otranto and not present-day Calabria; cf. C. Diehl, *Études sur l'administration byzantine de l'exarchat de Ravenne* (Paris, 1888), 32.

²⁸ Busuttil, 17-18.

²⁹ *Anthologia Graeca*, ed. H. Beckby (2nd ed: Munich, 1957), 166, book I nos. 97-98; *The Greek Anthology*, ed. and trans. W. Paton, i (London, 1916), 41-42.

³⁰ Paton, i. 41; Busuttil, 19 no. 17. Flavius Theodorus Philoxenus Soterius was consul in 505, 525 and one other unknown year: *Anthologia Graeca*, ed. Beckby, 658.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 166; see also R. Janin, *La géographie ecclésiastique de l'empire byzantin*, Ière partie, le siège de Constantinople; iii, les églises et les monastères (2nd ed.: Paris, 1969), 331.

³² J. Busuttil, 'Maltese Harbours in Antiquity', *Melita Historica*, v no. 4 (1971), 305.

³³ Arator Subdiaconus, *De Actibus Apostolorum*, liber ii, lines 1121-1127, ed. A. McKinlay, in *Corpus*, lxxii (Vienna, 1951), 141.

³⁴ G. Mansi, *Sacrorum Conciliorum Nova et Amplissima Collectio*, ix (Florence, 1763), 106C; J. Migne, *Patrologiae Cursus Completus, Series Latina*, lxxix (Paris, 1865), 114 = P. Jaffé, *Regesta Pontificum Romanorum*, i (2nd ed: Leipzig, 1885), no. 931. But the names appearing in the Ms. of the *Collectio Avellana* edited by O. Guenther, *Epistolae Imperatorum Pontificum Aliorum*, in *Corpus*, xxxv part 1 (Prague-Bonn-Leipzig, 1895), 319 no. lxxxiii, are quite different; see Lanzoni, 654.

to a bishop in Malta come in the register of letters of Pope Gregory the Great (590-604). The information given, although valuable, is disappointingly limited, and the recent study by Mgr. Coleiro³⁵ leaves only a few points to be made. The first letter, of July 592, ordered the bishop, Lucillus, to compel those of his clergy who held lands belonging to the African church to pay the *pensio* on them. Probably this referred to lands on Malta rather than on the African mainland, and these may have represented a hangover from the Vandal domination.³⁶ The next, of October 598, directed the Bishop of Syracuse to depose Lucillus for some unspecified crime, and to punish his accomplices by confining them in monasteries and depriving them of their honours.³⁷

A phrase about demoting soldiers implies that Malta had a military garrison, but the passage cannot be taken as firm evidence of monasticism there. Finally the *clerus* and *populus* were to be instructed to elect a new bishop. No mention was made of any *ordo* of bourgeois, as stated by Caruana.³⁸ It seems unlikely that Lucillus' crime was a lapse into the Donatist heresy,³⁹ since Gregory's general tone rather suggests some disciplinary misdemeanour.

Gregory's third letter, datable to September or October 599 and addressed to Romanus *defensor Siciliae*, ordered him to urge the former bishop Lucillus and his son to hand over the property they had taken from the church to the new bishop Traianus.⁴⁰ He also proposed that four or five monks from the Syracuse monastery of which Traianus had been the head should be allowed to accompany him. The *defensor* was surely not a civil magistrate who had jurisdiction over ecclesiastics,⁴¹ but rather an ecclesiastical official of the see of Rome, responsible for the routine administration of the patrimony.⁴² The idea that Malta was at this time a suffragan see of Syracuse⁴³ seems unfounded; the pope remained the metropolitan of all the bishops of Sicily until the eighth century, and Gregory only appointed the Bishop of Syracuse his vicar for the sees of Sicily in a temporary, personal capacity.⁴⁴ However, Gregory's letters give ample evidence of the close ecclesiastical bonds between Malta and Sicily both in the administration of the papal patrimony and in the local conciliar organization, and Traianus of Malta was one of the 'Bishops of Sicily' to whom Gregory commended his nominee for the see of Syracuse in January 603.⁴⁵

The patrimony of the Roman church possibly included lands in the Maltese

³⁵ E. Coleiro, 'Tre lettere di S. Gregorio Magno', *Missione* 1965, 17-21.

³⁶ *Registrum*, lib. II, ep. 43, ed. P. Ewald-L. Hartmann, *Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Epistolae*, i-ii (Berlin, 1891-1893), i. 142.

³⁷ *Registrum*, IX, 25 (*ibid.*, ii. 58).

³⁸ Caruana, 329.

³⁹ As suggested in Coleiro, 20-21. R. Markus, 'Donatism: the last phase', *Studies in Church History*, i (1964), 118-126, doubts the existence of Donatism on any scale in Africa at this time.

⁴⁰ *Registrum*, X, 1 (ii. 236-237).

⁴¹ As suggested in Coleiro, 17, 21.

⁴² E. Spearing, *The Patrimony of the Roman Church in the time of Gregory the Great* (Cambridge, 1918), 33-36; E. Caspar, *Geschichte des Papsttums*, ii (Tübingen, 1933), 335.

⁴³ Coleiro, 18.

⁴⁴ Lanzoni, 383; R. Aigran, in A. Fliche-V. Martin, *Histoire de l'Église*, v (Paris, 1947), 43; see also *infra*, 79-81.

⁴⁵ *Registrum*, XIII, 22 (ii. 388); Coleiro gives references to the outdated edition of Migne with a different enumeration of the letters.

archipelago. The see of Rome owned extensive estates on Sicily, and the order issued to the papal *defensor* Romanus to intervene in the case of the former Bishop of Malta suggests that Romanus may also have exercised in the islands the other, non-judicial function of a *defensor*, that of the management of papal lands. A list of donations made by the Emperor Constantine I in the early fourth century includes the grant to the baptistery of the Lateran of a *massa* with a revenue of 222 *solidi*, which was apparently located on the island of Gozo.⁴⁶ It can be assumed that such possessions would have remained in the hands of the Roman church until the early eighth century, when the Roman patrimony in Sicily and Calabria was confiscated by the Emperor Leo III in retaliation for papal opposition to his iconoclastic policy.⁴⁷ That Malta was similarly incorporated into the secular administration of Sicily is suggested by the civil geographical list attributed to George of Cyprus and datable ca. 603–ca. 606;⁴⁸ Malta (Μελέτη) and Gozo (Γαῦδος) are placed in the section of Sicily.⁴⁹ Another geographical list, compiled in Latin at Ravenna in the late seventh century,⁵⁰ lists both *Melite* and *Gaulos* among the islands lying near Sicily.⁵¹

Two passages from Byzantine historians show that Malta was used as a place of exile for rebels.

Ἱστορία σύντομος of the Patriarch Nicephorus:⁵²

He (the Emperor Heraclius: 610–641) was informed that his son Atalarich and Theodorus, *magister* by rank, the son of Theodorus, the emperor's brother, intended to conspire against him along with certain others. Believing in the accusations, he cut off their noses and hands and sent Atalarich into exile on the island called Principus.⁵³ But Theodorus he sent to the island called Gaudomelete (Γαυδομελέτην), ordering the *dux* of the place to amputate one of his feet on his arrival.

This conspiracy can be dated late in 637,⁵⁴ and this passage shows that Malta then had a *dux*; maybe it was already being governed by a regime of military officers of the kind found in Italy and Sicily.⁵⁵ Another chronicler, Theophanes, describes how in 790 the Emperor Constantine VI punished the leaders of the revolt

⁴⁶ *Le Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne, i (Paris, 1886), 175: *In Mengaulum: Massa Amazon, praest. sol. CCXXII*. Duchesne, pp. cxlix, 193 n. 63, identifies *Mengaulum* with Gozo. This important reference has apparently hitherto been overlooked by historians of the Maltese islands; cf. L. Voelkl, *Der Kaiser Konstantin. Annalen einer Zeitenwende* (Munich, 1957), 90, dating the Gozitan donation to 317.

⁴⁷ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, a. 6224, ed. C. de Boor, i (Leipzig, 1883), 410. Cf. P. Fabre, *De Patriarchis Romae Ecclesiae usque ad aetatem Carolinorum* (Lille, 1892) 61–62.

⁴⁸ *Le Synédesmos d'Héraklès*, 49.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 53 nos. 593, 592; Busuttil, 18 no. 5.

⁵⁰ S. Mazzarino, 'Da Lollianus et Arbetio al mosaico di S. Apollinare in Classe: note sulla tradizione culturale di Ravenna e sull'Anonimo Ravennate', *Rivista degli studi bizantini e neo-ellenici*, ns. ii–iii (1965–1966), 101, discusses the date.

⁵¹ *Ravennatis Anonymi Cosmographia*, v. 23, ed. M. Pinder—C. Parthey (Berlin, 1860), 407 nos. 5, 9.

⁵² Ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig, 1880), 25; Busuttil, 19 no. 18.

⁵³ This island lies in the Sea of Marmora: F. Dörner, 'Prinkipo', in A. Pauly—G. Wissowa, *Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Alterthumswissenschaft*, xxii, 2 (1954), coll. 2313–2314.

⁵⁴ For the background, A. Pernice, *L'Imperatore Eraclio* (Florence, 1905), 292; A. Stratos, *Byzantium in the Seventh Century*, ii: 636–641 (Amsterdam, 1972), 137–138.

⁵⁵ Diehl, *Études*, 3–41 *et passim*; L. Hartmann, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichte von byzantinischen Verwaltung in Italien* (Leipzig, 1889), 52–73.

of the Armeniakon theme by branding them on the face with the motto 'Armeniakos traitor' and sending them to Sicily and 'the other islands'.⁵⁶

A seal, datable to the eighth century, carries the name of one Nicetas *droungarios* and *archon* of Malta: +Νικήτα δρουγγ(α)ρίω s(=καὶ) ἀρχοντ(ι) Μελέτ(ης).⁵⁷ Busuttil deduced from it that Malta was governed by a high-ranking naval official who commanded a small fleet.⁵⁸ Mme. Ahrweiler concluded, from a very precise study of references to *archontes* and *droungarioi* from various Byzantine coastal areas, that Malta was the base for an important naval squadron which came under direct imperial, as distinct from thematic, control, and that this fleet was commanded by a naval officer of high rank who was directly responsible to the emperor, who had at his disposal a detachment of troops, and who also possessed the rank of *archon* in the military hierarchy because he was entrusted with the administration of the island. An impressive battery of evidence was adduced in support of her view that such a system of naval commands, with civil and military jurisdiction, was common in coastal areas on the perimeter of the empire.⁵⁹ Some reservations must however remain, especially as both the titles mentioned could have very diverse meanings. A case could be made, for example, for seeing this official as merely the land-army commander of a *droungos*, a unit of between 1,000 and 3,000 men, who had taken over the functions of an *archon* or civil governor of a town.⁶⁰ Ahrweiler only offered one other piece of evidence, a seal from Corinth which refers to the same combination of offices and which fits into her hypothesis.⁶¹ The meagre evidence does not justify all the details of her hypothesis, such as her description of the supposed naval governor of Malta as being under the direct control of the emperor. The existing sources point to continuously close bonds between Malta and Sicily in both the political and ecclesiastical spheres, but the very lack of references to

⁵⁶ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, a. 6285, ed. de Boor, i. 469. Busuttil, 21 no. 22, wrongly quotes Georgius Hamartolus as the author of this passage; it originally appeared in Theophanes' work, and was then taken over by later chroniclers.

⁵⁷ G. Schlumberger, 'Sceaux byzantins inédits', *Revue des Études Grecques*, xiii (1900), 492 no. 203; Busuttil, 25 no. 40. Schlumberger omitted to publish a drawing or photograph of this seal, or to give his grounds for dating it to the 7th/8th centuries. In view of its importance for Maltese history, the author planned to re-edit it here, but he has been unable to discover its present whereabouts. Schlumberger, 492, wrote only that it had been communicated to him by the Marquis d'Anselme de Puisaye, who had purchased it in Tunis, and he never stated that the seal had been given to him. Schlumberger's collection is now in the Hermitage Museum, Leningrad, but the curator of seals there, Dr. V. Shandrovskaya, kindly reported that the seal was not in its holdings. Nor does it appear to be in the Marquis' family collection, where the present Marquise d'Anselme de Puisaye most kindly searched for it. The present author still hopes to trace the seal, possibly in a Tunisian museum. The late Fr. Vitalien Laurent dated the seal on iconographical grounds to the 8th or early 9th centuries, and this dating seems preferable to Schlumberger's. The author is most grateful for the assistance of Fr. Laurent and Professor N. Oikonomides with this seal, which he still hopes eventually to publish. For a seal from Gozo, *infra*, 87.

⁵⁸ Busuttil, in *Melita Historica*, v. 307.

⁵⁹ Ahrweiler, 70, 87, 90–91; Eickhoff, 97, describes Malta as a useful naval station for forward naval defence, but adduces no evidence.

⁶⁰ On *droungoi*, Maurice, *Strategicon*, I, 3, 6, ed. I. Mihaescu, *Arta Militară* (Bucharest, 1970), 56; Leo, *Tactica*, IV, 11, ed. R. Vari (Budapest, 1917), i.56. On the term *droungarios*, H. Glykatzis—Ahrweiler, 'Recherches sur l'administration de l'empire byzantin aux IXe–XIe siècles', *Bulletin de Correspondence Hellénique*, lxxxiv (1960), 37; on *archontes*, *ibid.*, 72. J. Ferluga, 'Military and Administrative Units of Inferior Rank', *Zbornik Radova Vizantološkog Instituta*, ii (1953), 61–94 (in Serbo-Croat with English résumé), shows that *droungarioi* and *archontes* ruled administrative areas inferior to themes. On the presence of *droungarioi* as military commanders in Sicily, see Borsari, 148.

⁶¹ G. Davidson, *Corinth*, xii: *The Minor Objects* (Princeton, 1952), 319 no. 2695.

Malta counts against any view that the island was a naval centre of major importance; Byzantine historians never record it in such a rôle, and its supposedly important governor does not figure in Byzantine hierarchical lists.⁶² However, the fact that such a relatively small island apparently did not fall to the Muslims until 870, although their raids in the area began in the seventh century, does suggest that Malta was of strategic importance to the empire and that it had good defences.⁶³

It is puzzling that after the smooth operation of the ecclesiastical organization shown in Gregory's letters, no Bishop of Malta appeared either at Roman synods or at ecumenical councils in the East in the seventh, eighth or ninth centuries. Pirri believed that a Maltese bishop named Manas attended the Eighth Ecumenical Council held in Constantinople in 869–870, and identified him with the un-named Bishop of Malta mentioned as a captive at Palermo in 878,⁶⁴ but no Maltese bishop, of this name is recorded in that council's *acta*, and Pirri's identification is unwarranted.⁶⁵ This absence may have been due to the indisposition of individual bishops, the poverty and smallness of Malta, or the insecurity caused by Muslim raids. This non-attendance at the Eastern councils is especially surprising in view of the fact that the sees of Sicily and Calabria were transferred in the eighth century to the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. As a result, eight sees from the province of Sicily were represented at the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787. Nor can this non-appearance be explained by suggesting that the Bishop of Malta was still Latin-speaking,⁶⁶ as there is no evidence that this was the case. Indeed, the number of Greek inscriptions from Malta and Gozo gives some ground for believing that the islands underwent the same process of hellenization which occurred in Sicily. The surviving inscriptions are fragmentary and difficult to date; that a high proportion of them are in Greek⁶⁷ is surely significant, though the date usually given to them and to the catacombs in which they were found is appreciably earlier, from the third to the fifth century.⁶⁸ Cardinal Bres took the view that the Maltese

⁶² Eg. the *Tacticon Uspenskij* of 845–856, printed in V. Benešević, 'Die byzantinischen Ranglisten nach den *Kleterologion Philothei* und nach den Jerusalemer Handschriften', *Byzantinisch-Neugriechische Jahrbücher*, v (1926), 97–167, and in N. Oikonomides, *Les Listes de Préséance byzantines des IXe et Xe siècles* (Paris, 1972), 47–63, which records *droungarioi* and *archontes* for other areas. Oikonomides, 342–343 and n. 317, questions Ahrweiler's uniformly maritime interpretation of the term *archon*.

⁶³ Busuttil, in *Melita Historica*, v. 307, suggests that the name of the small Gozitan port of Xlendi may have derived from the Byzantine *chelandia* or light naval vessels.

⁶⁴ Pirri, ii. 905; on the 878 bishop, *infra*, 83.

⁶⁵ Mayr, 'Zur Geschichte . . .' 486.

⁶⁶ As suggested by Caruana, 382.

⁶⁷ Busuttil, 26, prints 5; see also E. Becker, *Malta Sotterranea: Studien zur altchristlichen und jüdischen Sepulchralkunst* (Strassburg, 1913), 130–143; A. Ferrua, 'Le catacombe di Malta', *Civiltà Cattolica*, quaderno 2381 (anno 100, 3 Sept. 1949), 513–514. Of the 8 inscriptions which Becker, 142, considers Christian or possibly Christian, 5 are Greek. S. Agnello, *Sillogi di Iscrizioni paleocristiane della Sicilia* (Rome, 1953), 12, concluded from a study of the inscriptions of Sicily that Greek was for the most part used there, but that Sicily underwent a process of partial 'latinization' from the 6th century on.

⁶⁸ Becker, 191–193; Ferrua, 515. A marble sepulchral inscription in Greek, incorrectly dated to 810, was recorded by G. Ciantar in his edition of G. Abela, *Malta Illustrata* (Malta, 1772), 530. It was found 'under the oratory of S. Giuseppe adjoining the church of the Padri Minori Osservanti' at Rabat and commemorated the 'venerable Domestikos, christian and doctor'. No dating is admitted in *Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*, iv, ed. A. Boeck-J. Franz (Berlin, 1877), 501 no. 9451, or in *Inscriptiones Graecae*, xix, ed. G. Kaibel (Berlin, 1896), 143 no. 604 (with incorrect location as 'in insula Gaulo'). A. Mayr, *Die Insel Malta in Altertum* (Munich, 1909), 111 n.2, favoured an early, pre-Byzantine, date but Becker, 135–137, demonstrated that a later date is equally possible, observing that the symbols misinterpreted by Ciantar as a date-reference actually represent a pair of surgical instruments.

church remained subject to the see of Rome and not the Patriarchate of Constantinople until the Arab conquest,⁶⁹ but this is disproved by Malta's appearance in the official Byzantine episcopal lists or *notitiae episcopatum* from the eighth and early ninth centuries.⁷⁰

The ecclesiastical position of Malta in this period is obscured by two controversies about the organization of the hierarchy in Sicily. The first concerns the date of the transfer of the bishoprics of Sicily and Calabria from the Patriarchate of Rome to that of Constantinople, an event traditionally dated to about 732⁷¹ but now placed in or shortly after 756.⁷² The later date seems preferable in view of the much severer iconoclastic line taken at that time by Constantine V, and because an important Byzantine *notitia* stresses that the dioceses were transferred 'after the Pope had fallen into the hands of the barbarians'.⁷³ This statement points to the 750's, when Ravenna was lost to the Lombards and the pope was turning for help to the Franks. In any case, the linguistic and cultural affiliations of the Sicilian episcopate had probably been closer to Constantinople than to Rome, at least from the late seventh century; no Sicilian bishop attended a Roman synod after 680.

The second problem concerns the date of the granting of metropolitan status to the see of Syracuse, with authority over the other Sicilian dioceses, including Malta but excluding Catania. It has been argued that this occurred only several decades after the transfer to Constantinople, since the priest from Syracuse who attended the Seventh Ecumenical Council of 787 was described as vicar of the *Bishop* of Syracuse and did not take the leading place or act as the spokesman for the Sicilian delegation;⁷⁴ it has also been noted that the Sicilian bishops were recorded as an autonomous group, placed between the metropolitan and autocephalous sees, and that therefore they were not yet fully incorporated into the hierarchical structure of the Patriarchate of Constantinople.⁷⁵ None of these arguments really seems valid. The fact that one of the Sicilian bishops referred at one point to the Patriarch of Constantinople as 'our most holy and universal patriarch' shows that they fully regarded themselves as his subordinates,⁷⁶ and Syracuse was actually referred to once in the *acta* as an archbishopric.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Fr. V. Laurent argued convincingly that a Greek seal found in Syracuse with the inscription 'Marcianus archbishop' must be attributed to an archbishop

⁶⁹ O. Bres, *Malta Antica Illustrata* (Rome, 1816), 431–439.

⁷⁰ *Infra*, 80–81.

⁷¹ D. Lancia di Brolo, *Storia della Chiesa in Sicilia*, ii (Palermo, 1884), 145; Mayr, 'Zur Geschichte . . .', 484–485; more recently, M. Anastos, 'The Transfer of Illyricum, Calabria and Sicily to the Jurisdiction of the Patriarchate of Constantinople in 732–733', *Studi bizantini e neo-ellenici*, ix (1957); *idem*, 'Leo III's Edict against the Images in the Year 726–27 and Italo-Byzantine Relations between 726 and 730', *Byzantinische Forschungen*, iii (1968), 38–39 and n. 62.

⁷² V. Grumel, 'L'annexion de l'Illyricum oriental, et de la Sicile et de la Calabre au patriarchat de Constantinople', *Recherches de sciences religieuses*, xi (1952), followed by G. Ostrogorsky, *History of the Byzantine State* (2nd English ed: Oxford, 1968), 170; *idem*, 'The Byzantine Background of the Moravian Mission', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, xix (1965), 12.

⁷³ *Notitia I*, 529, ed. G. Parthey, *Hieroclis Synecdemus et Notitiae Graecae Episcopatum* (Berlin, 1866), 74–75: διὰ τὸ ὑπὸ τῶν ἐθνῶν ἀρέσασθαι τὸν πᾶσαν τῆς πρεσβυτέρας Πάμης. See also *infra*, 80.

⁷⁴ F. Russo, *Storia della chiesa di Reggio Calabria*, i (Naples, 1961), 175–181.

⁷⁵ L. Duchesne, 'Les évêchés de Calabre', *Mélanges P. Fabre* (Paris, 1902), 9; J. Gay, 'Notes sur l'hellénisme sicilien', *Byzantion*, i (1924), 216.

⁷⁶ Mansi, xi. 1095.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, xii. 137.

of the second quarter of the eighth century.⁷⁸ Moreover, an episcopal list of the iconoclastic period datable to ca. 730–ca. 780 gives Syracuse as a metropolitan see of the Patriarchate of Constantinople and names the Bishop of Malta as one of its suffragans within the province of Sicily.⁷⁹ This suggests that the elevation of Syracuse to metropolitan status occurred at the same time as, or very soon after, the transfer of the Sicilian dioceses to the see of Constantinople.

Since such little use has been made of the *notitiae episcopatum* for the history of Byzantine Malta, their references to Malta are here recorded, with their approximate dates:⁸⁰

- 1 'Iconoclast *Notitia*' (ca. 730–ca. 780)⁸¹ mentions Μελέτη as a suffragan see within the province of Sicily.
- 2 *Notitia IX* (806–815)⁸² lists Μελέτη in the province of Sicily (186, no. 166).
- 3 *Notitia VIII* (ca. 820) lists Μελέτη νῆσος as in the province of Sicily (171, no. 257).
- 4 *Notitia I* (ca. 800–ca. 850). The compiler of this list, Basil of Ialimbana, employed earlier records of the Patriarchate of Constantinople for the sees within its jurisdiction, while for the sees belonging to other Patriarchates he reproduced the profane *descriptio orbis Romani* attributed to George of Cyprus,⁸³ which survives only as part of his *notitia*. As a result, instead of the usual 14 dioceses, 22 towns are listed as belonging to the province of Sicily, including Gozo and Malta, Γαῖδος and Μελέτη (77, nos. 592 and 593).⁸⁴
- 5 *Notitia III* (ca. 1100) mentions Μελέτη as one of the bishoprics under the metropolitan of Syracuse which had been removed from the Patriarchate of Rome (129, no. 720).

⁷⁸ V. Laurent, *Le corpus des sceaux de l'empire byzantin*, v: *L'église Ière partie, L'église de Constantinople* (Paris 1963), 694 no. 885. *Idem*, 693, suggests that Syracuse was at this time an autocephalous see directly dependent on Constantinople, and not an archbishopric of metropolitan status; possibly there was such a temporary half-way stage, but the 'Iconoclast' *notitia* proves that Syracuse enjoyed metropolitan status at around this time or soon after.

⁷⁹ Τάξις προκαθηδρίας τῶν δισυντάτων πατριαρχῶν μητροπολιτῶν καὶ αὐτοκεφαλῶν, ed. C. de Boor, 'Nachträge zu den *Notitiae Episcopatum*, II', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, xii (1891), 521, no. 45 ('Ἐπαρχία Συκελίας . . . ὁ Συρακουσῶν'); 531 no. 654 ('Ἐπαρχία Συκελίας'); no. 667 (ὁ Μελέτης). This list has been overlooked by scholars.

⁸⁰ Useful background information is given in E. Gerland, *Corpus Notitiarum Episcopatum*, Band I, Heft I (Kadiköy, 1931); but the relevant editions promised in this series have not appeared. All except the first of the *notitiae* here listed are edited in *Hieroclis Synecdemus*, ed. Parthey; numberings and references given are his.

⁸¹ C. de Boor, 'Nachträge zu den *Notitiae Episcopatum*, III', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, xiv (1894), 573, discusses the date. If the date c. 756 for the transfer of the Sicilian dioceses to Constantinople is accepted, it would provide a later *terminus post quem* for the *notitia*.

⁸² The dates for this and the following *notitiae* are those suggested by H. Gelzer, 'Die Zeitbestimmung der griechischen *Notitiae Episcopatum*', *Jahrbücher für protestantische Theologie*, xii (1886), 556.

⁸³ *Supra*, 76.

⁸⁴ Busuttil, 21 no. 21, but the Τάξις προκαθηδρίας τῶν ἀνωτάτων πατριαρχῶν is in fact *Notitia I* (not XII). On the relationship between Basil's list and the work of George of Cyprus, cf. A. Jones, *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* (2nd. ed.: Oxford, 1971), 514: V. Laurent, 'La Notitia de Basile l'Armenien', *Échos d'Orient*, xxxiv (1935), 439–440, 460, who dates the composition of the *notitia* between 845 and 869.

6 *Notitia X* (ca. 1200) gives Μελέτη as a suffrage of Syracuse (207, no. 309).⁸⁵

7 *Notitia XIII* (seventeenth century, after 1621) mentions the Bishop of Μελέτη as a suffragan of Syracuse (249, no. 168).

It is generally agreed that these lists had a practical purpose and did more or less reflect political developments.⁸⁶ There is, however, an obvious discrepancy in the lists concerning Malta and the other Sicilian sees. Some, such as *Notitiae VIII* and *IX*, accurately reflected the position of their time, and some lists of the tenth century and later respected political reality by omitting the Sicilian sees,⁸⁷ but some very late lists, such as *Notitiae III*, *X* and *XIII*, continued to refer to Malta and the other Sicilian bishoprics long after they had passed out of the jurisdiction of the Patriarch of Constantinople. This can best be explained by the hypothesis that the 'Iconoclast *Notitia*' and *Notitiae VIII* and *IX* were based on an earlier list, the 'Notitia of Epiphanius',⁸⁸ compiled in the early eighth century, but had been brought up to date by the addition of a list of the provinces transferred from the Patriarchate of Rome.⁸⁹ *Notitia III*, *X* and *VIII* seem to have been based on out-dated church lists and to have referred to a much earlier position than their date would suggest.⁹⁰ Leo VI (886–912) did make a major reform of the episcopal hierarchy and in so doing omitted lost provinces such as that of Sicily; but Leo's list, and those derived from it, employed an interesting fiction to avoid upsetting the hierarchy of metropolitan sees: Melitene in Armenia was inserted in the place of Syracuse, although Melitene it was still in Arab hands. Gelzer concluded that the Sicilian prelates were allowed to live as honorary, pension-receiving bishops in Constantinople, with their place in the hierarchy preserved.⁹¹ There are other examples of such an arrangement,⁹² but there seems to be no other evidence to confirm the theory in this case; nor is it known how long such a situation might have lasted.

After the Muslim conquest of 870, Byzantine sources have extremely little useful information about Malta. Even Constantine Porphyrogenitus, usually a treasure-house of information about the territories of the empire and its neighbours, provides none. In his *De Thematis* he merely states that Sicily 'has notable cities . . . some of which have been deserted, and others of which have been conquered by the Saracens. . . . There are 22 cities under Sicily and its governor or *strategos*.' His

⁸⁵ Another MS gives the Bishop of Μελέτης: 'V. Benešević, 'Monumenta Vaticana ad ius canonicum', *Studi Bizantini*, ii (1927), 140.

⁸⁶ Gelzer, 'Zeitbestimmung', 337; *idem*, 'Ungedruckte und ungenügend veröffentlichte Texte der *Notitiae Episcopatum*', *Abhandlungen der philosophisch-philologischen Klasse der königlich bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, xxi (1901), 543–544; de Boor, 'Nachträge . . . I', *Zeitschrift für Kirchengeschichte*, xii (1891), 321.

⁸⁷ Notably the Νέα Τακτικά, ed. H. Gelzer, *Georgii Cypri Descriptio Orbis* (Leipzig, 1890), 57–83, and the so-called 'Diatyposis of Leo the Wise' (*Notitia II*, ed. Parthey, 95–101).

⁸⁸ *Notitia VII*, ed. Parthey, 150–161.

⁸⁹ De Boor, 'Nachträge . . . I', 308–309.

⁹⁰ Cf. W. Ramsay, *The Historical Geography of Asia Minor* (London, 1890), 428.

⁹¹ Gelzer, 'Ungedruckte . . . Texte', 563–564. *Notitia X* reflects this development, because Melitene appears in the list of metropolitans, and then later its place is taken in the list of suffragans by Syracuse and its subordinate sees, including Malta.

⁹² For example, the rights of the refugee Archbishop of Cyprus over the see of Cyzicus were recognized by the Quinisextum Council of 691–2: R. Janin, 'Chypre', *Dictionnaire de l'Histoire et de Géographie Ecclésiastiques*, xii (Paris, 1953), col. 796.

De Administrando Imperio contains no reference to Malta, but it mentions the Dalmatian Meleda twice and states that it was the island on which St. Paul was shipwrecked.⁹³

There are a number of sources for the Muslim conquest, but they contain contradictions. Muslim raiders were active in the Central Mediterranean from the second half of the seventh century⁹⁴ and because of its strategic position Malta presumably came under increasing pressure, but there is no historical reference to raids on Malta before the ninth century. It has been suggested that by the time of the capture of Palermo in 831 Malta was already in Muslim hands,⁹⁵ or at least 'under Arab influence'.⁹⁶ The account given by Miège, from an unpublished work by Vincenzo Bonavita, of two Arab expeditions in 833 and 836 is now considered to have been derived from the falsifications of the forger Giuseppe Vella, and should therefore be discounted.⁹⁷ There is, however, a likely reference to a raid on Malta in the Arab chronicler Ibn al-Athīr; writing of the year 221 (26 December 835–13 December 836) he states that Abu al-Aghlab prepared an expedition which attacked the islands (near Sicily) and obtained great plunder.⁹⁸ This can be taken to refer to the Maltese archipelago, but it does not imply a definitive conquest. There seems no justification for the argument that the Muslims must, for strategic reasons have attempted a conquest, as distinct from mere raids, at such an early date; their earliest operations were launched from Susa in Tunisia against the nearest, western part of Sicily in the zone of Mazzara and Palermo, and they were not concerned with the area as far to the east as Malta.⁹⁹

All the Arab and Greek sources agree in placing the actual conquest later. Ibn Khaldūn gives the date as 255 (20 December 868–8 December 869).¹⁰⁰ Ibn al-Khaṭīb dates the conquest of Malta and the capture of its 'king' between 11 February and 12 March 875.¹⁰¹ An-Nuwayrī places the event in the same general period without precise indication of date.¹⁰² Ibn al-Athīr records what seems to

⁹³ *De Thematis*, 10, ed. A. Pertusi = *Studi e Testi*, 160 (Vatican, 1952), 96; Busuttil, 22 no. 27; Porphyrogenitus, *De Administrando*, cc. 30, 36, ed. G. Moravcsik, (Washington, 1957), 144 line 110, 164 line 17.

⁹⁴ Eickhoff, 16–17.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 102; M. de Goeje, quoted by T. Noldeke in *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, lviii (1904), 905 n. 2; P. Minganti, 'Fonti storiche arabe', *Missione* 1964, 18.

⁹⁶ E. Rossi, 'Le lapidi sepolcrali arabo-musulmane di Malta', *Rivista degli studi orientali*, xii (1929), 429.

⁹⁷ M. Miège, *Histoire de Malte*, ii (Paris, 1840), 20–24.

⁹⁸ Text in M. Amari, *Biblioteca Arabo-Sicula* (Leipzig, 1856), 226; translation in *Biblioteca . . . ; versione italiana*, 2 vols. (Turin–Rome, 1880–1881), i. 371. See also M. Redjala, 'L'archipel maltais dans la littérature historico-géographique d'expression arabe à l'époque médiévale', *Actes du Premier Congrès d'Études des cultures méditerranéennes d'influence arabo-berbère* (Algiers, 1973). Despite some inaccuracies, such as the description of the Norman conquerors of the island as 'Byzantines' (p. 207), this study represents a useful discussion of most of the Arabic references to Malta, together with French translations. Redjala, 204, 206, is probably correct in interpreting a passage of an-Nuwayrī (*Nihayāt al-'arab fī finūn al-'adab* [Cairo, n.d.], i. 233) to mean that Malta was among the islands attacked by the Arabs from the first half of the eighth century. Redjala, 206, points out that several Arab geographers may have confused Malta with the island of Khaalīsa or Jalīta (the present Jēziret Jālita) off the north coast of Tunisia, and claims that divergent readings in the Arabic Mss. support this assertion. Redjala, 207, concludes that to Arab authors Malta was only 'un morceau obscur détaché de la Sicile, qui ne méritait donc pas une attention particulière'; the present author reached a similar conclusion.

⁹⁹ Amari, *Storia*, i. 395.

¹⁰⁰ Text in Minganti, 17, from Amari, *Biblioteca*, 470 (trans. ii. 178).

¹⁰¹ Text in Minganti, 18; H. Abdul Wahab, 'Contribution à l'histoire de l'Afrique du Nord et la Sicile', *Centenario della nascita di Michele Amari*, ii (Palermo, 1910), 439.

¹⁰² Text in Minganti, 18, from Amari, *Biblioteca*, 449 (trans. ii. 147); the passages of an-Nuwayrī and Ibn al-Khaṭīb were transposed by Minganti in his article.

be a Byzantine reaction to the conquest; for the year 256 (9 December 869–28 November 870) he states that the Emir of Sicily sent an army to Malta, to which the *Rūm*, the Byzantines, had laid siege, and that the latter took flight at its approach.¹⁰³ A Greek chronicle composed at Cassano in Calabria in the eleventh century, states for the year 6378 (869–70) that the island of *Melite* surrendered on the 29 August, in the third indiction; the notice is repeated in an Arab version of the same chronicle.¹⁰⁴ This date is given striking confirmation by another Arab source, the anonymous *Kitāb al-'Uyūn*, which states that Malta was conquered by Ḥabashi ibn Umar ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-Aghlab, the man who commanded the expedition described by Ibn al-Athīr, and gives as the date for this three days before the end of Ramadan 256, that is 28 August 870. The discrepancy of one day can easily be explained by the uncertainties of the observation of the moon upon which the Muslim calendar is based.¹⁰⁵

Amari reconciled these discordant sources by accepting Ibn Khaldūn's date of 869 for the first Muslim conquest of Malta, and then postulating a Greek reconquest, to which both Ibn al-Athīr and the Greek chronicle of Cassano refer.¹⁰⁶ This hypothesis has recently been accepted, with some minor corrections, by Talbi who does not however succeed in explaining away the fact that Ibn al-Athīr mentions only a siege, and not a Byzantine reconquest.¹⁰⁷ Talbi also refers to the letter from a Greek monk Theodosius which describes how the Archbishop of Syracuse was taken to a prison in Palermo after the conquest of his city by the Muslims in 878 and met there the un-named bishop of Malta in chains.¹⁰⁸ Talbi suggests that the Aghlabids showed unwonted severity towards the Christian inhabitants of Malta by razing to the ground their place of worship and imprisoning their bishop, because they regarded them as having broken their 'ahd or treaty of submission to the Muslims by helping the Byzantine relief force. Talbi is wrong to imply that Theodosius mentions the destruction of a church in Malta, but his theory does derive support from the archaeological evidence for the sudden destruction of the important church at Tas-Silġ at around this time.¹⁰⁹

Talbi also pointed to a quotation in the *Kitāb al-'Uyūn* from the historian Ibn

¹⁰³ Text in Minganti, 18, from Amari, *Biblioteca*, 237 (trans. i. 387).

¹⁰⁴ G. Cozza-Luzi, *La cronaca siculo-saracena di Cambridge* (Palermo, 1890), 30, 102; A. Vasiliev, *Byzance et les Arabes*, ii 2e partie (Brussels, 1950), 99; for the Arab text, Cozza-Luzi, 31. In one Ms. of the Greek text (Biblioteca Vaticana, Cod. Vat. Gr. 1912) the date $\overline{\text{K}}\Theta$ (29th) seems to have been corrected to $\overline{\text{K}}\Delta$ (24th). The other Greek Ms. (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, Codex Suppl. Gr. 920) omits the day and the month, while the Arabic Ms. gives the 29th. A recent edition of the Greek text by V. Salletta, *Cronaca Cassanese del X secolo ovvero la cronografia del Vat. Gr. 1912* (Rome, 1966), 60, includes among its many inaccuracies the wrong date, $\overline{\text{K}}\text{A}$ (21st) $\mu\eta\eta\iota\ \alpha\nu\gamma\alpha\upsilon\sigma\tau\omega\varsigma$, for the surrender of Malta.

¹⁰⁵ O. Saïdi ed., *Kitāb al-'Uyūn wa-l-Hadā'iq Fī Ahbar al-Haqā'iq*, iv 1ère partie (Damascus, 1972), 13, a. 256, c. 16. Cf. M. Talbi, *L'émirat aghlabide 184–296 (800–909): Histoire politique*, (Paris, 1966), 11, 715–716.

¹⁰⁶ Amari, *Storia*, i. 470.

¹⁰⁷ Talbi, 475.

¹⁰⁸ Pirri, ii. 904; L. Muratori, in *Rerum Italicarum Scriptores*, i parte 2 (Milan, 1735), 264A. Most of the text of this letter survives only in unsatisfactory Latin translations: B. Lavagnini, 'Siracusa occupata dagli Arabi e l'epistola di Teodosio Magno', *Byzantion*, xxix–xxx (1960); a new edition incorporating a recently discovered complete Latin translation, mentioned by Lavagnini as in preparation by G. Rossi-Taibbi, has not yet appeared.

¹⁰⁹ Talbi, 475–476; M. Cagiano de Azevedo, *infra*, 89–93.

al-Jazzār, who died in 1004, in which he recorded an inscription on a fort at Qaşr Ḥabashi near Susa in Tunisia.¹¹⁰ Talbi interpreted this text as reading: 'Chaque dalle taillée, chaque colonne de marbre qui se trouve dans ce fortin provient de l'église de Malte, apportée par Ḥabashi ibn Umar dans l'espoir de mériter ainsi l'agrément de—Dieu Puissant et Glorieux!—et ses bontés.'¹¹¹ Such an inscription would have supported the notion of a Christian betrayal of the Muslims, while the harsh persecution reflected by the destruction of a church and the imprisonment of a bishop would also have explained the complete extinction of Christianity during the Muslim period.¹¹² A close reading of the original text, however, does not bear out this theory, since the word interpreted by Talbi as meaning 'church' appears to refer instead to the 'attack' launched by Ḥabashi.¹¹³ The level of persecution initiated by the Muslims cannot be determined with precision, and it remains possible that Christianity lost its hold because much of the population fled before or soon after the Muslim invasion, more out of fear of a new regime than because of any specific acts of repression. One of the most striking features of this period in the Central Mediterranean is the extent of the migration which took place.¹¹⁴

A possible reconstruction of these events is that the Aghlabids captured Malta in 869, but shortly after a Byzantine force arrived and received the co-operation of the local population, perhaps with the result that the Muslim garrison was forced to take refuge in a citadel. In 870, however, a Muslim relief force appeared, the Byzantine forces fled or were driven out, and the island came securely under Muslim domination. This is merely a hypothesis, which does not resolve all the anomalies or fill the gaps in the sources.¹¹⁵

Information about a later Byzantine attempt at reconquest is given by al-Qazwīnī:

The Rūm attacked it (Malta) after 440 (1048/9); they waged war with the (inhabitants) and they demanded from them riches and women. And the Muslims assembled and counted themselves, and the number of their slaves exceeded the number of free men. So they said to their

¹¹⁰ Saīdi, *Kitāb*, 13, c. 16.

¹¹¹ Talbi, 475–476; Ḥabashi was appointed governor of Sicily in 875 (*ibid.*, 478).

¹¹² After a detailed study of the evidence, Mayr, 'Zur Geschichte . . .', 486, concluded that the Byzantine church on Malta died out after the Muslim conquest. His main grounds were the complete lack of references to Maltese Christians during the Muslim period and at the time of the Norman conquest, the overwhelmingly Muslim nature of the population even in the 12th and early 13th centuries, and the reaction of the servile population to the Byzantine attempt at reconquest of c. 1048/9 (*infra*, 85). Recent archaeological activity and work on possible Eastern ecclesiastical terms and on Greek usages in the Maltese liturgy do not weaken the case for believing that there were no significant numbers of Christians in Malta in the Muslim period (*supra*, 20, 23–25, 32–34).

¹¹³ Talbi, 476, read *kanīsa* (church, synagogue), while Saīdi, *Kitāb*, 13, c. 16, gave *kabsa* (raid, attack). Consultation of the Ms. shows the reading *kabsa* to be the more sound from a palaeographic viewpoint: West Berlin, Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Wetzstein, ii. 342, folio 6r (not folio 6v, as in Talbi, 475 n. 2, 476 n. 1). *Kabsa*, however, is not a common word, and the reading *kanīsa* cannot be entirely ruled out. The author wishes to thank Professor Irfan Shahid and Dr. Clive Foss for their help with this passage, which he intends to discuss in a future article.

¹¹⁴ E. Eickhoff, 'Tema e ducato di Calabria', *Archivio Storico per la Lucania e la Calabria*, xxi (1952), 109, speaks of a strong flow of refugees from Sicily to Calabria after the Arab conquest; further references, *supra*, 71 n. 2.

¹¹⁵ Cf. A. Vasiliev, *Byzances et les Arabes*, ii lère partie (Brussels, 1968), 25 and n. 1, for a similar reconstruction of events and for useful comments on the Arab sources.

slaves: 'Fight with us; and if you win you will be free and what we have will also be yours; if you do not agree to this, we shall be killed, and so will you.' And when the Rūm came forward [the Muslims and the slaves] charged the enemy as a single man; and God helped them, so that they defeated and slaughtered a great number of the Rūm. The slaves were raised up to the level of the free men; their (joint) power became very strong and after this event the Rūm never again attacked them.¹¹⁶

Mayr used this passage to sustain his argument that Christianity had died out, on the grounds that such co-operation against the common foe would hardly have taken place had the 'slaves', or servile cultivators, not been Muslim like their masters.¹¹⁷ Furthermore, the Byzantine invaders would not have shown such violent hostility to all the inhabitants, if a substantial proportion of them had been Christian. The episode may be associated with the attempt of the Byzantine general George Maniaces to recapture Sicily, although the Byzantine sources place this rather earlier, in 1038.¹¹⁸ Busuttil has taken two accounts of Maniaces' expedition to Sicily to include references to Malta,¹¹⁹ but these merely record that the Saracens of Africa and Sicily were infesting 'the islands and coast', presumably that of the empire's possessions in Greece and Southern Italy, and that the Byzantine fleet responded by roundly defeating the raiders.¹²⁰ They therefore give no direct information about Malta. Nor is there any solid evidence for Busuttil's view that Malta was at this period a pirate nest from which raids were launched against the Italian mainland, although such a hypothesis cannot be ruled out. The episode to which he refers occurred when Saracens from Sicily besieged Reggio Calabria. They then retreated by land to Mileto, not to Malta, which they could hardly have reached, as their boats had been set on fire.¹²¹ In any case the notice describing this episode occurs in a chronicle which is generally held to be an eighteenth-century falsification.¹²²

The references to Malta in Arab geographers are short and uninformative, although they do usually attest the prosperity of the island. However Idrīsī, the geographer who gives the fullest account, was writing in the twelfth century, after the Norman conquest of the islands.¹²³ As a whole the Arab source material for Malta is very limited. Certain earlier scholars gave credence to the corpus of documents and annals incorporated by A. Airolti in his *Codice Diplomatico di Sicilia sotto il governo degli Arabi* published at Palermo in 1789 and 1792. The Arabic codices in question were falsified by the Maltese Giuseppe Vella, and the rich information they contained, including records of a census of Malta and Gozo supposedly conducted in 991 and a notice of the sale of the islands to the Byzantine

¹¹⁶ Text in Minganti, 20, from Amari, *Biblioteca*, 142–143 (trans. i. 240–242), as amended *supra*, 26; the reference is to 'slaves', not to 'Maltese'.

¹¹⁷ Mayr, 'Zur Geschichte . . .', 493.

¹¹⁸ Von Falkenhausen, 61, 91–92.

¹¹⁹ Busuttil, 24 nos 36, 38.

¹²⁰ Zonaras, XVII, 14, 28, ed. M. Pinder, iii (Bonn, 1897), 589–590; Ephraemus, *Chronographia*, Michael Paphlagonus anno VII, lines 3027–3029, ed. E. Bekker (Bonn, 1840), 132.

¹²¹ *Chronicon Cavense*, a. 1004, ed. C. Pellegrini—F. Pratilli, *Historia Principum Langobardorum*, vi (Naples, 1753), 427, misinterpreted by Busuttil (in *Melita Historica*, v. 307), who cites the confused treatment in Russo, iii. 59.

¹²² N. Cilento, 'Un falsario di fonti per la storia della Campania medievale: Francesco Maria Pratilli (1689–1763)', *Archivio storico per le provincie napoletane*, ns. xxxii (1950–1951).

¹²³ Idrīsī, *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq*: text in Minganti, 21, from Amari, *Biblioteca*, 24 (trans. i. 53–54).

Emperor Basil II in 992, must be discounted.¹²⁴ Most subsequent references to Malta in Greek sources are confined to the visit of St. Paul, or to traditional items borrowed from earlier geographers,¹²⁵ but 'The Order of the Patriarchal Thrones', composed in 1143 by Nilus Doxopatres, a Greek monk who migrated from Constantinople to Sicily,¹²⁶ stated that Sicily had one metropolitan see, Syracuse, and that under it were 21 bishoprics, including one each for Malta and Gozo.¹²⁷ This was actually incorrect, because Nilus used a source derived from the *civil* city list of George of Cyprus which led him to overlook the metropolitan status of Catania and to exaggerate the number of Sicilian bishoprics; there is, therefore, no evidence for the existence of a bishopric on Gozo in this period.

The fact is that the sources for a detailed picture of life in Malta in the Byzantine period do not exist. Moreover, the Arab domination seems to have represented a complete break between the Byzantine and the later periods, and it is difficult to point with certainty to any permanent legacy from Byzantine times. Further study of certain alleged Byzantine survivals would be worth while,¹²⁸ but the very sparseness of the evidence, even by early medieval standards, suggests that the strategic and political rôle of Byzantine Malta was a limited one. The idea that the island was an important naval base rests on one ambivalent piece of evidence and needs to be re-examined in the light of Byzantine naval strategy as a whole.¹²⁹ The main conclusion of this study is not that Malta formed a distinctive or important part of the Byzantine Empire, but that it participated fully in the momentous political, religious and cultural changes which occurred in the Central Mediterranean area from the sixth to the eleventh centuries.

¹²⁴ On this remarkable fraud, see Caruana, 37-55, and Amari, *Storia*, i. 6-12, who describes Vella as 'digiuno d'ogni erudizione, ma furbo, baldanzoso, sfacciato, ciarlatano'. Caruana wrongly believed that Vella had recourse to some authentic material, and he therefore made cautious use of the documents in his section on Muslim Malta (pp. 384-441).

¹²⁵ Busuttil, 23-24, gives examples.

¹²⁶ Edited by Parthey, *Hieroclis Synecdemus*, 265-308. The later edition contained in F. Finck, *Des Nilos Doxopatris τὰς τῶν πατριαρχικῶν θρόνων αρμενισχ und griechisch*, (Walaršapat, 1902), gives also an Armenian version translated in 1179/1180. On Nilus, K. Krumbacher, *Geschichte der byzantinischen Litteratur* (2nd. ed: Munich, 1897), 415; V. Laurent, 'L'oeuvre géographique du moine sicilien Nil Doxopatris', *Échos d'Orient*, xxxvi (1937).

¹²⁷ Ed. Parthey, 302 nos. 312 (Γὰδος νῆσος), 313 (Μελλίτη νῆσος ἢ λεγομένη Μάλτα).

¹²⁸ On the possibilities, *supra*, 23-25.

¹²⁹ Eickhoff's broad perspective is vitiated as regards Malta by certain inaccurate and unsubstantiated statements, eg. on the date of the Muslim conquest (*supra*, 82).

APPENDIX

A BYZANTINE LEAD SEAL FROM GOZO

Shortly before this article went to press, Dr. Anthony Luttrell drew the author's attention to a Byzantine lead seal located in the Gozo Museum which records an *archon* named Theophylact.

Lead seal. Diameter 0.028 m. Plate 5b and c. Impression off-centre on bottom; deterioration along circumference.

Obverse: Marial cruciform monogram with the continuation of the usual tetrasyllable in the cantons:

Θεοτόκε βοήθει [τ] φ σφ δουλῶ

Reverse: Legend in four lines:

+ Θεοφυλάκ[τ]φ ἄρχοντη (= ι)

In the marred area along the circumference, something further has been impressed, which does not appear to be lettering but a design. Since this seal is provincial, a leaf design may fairly be postulated.

Date: 8th-9th centuries, and most likely between ca. 750 and ca. 850.

This seal was certainly found on the island of Gozo ca. 1960. It possibly represents evidence that a Byzantine *archon* possessed authority over Gozo. It sheds no light, however, on the obscure functions and standing of the office of *archon* (see *supra*, 77-78). Two possibilities remain open; either the authority of the *archon kai droungarios* of Malta, who is recorded in a seal discussed *supra*, 77, extended to Gozo, in which case this seal could also denote such an official, or else Gozo had its own *archon*. The *dux* mentioned by the Patriarch Nicephorus (*supra*, 76) clearly ruled both islands, but some measure of independent administrative status is suggested by the separate mention of Gozo in the geographical list of George of Cyprus (*supra*, 76).

The author wishes to thank Professor Nicolas Oikonomidès and Mr. John Nesbitt for their helpful advice on the seal evidence for Malta and Gozo.