

The Heraldry of the Nobility and Gentry of Gozo

- From Medieval Times until the Onset of British Rule

Part 1

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What is Heraldry?

Heraldry concerns the study of Coats of Arms, which are simply insignia of identification and which may be personal (and hereditary) or impersonal. Heraldry, in the form we know it today, originated in the second quarter of the XII century. Coats of Arms were essential to identify people on the field of battle in the days of full body armour. They were also very useful for identification purposes in a time of widespread illiteracy. Although the original purpose of heraldry has gone, the science has persisted, mostly as a status symbol.

Office of the Chief Herald of Malta

On 21st March 2019, upon the recommendation of the Honourable Prime Minister and the Cabinet Secretary at the Office of The Prime Minister, Heritage Malta, through its subsidiary Heritage Malta Services Ltd, established the Office of **Chief Herald of Arms of Malta**, which now regulates heraldry, both corporate and personal within the Republic of Malta. I have the singular honour of being appointed Malta's first ever Chief Herald.

Gozo Historical Background to its Gentry

Prominent among the citizens of Gozo, were its Jurats (*Giurati*) who were elected to an administrative council known as the *Università*, which was founded in 1350. The Electors were chosen from the nobility, landed gentry, honoured citizens, professional people or those exercising a liberal art, secular priests, businessmen and artisans. Jurats were qualified to display Coats of Arms, although their use was largely unregulated. Up until 1551, the *Università*, was presided over by the *Capitano della Verga* (*Hakem*) who had by statute to be a Gozitan elected by the jurats. In 1551, his title was then changed to that of Governor. After

that year, the Grandmaster usually, but not always, appointed a Knight as Governor.

The Nobility and Gentry in and of Gozo

Gozo had its own nobility and landed gentry in the upper stratum of society. These two classes provided most of the *Giurati* (Jurats) and *Capitani della Verga* (Civil Governors) of the island. There also existed holders of Maltese titles of nobility based on Gozitan fiefs together with Gozitans awarded titles of nobility in Malta. In a very short article such as this it is not possible to discuss all the elite families or go into any great detail about the ones mentioned. It is also not possible to show all the coats of arms of the families concerned, however interested readers are referred to the many books, which I have written on the subject (*see bibliography*).

Aragonese Creations and Some of the Old Titled and Non-Titled “gentle” Families of Gozo

Asciaq (Ghaxaq, Axac): Tomasio Axac was created *Regio familiaritas* in 1373 by King Frederick II of Sicily - hence the eagle in chief, on the Asciaq family Arms (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1: Asciaq family Arms

The Ascias family were originally established in Mdina but left Malta to settle in Gozo, between 1570-1578, so as to escape the attention of the Inquisition. Several prominent Mdina families were embracing the Lutheran doctrine and Don Andrea Axac a practising Lutheran was convicted for harbouring prohibited books. His father, Manfredo, was a Jurat of Mdina where his brother Antonio was *Capitano d'Armi* in 1517. The family was connected by marriage to many other families belonging to the Gozitan gentry such as Apap, Abela, Cuzkeri and Bonici. They founded a rich *primogenitura* which eventually passed into the Bonici family by marriage. They were also related to the Barons of Grua. Dr Martino Ascias was a Jurat in Gozo in 1807. The Tombstone of Dr Felice Axac can be seen at the Gozo Cathedral (here, the Axcias arms are conjoined with those of Apap). He was the major benefactor for the reconstruction of the *Matrice* after the 1693 Earthquake destroyed the previous Cathedral. (see Fig. 2).

Attardo: The *Milite* Francesco Attardo, was granted the fief of *Saccaya* in Malta in 1360 and given the privileged status of a royal *familiaritas* in 1372. His descendant Giulio Attardo settled in Gozo



Figure 2: The tombstone of Dr Felice Axac



Figure 3: Attardo family Arms

and in 1601 married Mattea or Marietta Dimech, with issue. He thus started the Gozitan line of the family which intermarried with other noble Maltese families such as Viani and Fiteni and with the Gozitan gentry (Jurat) families such as d'Anastasio, Seychel, Agius and Pace. The family Arms are shown in Fig. 3.

Avola: Don Carlo d'Avola, "Captain of Naxxar", 1570-1580 fought in the Great Siege of 1565 displaying great heroism in the fighting near Mosta. On 5 June 1569 he was granted the right to bear arms by King Philip II of Spain, for his services in the Siege. His arms displayed two military belts bearing two moors' heads. (Fig. 4). His descendants lived in Gozo.



Figure 4: Avola family Arms

Barberi: Antonio Barberi, who arrived in Malta c. 1550 with his siblings, was the son of Vincenzo Barberi of Sicily. He was created a Baron in 1562 and having become a widower, married in Gozo (1566) his second wife, Isabella Sceberras. Most of their descendants settled in Gozo. For the family, Arms see Fig. 5.



Figure 5: Barberi family Arms

Bonnici/Bonici: Giacomo Bonnici/Bonici of Florence, Italy, moved to Gozo in 1356 and married Selvagia Doria, with issue. Their descendants settled in Gozo from where they eventually moved to Malta. (Created Barons of Qlejja, 1737). Many members of this family served as Jurats in Gozo between 1400 and 1721. For the family Arms see Fig. 6



Figure 6: Bonnici/ Bonici family Arms

Bocchio: Bocchio di Bocchio, was granted the fief of La Grua in Gozo, in 1347. He married Beatrice Mileto. His descendant, Elvira di Bocchio, 6th and last holder of the fief of Grua (Aragonese creation) sold it to the Order in 1541. She married (c 1530), Damiano Psinga. Their daughter, Grazia Psinga married Giovanni Carbott in 1559; their descendant, Saverio Carbott Testaferrata was granted the fief of Grua by the Order in 1794. The Family Arms are shown in Fig. 7.



Figure 7: Bocchio family Arms

Bordino: The first reference to this family (in Malta) is to the *Milite*, Federico de Bordino, a Jurat in Malta 1406. In 1510, his descendant Giovanni Bordino was granted the fiefs of Benwarrad and Culeja in Malta. A line of the family became part of the landed gentry in Gozo. Ismeralda Bordino the wife of Antonio Vagnolo (viv. temp. 1419), founded several benefices. Domenico di Bordino (died 1507) was *Castellano* in Gozo. For the family Arms see Fig. 8.

d'Anastasio: The d'Anastasio family came over with the knights in 1530 and settled in Gozo. Dr Paolo d'Anastasio JUD married Imperia Abela in 1612. She descended from Raimondo Abela, the son of the *Milite* Ferrone de Abela, who came with the Aragonese to Sicily from Spain and was



Figure 8: Bordino family Arms

created *Signore* of Giaesi, Castellanio di Agiro and Raginelgi. Their daughters married into the Cassia family transmitting to her issue the Baronies of Castel Cicciano in Naples and of Għariexem in Malta. Beatrice Cassia d'Anastasio, Baroness of Castel Cicciano also acquired the barony of Gomerino in Malta jointly with her husband, Paolo Testaferrata in 1710.

The d'Anastasio family were also descended from the Cassia family in their own right. Gabriele d'Anastasio, Emilio d'Anastasio and Fabrizio d'Anastasio were Jurats in Gozo, in the XVI and XVII centuries. The family Arms are shown in Fig. 9.

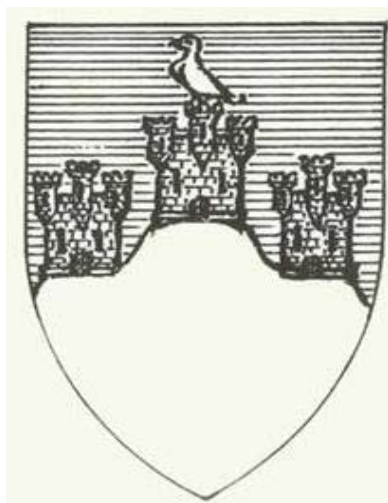


Figure 9: d'Anastasio family Arms



Figure 10: d'Aragona family Arms

d'Aragona: There are various d'Aragona lines in Malta and Gozo with both legitimate and illegitimate descending from King Frederick II (III) of Aragon-King of Sicily and Malta 1296-1337 and King Frederick III (IV) of Aragon, King of Sicily and Malta, 1355-1377. Blasco d'Aragona and Sigismondo d'Aragona were both Jurats in Gozo, in the XVI century. The d'Aragona escutcheon is shown in Fig. 10.

Cadumi: Salvo Cadumi of Gozo, was created Baron of San Marciano in 1398. His descendants, extinct in the male line by the late XV century lived in Gozo for many years but the fief of San Marciano was eventually returned to the government, to be re-granted to the Galea Feriol family (see Part 2).

Cassar/o: The Cassar/o family descended from an ancient family who once held the fief of Castel Cassar near Syracuse in 1392 and occupied many high offices in Malta. A branch of the family established itself in Gozo. Members of the family were Jurats in the XVI and XVII centuries. Giuseppe Cassar was Governor of Gozo, 1729. On 18 September 1798 during the uprising against the French, the Gozitans, taking the lead from the Maltese, set up their own provisional government in a special congress. Don Saverio Cassar, the archpriest of the Gozo *Matrice*,

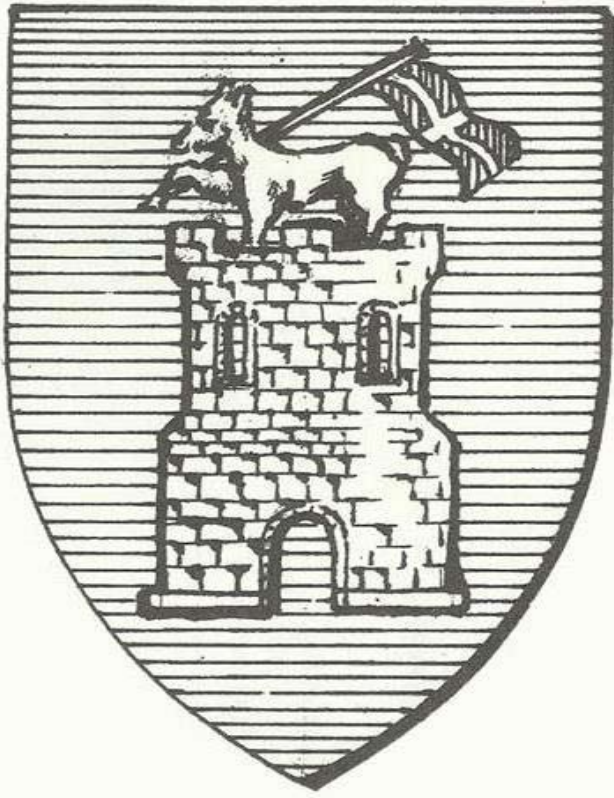


Figure 11: Cassar family Arms

was elected head of the provisional government and superintendent general of Gozo. For the family Arms, see Fig. 11.

Cassia: The earliest reference to the Cassia family in Malta is to Judge Gaddo Cassia of Mdina –*viv. temp.* 1450. His great-grandson, Carlo Cassia married Isabella Sansone in Gozo in 1571 and this line of the family settled in Gozo. Giovanni Cassia, served as a Jurat several times between 1650 and 1696 and was Governor of Gozo, 1664. The Maltese branches of the Family became Barons of Ghariexem in 1638, inherited the Barony of Castel Cicciano and were jointly created Barons of Gomerino in 1710. For

the family Arms see Fig. 12.



Castelletti: The first recorded member of the Castelletti family in Malta was Giovanni Castelletti /Castelletta who belonged to a Catalan family which settled

Figure 12: Cassia family Arms

in Palermo, Sicily from where Giovanni made his way to Gozo in 1497. Here, in 1498, he married Imperia Navarra. Giovanni's ancestor, Gilberto Castelletti, was a Catalan knight who was sent to Sicily by King James II of Aragon, James I of Sicily and Malta (1285-1295). In 1521, Giovanni purchased some properties in Gozo from the di Vivaia family. He founded the chapel of St Catherine (situated in the Cathedral at Victoria) in 1532 where he was buried, following his death in 1544. He served as a Jurat in Gozo, 1531. His son, Andrea, *viv. temp.* 1578, served as a Jurat in Gozo, 1542 but eventually settled in Malta where he married Antonella de Nava, the daughter of Francesco and of Almeria Montalto. For the family Arms, see Fig. 13.



Figure 13: Castelletti family Arms

Catalano: Almuccio Catalano was created Baron of San Cosimo in Gozo sometime before 1350. He produced no issue, so the fief was then conferred on Enrico de Osa in 1364. For the family Arms, see Fig. 14.

Caxaro: Luigi Caxaro was created a Baron in 1409. He married Zuna d'Amodeo, establishing their family in Gozo. Members of the family served as Jurats between 1512 and 1719. Manfredo Caxaro was *Credenziere*, 1513. Nicola Caxaro was



Figure 14:
Catalano family
Arms

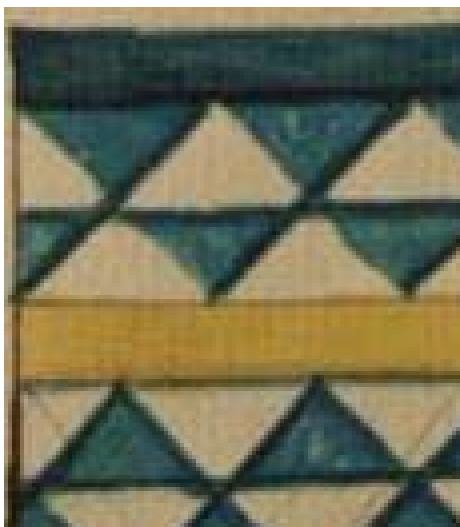


Figure 15:
Caxaro family
Arms

Governor of Gozo, 1545-1546. The Caxaro family also held the post of *Viceammiraglio* of Gozo. For the family Arms, see Fig. 15. The Caxaro are ancestors of Catherine Elizabeth Middleton, the wife of HRH, Prince William of Wales, Duke of Cambridge.

Cuzkeri/Cuschcieri: Gaddo Cuzkeri was the son of Federico de Cuzkeri, a soldier in Messina, who married (c. 1340), Donna Antonia d’Aragona. Gaddo, the first Maltese holder of the office of *Secreto* of Malta was appointed to that post by King Frederick III (IV) of Sicily and Malta in 1375. He was also created Baron of Frigenuini in Malta. The fief remained in the Cuzkeri family up until 1513, when it was sold to the Stuniga family. Some of his descendants settled in Gozo to establish the family there. Alessandro Mompalao-Cuzkeri was

re-granted the barony in Frigenuini in 1737, but being without issue, on his death the fief reverted to the Order. Members of the family served as Jurats between 1649 and 1697. For the family Arms, see Fig. 16.

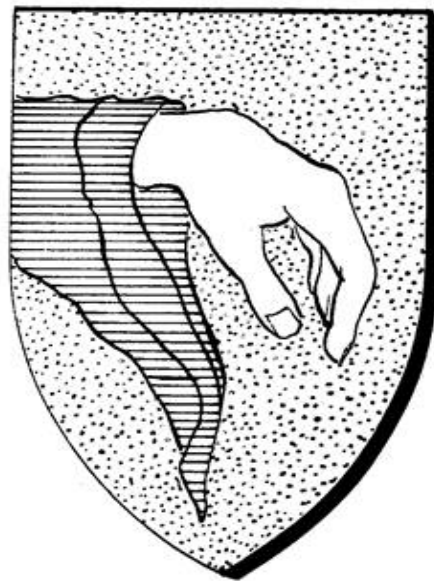


Figure 16:
Cuzkeri/
Cuschcieri
family Arms

De Osa/o: Enrico de Osa/o was created Baron of San Cosimo in 1364 (purchasing the fief from the Catalano family). The family became extinct early in the XVI century.

Guantis: Baron Pietro Guantis, was *Vice Capitano* of Gozo, 1360-70. For the family Arms, see Fig. 17.

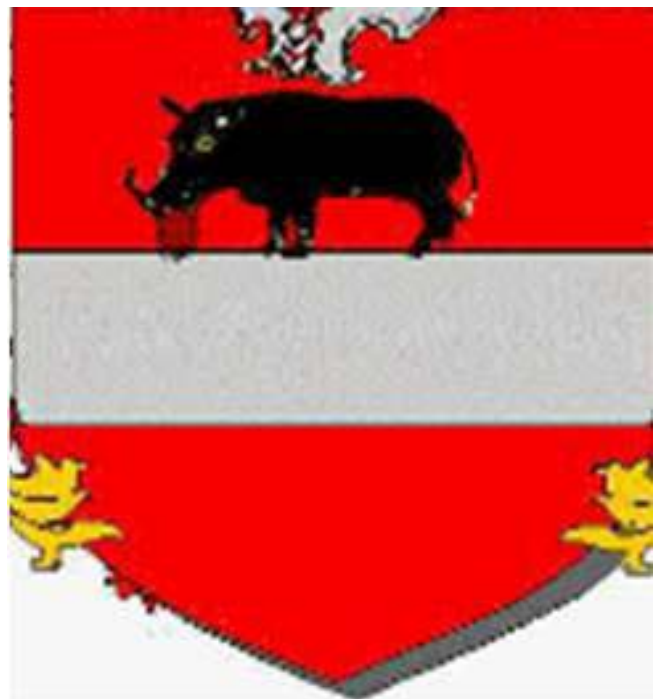


Figure 17: Guantis family Arms

Inguanez: This line descended from Antonio Inguanez, a Spanish Baron who became, by marriage, the 4th Baron of Djar-il-Bniet and Buqana in Malta. His descendant, also Antonio Inguanez served as Capitano della Verga, 1437. Members of the family served as Jurats, between 1530 and 1599. For the family Arms see Fig. 18.



Figure 18: Inguanez family Arms

Mannara (Almenara): Manfredi Mannara was Jurat in Gozo, 1403, 1439. Matteo Mannara was a Judge in Gozo, 1433 and Andrea Mannara was a Jurat in Gozo, 1530 and Governor of Gozo, 1533. For the family Arms see Fig. 19.



Figure 19: Mannara family Arms

di Manuele: *Miles* Rodolfo di Manuele *viv. temp.* 1347 in Sicily was Baron of Burgetto in that island. From him descended several members of the family who served as Jurats in Gozo between 1401 and 1550. A Guglielmo di Manuele, married Imperia, the daughter of the 3rd Baron Rapa (*see below*). Their granddaughter, Isabella di Manuele married. (1562) Notary Tommaso Gauci, another prominent Gozitan, from who descended the Baron Gauci. For the family Arms see Fig. 20.



Figure 20: di Manuele family Arms

Navarra: A Sicilian family which moved to Gozo at the start of the XV century. Ugolino Navarra was a Jurat in Gozo 1428, 1432. Andrea Navarra was a Jurat in Gozo 1445. His daughter, Imperia married Giovanni Castelletti, the first of that family to settle in Gozo. Paolo Navarra was a Jurat in Gozo 1532, 1537 but he later moved the family to Malta. Ignazio Moscati Falsoni Navarra was made Count of Bahria in Malta, 1743. For the family Arms see Fig. 21.



Figure 21: Navarra family Arms

de Nava: This was a Castilian, warrior, corsairing and noble family extinct in Malta by 1583. They were virtually the hereditary keepers of the Castle of St. Angelo. They held many fiefs in Malta. A line of the family settled in Gozo. Pietro de Nava was a Jurat in Gozo, 1550. For family Arms see Fig. 22.

Pellegrino/Perregrino: A very powerful family. In 1362, Giacomo de Perregrino/Pellegrino married Margherita d'Aragona ("*La Fata*") daughter of Guglielmo d'Aragona, the natural son of King Frederick III (IV). Giacomo was *Castellano* 1356-1372, *Capitano della Verga*, 1356 and *Giustiziere* all in Malta. In 1372, he led a serious rebellion against the crown which was crushed leading Margherita to plead with her kinsman, the king for

her husband's life. In 1361, Giacomo was granted the Maltese fief of Ġnien-is-Sultan. Some of his descendants settled in Gozo, where we find Pino de Pellegrino (i), Jurat in Gozo 1406, Federico Pellegrino, Jurat in Gozo 1441, Pino de Pellegrino (ii), Jurat in Gozo 1469, 1471. For the family Arms see Fig. 23.

Platamone: Battista di Platamone, a doctor of law and *Regio Consigliere*, was sent to Malta by the Viceroy of Sicily in 1420 to hand possession of the islands over to Don Antonio Cardona. Platamone himself, later jointly occupied the post of Viceroy of Sicily in 1440, in the name of Alfonso I of Sicily. In 1438, a Francesco di Platamone was *Capitano della Verga* in Malta. The Platamone family eventually settled in Gozo where they were one of the leading families. They occupied the posts of Jurats between 1469 and 1530. Antonio Platamone was Governor of Gozo, 1531. Francesco Platamone (ii) was Governor of Gozo 1532, 1536. Bartolomeo Platamone was Governor of Gozo, 1534. Ludovico Platamone was Jurat of Gozo and Ambassador of Malta to the Order of St John, 1530. For the family Arms see Fig. 24.

Rapa: Antonio Rapa (i) was *Capitano della Verga*, 1435. Notary Salvatore Rapa, Jurat in Gozo, 1453, 1459 was created Baron Rapa in 1453; the title became extinct early in the XVII century. Antonio Rapa (ii) was a Jurat in Gozo, between 1522 and 1530. Giovanni Rapa was Ambassador of Malta and Gozo to the Viceroy of Sicily, 1527. Gio. Domenico Rapa was a Jurat in Gozo, 1593. For the family Arms see Fig. 25.

Savona/Sagona/Saguna: The common ancestor of this family is Leonardo (sive Nardus) Sagona, Jurat in Gozo, 1471 and 1476. In 1487 he was appointed "*Soprintendente alle pubbliche fabbriche*". In 1463, he was appointed one of the Gozitan *Accatapani*. Giulio Sagona was a Jurat in Gozo, 1542 and *Capitano della Verga*, 1548-49. From him descends Horace II Walpole, (1723-1809), 2nd Baron Walpole of Wolterton, created 1806 Earl of Orford in UK. Niccolo' Saguna served for eight terms as a Jurat of Gozo during the period 1513-31. He was appointed *Vice-Secreto* in Gozo by a privilege granted him (from Brussels) by Queen Joan and King Charles on 30th September 1516. He was appointed *Vice-Secreto* for Gozo for life on 23rd

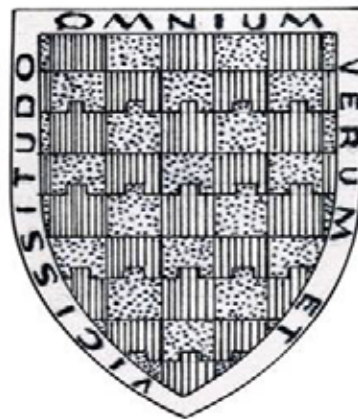


Figure 22: de Nava family Arms



Figure 23: Pellegrino/Perregrino family Arms



Figure 24: Platamone family Arms



Figure 25: Rapa family Arms

June 1530. He married Violante natural daughter of Don Lanza Inguanez, Baron of Għariexem, Lord of the Mugiario, Archdeacon of the Cathedral (1431-1493) Vicar-General of the Diocese of Malta c. 1480 and subsequently. For the family Arms see Fig. 26.

Soria: Giovanni Soria, *Capitano della verga* of Gozo, 1530 or 1531, was the first-ever *Capitano* directly chosen by the Grandmaster (de l'isle adam). He served as a Jurat in Gozo, 1534. For the family Arms see Fig. 27.

Torres: An ancient and very noble Spanish family. A branch established itself in Malta and later in Rome (1577). Francesco Torres was created Baron of Fiddien in Malta in 1520. His descendant, Don Giovanni Torres, 4th Baron of Fiddien married 1567 (at the Matrice Gozo) Caterina dei Baroni Nicolao-Rapa, a descendant of the (5th) Baroness Rapa. For the family Arms see Fig. 28.

Vagas/Vargas: The Vagas/Vargas family were very prominent in Spain where they played a major role in the *Reconquista* – the battles between Christians and Moors for control of the Iberian Peninsula during the middle ages. They were Knights of St John, Santiago, Calatrava and Alacantara and held many fiefs and titles in Spain. Alonso de Vagas was *Capitano della Verga*, in Gozo, 1544. For the family Arms see Fig. 29.

Vagnolo/Bagnolo: First mention of this family is in a contract of purchase of land in Gozo in the name of the *Milite* Antonio Vagnolo. King Alfonso I named him *Milite* in 1447. His son, also Antonio was Jurat in Gozo, 1470, 1491, 1493. Vito, Giacomo Vito and Biagio Vagnolo all served as Jurats in Gozo between 1530 and 1584. For the family Arms see Fig. 30.

Vassallo (Paleologo): Count Ludovico de Vassallo Paleologo married (in Palermo) 1570 Leonora Corvera dei Baroni di Miserindino from whom was born Count Matteo de Vassallo Paleologo born c. 1577 who married firstly (in Palermo) 04-11-1611 Emilea Platamone dei Baroni di Cefalù and who married secondly (Matrice Gozo), 1622 Caterina di Rinaldo. He settled in Malta 1622 establishing branches of the family in both Malta and Gozo. His great grandfather Count Niccolò de Vassallo Paleologo was Councillor to Emperor John VIII



Figure 26: Savona/Sagona/Saguna family Arms



Figure 27: Soria family Arms



Figure 28: Torres family Arms



Figure 29: Vagas/Vargas family Arms



Figure 30: Vagnolo/
Bagnolo family Arms

Palaeologos (1425-1448) and to Constantine XI (XII) when Despot of Morea. He eventually settled in Sicily, 1436, where he was recognised as being of imperial blood by King Alphonso the Magnanimous. For the family Arms see Fig. 31.

Viani: A very old and noble Maltese family. They displayed great heroism during the Great Siege and were awarded the right to display a moor's head in their Arms (*see also Avola* above). Teodora Attard Fiteni, married in 1702 at the Matrice in Gozo, Isidoro Viani, Baron of Tabria in Malta. For the family Arms see Fig. 32.

Testaferrata: Ercole Martino Testaferrata, Baron of Gomerino, Rector of the Benefice of S. Maria Annunziata della Saccaia nel Gozo (known as La Nuza, today's Lunzjata valley) *eretto da D. Sibilla d'Aragona, come si legge in una provisione del Re' Martino, qui' fu' donato l'anno 1372 dal Re' Federico, ritrovandosi in quest' isola a 12 di Novembre al Sacerdote Bartolomeo Axac.* For the family Arms see Fig. 33.

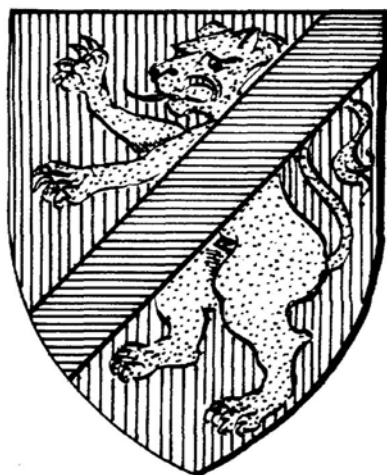


Figure 31: Vassallo
(Paleologo) family
Arms



Figure 32: Viani family Arms



Figure 33: Testaferrata family Arms

Other Medieval Landed Gentry in Gozo

- D'Alagona
- Algaría
- Barba
- Benfanti
- Bonafede
- Bordino
- Boniamin
- Bordino
- De Bovadilla
- Caraffa
- Cardona
- Federico
- Hernandez
- Infantino
- Mahnuq
- Medrana
- Messina
- Migliares
- de Nasi
- Nicholaci
- Pontremoli
- Rajadel
- Rajneri
- Reggio/Riggio
- Rioles
- Sanctoro
- Vaccaro (Barons)

Other Jurat Families of Gozo

De bono	Jurat	1726
Agius	Jurat	1576
D'Armenia	Jurat	1627
Arpa	Jurat	1773
Azzopardi	Jurat	1764
Bajada	Jurat	1771
Bencini	Jurat	1766
Bonello	Jurat	1597
Bondi	Jurat	1539
Boradella	Jurat	1578
Borg	Jurat	1798
Burgio	Jurat	1588
Burlo'	Jurat	1598
Busuttill	Jurat	1776
Caccialepre	Jurat	1629
Caruana	Jurat	1709

Carbone	Jurat	1667
Candiu de Candia	Jurat	1558
Cilia	Jurat	1595 (*)
		(*) Budaq 1590

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To be continued

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