

Book Review

"MARIA CALLEJA'S GOZO....A LIFE HISTORY" Edited and Introduced by Micheline Galley Utah State University 84322-7800 U.S.A. in the UNESCO Collection of Representative Works, European Series. 1994. x, + 245 pp. + illustrations. \$29.95 + \$5 postage and packing; or Lm 12 through Maria Calleja, "Cova da Iria" Xuxa Street, Kerċem, Gozo. (Tel.556622)

Madame Galley is a French ethnographer, director of researches at the National Centre for Scientific Research in Paris; formerly secretary general of the International Association of Studies in Mediterranean Civilisations. She has also written many publications on oral folklore, some also including folk chants and poems from our islands. The book has a foreword by Ġuże' Cassar Pullicino, the leading Maltese folklorist, and has notes and appendices to elaborate on the text.

Maria Calleja's experiences, as related to Madame Galley, sum up the life history of a typical, educated Gozitan woman of this century, especially bringing out the way of life prevailing since the 1930's. Being an ethnologist, Madame Galley used her questions, to bring out of her friend and subject those aspects which would most interest readers of this type of work. She adds value to the text by including notes and observations on mannerisms, intonation, style and gesticulations of the speaker which the ethnologist values so much to give more meaning to oral folklore.

The questioner's intention was clearly to bring out the life story of one woman within a closely-knit community, and not to produce a study on Gozo's community in the context of a wider world, and therefore Maria Calleja's story dwells more on her intimate life and surroundings.

Had the subject been an uneducated person, Madame Galley's work would have been rendered more difficult, to put it mildly; as it is, Maria Calleja, a former teacher and headteacher, did not need an interpreter, and found her way effortlessly and easily to relate her experiences through all imaginable subjects under the sun of Gozo. Her narrative style and presentation betray her attitudes and feelings, and the reader can easily judge her character.

Her account shows contrasts between different life styles coexisting in Gozo, and also between those of the two islands, (with a kindly eye on her remark, page 113, "Sliema...where the snobs live" which, for an educated person, is too hasty and thoughtless, besides being incorrect).

She touches on all sorts of things, as the comprehensive index also shows, and reveals personal sorrows and jubinations, opinions on, and attitudes to the numerous aspects of life around her.

It will not be of any particular advantage for me to dwell on only one or two particular points in her narrative, when there are hundreds, and all of the book is of interest to sociologists,

folklorists and ethnologists in general. Contemporaries of Maria Calleja will appreciate better the meaning and intricacies of her account, enacted on an island no longer as we remember it before the second world war.

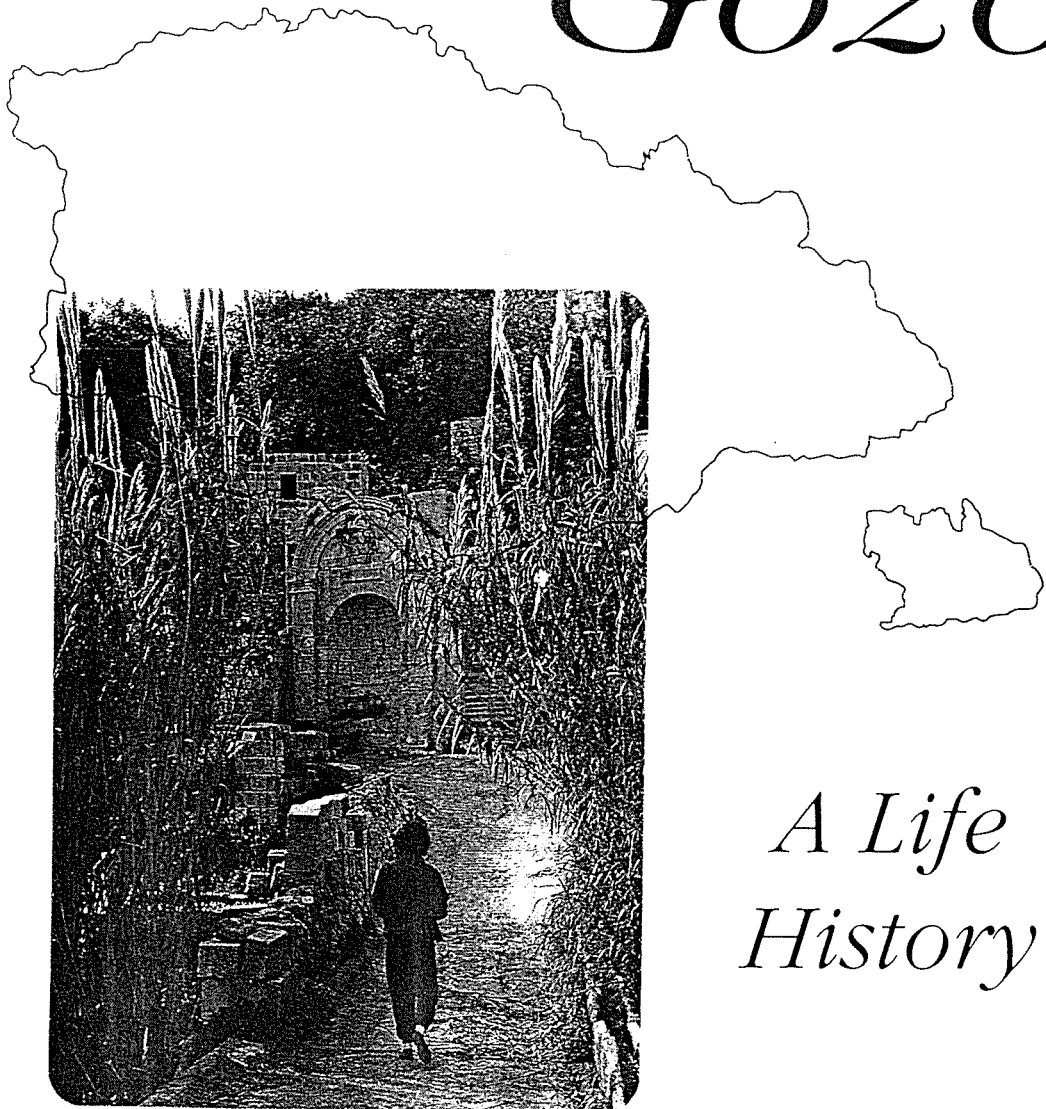
It is a well-produced and enjoyable book which should not only be obtained by scholars in the above-mentioned fields, but also by the general reader, besides being a valuable addition to all collectors of melitensia.

Guido Lanfranco

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