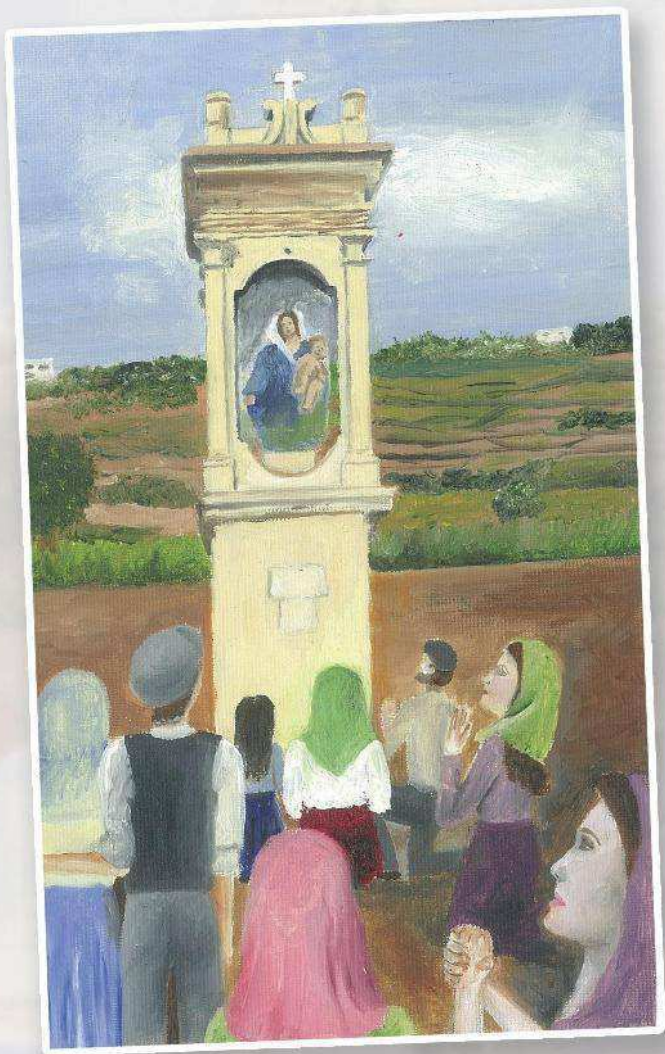




Joseph Bezzina

Ten singular stories from the village of
SANTA LUČIJA • GOZO

with input by

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Santa Lučija–Gozo
FONDAZZJONI FOLKLORISTIKA TA' KLULA
2011

First published in 2011
by the FONDAZZJONI FOLKLORISTIKA TA' KLULA
23 Triq Ta' Klula, Santa Luċija, Gozo. KCM 3060. Malta.
and
ECO-GOZO

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Cataloguing in Publication Data

Bezzina, Joseph, 1950-

Ten singular stories from Santa Luċija, Gozo / Joseph Bezzina with input by Ricky Bugeja – Kelly Cassar – Gordon Formosa – Graziella Grech – Rodienne Grech – Joe Mizzi – Mario Mizzi – Lucienne Sultana – Marilyn Sultana. – Santa Luċija, Gozo : Fondazzjoni Folkloristika Ta' Klula – Eco Gozo, 2011

40 p. : col. ill. ; 18 cm.

1. Santa Luċija (Gozo) – History 2. Santa Luċija (Gozo) – Churches 3. Churches – Gozo, Malta

I. Title

DDC: 945.8573

LC: DG999.N336C358B4

Melitensia Classification: MZ8 SLC

Computer setting in font Arno Pro

Production Joseph Bezzina

Printed and bound in Malta Gozo Press, Ġhajnsielem-Gozo. GSM 9016

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1. The bell-tower of the church of Santa Lučija (*see Story 10*).

SANTA LUČIJA A VILLAGE BRIMING WITH HISTORY

Santa Lučija lies to the west of the island of Gozo, 2.25 kilometres away from *It-Tokk*, the centre of the city of Victoria, Gozo. The place has a host of natural and historic attractions. It encompasses within its confines what is probably the first human settlement in Malta and Gozo. As such, the locality can be called the first *village* in the Maltese Islands. The present settlement is one of the earliest that developed on the island in the late Middle Ages.

The name Santa Lučija is the last toponym of the village. It was previously known first *Ta' Qabbieža* and later as *Santa Katerina*. It is now so called after Saint Lucy, an early fourth century virgin martyr from the city of Syracuse, the dedication of a late medieval rural chapel in its midst and of the present village church.

The place-name *Santa Lučija ta' Qabbieža* is first recorded in an act drawn by Notary Tumas Gauci on 22 August 1570 (NAV, R 287/5, f. 423, 2nd part). The locality is described as a *contrada*, a word from medieval Italian meaning *strada di luogo abitato*, which is a street lined with houses and not merely a farmhouse here and there. The hamlet had already developed at that time.

The following ten stories originated within its confines; the first five are legends, the other five are historic accounts of important events that occurred during the past centuries.



2. The spring at Ghajn Ghabdun (*see Story 1*).

1 • The spring at Ghajn Ghabdun

Ghawdex, the name of the island of Gozo in Maltese, is the second largest island of the archipelago of Malta. Lying in the geographical centre of the Mediterranean Sea, the island was subject to continuous raids by the masters of navigation of this enclosed sea. The Genoese, the Calabrians, the Hafside of Tunisia, the Turks, and other marauding corsairs frequently landed on Gozo in search of water and food. They caused widespread havoc, stole whatever they could lay their hands upon, and kidnapped people to barter them on the prosperous slave markets abroad. The island lived under this terrible threat for centuries.

The authorities did their best to ward off these corsairs. They organised a local militia in which all able-bodied men between eighteen and sixty five years of age were obliged to enlist. Whenever an alarm of a landing was raised, the section on call rushed to the site to frighten the corsairs away. The militia was at times successful, at times it failed, and the corsairs succeeded in their sinister work.

The *Universitas*, the local government of Gozo at that time, did its best to avoid the people falling slaves. A law laid down that between May and October, when the sea was usually calm, the people were obliged to sleep within the safety of the fortified Citadel in the heart of Gozo. There were heavy penalties for those who did not comply.

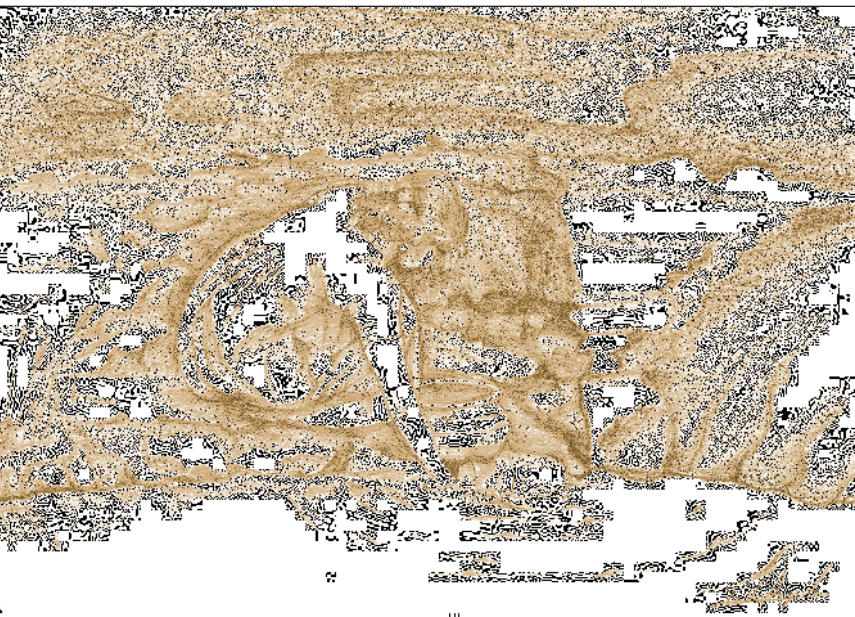
One day, a galley found shelter in the port of Dwejra, on the western coast of Gozo. Its captain was Ghabdun, more daring than his fellow corsairs and always asking for more. Ghabdun is a common Arab personal name of Magħribi formation, also frequent among Magħribi Jews. Its root is the word *Ghabd*, the servant of someone, normally employed in relation to God; so a slave of his own choice to the Almighty, *Ghabd Alla*, also written as one word, *Ghabdalla*.

As soon as darkness enveloped the port, Ghabdun led a party inland in search of water and whatever else fell in their way. In the



3. Ghabdun drank so much that he soon fell down dead (*see Story 1*).

4. At the pond to launder their clothes (*see Story 2*).



pitch darkness, by chance or more probably by design, the party got detached from him. He proceeded in his greed, while the party returned upon the galley patiently waiting for his return.

The galley at Dwejra had been sighted from a *wardija* or look-out post perched high on a promontory that is known to this day as Ras il-Wardija, at the extreme west of Santa Lučija. The message was quickly despatched to the captain of the militia within the Citadel. A search party descended immediately on the spot in search of the corsairs. The men on the galley sensed the danger and decided there and then to depart without their captain.

Għabdun was left behind, but he succeeded to elude the people in a hideaway for several days. Early one morning, some farmers spotted him in a grotto in the vicinity of *il-Mixta*, where he was wandering in search of food and water. They rounded him up and bound his hands and feet. Their wrath for all plundering they had suffered in the past fell upon him. They decided to starve to death.

They chained him in a desolate field where no one could convey him help. He begged for some water but was given none. Hoping that he would find a trickle, he began to dig with his bare hands and when these became sore he proceeded with some pieces of broken pottery sherds.

All of a sudden water began to trickle and it soon became a tiny stream. Dehydrated and exhausted, he thought it was a mirage. Yet the coolness of the spring in the scorching heat convinced him he had discovered his gold. He drank and drank. In fact he drank so much that he soon fell down dead by the spring that bears his name to this day.

The place name of Għajn Għabdun in the vicinity of what is nowadays the village of Santa Lučija is first recorded in a deed of 28 April 1483.

With input by Rodienne Grech



5. The natural fresh water pond known as
L-Ghadira ta' Sanrafflu (see Story 2).

2 • A kidnapping at *Sanrafflu*

Beyond the hamlet of Santa Lučija, there is small natural fresh water pond known as *L-Għadira ta' Sanrafflu*. It lies in the middle of an expanse of trees at the end of the road that from the village leads towards Ras il-Wardija, the southeastern tip of Gozo.

Sanrafflu or *San Rafflu* is one the seven seraphims standing before the throne of God. Its designation is either derived from a nickname or from a niche of the Seraphim Raphael – San Rafflu in Maltese – that was hollowed out on the wall of a room on the western edge of the pool. Its name is quite recent, as Gozo historian Agius de Soldanis does not record it in his monumental history of Gozo concluded it in 1745.

This pond is within a natural low circular depression that fills up naturally with water for most of the year. It lies about 152 metres (500 feet) above sea level and is the only natural large waterhole on the island. A number of fish thrives in the pond.

Until very recently, the people that lived in the vicinity used to go to the pond to launder their clothes. To reach the water level, they had to go down a flight of steps, where one is invisible from the surrounding area. The corsairs that frequented the island were, alas, aware of this freshwater pond.

One day, a number of corsairs that had lingered in the area till early morning surprised three young girls busily washing by the pool. They blindfolded them and dragged them to their hideaway. At night their companions approached land and boarded the girls on the galley.

Their families sought in vain every nook in the fields and the valleys. They soon realised the harsh truth as all their searches proved fruitless. The fate and destiny of the three young girls like many others before them and after remained a mystery ever after.

With input by Kelly Cassar



6. Ta' Dbiegi hill is the highest point of the island of Gozo (*see Story 3*).

7. A French captain found himself in a severe storm (*see Story 3*).



3 • The chapel on the top of Gozo

The island of Gozo is renowned for its many churches, chapels, and shrines. It is believed that the islanders were christianised by Saint Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles, when in the year ad 60, he was shipwrecked on the island of Malta on his way to Rome. He wintered for over three months in Malta and during his stay he preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ. The Christian faith has never ceased to glow and this faith is at the root of many a folk account.

There was at one time some fifty tiny chapels scattered throughout the island of Gozo; half of them were dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary, commonly referred to by the people as of *Santa Marija*. The term *Santa Marija* in reference to the Blessed Virgin originated among the Arab speaking Christians in nearby Sicily from where it must have reached Gozo. The term was eventually refined by Sicilian and Maltese Christians to refer to one solemn moment of the Blessed Virgin's life – her Assumption body and soul into Heaven, a feast celebrated with great pomp to this day in mid-August.

No less than twenty-one chapels dedicated to *Santa Marija* are recorded on tiny Gozo from the twelfth century onwards. One of them was unique. It was perched on the hill of Ta' Dbiegi, next to the village of Santa Lučija. Ta' Dbiegi is the highest point of the island of Gozo, its top is 195 metres above sea level.

The chapel of Santa Marija ta' Dbiegi dominated the whole island and the lives of its inhabitants who placed themselves under the protection of the Blessed Virgin. The bishops paid periodical visits to this chapel. They noted in their official reports that, notwithstanding the steep cumbersome climb to reach it, faithful of both sexes frequented the chapel with great devotion throughout the whole year. Though first documented in 1598, it must have stood there for many years before.

The story goes that hundreds of years ago, while crossing the



8. The awesome grotto of *Santa Katerina* (see Story 4).

Mediterranean, a French captain found himself in a severe storm. For a number of days the sun and stars were invisible and they lost their bearings completely. They gave up all hope of surviving; the storm raged unabated and the vessel was taking on more water than they could cope with. The captain and his crew prayed together and also made a vow.

All of sudden, a member of the crew, raised a cry. Amidst the billowing waves, he had beheld a landmass rising from the sea. They all plucked up courage and strove hard to direct the vessel towards a safe haven. They found refuge in a tiny port and soon discovered that the island was called Gozo and identified the tip of land they had seen as Ta' Dbiegi.

In fulfillment of their vow, they donated a sum of money to the Archpriest of the Matrice Church, the mother church of Gozo, so that he could built a chapel on the summit of the hill. The vow was soon fulfilled and the chapel became amazingly popular: it was one of the very few with a bell on the roof. Mass was said there every week and several people chose to be buried inside.

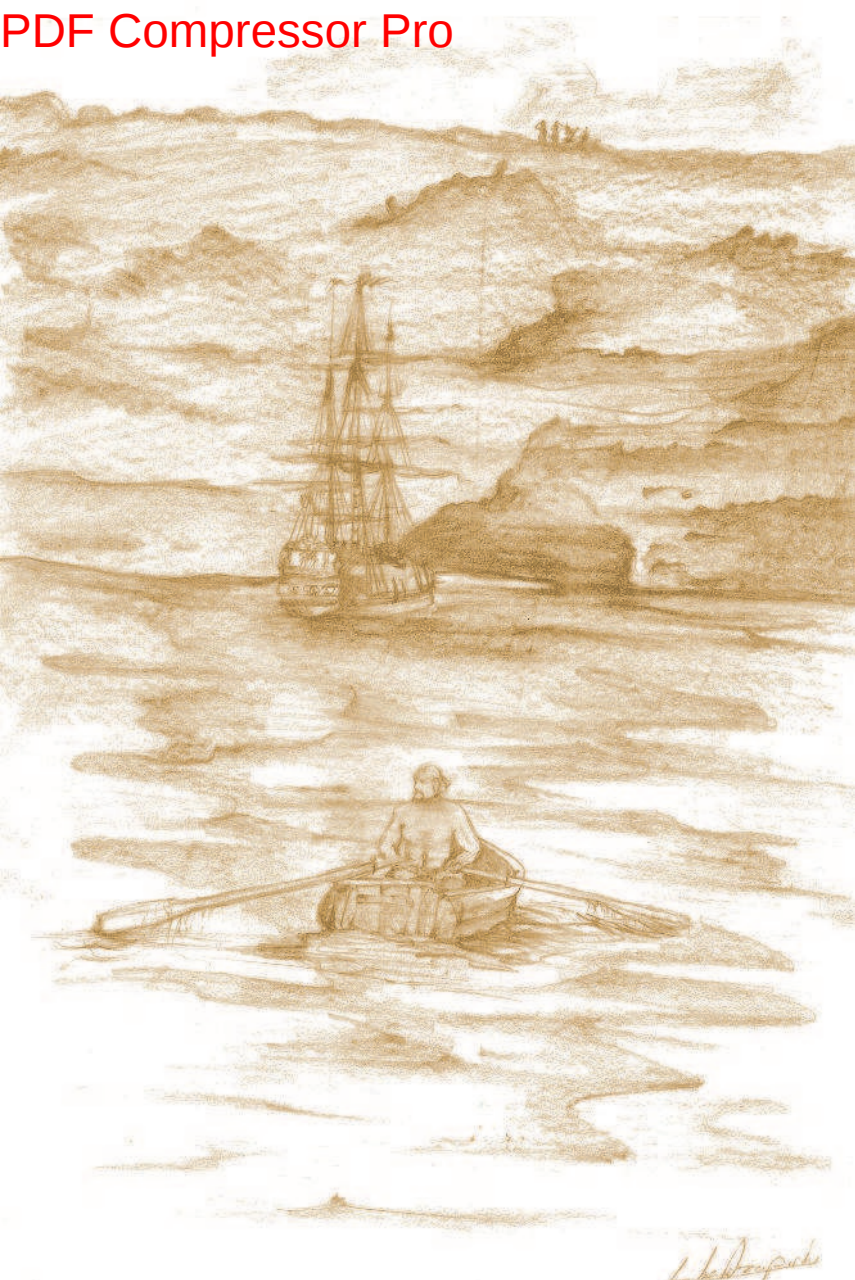
One day, early in the seventeenth century, a storm wiped away part of the chapel and it was never raised again.

With input by Lucienne Sultana

4 • The awesome grotto of *Santa Katerina*

The earliest settlement in the area of what is now Santa Lučija developed next to a tract of land known as *il-Vapur*, half way on the road that from Santa Lučija leads to Sanrafflu pond. *Il-Vapur*, literally the ship, refers to a number of fields nestled between two streets and are possibly so called from their oval shape.

The first farmsteads were built on this spot next to a chapel dedicated to Saint Catherine. It is interesting to note that the folk



9. He lowered himself into a boat and rowed inland unnoticed
(see Story 4).

also refer to this spot as *Ta' Santa Katerini*, the proper name of Catherine in the plural, unknown elsewhere in the Maltese islands. This due to the fact that for some time, there were possibly two tiny chapels on either side of *il-Vapur*; one dedicated to Saint Catherine of Alexandria, a martyr of the fourth century; the other to Saint Catherine of Siena, a virgin and doctor of the Church who lived in the fourteenth century.

The chapel of Saint Catherine of Alexandria is first recorded in a report of an apostolic visitation carried out by the Pietro Dusina, the Pope's delegate, in 1575. Saint Catherine was an early Christian martyr (died c. 307), who according to tradition, opposed the persecution of Christians under emperor Maxentius and refused to marry the emperor or to recant. In 1575, the chapel was not in good shape; the island had still not overcome the disaster of 1551 when almost all Gozitans were taken into slavery. The chapel had neither a rector, nor any ornaments, nor wooden doors. It did however have a procurator who managed a piece of land bequeathed to the chapel. From its income, the procurator was obliged to have a mass said in the chapel on 25 November, the feast day, and to distribute *iż-żerda* or some food to the poor. The visitor noted that the obligation was being fulfilled. It is no more.

Its name however survives in a megalithic grotto at sea level adjacent to the chapel known to this day as *il-Għar ta' Santa Katerina*, Saint Catherine's Grotto. It can be reached by taking a boat from the tiny port of Xlendi. It lies about one kilometre from the entrance to the port on the right, under a promontory known by local fishermen as *Kap Bumbarda*. The grotto was a haven for *il-ħamieħ tal-barr*, collared doves, and people had gone there shooting these birds since hundreds of years. For some time, the Knights of Saint John, the rulers of Malta, monopolized the use of this grotto.

It is recorded that in early summer 1699, Grandmaster Ramon Perellos and his retinue were entertained at the grotto with a sumptuous dinner. The Governor of Gozo and the *giurati* or



10. A poor fellow that lived in the hamlet below
implored shelter (*see Story 5*).

aldermen visited him at the grotto and offered him a number of local products, including a barrel of strong wine.

This proved to be too great a temptation and, one glass after another, the wine was soon consumed. The Grandmaster's trusted slave noted the drowsiness of the master and his retinue. He sauntered towards the entrance of the grotto, lowered himself into a boat, and rowed inland unnoticed. His fate remained a mystery, but with all probability he succeeded to find a passage to the Maghreb from where he had been abducted many years before.

With input by Joe Mizzi

5 • A miracle at *Għar Ilma*

Għar Ilma is Maltese for a water cave. It is also the name of one of the best-known hills of Gozo that dominates the village of Santa Lučija and the western part of the island.

There was such a quantity of water in the vicinity of this hill that in 1840 the Government initiated the building of a two and half kilometre-long aqueduct to carry the bountiful water from this hill to the town of Rabat. The aqueduct in the proximity of the hill was an underground gallery that was used as a shelter during the Second World War; the second part is a majestic arched building that still partly stands on the road that leads from Rabat to the west of Gozo. In 1873, a water reservoir was built off the village square of Santa Lučija Square to provide water to the villagers.

There was once a *contrata* or settlement upon this hill. It is first recorded on 12 November 1575 in the acts of Notary Ferdinando Ciappara. The ruins of a group of medieval houses scattered around Għar Ilma, still untouched until the early 1980s, gave a good idea of this settlement. There were close to fifteen houses, built along an easily accessible lane. Except for one or two, they were all built facing east and below the ridge of the flat plateau. They were perfectly



11. Farmhouses at Ghar Ilma below the ridge of the flat plateau
(see Story 5).

12. Bells that summoned pilgrims to the route of the seven churches
(see Story 6).



located – sheltered from the prevailing winds and in a position to guard the fields below. A winding path linked the doorways to the lane upon the plateau.

One of these dwellings on the hillside belonged to a widower who lived there with his two sons with very meagre possibilities. One day they broke the news to their father that they had decided to emigrate and seek their fortunes in Sicily. The old man did his best to convince them to desist from their plan, but it was all in vain. They implored him time and again to join them, but he declined. He argued that he could neither leave the fields that had been in the family for generations, nor the peacefulness of his farm. He was left all alone.

One night, a persistent knock at the door woke him up. A voice that he recognized as that of a poor fellow that lived in the hamlet below implored him shelter. He ascertained his identity, raised the bolt, and threw the door open to let him in. The poor youth rushed inside and hastily helped the widower to bolt the door again.

It was at a time when the island was passing through one of the worst droughts in memory. The poor fellow had nothing to eat and that night he tried to fill his empty stomach with a melon from a nearby field. It was a time when thefts from fields were widespread and most owners kept an eye on their products day and night. He had been caught red-handed and apprehended, but he succeeded to flee.

He remained in hiding for some time helping the widower in his daily chores in the house and the fields. One day scorched by the sun, he sought rest and relief in a nearby cave. He could not believe his ears when he heard the sound of trickling water in the pitch darkness. Maybe, he presumed a hallucination, the result of his great thirst. Nonetheless, he began groping with his hands until to his amazement he discovered a spring – a miracle, nothing less than a miracle, after the very long drought.

The spring was soon diverted to the widower's lands and that year he did make ends meet from the sale of his products. This story with a moral was recounted to children from one generation to another; indeed, a good deed pays back.

With input by Mario Mizzi

6 • The Pilgrims Way or the route of the seven chapels

It is very much possible that the tiny island of Gozo had its pilgrims' way, just as larger Christian communities abroad. This was on the road that from Rabat led to Santa Lučija.

One of the best-known pilgrims route abroad is the *Via delle Sette Chiese* or the *Street of the Seven Churches* in Rome. It started at the Basilica of San Paolo fuori le Mura, Saint Paul outside the Walls, on the famous ancient Roman road of Via Ostiense and led to the Catacombs of Saint Sebastian on the equally ancient Via Appia Antica. People walked in penance and devotion from one place to another visiting the churches on the route in a two-day pilgrimage that usually started on *Giovedì grasso*, the Thursday preceding Carnival. Along the way, the pilgrims sang, recited prayers, and listened to sermons delivered by renowned preachers.

England had a much longer *Pilgrims Way*. It started from the shrine of Saint Swithin at Winchester Cathedral in Hampshire and proceeded for two hundred and thirteen kilometres to the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury in Kent. The route actually followed a pre-existing ancient track-way. Winchester was an important regional focus and an aggregation point for travellers arriving through the seaports on the south coast. The pilgrim originated soon after Becket's canonization in 1173 when his shrine at Canterbury became the most important in the country and amongst the top three of Europe. It drew pilgrims from far and wide.

There seems to have been a similar much shorter pilgrims' way on the Rabat–Santa Lučija road, for no less than seven chapels were situated along the route. All seven are well documented between the fifteenth and eighteenth century. Six of them have not withstood the ravages of time.

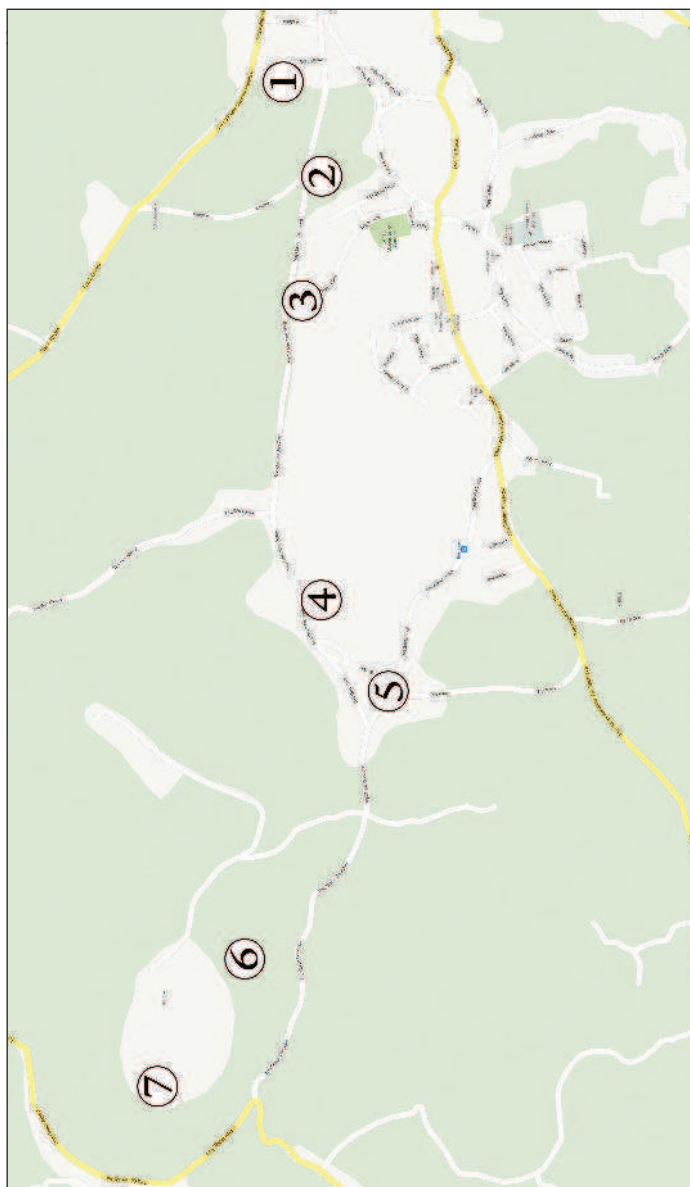
The first chapel was dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damian, two early Christian martyrs from Cyrrhus in Syria. It stood on a hillock known as *L-Ixkora* in front of Gelmus hill. A path from the back of the chapel led to the road below, the Rabat – Santa Lučija road, known in fact as *Taht l-Ixkora*, below the *Xkora*, to this day. The feast day of the saints falls on 26 September. On that day, people flocked to the chapel to invoke these brother saints to ward off maladies from their families.

The second chapel was dedicated to Saint John the Baptist, a Jewish preacher and prophet, contemporary of Jesus Christ, whom he baptized on the banks of the river Jordan. His feast is on 24 June. The chapel stood a short distance beyond Wied il-Liebru, nowadays spanned by a bridge, on the left-hand side going towards Santa Lučija.

A third chapel, some distance away from the previous, and on the same side of the road, was dedicated to Saint Anthony the Abbot (c. 251–356), an Egyptian hermit, founder of Christian monasticism. His feast day falls on 17 January. He was invoked by farmers to keep disease away from their animals.

The fourth chapel was known as *Santa Marija tal-Warda* or Saint Mary of the Flower at the end of the Rabat–Santa Lučija road. Its entrance was towards the west. The alley where it stood is now named after the chapel. The flower, very probably, refers to a lily pictured in the altarpiece, a flower related to the Virgin Mary in Marian images. The feast day was sometimes celebrated on 15 August.

The fifth chapel, the one that still stands, is the village church dedicated to Santa Lučija. Lucy was a virgin and martyr of Syracuse, a city in Sicily about one hundred and fifty kilometres to the north



13. The Pilgrims Way or the route of the seven chapels (*see Story 6*).

east of Gozo. She suffered martyrdom during the persecution of Diocletian around the year 304. She is invoked by people suffering from their eyesight.

The sixth chapel was dedicated to Saint Anastasia. This was situated along a path in the fields between the hills of Għar Ilma and Ta' Dbiegi. The path could be reached by making a right turn halfway on triq Għajn Għabdun, the road going out of Santa Lučija towards the village of San Lawrenz. Its remains are still visible. Saint Anastasia suffered martyrdom at Sirmium (Mitrowitz, Slovenia). She enjoyed the distinction, unique in the Roman liturgy, of having a special commemoration in the second Mass on Christmas day.

The seventh chapel was that of Santa Marija on Ta' Dbiegi hill; it is the subject of the third story in this booklet.

Though not formally a pilgrims' way, as the routes of Rome and England, it is certain that people did move in pilgrimages from one chapel to another from time to time. These pilgrimages took place on the occasion of feast days and when calamities struck the island.

Researched by Joseph Bezzina

7 • Deliverance from a cholera outbreak

The niche to the Blessed Mary of Mount Carmel cannot be missed by any visitor to Santa Lučija. It stands on a monumental plinth on the Rabat–Santa Lučija road, at the intersection with triq San Niklaw.

The stone statue depicts the Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel with Baby Jesus in her arms with the two of them displaying a scapular. This consists of two strips of cloth that are carried hanging down the breast and the back and joined across the shoulders – a symbol of affiliation to an ecclesiastical order and of devotion.

The majority of the niches that dot the island of Gozo were not raised for show or even for mere piety. They put in evidence of the faith of a people along the challenging orders of the times. They



14. They recurred to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary to deliver them from cholera (*see Story 7*).

evinced a willingness of the locals to pass on to their descendants their experiences in joy and sadness, as their island and their village adjusted to different fortunes and to the changing occupiers throughout the centuries.

Malta and Gozo in the middle of the Mediterranean were extremely prone to epidemics that thrived on both sides of the littoral of this enclosed sea. These epidemics caused havoc and distress and decimated the population. The authorities did take measures; however as the knowledge on the transmission of disease was still in its infancy, the precautions taken were never enough. An outbreak of cholera in several ports bordering the Mediterranean in 1834 could not miss Malta notwithstanding the vigilance by the military authorities.

Cholera in fact reached Malta on 9 June 1837 and it first appeared in Gozo, at Rabat, on 6 July. The people of Santa Lučija were terrified that it would continue to spread. So they resorted to the intercession of the Blessed Virgin Mary to deliver them from this calamity. They raised a plinth on the village approach and commissioned a statue of the Blessed Virgin to be placed upon it so that their trust would be expressed in a tangible way.

A total of 753 persons were affected by cholera in Gozo; 346 succumbed to the infection, and 407 recovered. Santa Lučija suffered just one fatality; on 14 July, Anġlu Pace from Għar Ilma succumbed to cholera. Three others were infected, Salvu Grech, Annunzjata Frendo, and Marija Vella. The first two were isolated and cured at home; the third was taken to hospital where she was cured. The people of the village attributed their deliverance to the Blessed Virgin.

The severity of the outbreak started to wane in mid-August. By that time, the statue was in place. On 20 August 1837, the bishop granted a forty-day indulgence – a grant of remission of the temporal punishment in purgatory still due for sins after absolution – to those reciting a *Salve Regina*, the Hail Holy Queen, in front. This is

recorded on a marble inscription on the front of the plinth: *L-Eċċ. Tiegħu l-Arcisqof Frangisku Sav. Caruana, b'degriet tal-20 t'Awwissu 1837 jagħti 40 jum indulgenza lil min iġhid Salve Regina quddiem din l-istatwa tal-B.V. Maria tal-Karmnu.*

The devotion of the villagers towards this image had its ups and downs and the statue began to deteriorate. In 1968, Ċelest Cassar (1909-1989), a farmer who lived across the street from the plinth, decided to renovate the shrine. Out of his own expense, he dismantled the plinth, raised it anew, and built a niche on its top to enclose the statue and preserve it from the elements. The people began to refer to the shrine as *in-Niċċa ta' Ċelest*. A second marble inscription records the benevolence of Cassar: *Fl-1968, Ġelest Cassar waqqaf niċċa lil din l-istatwa tal-Madonna tal-Karmnuu dejjem ha ħsiebha f'xegħil u f'kollox għas-spejjes tiegħu.* Until his passing away, he adorned it regularly and lit a candle in front everyday.

In 2011, the plinth, the niche, and the statue were restored by the Ministry for Gozo and the Ta' Kerċem Local Council. It is indeed a commendable renovation for this and other niches are witnesses to the living and tangible faith of past generations. Besides, the artistic and historical elements involved weave a tapestry of social relevance.

With input by Graziella Grech

8 • *L-Orkestra tad-Dudi* – Gozo's quartet

The village of Santa Luċija was home to the island's best-known quartet – *L-Orkestra tad-Dudi*, better known as *Il-Banda tad-Dudi*. It dominated Gozo social life from the mid-nineteenth century up to the early 1920s.

The quartet was made of four men playing a viola, a violoncello, and two violins. Sometimes a dulcimer was also played. The quartet's name *tad-Dudi* was derived from the nickname of its founder. It flourished within members of the same family.

Wenzu Debrincat, *id-Dudi* (1829 – 8 September 1908) and Toni Bugeja, *Medda* (1851 – 13 February 1907) are the earliest known players. The best remembered are Ġużepp Debrincat, *id-Dudi* (10 December 1857 – 23 April 1913), son of Wenzu; Carmelo Bugeja, *Harbat* (7 July 1871 – 17 March 1939); his brother, Ġużepp Bugeja, *Kaxxetta* (6 December 1877 – 4 November 1955), both sons of Toni; and Ġużepp Pace, *It-Tira* (13 December 1879 – 20 October 1928), violoncello. These four are immortalised for posterity in a photo taken early in the twentieth century.

When Ġużepp Debrincat died, his place was taken by Ġużepp Bugeja, *Il-Billu* (born 18 January 1897), Carmelo's son who emigrated to Australia in 1921. Another Ġużepp Pace, *It-Taħhan*, played the dulcimer on and off.

The quartet was summoned throughout the whole length and breadth of Gozo to play on special happy occasions of the well to do. Such were the birth of a baby, a wedding, an ordination to the priesthood, a graduation, a migrant returning home after many years, a wedding or ordination anniversary and so on. They also played outside the residences of the rich on New Year's Day to wish them a musical happy New Year – and get a special *strina* or money offering in return.

The people of Santa Lučija were frequently entertained by the quartet. On warm summer evenings, Ġużepp *id-Dudi*, whose house was on the village square corner with triq Ta' Klula, used to sit on his doorstep entertaining neighbours and all those who gathered gossiping in the square. Children and young lads were always eager to join in the merrymaking.

During its heydays, the quartet was the central attraction of the Gozo carnival, keeping people merry and children happy. Children pushed against each other to be as close as possible to the players, aware that from time to time *id-Dudi* would throw a shower of *helu tal-lewż* or sweet confetti into the air. They also played in the village square on the occasion of the feast of the patron saint. Carmelo



15. The early Orkestra or Banda tad-Dudi (see Story 8).

16. L-Orkestra tad-Dudi immortalised for posterity in a photo taken early in the twentieth century (see Story 8).



Bugeja loved a glass of wine during intervals and, on more than one occasion, it was necessary to prop him up from behind so that the show might go on. The British troops stationed at Fort Chambray in Gozo also invited the *Gozo Quartetto* – as they called it – for their celebrations. On such occasions, a young lady or two were sometimes invited to dance to the tunes of the quartet to further entertain the hosts.

The beginning of the year 1923 spelt the end of the quartet. On 1 January of that year, *l-Orkestra tad-Dudi* entertained guests during the reception held after the first Solemn High Mass of Dun Frangisk Spiteri, a priest from Fontana ordained the previous 23 December. This is believed to have been its last appearance.

It was a quartet in demand but, nonetheless, it came to an abrupt end when the children and relatives of the last players opted to seek their fortunes abroad in Australia and the United States of America. An attempt to revive the group soon after the end of the Second World War had to be aborted.

With input by Ricky Bugeja

9 • The ex-voto statue of Santa Lučija

The statue of the patron saint of the village of Santa Lučija knows its beginning to a group of migrants that on 12 September 1916 sailed from the Grand Harbour of Valletta on board the French mail-boat *Gange*. It was at the height of the First World War.

That day, the *Gange* embarked 214 men in search of a new lease of life in Australia. The majority were farmers from Gozo – from l-Gharb, l-Ghasri, Ta' Kerċem, San Lawrenz, ir-Rabat, ix-Xagħra, ix-Xewkija, and iż-Żebbuġ. Fourteen of them hailed from Santa Lučija: Ċikku Bugeja (Ta' Harbat), Ċikku Debrincat (Tan-Nahli), Ġużepp Debrincat (Tan-Nahli/id-Didi); Ġużepp Debrincat (Tan-Nahli, son of previous); Mikelang Galea (Tal-Maxxa); Pawlu Galea (tal-Maxxa); Wenzu Galea (Tal-Maxxa – the last three brothers); Wistin

Gatt (tal-Furnar); Ġorġ Mercieca (Tal-Bieba); Ġużepp Stellini (Tal-Mallu); Ġużepp Stellini (Tal-Bubun); Wenzu Stellini (Ta' Kurun); Salvu Sultana (Tan-Nigret); and Ġużepp Tabone (Tat-Testus).

Under orders from the British Navy, the *Gange* sailed to Port Said and then through the Suez Canal to Colombo, where it berthed on 3 October. The *Gange* encountered very rough seas and was on the point of sinking on its way to Fremantle, Australia, where it arrived on 21 October.

William (Billy) Hughes, the Prime Minister of Australia, instructed immigration and customs officials to take action under the Immigration Act and declare them prohibited immigrants. At that time, he was in a tussle with the Unions regarding the law on conscription of soldiers that was put to a referendum. The Unions argued that conscription would deprive Australia of able-bodied men and flood the country with cheap, imported, foreign workers. The Prime Minister hoped to gain some time until the referendum vote, due on 28 October, was over.

After waiting for two days outside Fremantle Harbour, the captain was ordered to proceed slowly to Melbourne where it arrived on 28 October. Whilst outside the harbour, in compliance with Section 3(a) of a notorious Immigration Act, the men, who could hardly read and write Maltese, were tested in the Dutch language by a professor from Melbourne University. As they failed, they were refused disembarkation and became liable to six months imprisonment and deportation should they somehow make it to shore.

Hughes lost the referendum, but the Unions continued protesting noisily. The men were once again turned away when the *Gange* arrived at Sydney, the intended port of disembarkation, on 4 November. It was placed under a strong military guard so that none could escape. However, under the cover of darkness, some did jump into the water and swam ashore; amongst them Wistin Gatt (tal-Furnar). Fr William Bonnet, a Maltese priest, was allowed to

visit the emigrants. Wenzu Stellini (Ta' Kurun), who could read and write, handed him two letters, one for his family and another for the bishop, to inform them on their ordeal. He also sought the intervention of the bishop with the British Colonial authorities on their behalf.

On 12 November, the *Gange* proceeded with the emigrants to its final destination, the port of Noumea, the capital and only sizeable city of New Caledonia, an island in the South Pacific, east of Australia. After ten weeks there, the men were transhipped back to Sydney on the *St Louis*, an old cargo boat, and detained under armed guard on an old hulk in Berry's Bay. They were only allowed to disembark on 21 March 1917 – a full 152 days or twenty-two weeks after they had arrived off Fremantle.

It was rare indeed, by 1916, that such a large group – regardless of nationality – should have been excluded. This treatment of the Gozitans who held British passport was disgraceful. Among the Maltese communities, these emigrants became known as the *Maltese of New Caledonia* or the *Children of Billy Hughes*.

During the long interminable weeks on board, a number of men lost all hope of ever gaining freedom. They were also distressed because their families back in Gozo were suffering untold hardships as a result of their detention. Most of their families were dependent on their income to survive. It was during these nerve-racking days that the men from Santa Lučija got together and beseeched their patron saint to put an end to their ordeal. They vowed to purchase a statue for their church back home if they were allowed to disembark.

As soon as they succeeded in saving some money, the men began to take regular collections to send it to the village priest. The first amount of £4-11s (€10.60) was sent by Ġużepp Stellini and it reached Gozo in October 1919. Wenzu Stellini sent £2-2s (€4.89) the following month. Other offerings followed and the locals also tendered their share. The statue was commissioned to Wistin Camilleri, a local sculptor. The statue of Saint Lucy was



17. The ex-voto statue of Santa Luċija (*see Story 9*).

solemnly translated from Ta' Kerčem to Santa Lučija on Sunday, 12 December 1920, in a procession accompanied by the Leone Band of Rabat. Wenzu Stellini eventually sent another £10-10s (€24.47) for its plinth.

Santa Lučija is depicted as a robust beautiful youth who has put worldly pleasures behind her and is intent on the world to come. With her right hand on her breast, she is graciously accepting the will of God; and with her eyes raised towards heaven, she is already contemplating God in glory. Her almost princely attire reflects her spiritual nobility in front of the impending martyrdom, symbolised by the palm frond in her left hand. Two putti at her feet carry her symbols – a platter with her eyes and the lily of her virginity.

This ex-voto statue is a tangible reminder to the faithful of the powerful intercession of the saint.

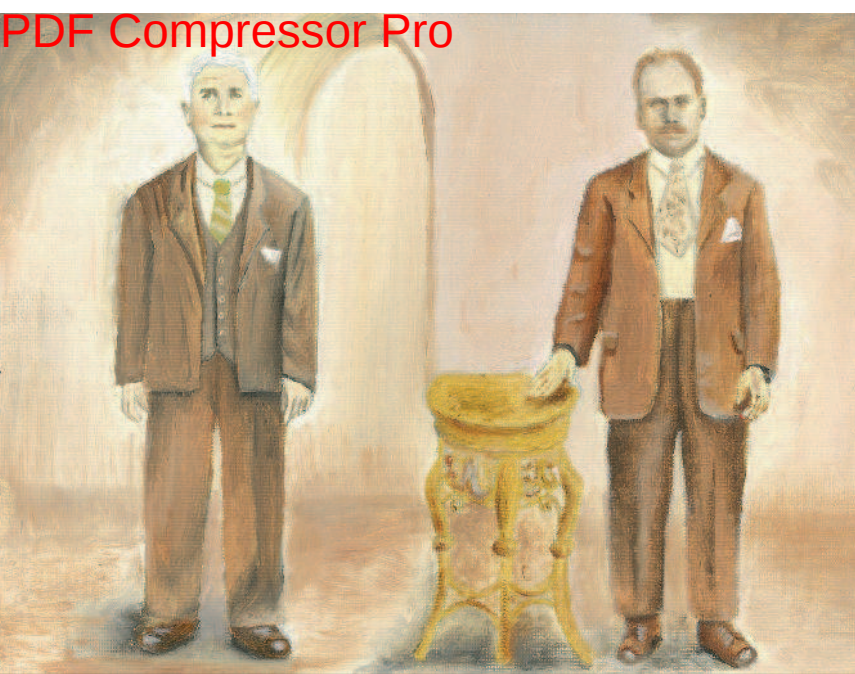
With input by Gordon Formosa

10 • Four melodious bells

The church of Santa Lučija is tucked away at the top of the village square. It has a *zuntier* or parvis in front reached up three steps. On the *zuntier* there is the only entrance to the church.

The exterior of the church is simple and pleasing. It has a classical façade articulated by a row of four Ionic pilasters with a base and a capital, which carry a boldly projecting cornice. The central pair is stepped forward and carries a triangular pediment above the entablature.

The square-headed ornate door is crowned by a tympanum and has a blind window above it adorned by a bronze bas-relief of the patron saint. The symbol of martyrdom – palms entwined around a cross, surmounted by a crown – is sculpted in the panels of the heavy wooden door. An equally ornate bell-tower, with Ionic pilasters forming the arched opening of the bells, is placed centrally at the top.



18. Wenzu Stellini (
– principal benefactors of the statue (*see Story 9*).

19. The satisfaction and joy of the villagers were tangible (*see Story 10*).



In 1946, the bishop appointed Dun Anton Grima (24 November 1901 – 13 February 1972), a young priest from Santa Lučija, ordained on 23 August 1931, as rector of the church. He soon engaged architect Joseph Refalo to prepare plans for still another enlargement of the church. On 16 July 1947, he applied to the civil authorities to grant him permission to restructure the whole edifice. Permission was granted on 12 August.

When the major building works were being concluded, Dun Anton launched another project – the purchase of a new set of bells. Up to that time, there were only two old bells; one was very small, the other cracked. He turned to the generosity of the villagers, especially the well to do, to dig deep into their pockets to purchase a set of four new bells.

Once every week, he went around the village knocking at every door to collect the necessary funds. These would have never been enough were it not for the extraordinary generosity of three families. Frenc and Ġużeppa Cassar offered to fork out the cost of the largest bell; Dun Ġużepp Cachia, a village priest, paid for the third bell; while Ġamri and his wife Mikelina Bugeja offered the cost of the smallest bell. The second bell was mostly paid for by the funds collected door to door. The sale of one of the old bells to the branch of the Society of Christian Doctrine in Haż-Żebbuġ-Malta yielded £80 (€186.40); while the cracked bell was shipped on the SS *Helka* to the foundry for scrap.

The choice fell on *John Taylor Bellfounders* of Loughborough, Leicestershire. This firm continues a line of bellfounding that has been unbroken since the middle of the fourteenth century, when Johannes de Stafford was active only ten miles from the site of the present foundry. Since 1784 the business has been in the hands of the Taylor family. The business settled in Loughborough in 1839 and is now proud to operate the largest bellfoundry in the world. Centuries of experience, together with up to the minute advances in technology, have put Taylors at the forefront in the design and manufacture of bells.



20. The bells were raised up in the bell tower (*see Story 10*).

The new bells reached Malta packed in big wooden boxes in July 1948. They were transferred by ferry to Gozo and raised by a crane from the ferry onto a truck bedecked with flags and palm fronds. Accompanied by a sizable crowd they were taken triumphantly to Santa Lučija.

The following are their technical details.

	YEAR	NOTE	DIAM (mm)	WT (kg)	OFFICIAL NAME	POPULAR NAME
1	1948	G flat	1067	700	Josepha	il-Kbira
2	1948	B flat	838	343	Lucia	il-Mezzana
3	1948	D flat	724	229	Paula	it-Tan
4	1948	G flat	584	127	Michaelina	iz-Żghira

The bells cost the then exorbitant sum of £810-10s (€1888.47). The first installment was paid soon after their arrival in July, the second and full payment was effected in August.

In the meantime, a row had risen over the bells. A number of parishioners from the nearby village of Ta' Kerċem were filled with envy that a church that was dependent upon their parish had a set of new bells, while a set was wanting in their own parish. One or two influential persons succeeded to convince His Lordship Joseph Pace, the bishop of Gozo to order that the bells should be instead hung in their parish church. The set of bells had been brought, they argued, to taunt the parishioners of Ta' Kerċem and the bishop should give a lesson to the people of Santa Lučija by appropriating the bells.

The people of Santa Lučija were let down. They unpacked the bells, transported them inside a storeroom, and guarded them day and night. The people, led by Wistin Borg, the sacristan and a point of reference to one and all, were adamant not to give in to such an unreasonable request. The bishop hoped to make the people of Santa

Lučija change their mind by temporarily closing down their church. The people protested by abstaining from going to mass. The tussle with the bishop protracted itself for months. At long last, through the mediation of Dun Mikelanġ Grech, a priest from Ta' Kerċem, who passed his whole life serving at the Gozo Cathedral, the bishop retracted from his decision.

On 5 December 1948, the Sunday preceding the feastday, Bishop Pace himself went to Santa Lučija and presided over the ceremony of the blessing of the bells. They were suspended from a pole supported by two columns on the parvis and decorated with palm fronds and flowers. The benefactors acted as sponsors: Frenċ and Ġużeppa Cassar for Josepha, the largest bell; Dun Ġużepp Cachia for Paula, the third bell; and Ġamri and Mikelina Bugeja for Michaelina, the smallest. Nikol Mercieca, who with Wiġi Grech, another villager, had forked out a good amount of money, acted as sponsor for Lucia, the second largest bell.

The satisfaction and joy of the people were tangible and increased a hundredfold when the bells were rung for the first time. That same evening they were raised up in the bell tower. A dream of a whole community had finally come true.

With input by Marilyn Sultana



Quello sanmarinese
ha tutti i colori di natura
e per tutti i suoi figli è un
colore unico



Ta' Klula Foundation

eco
gozo
a better gozo