Melita Illyrica
and Melita Africana:
The Islands of Saint Paul

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Foreword by Chev. Prof. Horatio C. R. Vella

Malta 2018
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Foreword

I have known Fr Noel Muscat O.F.M. from a pilgrimage to the Holy Land he conducted some years ago which my son and I participated in. From the thorough information and explanations he gave us on the holy places and the political history of Israel, I can say that this is the same person who here appears as a balanced commentator on an issue which also here bears the element of the divide. I have also known Fr Muscat as the Guardian of the Monastery of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem, appearing then as a strict superior but benevolent at the same time: these two qualities re-appear in this present commentary, strictness to his sources and kindness in his judgement regarding the opinions on Mljet. Finally, I have known Fr Muscat at the Monastery of St Mary of Jesus in Valletta, introducing me to the work I am presently carrying out at that same monastery at its Provincial Archives: here he appears as both knowledgeable and humble: qualities one can also see in this work.

Indeed, here Fr Noel makes several humble statements. He thinks highly of scholars, not so of his own work. Anybody familiar with the Maltese version of the Terra Sancta is used to his writings which go into details and which are so enriching with important information on the history of the Franciscans in the Holy Land. Maybe he thinks that one must be an expert in one thing: this is not humility, but good sense. But then a scholar should not be narrowed down by what he is an expert in: on the contrary, his horizons are widened to so many other spheres. This reminds us of what Cicero says in the Pro Archia, that all subjects are somehow interwoven one with another. Fr Noel is an expert in Franciscan history and spirituality: it is for this reason that he qualifies to be a writer on related subjects, such as that of St Paul’s shipwreck.

What motivated primarily Fr Noel in writing this commentary is the opportunity he had of being in two places which refer to the same event. He first visited these locations, then he was inspired to write about them, and finally he researched on them. Very often, scholars do not have such an opportunity of visiting places they write about. Herodotus and Pausanias made it a point to do so in Classical times. Some modern scholars write on subjects they are far from familiar with. On the contrary, as a Franciscan Friar and Catholic priest from Malta, and having been twice on the island of Mljet, such a contribution must bear appropriate motivation.

Fr Muscat does not hide his feelings: he claims he is biased toward one of the two islands which claimed to have received St Paul on his journey to Rome. But this bias is not only personal, having been born on Malta and having heard so much on “our” St Paul in “our island”; but it is also scholarly and properly weighed as a scholar ought to weigh arguments. His conclusion is one: that not enough archaeological evidence can give the final stamp to what appears to be the more persuading in argument. He, despite the fact that he is priest, does not accept at face value certain traditions, particularly that the Gozitans heard the preaching of St Paul in Naxxar. He throws doubts on whether Publius, Roman Governor of Malta, could have been ordained Bishop. Certainly, and this is to be noted, he never calls him “St Publius”.

Fr Muscat knows me as a familiar name in such matters as Maltese history. It is for this reason that I have been consulted for the revision of his work. He knows that when I was a student at the University of Malta, I was then asked to translate Jean Quintin’s Insulae Melitae descriptio, published in 1536, to make a new edition of the work and to write a commentary on it, which edition with translation and commentary was published in 1980 through my The earliest description of Malta in Latin (Lyons, 1536). Thanks to Latin, I was introduced to Melitensia Studies, and forty years ago I read in Latin the two works analyzed and consulted by Fr Muscat for this work, those of Georgius and Ciantar.

I too have gone into the question of the site of St Paul’s shipwreck in Malta because Jean Quintin had gone into this issue before us. And I consider that Jean Quintin is the most
important and among the most ancient sources for the exact site of the shipwreck, even if Fr Noel repeatedly says that this cannot be proved and has not been proved for lack of archaeological evidence derived from the bottom of the sea. The problem here is that although several anchors from Roman times have been found, none will bear the name of St Paul or the name of the boat which brought him here. But Jean Quintin is the most important because, as he himself said, he did not believe that St Paul came here, but to Mljet. It is for this very reason that it is the most important source, because it is an unbiased report based upon the information he received from the Maltese residents at the time of the coming of the Knights of St John to Malta in 1530, whom he described as experts in navigation.

In his account, Jean Quintin reports on a very long tradition which the Maltese residents then had kept from immemorial times. His words *Ibi vetustissime*, referring to the jut of land separating the beach within a bay at St Paul’s Bay, and to the site of the church built close by the site of the shipwreck, confirm that the site and name of the locality were not invented by the Order of St John, but existed long before and kept alive by tradition which counts for unwritten history.

Fr Muscat also knew I translated a long poem from Greek into English written on Gozo in the 12th century A.D. by a Byzantine exile. The remarkable thing about this poet is, that despite the fact that he was Greek and belonging to the Orthodox Rite, he felt no antagonism or repugnance at calling “the other island”, that is, Malta, as the island of the shipwreck of St Paul. As Greek Orthodox, one expected him to opt for Mljet instead, an island which in ancient times belonged to the Greek world.

The importance of Fr Noel Muscat’s work is to be seen as a review of a controversy which in the past was passionate, but today it is cool and free from prejudice. Its importance is increased by the fact that the author of this work has been on both sites which claim St Paul’s shipwreck. Furthermore, the author is highly cognizant of the relationships between the Orthodox and the Latin Rites which in the past pulled the story of the shipwreck to their own interests: indeed, Fr Noel served for many years, as he still does, as a Franciscan in the Holy Land where, especially at the Shrine of the Holy Sepulchre where he was Guardian at the Franciscan monastery, and where the two religions often got entangled in their passionate care for the sacred vestiges.

May this work help in encouraging historians and archaeologists in both Mljet and Malta further their studies on such an important event in our common history.

Chev. Prof. Horatio Caesar Roger Vella
4th June, 2018
Introduction

Paul of Tarsus was on his way to Rome from Caesarea in Palestine, held as a prisoner who had been unjustly accused in front of the Roman governor by the Jewish establishment of defiling the Temple of Jerusalem by introducing pagans in it, with the result that he had to appeal his case before the emperor. It was the autumn of A.D. 60 when Paul set sail from Caesarea on an eventful journey that at first hugged the coasts of Syria, Cyprus and the Anatolian peninsula, until the whole company of 276 men arrived on the southern coast of Crete. From there they could try to hug the coast of Greece and cross over to Italy or face the open sea to cross WNW to Sicily and across the Straits of Messina into the Tyrrhenian Sea on to the port of Puteoli (Pozzuoli), and hence proceed to Rome. The prospect of facing the open Mediterranean in one of its deepest sections was a dangerous decision to make. It was late autumn and shipping lanes were officially closed because of the late autumn and winter storms. In spite of this, Julius, the centurion who was responsible to ferry the passengers on the large Alexandrian cargo ship, decided to follow the captain’s decision to give it a try and make it to a safer harbour in Crete and winter there.

The decision was to prove disastrous. As soon as the ship rounded Cape Matala it met the fury of a strong ENE gale blowing down from Mount Ida (Psiloritis), the highest mountain in Crete. The ship was carried away towards the open sea, first in the direction of the islet of Gavdos (Cauda) and then on to the dreaded Syrtis Maior banks of Libya. In order to avoid catastrophe, the sailors and captain aptly turned the ship facing north and sideways to the gale, in order to be carried westwards. They had no inkling where they would end up. Maybe they were hoping to get to Sicily. After fourteen days of hell, the ship was dashed to pieces on a reef or sand shoal facing “a bay with a beach”, in a place “where two seas meet” (διθάλασσον / dithalasson). Miraculously all the persons on board swam safe and sound to land. They had landed on an island, but they had no way of recognising its features. Welcomed kindly by the indigenous natives, they came to know that the island was called Μελίτη (Melítē).

This eventful journey is narrated by the evangelist Luke, author of the Acts of the Apostles, in chapters 27 and 28:1-10 of this book, in the style of a diary of navigation. Indeed, the narrative is the best-preserved example of navigational journeying in the Bible and maybe stands on a par with famous texts like Homer’s Ὀδύσσεια (Odýsseia). The aim of Luke, however, is purely theological. He does not intend to present an expert description of a sea-journey, but rather to fit in the story within the overall plan of the Acts namely, that of proving how the Gospel of Jesus Christ was preached first in Jerusalem, then in Samaria, and finally, through the apostolic efforts of Paul of Tarsus, “to the ends of the earth.” The journey to Rome was the coronation of such an effort, and the events narrated in chapters 27 and 28 of Acts are meant to be of service to the evangelisation of the gentiles, for which Paul merits pride of place and the title of Apostle.

To what island is Luke referring? Melítē, or Mélita in Latin, sounds familiar with the names of at least two islands in the Mediterranean basin. The most accepted theory is that it refers to the island of Malta, situated in the centre of the Mediterranean, 80 km south of Cape Passero in Sicily, 284 km east of Tunisia, and 333 km north of Libya. It is an archipelago covering 316 km², and consists essentially of three islands, namely Malta (Maleth, Méitia, Malitah), Gozo (Ghawdex, Gaulos/Gavdos), and Comino (Kemmuna), and some other islets. Its coordinates are 35°54’N 14°31’E / 35.900°N 14.517°E. This means that the archipelago lies slightly WNW of the coordinates of the islet of Gavdos, off the southern coast of Crete (34.8462° N, 24.0845° E).
The other island with a similar name is Mljet (Meleda), in the Adriatic Sea, off the Dalmatian coast, NW of the city of Dubrovnik in modern day Croatia. It is 98.01 km², and its coordinates are 42.7478° N, 17.5150° E. This means that it lies much further north than Crete, in a NNW direction. To reach Mljet from Crete a ship would have to follow the Greek coast, hugging the island of Cephalonia (Kephalonia), and then entering the Adriatic through the Straits of Otranto.

Both islands have historically defended the honour of having welcomed the Apostle Paul on their shores. Both have their reasons for doing so. Malta lies across the route that Luke describes in Acts. The gale that brought Paul’s ship to its shores is the typical Gregale storm that batters the island every autumn, bringing force 8 winds from the ENE, precisely from the direction of Crete. A meteorological examination of this gale shows a set pattern that recurs every time moist and warm air from Libya meets cold currents on Mount Ida in Crete, creating an intense area of low pressure moving away from the island in a westerly direction towards Tunisia. This cyclone is accompanied by strong wind and intense rainfall, which dampens the atmosphere and impairs visibility. This partly explains why the sailors could not recognise the land when they were approaching Melítē. When Paul arrived, Malta and Gozo were Roman municipia. The islands had fallen under Roman rule in 218 BC, initially under the praetorship of Sicily, but later on each island gained municipium status. This explains why there was a τῷ πρώτῳ τῆς νήσου, a “chief man” or prōtos, of the island, which the Acts name as Publius, who welcomed Paul and his companions in his estates and offered them hospitality for three days. Another interesting detail is that the natives are called οἵ τε βάρβαροι (hoí te bárbaroi), a word that is normally interpreted as referring to persons who could not speak Greek. Indeed, the Maltese natives spoke a Punic dialect, having been under Phoenician and Punic rule, but this, as we shall see, is not the only meaning of “barbarians”. The last note regarding Malta is the mentioning of the ἔχιδνα (échidna), or viper, that was aroused by the heat of the fire and attached itself to Paul’s hand when he was adding brushwood to the fire. In Malta there are no vipers, and the species of snakes living there are harmless. This is maybe one of the toughest hurdles to overcome in order to prove that Malta was indeed the scene of the shipwreck of the Apostle.

On the other hand, the island of Mljet was infested with highly poisonous snakes until 1910, when the snake population was brought under control. It is a very densely wooded island, in which snakes can live freely, and up till this very day is scantily populated. It also lies close to the Dalmatian coast, and it is an accepted fact that shipping lanes would normally hug the coast and not choose the open sea. A ship going from Greece to Italy could cross the Adriatic, and Mljet lies a relatively short distance north of the Straits of Otranto. The Adriatic is also the name given to the sea by Luke, who calls it “in the sea of Adria (Ἀδρίᾳ).” To what geographical extent of the sea is he referring? Is he simply speaking of the Adriatic Sea as we know it today? In antiquity, it seems that the Adriatic Sea extended way beyond the Straits of Otranto and would include the Adriatic Gulf (the modern Adriatic Sea where Mljet is situated) and the Sea of Adria, covering the entire expanse of water between the Peloponnese, Crete and Sicily. Not all agree with this thesis, advocated since classical times, and the defenders of Mljet have a strong argument to state that Paul was shipwrecked in the Adriatic and not in the Mare Sicumum, or what is now known as Ionian Sea. Thus, they would speak of Mljet as the Melita Illyrica, as opposed to Malta, the Melita Africana. Moreover, the Adriatic also experiences a gale force wind from the SE, called Jugo in Croatian, which has the similar characteristics to the Scirocco wind in the Mediterranean or also to the Gregale wind we have already mentioned. Finally, the inhabitants of Mljet were Neretva settlers from the mainland, and they certainly were barbarians who could not speak Greek.

In the 18th century, the question regarding the authentic Melítē mentioned in Acts 28:1 reached its peak in the discussion between various authors, but especially after the publication
of a study by a Croatian Benedictine abbot of the monastery of Saint Mary on Mljet, by the name of Ignjat Đurđević (Ignazio Giorgi) from Dubrovnik, who in 1730 published an erudite and voluminous work to prove that Mljet, and not Malta, was the place where Saint Paul was shipwrecked. His main thesis is that the cult towards Saint Paul on the island of Malta was more recent than that existing on Mljet, and that it was introduced and enhanced by the prestige and power of the Knights of the Order of Saint John, especially after 1610, when Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt proceeded to endow with great devotional value the so-called Grotto of Saint Paul in Rabat (where the ancient Roman town of Melitē stood) and the bay that was considered to be the place of the shipwreck of the Apostle, namely the Cala di San Paolo, where he built a church to commemorate the event. At the same time, Đurđević tried to ridicule many of the Maltese popular devotions towards Saint Paul, and to question their historical value, while enhancing the value of Mljet as the authentic spot where Paul was shipwrecked. His many arguments are strengthened by references to classical authors, by a scientific biblical interpretation of Acts 27-28 and especially by the testimony of the Byzantine Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus in his De administrando imperio.

Đurđević soon found an opponent to his thesis in the person of Giovanni Antonio Ciantar, a Maltese nobleman and scholar, who published his own answer to the Mljet theory in an equally detailed study in 1738, in defence of the Order of Saint John’s interests in Malta and its efforts to promote the island as a devotional centre for the cult of Saint Paul. Ciantar’s study, together with that of other eminent Maltese scholars, like Giovanni Francesco Abela and Giovanni Pietro Francesco Agius De Soldanis, tries to defend at all costs the value of Malta as the exact location mentioned in Acts, and as an island that can boast of having a Church with an apostolic foundation.

The so-called “shipwreck controversy”, which was further complicated with the Cephalonia theory, has never been satisfactorily resolved, and maybe never will be. It is true, of course, that contemporary biblical exegesis and historical documentation all point to Malta as the place where Paul was shipwrecked. Yet, the Croatian tradition has never really died down. One has to remember that, if the Maltese theory was supported by the powerful influence of the Order of the Knights of Saint John, the Mljet/Meleda theory defended by Đurđević was also based upon the prestige of the famous city-state Republic of Ragusa, or Dubrovnik. During a time when the supremacy of the seas was being fought for by various European powers, and especially by the Republic of Venice, in perpetual war against the Ottoman Turks, but also with the safeguarding of commercial interests with the arch-enemy of the Christian religion, the importance of having been evangelised by the great Apostle Saint Paul was very significant in order to have a common denominator in the battle against Islam and in support of the Catholic Church. In both Ragusa and Malta the influence of the ecclesiastical establishment was supreme.

Our aim in this study is not that of providing a detailed analysis of the cult of Saint Paul in Malta. Many volumes have been published on this issue, containing studies by eminent scholars, many of whom are Maltese. In 2008-2009, when Pope Benedict XV invited Christians worldwide to commemorate 2000 years since the birth of Paul of Tarsus, and again in 2010, when the Maltese celebrated 1950 years since the shipwreck of the Apostle, the interest on the figure of Saint Paul increased with symposiums, congresses, exhibitions, publications, etc. Although Malta had its fair share in such an effort, one cannot forget that a handful of scholars in Croatia also tried to foster the importance of the cult of Saint Paul in the area of Dubrovnik, also through scientific publications.

It was this interest and curiosity in the Mljet theory that prompted me to try to understand better the complexities of the whole controversy surrounding the shipwreck of Saint Paul. To do so I had to go personally to see and visit Mljet. With the kind generosity of a good Croatian brother and friend, Fr. Sandro Tomašević OFM, from the Franciscan Province of
Zagreb, Croatia, who kindly accompanied me twice to Mljet and took the photos of this enchanting island, I was lucky to see my dream come true. Had it not been for his efforts, I would never have been able to visit Mljet so thoroughly. Obviously, since I am Maltese, I am not convinced with the Mljet theory. However, I believe that popular traditions are not born out of nothing, and that a grain of truth can be found in them. Mljet is no exception. It does not abound with Pauline memories and places of cult as Malta does, but the memory of Saint Paul on the island is ancient. There are some Byzantine and Mediaeval remains, just as there are many more in Malta. What one can conclude is that, while Malta is certainly the Melitē of Acts, the cult of Saint Paul in Dalmatia is also documented, or at least, hinted at, by references in the New Testament and in early Christian history. Unfortunately, both Malta and Mljet have no hard and fast archaeological or documentary evidence that goes back to the 1st century AD, and therefore the possibility of conjecture must be left open.

My plan in this work is simple. I first intend to analyse the treatise of Đurđević from the point of view of its contents, in order to provide a summary of what the Croatian abbot states regarding the core issues of the controversy, including the name Melitē, the Sea of Adria, the viper, the devotional value of Pauline memories in Malta. Đurđević also devotes particular attention to the beauty of the island of Mljet, where he lived in the monastery of Saint Mary on the western tip of the island. The charming monastery and church, which are still visible today, lie on a tiny island in the midst of what used to be a freshwater lake, later on transformed into a seawater lake when a channel was dug connecting it to the open sea.

The island itself will be the object of our second chapter, entitled “Otok Mljet”, the Island of Mljet. This chapter will describe the island from the geographical and historical points of view, and also try to discover the few vestiges of cult to Saint Paul, which Đurđević presents as having roots in antiquity. My tour of the island also made me discover some possible locations where the supposed shipwreck could have taken place, particularly those which resemble a place “where two seas meet”.

After having presented the Dalmatian island of Mljet, or Melita Illyrica, I will proceed to a parallel plan in the case of Malta, or Melita Africana. In chapter 3, I will present a summary of the work by Giovanni Antonio Ciantar, which is an apologetic response to Đurđević’s volume, constructed very much along the same lines. I will show how Ciantar tries to confute the theses of the Benedictine abbot, one by one, with proofs taken from the ancient traditions of Malta, which all point to a strong cult of Saint Paul in the various memories linked with catacombs, cave churches and mediaeval churches scattered throughout the island, as well as with place names that are associated with Paul and his physical presence in Malta.

Chapter 4 deals with the description of the Gregale gale that carried Paul to Melitē, and to the account of Acts 27, which deals with the minute details of the sea journey that brought Paul providentially to Malta. My aim is not that of providing an exegetical or theological reading of the account. This does not fall within my competence, and literature on the topic is abundant. It is rather my aim to provide a description of the meteorological phenomena associated with the Gregale gale and its influence on Malta, drawn also from my personal experience of this stormy weather that hits the Maltese islands nearly every year in late autumn or early winter. My aim is also that of pinpointing the various possible places on the Maltese coast where the shipwreck could have occurred, without arriving at any hard and fast conclusion, since archaeological evidence is lacking and we do not possess enough information as to the configuration of the geology of Malta nearly 2000 years ago. Having said this, it is interesting to note the close relationship between toponomy and devotion towards Saint Paul, which is not simply an “invention” of the Knights of Saint John, but goes back much further in time, and could be based on solid traditions.

The last chapter will dwell upon the cult of Saint Paul in Malta, describing how it can be constructed from the documentary evidence of the narrative of Acts 28:1-10, as well as from
the various places that are witnesses of such a cult, including the traditional places associated with the shipwreck, the cave church known as Saint Paul’s Grotto in Rabat, and other churches dedicated to the Apostle and marking possible locations where he would have preached and worked miracles on the island.

The cult of Saint Paul on Malta is unfortunately intertwined with many legendary elements that were the reason why a certain number of scholars dismissed the Malta story of the shipwreck of Paul as a myth. The truth, however, is that Malta has always been placed at the crossroads of cultures and dominated by various powers who ruled the Mediterranean. Even the ecclesiastical history of the island was seen as swinging between the influence of Byzantine Constantinople and Latin Rome. The Arab domination of the islands, officially dated to between 870 and 1090, further complicates matters. Nowadays, much light has been shed on historical truth with a scientific analysis of documentary material going back to the 12th century, through which we come to know that there was a Christian presence on the Maltese archipelago, particularly in Gozo.

The oldest reference to the shipwreck of Saint Paul on Melitē comes from Byzantine sources of the 10th century, as we shall see, and precisely from Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus in his De administrando imperio. This is the reason why Đurđević defends his stance on Mjlet/Meleda with such strong arguments. The case of Malta was different. Even though Malta was certainly Christian from the 7th century onwards, and there are archaeological vestiges of a Christian presence way back in the 4th century, the fact that the island had been under Arab Muslim control did not help at all to foster its Christian identity. According to an expert Maltese historian, “in the twelfth century, Malta was largely Muslim. A few years earlier, in 1175, Burchard Bishop of Strassburg, who presumably had stopped on the island while on his way on an embassy to Egypt had described it as ‘a Sarracenis inhabitata’.

The Maltese spoke a language like that of the Saracens. Hence the possible confusion. The Normans had definitely conquered the Maltese archipelago by 1127 and had embarked upon a Christianisation and Latinisation process on the local population.

In spite of this undeniable historical truth, the fact that Malta’s links with Saint Paul have been so strong is an indication that the memory of the Apostle on the island was alive for many centuries. Even if one ignores the false fabrications of history that should justly be dismissed, the mythological element of Paul’s presence is not without a historical foundation, based as it is on a narrative that comes from the pen of the evangelist Luke of Antioch, who accompanied Paul on his eventful journey to Rome. If Malta was truly the island in which Paul was welcomed after his shipwreck, and where he stayed for three months in A.D. 60-61, then it comes as natural to think and reason about his activity on Melitē within the parametres of what we come to know from the same Book of Acts regarding his activity in many other places which he visited in his apostolic journeys.

In other words, what I am trying to state is simply that Paul did leave a flourishing Christian community on Melitē just as he did in many other places that he evangelised. This does not mean that we can speculate about the composition of such a community and make of it a well-organised ecclesiastical establishment modelled upon the Tridentine notion of hierarchy. Unfortunately, this mistake was made by the eminent Maltese historians who, during the 17th century, wanted at all costs to defend the uninterrupted apostolic succession of the local hierarchy and its direct link to Paul’s mission. It is not necessary to go so far in order to prove, with some common sense, that Paul did land on Melita Africana, as Đurđević would have it, and that he did leave a Christian legacy of some sort, just as he would have done had he truly landed on Melita Illyrica at some stage of his later life and mission, maybe after his release from the Roman capitivity. This, however, goes beyond the scope of the author of Acts, as well as beyond the scope of our present analysis.
In my work I have found invaluable and expert help from Professor Chev. Horatio Caesar Roger Vella. He not only offered me many suggestions and read through my work with painstaking patience in order to note corrections, but he also volunteered to write the preface for this book. I personally feel privileged to have found in him an expert scholar and a good friend, and I will ever be grateful and indebted to him.

Although I have personally written this study, I expressly wished to include the name of my Franciscan brother Sandro Tomašević as the co-author. As I have already stated, without him it would not have been possible for me to visit Dubrovnik and especially the enchanting island of Mljet. I thank him for his photos of the island and for his fraternal patience in accompanying me during my visits to Melita Illyrica in order to discover traces of traditions linked to Saint Paul’s shipwreck, just as there are in my island home of Melita Africana. Two islands with one name, but also with one tradition of having welcomed the Apostle of the Gentiles. That is why this book is entitled: Melita Illyrica and Melita Africana: The Islands of Saint Paul.
Chapter 1
Ignjat Đurđević and the Mljet theory of Saint Paul’s shipwreck

The Saint Paul’s shipwreck controversy was ignited by a Benedictine monk from Dubrovnik (Ragusa) in 1730, Ignjat Đurđević (Ignazio Giorgi), who wrote an erudite study claiming that Saint Paul was shipwrecked on the coast of the island of Mljet (Meleda) in the Adriatic, off the coast of Dubrovnik. The volume is an interesting and scholarly representation of the author’s theory, and merits a special attention because of the importance that the question of the location of Paul’s shipwreck assumed at that particular historical moment. My aim is that of presenting a summary of Đurđević’s volume, after a reading of its contents and also with the help of my personal observations upon visiting twice the island of Mljet.

Ignat Đurđević

Ignat Đurđević was born in Dubrovnik (Ragusa), the famous Republic on the Dalmatian coast, in 1675, son of Bernard Đurđević and Teresa Zlatarić. His baptismal name was Nikola (Nicolò). He came from the noble Giorgi (Đurđević) family, which received its title of nobility after the earthquake of 1667.

Nikola spent his youthful years living a comfortable and often reckless life. He was chosen for the position of Duke of Šipan, but lost his title because of his excessive love adventures, especially toward an unknown young female from Dubrovnik, after he addressed a love-poem to her that was deemed libertine.

He was an erudite poet, having received his education with the Jesuits of Dubrovnik, and studied philosophy under Luka Kodrić. He could write in Latin, Italian and Croatian, and became famous for his Ljuvine pjesni, or love poems. His most famous work was entitled Uzdasi Mandaljene pokornice (Sighs of Repentant Magdalene), printed in Venice in 1728. In 1729, he also published a volume of paraphrases of the Psalms entitled Saltijer Slovinski (Slavic Psalms).

In 1697, when he was 22, Nikola went to Rome and there he entered the Jesuit Society. He continued to study Theology and the other arts and sciences, as well as Biblical Hebrew. His superiors sent him to Ascoli as lecturer of Rhetoric. He remained as a Jesuit for eight years, but his frail health compelled him to leave the Society and return to his hometown Dubrovnik, where in 1705, when he was 30, he joined the Benedictine monastic Order and changed his name to Ignjat (Ignazio). He entered the Benedictine Congregation of Meleda, which existed in the Republic of Ragusa, and particularly on the island of Mljet, where Ignjat became a member, and also Abbot, of the community of the monastery of Otočić Sveti Marija (Saint Mary) on the islet in the Veliko Jezero (Big Lake) on the north-west corner of the island. The Benedictines had arrived in Mljet from Monte Gargano and Pulsano in the Puglie region of Italy. They became feudal lords of the island in 1151. In 1187-1198, the Serbian Prince Desa of the House of Vojislavljević built for them the church and monastery of Saint Mary, on Veliko Jezero. Pope Innocent III recognised this foundation in 1198. The monastery was the centre of the Congregatio Melitensis or Melitana, the Mljet Congregation to which all Benedictine monks of the Republic of Ragusa belonged. The Benedictines remained feudal lords of Mljet until 1345 and then retained only a third of the island, which became part of the Republic of Ragusa in 1410. The monastery was abandoned in 1809, during the times of the Napoleonic wars, and the Seat of the Congregation moved to Sveti Jakov near Ragusa. In the
20th century the monastery and church were given over to the Bishop of Dubrovnik. The building became a hotel in 1960, but in 1998 it was returned to the Bishop.

In the period he lived as a Benedictine monk, Ignjat also occupied other prestigious offices. The Senate of Ragusa chose him as Councillor and Theologian of the Republic; he was one of the leaders of the Academy “degli Oziosi”. He refused the bishopric of Trebinje in Herzegovina, which was repeatedly offered to him. He had travelled widely also in Italy, particularly in Naples and Padua, and kept constant correspondence with intellectuals of his times. For a period he entered into a bitter conflict with the civil authorities of Dubrovnik on the question of ecclesiastical immunity, and was exiled to Italy, where he visited many cities of the ancient Magna Græcia, until the Pope interceded for him and he could return to the Republic of Dubrovnik.

Ignjat Đurđević died on 12 January 1737, aged 61, after an apoplexy that he suffered in the house of his friend Raimondo Tudisio. He was buried in the monastery church of Sveti Jakov outside Dubrovnik. His contribution to Croatian literature as a baroque poet remains a strong element of his fame, but for us his polemical work on the shipwreck site of Saint Paul is of particular interest.

*Divus Paulus Apostolus in mari. Đurđević’s Theory on Saint Paul’s Shipwreck on the Island of Mljet*

The title of Ignjat Đurđević’s volume in English reads: “Saint Paul the Apostle Shipwrecked in the Sea today called Venetian gulf, guest of the Dalmatian Island of Mljet after the shipwreck, or on the genuine significance of the two texts in the Acts of the Apostles, chapter XXVII,27: ‘We were being driven here and there in the Sea of Adria,’ and chapter XXVIII,28: “We came to know that the name of the island was Melita.”’ The volume is meant to be a critical discussion of the whole issue, and is a strenuous attempt to defend the theory that the island of Mljet in the Adriatic (*Melita Illyrica*), and not the island of Malta (*Melita Africana*) was the site of Saint Paul’s shipwreck. A good description of the contents of this volume has already been given by Miho Demović and has been published in English under the title: “A Study Accompanying Croatian Translation of the Đurđević’s Book on Saint Paul’s Shipwreck on the Island of Mljet.”

Ignjat Đurđević presents first a solemn dedication for his study, which he addresses to his erudite friends in Padua. The reason for doing so and avoiding to mention the citizens of Dubrovnik lay in the fact that such an action would have created political tension between the Republic of Ragusa and the Knights of Saint John, who at the time were feudal lords of Malta (1530-1798). The author prefers to address his dedication to persons living in the Republic of Venice, since it obviously had political and commercial interests in the Adriatic. As was customary at the time, the book had to receive the official *imprimatur* from an Inquisitor, and it did so on 19 February 1729, when the Inquisitor Toma Maria Gennari declared it free from doctrinal errors.

*The synoptic analysis of Acts 27-28*

Đurđević presents, first and foremost, a synoptic analysis of the two chapters 27 and 28 of the Book of the Acts of the Apostles, which deal respectively with the storm that brought Saint Paul to be shipwrecked on the shores of *Melite* and the welcome that the Apostle received from the indigenous inhabitants of the island.
The method followed by Đurđević is that of listing on parallel columns the Vulgate Latin edition, the original Greek text of Luke’s account, and then his own personal translation. By doing so he wanted to underline some important differences which, according to his scholarly methodology, were fundamental in proving his thesis that the island mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles is Melita Illyrica (Mljet) and not Melita Africana (Malta).

The main divergencies, according to Đurđević, concern the following terms: (1) the hurricane wind described in the Greek text is called Ευροκλύδων (Euroklydōn), which Saint Jerome in the Vulgate translates as Euroaquilo, when in truth it should retain its original Greek name Euroklydōn; (2) the name of the Sea in which the ship was being tossed by the tempest is Αδρία, Adria, which according to Đurđević refers specifically to the Adriatic Sea (Venetian Gulf) and not to the outer open Sea which should, instead, be known as the Ionian Sea or Sicilian Sea; (3) the place of the shipwreck is indicated by the Greek word διθάλασσον, which the Vulgate translates as in locum dithalassum, whereas Đurđević translates as in locum bimarem (a place between two Seas); (4) the name of the island according to the Greek text is ὅτι Μελίτη, which the Vulgate translates as Melita insula, whereas Đurđević translates into Melitē insula; (5) the local indigenous inhabitants of the island are described as οἱ βάρβαροι in the Greek text, whereas the Latin of the Vulgate and Đurđević himself call them Barbari, indicating that the inhabitants of Melitē/Melitē did not speak Greek or Latin. Đurđević insists that in Melita Africana Greek was spoken along with Punic, but not on Melita Illyrica; (6) the Apostle was bitten by an ἔχιδνα, vipera, or viper, and should surely have died because of its poisonous bite. Now on Melita Illyrica (Mljet) there are venomous vipers, but not on Melita Africana (Malta); (7) the prince or governor of the island is called τῷ πρῶτῷ τῆς νήσου ὀνόματι Ποπλίῳ, translated in the Vulgate principis insulae, nomine Publii, and by Đurđević primatem (seu principem) insulae, nomine Publium. Who was this “prince”? Đurđević rejects the theory on Melita Africana that Publius was baptised by Paul and became the first bishop of the island.

Besides these indications, Đurđević also concludes that many of the Maltese traditions on Melita Africana referring to Paul’s presence on the island are totally without any historical foundation. We shall take a look at the various contents of Đurđević’s volume, which is divided into eight chapters. Before doing so, however, we shall examine the description that Đurđević gives of the island of Mljet, which is very interesting and detailed. We shall limit ourselves to Đurđević’s own observations, and reserve a separate chapter for our personal presentation of modern day Mljet and its topographical, geographical and historical links with the tradition of the shipwreck of Saint Paul.

Đurđević’s description of the Island of Mljet

“The island of Melita, nowadays known as Meleda, lies in the Adriatic Sea, which we recently know by the name of Venetian Gulf. The supreme dominion over this Sea is held by the Republic of Ragusa, in which one also finds the Order of the Black Monks of Saint Benedict, or the Congregation that takes its name from the same island. On its western side one finds the island of Korčula (Korkyra Melaina, Corcyra Nigra), and on its eastern side the island of Šipan [...] on its outer shore it overlooks the coast of Italy, namely the mountain of Gargano in Puglia, from which it is less than one hundred and twenty miles distant. It is about three thousand feet from the Illyrian continent, and sixty miles from Epidaurum (Cavtat, Dalmatia): it is more than sixty miles in circumference, and it has five excellent and sheltered harbours, which are useful for big vessels. It is characterised by high mountains, fertile fields, pastures, and very dense forests, in which there are Vipers or Snakes, which to this very day have an instantaneous poison, in such a way that whoever is bitten by them, after a short while swells up, becomes pale, and dies there and then, just as the inhabitants of Melita thought of the
Apostle Paul, when they said that he would swell up and drop dead immediately. The major part of the island, which overlooks the Sea, is full of jagged rocks and cliffs, and it is surrounded by them in such a way that to this day gently sloping shores are lacking, and there is more than one dithalassos (shoal, sandbank, underwater rock?); these are hidden underwater and are of great danger for shipping.”
Some pages are omitted from this book review.
Chapter 3: On the Viper of Melítē

Another important issue raised by Đurđević regards the venomous viper that bit Paul on the island of Melítē. The Acts state that the inhabitants of the island expected to see Paul fall down dead as a result of the deadly poison in the viper, but then nothing of the sort happened, and Paul just shook the viper into the fire and suffered no harm. According to the Philomaltenses, this miracle was evident in the fact that, on the island of Melita Africana there are no poisonous snakes, for the simple reason that Paul took away their deadly substance through divine intervention. Moreover, even the same soil and earth of Malta acquired curative properties as a result of this miracle. Đurđević dismisses all these traditions as pious inventions, and states that Melita Illyrica, that is, the island of Mljet in the Adriatic, is full of poisonous vipers, and that is one of the greatest proofs that Paul was shipwrecked on this island and not on Malta.

The simple explanation provided by Đurđević has, indeed, its weight of significance, at least taken at face value, since it is true that there are no poisonous snakes in Malta, even though we are not sure whether there were any at the time Paul arrived on the island. Đurđević shows how ridiculous the Maltese traditions were, namely those that were born at the place where Paul was supposed to have been kept imprisoned when he was wintering on Malta. The place is known as Saint Paul’s Grotto in Rabat, just outside the walls of the ancient Roman town of Melitē (nowadays, Mdina). Fragments of the rock of this grotto were sent all over Europe, especially during the period in which Malta was governed by the Order of Saint John, since these pieces of rock were reputed to contain miraculous power against snake venom. Another fake tradition, according to Đurđević, regarded the export of local Maltese fossils, the snake-like fossils or shark teeth belonging to the extinct monaster shark “Charcarocles megalodon” which used to live in the Tethys ocean, and which are sometimes found embedded in the local Maltese Globigerina limestone outcrops on the coast of the island. They resemble tongues, and in fact, in Maltese they are known as “Ilsien San Pawl” (the tongue of Saint Paul), because of the presumed miraculous properties they were believed to hold.

In order to prove his thesis that the story of the curative properties of Maltese soil were all made up, and that the true venomous vipers were to be found on Mljet and not on Malta, Đurđević sent some very poisonous vipers from Mljet to a physician of Padua, by the name Antonio Vallisneri, and asked him to make experiments with their poison to see and prove how effective it was to kill a person. At the end of this chapter, Đurđević presents a long letter by Vallisneri, who replied to his queries by showing how he had used these vipers on some poor domestic animals in order to see the effect the poison could exert on these unfortunate creatures! In this way Đurđević continued to prove his assertion that it was Mljet the island of the shipwreck, since during his times it was infested by vipers. During the 20th century, Asian mongooses were introduced on the island, and they nearly completely wiped out the viper population of Mljet.

Chapter 4: On the Barbarians of Melítē

In Acts 28:2, Luke mentions the inhabitants of Melítē by the name οἱ τὰ βαρβαροὶ, an expression which is roughly translated by the term “inhabitants”, but which literally means “barbarians.” The term refers to races which could not speak the classical languages, namely Greek or Latin. In other words, in order to prove that Melita Africana or Melita Illyrica were the place where the apostle was shipwrecked, and where he was kindly received by the
Barbarian inhabitants, one needs to prove which one of the two islands housed a population which could not speak either one of the two classical languages.

According to Đurđević the inhabitants of Melita Africana were not Barbarians during the time when Paul was shipwrecked. They were Hellenized and were inhabitants of a Roman municipium. So, they should have known Greek and Latin, and thus cannot be described as being Barbarians. The inhabitants of Melita Illyrica, or Mljet, on the other hand, were native tribes of Neretva and Korčula, who practised piracy on Roman ships in the Adriatic, and had to be subdued by emperor Augustus in 35 B.C. This is another proof that Saint Paul and his shipwrecked companions were kindly received by the Barbarian inhabitants of Mljet, and not by the inhabitants of Malta.

This thesis by Đurđević has a certain intrinsic value, but it should be seen against the backdrop of the true history of Malta during the time when Paul was shipwrecked. Malta had been occupied by the Romans in 218 B.C. At the time, it was made up of a peaceful coalition between Phoenician/Punic and Greek races. So, although it is true that Malta was Hellenized when Paul arrived, it is also true that Punic influences were very strong, and that Phoenician was normally spoken in Malta. In this way, the term Barbarians could very well fit the description of the native Maltese, even because of another thesis that delves into the authentic meaning of the word barbaroi in Greek, deriving it from Oriental languages which used the term bar to refer to peasants or farmers, as well as the same term bar to refer to their descendants, that is, “children of the countryside.”

Chapter 5: On the Typhonic Gale

We have already noted that the gale which brought Paul to the shores of Melité is called Ευροκλύδων (Euroklydôn) in Acts 27:14, but that it has often been interpreted as being Ευρακύλων (Eurakylôn), translated by Saint Jerome as Euroaquilo. The same Vulgate calls the gale by the name “ventus typhonicus”, which means a strong gale, or even hurricane.

It is not our intention at this point to enter into the detailed analysis of this particular gale-force wind. We shall limit ourselves to what Đurđević himself states in defence of his position that the gale that brought Paul ashore on Melite led his ship not on Melita Africana but on Melita Illyrica.

A cursory glance at a map of the Mediterranean shows the complexity of such an affirmation, since the direction from Crete to Malta is radically different to that from Crete to Mljet. Đurđević defends the position that the Euroklydôn gale refers to a strong wind blowing in a south-easterly direction, whereas the Eurakylôn blows rather in a north-easterly direction. If we see the coordinates of Mljet and Malta respectively from Cape Matala in Crete, where the gale originated, we notice that a SE direction would have blown the ship roughly towards the entrance to the Adriatic and on to Mljet, even though it would have been a SSE gale that could achieve such an end, whereas a NE gale would have blown it on the Syrtis Banks in Libya, and it would have to be an ENE gale that would be able to blow it to the shores of Malta. One could reason that the gale was a Levanter wind without any specification of the exact direction where it was blowing. We shall see that the issue can be satisfactorily resolved on a meteorological level, but this would take us out of Đurđević’s analysis and his concrete possibilities of research in the 18th century.

Đurđević is adamant in defending the term Euroklydôn, and in stating that it was a SE gale that carried Paul’s ship into the Adriatic and on to Mljet. He proves his assertion by stating that, in the Adriatic, the only two gale-force winds are the Bora, or Bura (in Croatian) N or NE katabatic wind blowing from the Dinaric Alps, which hits the Dalmatian coast in violent icy gusts, and the Jugo, or SE humid and warm gale that blows for days on end on the Dalmatian
coast. The other winds are not so strong, namely the Mistral, or NW wind, and the Libeccio, or SW wind. In any case, the only wind that could bring a vessel into the Adriatic through the Straits of Otranto is the Jugo or any Levanter strong gale. Đurđević states that this climatic phenomenon is not rare, and that the direction it takes in the Adriatic blows a ship directly upon Mljet. Indeed, the place where the shipwreck is reputed to have taken place on Mljet lies on the SE extremity of the island, at Saplunara, close to Korita, and in the straits between Mljet and the islets of Veliki Školj and Mali Školj.

Chapter 6: On Publius the Melitean

According to Acts 28:7: Ἐν δὲ τοῖς περὶ τὸν τόπον ἐκεῖνον ἐκεῖνον ὑπῆρχεν χωρία τῷ πρώτῳ τῆς νήσου ὀνόματι Ποπλίῳ (In the areas around that place there were estates belonging to the chief man of the island, by name Publius). The title given to Publius by Luke is prōtos, translated as “the chief man” (of the island) and as princeps insulae in the Vulgate edition. Đurđević was aware of the tradition on Melita Africana that stated that Paul not only cured Publius’ father from fever and dysentery, but that he baptised him and the other islanders, and even went as far as consecrating him first bishop of Malta. Publius was reputed to have been transferred to the See of Athens where he died a martyr and saint in circa 125 A.D., having been the successor of Dionysius the Aeropagite.

Đurđević dismisses all these traditions as pious inventions. He questions the historical truth of an inscription which mentioned a certain Prōtos Melitaïōn. The inscription or epigram on a marble slab used to be found in the ditch of Mdina and was studied by Maltese historians, like Giovanni Francesco Abela (1647), and by Quintinus (1536). This personage would have been a kind of patronus municipii. According to Đurđević the title of princeps or primus, given by the Vulgate is not correct, since he would have rather been a magistrate, on the type of the Greek Archontes, since Melita Africana was Hellenized when Paul was shipwrecked, and had been under Roman domination for more than 200 years.

The other two objections by Đurđević regard the fact that Publius was never bishop of Melita Africana, and that he could not be such in any way. Luke is silent about Publius’ baptism. Moreover, according to 1Timothy 3:6, the bishop “must not be a recent convert.” Thus it is impossible that the chief man of Melita, Publius, was consecrated bishop within the short period of three months that Paul was supposed to have remained on the island. Đurđević also lists a number of authors and quotes martyrologies, which never mention that Publius, bishop of Athens and martyr, had ever been bishop of Afromelita or Melita Africana. He regards as fake the indication of the Philomaltenses, who indicate 21 January on the Martyrology as the feast of Saint Publius of Malta: XII Kal. Febr. Athenis S. Publìi Episcopi, qui Militenus a Paulo Episcopus ordinatus. There is no link between Saint Publius, bishop of Athens and the Publius, prōtos of Melita Africana.

Chapter 7: On the Traditions of the Maltese

Đurđević dismisses many of the popular traditions of the people of Melita Africana as pure inventions regarding the supposed stay of Saint Paul on the island. He insists that such traditions were not so ancient as they were presented, and that many had been born out of a popular devotion encouraged by the Knights of Saint John, who were interested in finding a prestigious reason for their political power in Malta.

Among the traditions Đurđević dismisses as absurd, he mentions the supposed miracle that Paul worked when he took the venom out of all snakes in Malta, when he gave the soil and
Some pages are omitted from this book review.
Chapter 2
Otok Mljet and its link with the shipwreck of Saint Paul

I had the occasion to visit the Croatian island of Mljet twice, on Wednesday 29 April 2015 and on Thursday 8 June 2017. My first visit was a brief one. After arriving with the car ferry at Sobra, I visited the port of Polače and the Nacionalni Park Mljet, crossing to the islet of Sveta Marija with the Benedictine monastery on the Veliko Jezero. The visit in itself was a welcome surprise to my longing to see the island which cherishes a local tradition regarding the arrival of the Apostle Paul after his shipwreck on the way to Rome. After the visit, my interest in Mljet could only increase and my desire was that of discovering the entire island, since the memories connected to Saint Paul’s shipwreck were to be found in other areas of Otok Mljet. The second occasion to visit the island was therefore most welcome. This time I was much more fortunate in having one whole day to tour the island, sleeping overnight at the beach resort of Saplunara at the south-eastern tip of the island. This time I did not only visit Polače and Otočić Sveta Marija, but also other important sites related to the theory of Saint Paul’s tradition on Mljet, including the twin islets of Veliki Školj and Mali Školj at Saplunara, which mark the traditional site of the shipwreck, the archaeological remains of two churches, one Byzantine and one Mediaeval, on a hill east of Korita, the cliffs above the islet Prečki Školj, which is also another traditional site for the shipwreck and, always on the southern coast of Mljet, the Odisejeva Špilja, or Odyssey Cave, a natural karst hole with a sea opening at the end. The Croatian Franciscan brother who accompanied me had already made his homework and made me get the feel of the island not only by driving me around along the roads in the various other coves and villages, like Maranovići, Okuklje, Govedari and Pomena, but also by walking along country footpaths in the natural beauty of the pine forests of the island. This experience proved to be providential in order to contextualise the erudite study of the Benedictine scholar and abbot Ignjat Đurđević regarding his defence of Mljet, *Melita Illyrica*, as the island where Saint Paul was shipwrecked on his way to Rome, against the theory of the *Philomaltenses*, supported by the Order of the Knights of Saint John, who defended Malta, *Melita Africana*, as the more probable location to which Acts 28:1-10 could refer.

**Geography of Otok Mljet**

The island of Mljet is one of the southernmost islands off the Dalmatian coast of Croatia. It lies NW of the city of Dubrovnik, facing the Pelješac peninsula, from which it is divided by the Mljetski Kanal, and is flanked on the SE by the Elafitski Otoci, made up of Kolacep, Lopud and Šipan, 17 km northwest of Dubrovnik, Croatia, three islands which are separated from the mainland coast by the Kolodějski Channel. Indeed, for any vessel coming into the Adriatic from the Straits of Otranto in a NW direction, Otok Mljet is the first large island that is met. Beyond it, on the W lies the island of Lastovo and on the NW the larger island of Korčula. Its SW coast faces the open Adriatic Sea in the direction of the Gargano Peninsula of Italy.

Mljet is a long and narrow island aligned due NW to SE. It is partly of sedimentary and partly of volcanic origin and, seen from a distance, presents a panorama of craggy crests and cliffs and deep gorges and ravines, all covered with lush Mediterranean forest. Its total length
is 37 kilometres and it has an average width of 3.2 kilometres. 98 square kilometres, or a total of 84 per cent of the island, is covered with forest, dominated by the Mediterranean pine. Its climate is typically Mediterranean, with short, cool and wet winters (average temperature for January is 9° C.) and warm dry summers (average temperature for July is 24° C.). Rain is plentiful during the period October to April.

The craggy crests of the island are still untouched places of great natural beauty. The highest peak is Veliki Grad (514 metres) above Babino Polje, in the central area of the island. In the same zone are found other peaks, including Zirinje (486 metres), above the port of Sobra, Kantun (459 metres), and Katani (427 metres).

The geomorphological makeup of Mljet consists largely of limestone and dolomite rocks. The coast is characterised by craggy cliffs, with many islets and underwater rocks and shoals, but it also has some fine sheltered harbours. Indeed, Mljet was always famous as a safe haven for ships in the Adriatic. Its harbours and bays include the following, in a clockwise direction starting from Klačina Luka and Luka Sobra where the car ferry berths. Going due east is Prožurska Luka, with the islets of Galičnjak, Borovac, Veliki Školj and Senjevac. The next bay is Okuklje Bay, and then the coast proceeds to the easternmost tip of the island at Rat Vrtnički.

It is at this point that the coast turns south into the small peninsula of Saplunara. This is the southernmost tip of the island. For the sake of our study, this area is particularly important because it is traditionally considered to be the exact spot of the shipwreck of Saint Paul. Indeed, there are two islets at this tip, simply called Veliki Školj and Mali Školj. They lie some metres away from the shore and are separated from it by a narrow sea channel which could be regarded as a “place between two seas” (διθάλασσον or locus bimaris). As I have pointed out earlier, this point of the island faces the SE, that is the open sea leading to the Straits of Otranto. It is certainly the place where a vessel could be shipwrecked in strong Jugo gale. The bay of Saplunara, facing the SW is one of the most enchanting beaches on the island.

From Saplunara the coast follows a WNW direction. It is mainly a craggy coast full of cliffs, peninsulas, gorges and islets. Of particular interest are a group of islets beyond the Dugi Rat peninsula. They include the islets of Prečki Školj, Golić, Kosmač, and Lukovac. From the high cliffs above the islets, close to the hamlet of Maranovići, one has a splendid view over the islets and it is also possible to see underwater rocks and reefs in the area. A local lady from Saplunara indicated this place as the traditional site of the shipwreck. Indeed it also faces the right direction of the Jugo gale. One should not be surprised that the site of the shipwreck is indicated in more than one spot on Mljet. The same phenomenon is evident on the island of Malta, since the exact place of Paul’s shipwreck has never been determined on a satisfactory level from the scientific point of view. Local tradition, however, has its own intrinsic value which should not be underestimated.

Going further west, on the widest section of the island, and below the hamlets of Zabrežje, Sršenovići and Zadublje, which make up the main village of Babino Polje, an arduous walk down the cliff takes you to the lookout above the Odisevja Špilja, or Odysseus Cave, which is a natural karst hole in the cliff leading down to the sea below and connected to the open sea by a natural cave opening at the far end. According to Homer’s Odyssey, after his arrival on the island of Ogygia, Odysseus spent seven years longing for his beloved Penelope, while he was held captive in love by the nymph Calypso, Atlas’ daughter. There are a number of Mediterranean islands that claim to be the place where the nymph Calypso seduced Odysseus, until she was ordered by the gods to set him free. Mljet is one of them. So is the island of Gozo, where local tradition indicates a much smaller cave, which is more of a cleft in the rock, overlooking the Bay of Ramla l-Ħamra, as the Cave of Calypso. This fact is another proof of the competing claims between Mljet and Malta regarding not only the shipwreck of Saint Paul but also other legends. Such claim is the result of the resemblance of the names of
both islands, particularly the name Melítē, with which both were known. One has to admit, however, that the Odisevja Špilja on Mljet is a much more striking natural feature than the Calypso Cave of Gozo.

The coast proceeds to the hamlet of Ropa, and one enters the NW section, covering one-third of the island of Mljet, which is a National Park, the Nacionalni Park Mljet. This area covers roughly the extension of the property of the Monastery of Sveta Marija, the Benedictine Monastery where abbot Ignjat Đurđević wrote his famous treatise on Mljet and the shipwreck of Saint Paul. After the two islets of Vranji Škoj and Utrnji Škoj, one finds the Solinski Kanal, the opening to the Veliko Jezero, or Great Lake. This is the lake on which the Otočić Svetra Marija stands, with the monastery and abbey church of the Benedictine monks. Originally Veliko Jezero and Malo Jezero were freshwater lakes on the northwestern section of Mljet, but the Benedictines dug a channel in order to communicate with the open sea and the lakes became sea water. We shall describe the islet of Svetra Marija in a separate section and continue on our description of Mljet. The Veliko Jezero is a paradise of deep blue and green crystal clear water, with pine trees growing right to the very edge of the shore. The pristine natural beauty of the surroundings has fortunately been left very much untouched, even though the islet of Svetra Marija is visited by many tourists who come as day trippers on Mljet.

The westernmost peninsula of the island is made up of Sparožni Rat and the tourist harbour of Pomena, another important ferry connection to the mainland. In the interior one finds the hamlet of Govedari. Hugging the NW coast of the island are the islets of Galicja, Pomeštak, Glavat, Borovac and Maslinovac.

The principal village in the National Park of Mljet is Polače. It lies in a sheltered harbour, protected by other islets, including Moračnik, Tajnik, Ovrata and Kobrava. The name Polače evokes the Latin Palatium, and is known in Italian as Porto Palazzo. The bay in which the village is found is very popular with boating enthusiasts, being protected by the islets and being 5.6 kilometres long and 4 kilometres wide. The name comes from the remains of a Roman country villa dating from the 1st to the 6th centuries. It is one of the largest Roman buildings in Croatia after the palace of Diocletian in Split. The Roman remains are still visible, together with the remains of two Byzantine churches some distance away from the palace.

The coast looking towards the Pelješac peninsula on the mainland leads you back to Sobra, from where our geographical description of the island of Mlejt started.

**Brief History of Otok Mljet**

Mljet was first discovered by the ancient Greek and Roman cartographers. The name of island in classical antiquity was Melítē. The Romans conquered it in 167 B.C. and called it Melita. It was also known by other names, including Meleta, Malta, Meleda, especially from Mediaeval times. The descriptions of the island by Greek and Roman geographers are examined by Đurđević in his study. The inhabitants of the island were Serbian pirates from the Neretva region and the island of Korčula. They were described in the 10th century by Emperor Constantine Porphyrogenitus, in De Administrando Imperio. He called the region of Mljet and the lower Neretva by the name Pagania, since the tribes that inhabited these regions accepted Christianity only about 890, some 250 years later than other Slavs. They were known as Pagani or Narentani. In ancient times, they were expert pirates who attacked shipping from Alexandria to Aquileia. That is why the Emperor Augustus had to subdue them in 35 B.C. They continued to practice piracy also against the Venetians, until they were crushed by the Doge Pietro Orseolo II in 998.
Some pages are omitted from this book review.
Having said this, however, I cannot remain silent about my surprise in discovering that the tradition of Saint Paul on Mljet is by no means an invention. If one is after the exact spot where Paul was shipwrecked, he is bound to end up disappointed both on Mlejt and on Malta. Whatever theories have been brought forward in Malta to determine the exact location of the shipwreck, none is convincing. We have to rely on local tradition. The same can be said of Mljet. I am not convinced that the site of Saplunara is definitely the place of the shipwreck, for various reasons. First, because the site is not a sand bar but a rocky islet. Second, because it faces the southeast, and although it would be the perfect spot for a shipwreck during a Jugo gale, one needs to have a lot of imagination to figure out how a ship running under the lee of Gavdos in the direction of the Syrtis Banks could possibly have found its way northwards into the Straits of Otranto and into the Adriatic, and on to Mljet. True, sea currents in the Adriatic follow the Illyrian coast northwards, but the sudden radical change in the wind direction is hard to imagine.

Mljet remains much of a paradise. It is true that visitors who fall in love with this enchanting island want to return. I experienced this sensation myself. Maybe because Mljet is still untouched by savage development. Maybe because of its charm and mysterious allurement reminiscent of Odysseus’ legendary seven-year stay trapped in the love-net woven for him by Calypso. What goes beyond mere fantasy and emotion is, however, more important. Mljet is an island which hides secrets of a fruitful Christian presence since Byzantine times. The remains of churches are proof of this. And then Mljet is blessed to have been the property of the Benedictine monastic Order for some 700 years. The description that abbot Đurđević gives in his study on Saint Paul and Mljet is truly a clear photograph of the true face of Mljet. The National Park which houses the islet of Sveta Marija with the Benedictine monastery is truly a paradise, in which the deep blue hues of the water and sky embrace the lush greenery of the Mediterranean pine forests all around on the surrounding hills and peninsulas.

If Saint Paul truly stayed on Mljet is still a question which is unresolved. His intention to go to Illyricum is expressed particularly in his plan to leave Titus in charge of the church in these regions. It could very well be that Paul did visit Mljet and Illyricum after his first captivity in Rome. This would explain the cult of Saint Paul on Mljet and even in the Republic of Dubrovnik. In Romans 15:19, Paul writes: “So from Jerusalem all the way to Illyricum, I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ.”

According to the Pastoral Letters, after the two year captivity in Rome was over, Paul would have followed this itinerary. He would first have gone to Spain (Rom 15:24), as Clement of Rome also states. Then he went to Ephesus together with Timothy, and resided for a brief time in Macedonia after leaving Timothy in Ephesus (1Tim 1:3). From there he crossed over to Crete, where he left Titus in charge of the church on the island (Tit 1:5). Paul then visited Nicopolis in Epirus (Tit 3:12). This is the moment when he would have set foot on Illyricum. Nicopolis is found at Preveza in Greece, to the north of Cephalonia in the direction of the island of Corfù. That means that it would have been easy for Paul to sail into the Adriatic and visit the coast of Illyricum, including Mljet.

Concluding remarks

Remaining on the level of reasonable conjecture, we can conclude that there exists a probability that Paul did, in fact, visit the island of Mljet in his apostolic journeys. Whether he did so as a castaway during his epic journey to Rome, or else later on, after he was freed from the first Roman captivity, is a question open to debate. What is important is that the cult of Saint Paul on Mljet does have ancient origins and is a sign of a long tradition that has linked this enchanting Dalmatian island of Melita Illyrica with the Apostle of the Gentiles, just as
occurred in the other Mediterranean island of *Melita Africana* which boasts pride of place in being an apostolic church founded by Paul of Tarsus during the three months he spent marooned on the island before proceeding for Rome.
Chapter 3
Giovanni Antonio Ciantar, De Beato Paulo Apostolo in Melitam

The publication of Ignjat Đurđević’s study on Saint Paul’s shipwreck on the island of Mljet was received with great interest, but also with apprehension, by erudite Maltese scholars, particularly those linked with the rule of the Order of the Knights of Saint John. During the 18th century, Malta was seen as a bulwark of Catholicism against the threat of the Turkish empire. Its history during the preceding two centuries had been intimately linked with this crusading spirit of the Knights. The Order had arrived in Malta in 1530, after having been ousted from Rhodes by Suleiman the Magnificent in 1522, and after having had to reluctantly accept the arid islands of Malta and Gozo, plus the garrison of Tripoli, as a fief from Emperor Charles V. Although the Knights settled in Malta with difficulty during the first years of their stay, they soon had to face the onslaught of Suleiman, who sent an armada in May 1565 to besiege the islands, after he furiously saw how the Knights plundered his vessels in the Mediterranean, contrary to their promise when they had left Rhodes. The Great Siege of Malta, which was lifted on 7 September 1565, was seen as a victorious triumph for the Order against the might of the Ottoman Turks. The participation of the Knights during the Battle of Lepanto in 1570 further enhanced the prestige of the Order. For the next two centuries the Order of Saint John was to make of Malta the southermost bulwark of Catholic Europe against Islam.

The Knights not only brought with them their European and Christian traditions, they saw to it that the Maltese would become obedient subjects and fervent Catholics. They gave to the Maltese islands their typical Catholic character, which is still evident externally in the many magnificent baroque churches in the various casali or villages, which until a few decades ago dominated the Maltese skyline. The Knights knew that Malta could be seen as an important and strategic island not only for defence purposes, but also for the propagation of the Catholic faith. The fact that local tradition had long held that Saint Paul himself had been shipwrecked on the island and evangelised the Maltese inhabitants to embrace the Christian faith became, for the Knights, the *raison d’être* for their style of monastic and military rule on the islands.

It was particularly during the Grandmastership of Alof de Wignacourt (1601-1622) that the cult of Saint Paul took a strong foothold in Malta. It had been present ever since mediaeval times, and no doubt even before, since the island abounded with evidence of places of cult in troglodyte churches and some Byzantine remains. The centre for the Pauline cult in Malta was established in the Grotto of Saint Paul outside the walls of the town of Notabile, in Rabat, an area under which are spread various Christian catacombs, known as the Catacombs of Saint Paul, the Catacombs of Saint Catald and the Catacombs of Saint Agatha. It was at this place, which had been venerated at least since 1336 when an *ecclesia Sancti Pauli de crypta* is mentioned, that a church dedicated to Saint Publius, who had welcomed Paul to Malta, was built by Knight-hermit Juan Benegas de Cordoba. Later on, in 1692, a large collegiate church was erected adjacent to the Grotto, namely the church of Saint Paul, the work of architect Lorenzo Gafà, which was built by funds donated by the noble lady Guzmana Navarra. Since 1610, during the time of Grand Master Wignacourt, Pope Paul V instituted a college of Canons in the Grotto, with a college for conventual chaplains and a Chapter hall close by. It was also Wignacourt who took care to rebuild the medieval church of *San Paolo al mare*, which replaced a more ancient church. The church, built in 1617, marked the spot where Paul and his companions were welcomed ashore after the shipwreck in this bay.

These events were instrumental in enhancing the cult of Saint Paul on the island of Malta, during the times of the Knights of Saint John. When Đurđević wrote his treatise in 1730,
he was aware of the importance of this cult of Saint Paul in Malta, and he himself was well informed regarding the sites linked with the presence of the apostle on the island. It was to be expected that his thesis regarding Mljet as the possible island where Paul was shipwrecked in the Adriatic, would have enkindled an apologetic response on the part of Maltese historians and on the part of the Order of Saint John.

This response was entrusted to a famous Maltese historian and scholar, namely Giovanni Antonio Ciantar, who published a parallel treatise to that of Đurđević eight years after the Benedictine Abbot had published his volume in 1730. In 1738, Ciantar published in Venice the volume *De Beato Paulo Apostolo in Melitam*, defending the thesis in favour of Paul’s shipwreck on the island of Malta.

**Biography of Giovanni Antonio Ciantar**

Giovanni Antonio Ciantar was born in Valletta on 4 September 1696, the son of a noble family which had settled in Malta during the 15th century. When he was fifteen years old, in October 1711, he journeyed to Maiorca, Genoa, Pisa, Florence, Siena and Livorno. He then settled in Rome, where he studied at the Collegio Nazareno, dedicating himself to the study of law and literature, under the direction of Padre Paolo Chelucci. He next studied theology under Padre Benedetto Cellesi. Besides Rome, he also stayed in various Italian cities, among which Naples and Palermo, where he arrived in 1721. He was also offered prestigious posts by the viceroy of Sicily, but he returned to Rome, and in 1723 was again in Malta. Back home he married Teodora, daughter of Count Ignazio Wizzini Paleologo, and became father of a numerous family. Some of his children died when they were still young. He became one of the four Jurats or administrators of Malta. Because of his formation in literature, he became a member of the *Accademia degli Intronati di Siena* and of the Colombaria of Florence. In 1745, King Louis XV endowed him with the honour of being member of the *Academie Royale des Inscriptions et Belles Lettres de la Ville de Paris*. When he was 55, he lost his eyesight, but continued to dictate and publish various works, thanks to his good memory and erudition. He possessed a fine library and a museum in his own house. He was also a scholar of antiquities, particularly having the ability to interpret ancient inscriptions found in Malta. Giovanni Antonio Ciantar died on 14 November 1778.

Ciantar was a prolific writer of Latin and Italian. The island of Malta, which was a feudal dependency of the crown of Sicily, under the leadership of the Order of the Knights of Saint John (1530-1798), lived within the sphere of the Italian cultural influence. In 1592, in the new city of Valletta, a Jesuit College was founded, on the model of the Collegio Romano. In 1769, this College became the University of Malta. In 1642, the first printing press was introduced on the island, and thus local publications appeared more frequently. One of the first among these works was that of Giovanni Francesco Abela, *Della descrizione di Malta*, published in 1647. Unfortunately, the continual struggle between the Order, the local bishop and the papal inquisitor led to many suspicions regarding publications, and it was not before 1756 that the whole question of censorship was resolved between the authorities, and the printing press of the Order could resume its activity. This is the reason why many of the works of Ciantar were published in Italy, although some manuscripts survive in the National Library of Valletta.

Ciantar published a book of Latin epigrams, entitled *Epigrammaton Libri III*, Romae 1722. Next he published the volume *De B. Paulo Apostolo in Melitam Siculo-Adriatici Maris Insulam Naufragio Eiecto disserationes apologeticae*, Venetiis 1738, which is the polemic work against the thesis of the Benedictine Abbot Ignjat Đurđević, who defended the position
Some pages are omitted from this book review.
In the Franciscan Church of Ta’ Ġieżu, in Valletta, Malta, there is a beautiful painting by Pietro Paolo Novelli, known as il Monrealese (1603-1647), depicting Saint Paul while he was in Malta, and who is in the act of curing Publius’ father who was sick with dysentery. This is a unique painting in the chapel dedicated to Saint Trophimus (or rather, Saint Paul), in the Franciscan church, and its link with the family of Giovanni Francesco Abela indicates the strong local Maltese tradition that interpreted the name Miletus as referring to the island of Melita where Paul was shipwrecked. Ciantar continued the tradition that Abela had initiated in Malta, particularly in his study *Malta illustrata*.

*Dissertatio* 18 is entitled: “How we suspect that our adversary rashly concludes that the Maltese took over themselves the name of Christians late during their history.” Ciantar mentions the opinion of Đurđević, who stated that there were remains of a temple dedicated to Juno in Malta (*Fanum Junonis* at Tas-Silġ), that an inscription found on Gozo gave the title of *divus* to Emperor Antonius Pius, and that the Punic culture of the island was pagan. At the same time, Ciantar also reminds his readers that, in many other places where Paul preached the Gospel, it was difficult for him to abolish pagan cults, and yet one cannot say that Paul did not form Christian communities in such places as Ephesus. The fact that emperors continued to be proclaimed as *divi* should not surprise us, since even Saint Helena, mother of Constantine, called her son *divus* even when she became Christian. The titles *Divus, Divinissimus, Sanctus, Sanctissimus*, were often used to address persons in high authority both in the state and in the church, and they in no way indicated a pagan cult towards the same persons. So an inscription found in Gozo with this title does not mean that Malta was totally pagan and only accepted the Christian faith much later than apostolic times. As long as Malta was Roman, until Constantine, it was officially pagan.

The last two *Dissertationes* of Ciantar’s study regard the Traditions of the Maltese linked with the cult of Saint Paul. *Dissertatio* 19 is entitled: “The Maltese Traditions are praiseworthy and highly worthy of being believed.” Although Đurđević tried to ridicule many of the Maltese Pauline Traditions, Ciantar insists on the veracity of historical evidence, particularly in his defence of the role of Publius in the Christianisation of the island of Melițē, which was continued throughout history by the list of bishops in communion with the See of Rome. Ciantar also defends all the local traditions of the Maltese, particularly those linked with the miracle of the innocuous nature of vipers on Malta and especially the fact that Luke states that Paul cured many of the islanders from various kinds of sickness. All these facts point to the truth of Paul’s evangelising mission on Melițē.

Ciantar also tells his adversary: “It is true to all intents and purposes that no other Writer before Constantine Porphyrogenitus holds on to the statement that Paul was shipwrecked on the island of Melita of Dalmatia.”

The 20th and final *Dissertatio* is entitled: “Regarding the Monuments corroborating the Maltese Traditions, and especially the Pauline Crypt.” Ciantar insists that, on Malta, there are various monuments which confirm the tradition of Saint Paul’s shipwreck and his three-month stay on the island. He refers to his opponent Đurđević as suffering from the complex of the fox looking at the grapes in the fables of Aesop, since he could not boast similar monuments on Mljet. Ciantar boasts by stating: *Noster igitur, noster est Paulus Naufragus.*

The first monument mentioned by Ciantar is the *Cala di San Paolo*, or Saint Paul’s Bay, in which one finds the *locus dithalassus* marking the site of the shipwreck. He states that the Maltese name *Tal-Pwales*, which is attributed to the inner section of the bay, is the genitive form of Paul’s name in Latin: *Pauli*. Obviously this is a far-fetched conjecture with no historical or etymological foundation. Ciantar then mentions the church of Saint Paul built by Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt in 1610 (the date should read 1617), as well as the watch tower, some distance away on the eastern shore of Saint Paul’s Bay. The church commemorates the place where the Apostle and his companions were welcomed on land by the islanders. He
hints at the Cathedral church of Mdina, dedicated to Saint Paul, and to the many altars in various churches dedicated to the Apostle. In the same bay of Saint Paul one finds the Fons Paulinianus, or Spring of Paul, locally called Ghajn Rażul, a name having Phoenician roots.

Some distance inland from Saint Paul’s Bay there were the estates of the first man of the island, Publius, who welcomed Paul and his companions, 276 persons in all. Ciantar indicates this place at Benuerrat, today known as Burmarrad, where the Maltese had built a church on the remains of a Roman agricultural estate or villa, known as San Pawl Milqi. On the hills directly opposite, overlooking the Burmarrad valley, stands the village of Naxxar. According to local tradition, confirmed by the coat of arms of this village, Prior credidi, the inhabitants of these hills were the first Maltese to accept the Christian faith preached by Paul. According to Ciantar, the name Naxxar derives from the Arabic Nassara, meaning Christians.

Close to the Roman establishment traditionally considered, without any historical foundation, to have been Publius’ country residence, on the hills of Wardija, Ciantar indicates the church of Saint John, known as San Ġwann tal-Ħereb, where according to tradition Paul baptised Publius and many of the Maltese. We have already hinted at the “baptismal font” that was present near this church and for a time was located outside another church, that of San Xmun ta’ Wied Qannotta, although according to the experts of the Italian Mission who conducted excavations at San Pawl Milqi in the 1960s, the nucleus for the tradition of Paul who baptised Publius should rather be located beneath the church of San Pawl Milqi, in the remains of the Roman country villa, which rendered that particular place sacred for many generations of believers.

Ciantar also refers to another tradition, always the result of popular belief but without any historical foundation, which states that, when the Norman Count Roger “freed” the islands from Saracen domination in 1090, the Maltese Christian slaves met him by singing Kyrie, eleison in Wied ir-Rum, which literally means Vallis Christianorum, the Valley of the Christians, from the Byzantine tradition Rum, meaning Christians. This is a valley overlooking the cliffs on the western coast of Malta.

Ciantar quotes John Chrysostom, who comments Acts 27:24: “God has graciously given you the lives of all who sail with you.” He says that these words are a proof that Paul converted to Christianity not only his companions on the journey to Rome, but the islanders with whom he stayed on Melitē during the winter months of A.D. 60-61.

On the northern section of the island of Malta, above Saint Paul’s Bay, Ciantar mentions another bay, sinus a Salinis dictus. The local name in Malta is Mellieha. In the hills above the bay the Maltese still venerate an ancient rock painting of the Virgin Mary and Child in one of the troglodyte churches in this area. This place is nowadays a national sanctuary, known as Il-Madonna tal-Mellieha. According to tradition, the icon of the Virgin and Child on the rock face was painted by Luke, companion of Paul during the journey to Rome and eye-witness of the shipwreck since the narration is included within the “we” sections of the Acts of the Apostles. Ciantar mentions the bishops who supposedly consecrated this Marian sanctuary in 416 on their way to the Council of Milevo near Carthage in North Africa (Melivetanum Concilium).

The most important shrine testifying to the presence of the Apostle Paul on Melita is the Crypta Paulina, or Saint Paul’s Grotto, in Rabat. Ciantar first mentions the healing power of the rock powder taken from this Grotto, known as Terra sigillata Melitensis, a very popular but purely devotional talisman against snake-bites, which was exported in large quantities from Malta and sent all over Europe. As we have seen, Đurđević had ridiculed this practice in his study. Ciantar mentions the sacred area around the Crypt, locally known as iz-Zuntier ta’ San Pawl, where an ancient cross marked the place on which the Apostle would have preached to the Maltese. The place is marked by a stone mound and pedestal with the statue of the Apostle, a memorial built by the noble Maltese Lady Guzmana Navarra in 1678. Ciantar states that Paul
would have resided in the Grotto or Crypt, and then would have preached the Gospel to the Maltese from this raised platform. Ciantar accepts the theory that Paul was kept in relative captivity in the town of Melitē, but at the same time he states that from that place Paul could preach and cure many of the inhabitants who came to him. He accepts the far-fetched theory, ridiculed by Đurđević, that from that place Paul’s preaching could be heard on the island of Gozo, and thus the inhabitants of the island of Gaulos were converted to Christianity.

Ciantar dwells also on the Cathedral church of Malta, situated in the old town of Mdina, the Arab equivalent form of the ancient Roman town of Melitē. According to him, the Cathedral was built on the same spot of the town palace of Publius, where the prōtos welcomed the 276 survivors of the shipwreck. In this church the Maltese venerate a very ancient icon of the Virgin Mary, said to have been painted by Saint Luke. Indeed, the icon is mediaeval in origin, and does not go back to the first centuries of Christianity, although a pious tradition also states that the icon was placed in the new Cathedral by the Normans after the previous one by Luke had been destroyed during the Arab domination of the islands. These are all conjectures that have no solid historical basis to be proven as true affirmations.

Ciantar concludes this important section with a direct attack on his adversary Đurđević, telling him that on Melita Illyrica he could not pin-point any of these monuments or traditions linked with the presence of Saint Paul. All evidence points towards Melita Africana as the island evangelised by Paul.

Concluding remarks

Ciantar’s study merits also the attention we have given to Đurđević’s analysis of the Mljet theory, against the Malta theory that is generally accepted by biblical scholars. The period during which both authors composed their volumes saw a resurgence of interest on the location of Saint Paul’s shipwreck. We have seen that it was during the first quarter of the 17th century that the cult of Saint Paul was revamped in Malta, thanks to the efforts of the Order of Saint John. Ciantar was a son of his age and culture. He was proud to be a native of the island that was evangelised by Paul, but also that was considered as a bulwark of Catholicism against the infidel Saracens. His rhetorical style, prevalent throughout the book, is a result of this sense of pride and prestige.

The author was simply replying to Đurđević’s theory, expressed also in a polished but nearly arrogant style, and defending to the end the importance of Mljet as the island visited by Paul. We have seen both authors and examined their positions. We can say that both are rather biased about their ideas, and their style is polemical as a result. Yet both have their fair share of logical reasoning. Ciantar’s position was certainly better placed that Đurđević’s, given that Mljet was never as densely populated as Malta, and the monuments commemorating a Christian presence on it are far fewer than the great number present in Malta. Nevertheless, it is very difficult to accept Ciantar’s certainty that the Maltese traditions are proof of the veracity of Paul’s presence on the island. Up to Constantine, Malta had to be officially pagan, and it practised Christianity underground, as in Rome. From recent studies we know that Christian presence in Malta can be dated to early Byzantine times, at least from the few remaining troglodyte places of cult on the island. What exactly happened before that is very much an object of conjecture, even though some of the conclusions that Ciantar makes have their degree of validity. It is indeed difficult to imagine the Apostle Paul staying on Melitē for three months and remaining idle, not proclaiming the Gospel. But the conclusions one takes on a devotional level are valid in their own sphere, and cannot be proven with historical documentation. Saint Paul was liberated by the very fact that he was shipwrecked. He was therefore never imprisoned in Malta, but was free to roam about.
The Mljet-Malta theories can only be examined in further detail with the help of contemporary evidence, particularly regarding the gale that could have carried Paul’s vessel to either one of them. We have already spoken about Mljet. Now it is Malta’s turn.
Chapter 4
The gale that carried Paul’s ship from Crete to Melité

The meteorological phenomena prevalent in the eastern and central Mediterranean during the late autumn and early winter provide us with the key to understand the facts narrated by Luke in the voyage diary that he wrote in Acts 27 – 28:14. We have already studied the interpretations given to this episode by two authors during the 18th century, who held widely differing opinions and theories, namely the Croatian Abbot Ignjat Đurđević, who defended the theory that Paul was carried from Crete into the Adriatic Sea and was shipwrecked on the island of Mljet, and the Maltese historian Giovanni Antonio Ciantar, who defended the more-accepted view that the gale carried Paul’s ship from Crete to Malta. Given that these authors were writing at a time when the knowledge of meteorological phenomena was much less developed than it is nowadays, we cannot base our conclusions on their analysis, although they did produce erudite and well-presented studies, at least from the point of view of the historical and ancient documentary evidence. With the help of modern biblical exegesis and contemporary knowledge of meteorological phenomena in the eastern and central Mediterranean, we are in a position to trace the sequence of events as they occurred, even though Luke’s intention was certainly that of providing a theological reading of them rather than a purely scientific or geographical interpretation.

In our analysis of the phenomenon of the gale or typhonic wind that carried Paul’s ship to Melité, we shall base our analysis upon Luke’s account, although we repeat that it was not Luke’s intention to speak of meteorological phenomena. The biblical studies on the journey of Paul to Rome are countless and it is not our intention to repeat what eminent biblical scholars have already stated. It is rather our intention to base our analysis upon two elements which can be of great help in tracing the correct course of events. The first one is a publication by James Smith, The Voyage and Shipwreck of St. Paul, which is undoubtedly one of the best contributions to the study of the art of seafaring, having been the result of personal experience of the author as an able seaman. Although it was written more than a century and a half ago, the book remains a valuable source of information regarding meteorological phenomena in the Mediterranean and the art of seafaring, as well as being a good analysis of Luke’s account, since the author was well versed in Greek. The second element, which finds many confirmations in Smith’s analysis, is my personal experience of the autumn and winter gales blowing on the island of Malta. Being an islander and having been a keen observer of meteorological phenomena on the coasts of my island home, like other Maltese, I have a personal experience of the typhonic ENE gale locally known as Grigal, from the Italian Gregale, which literally means a gale blowing from the direction of Greece. As we shall see, the term is normally understood to refer to a NE wind, which would presumably blow from the Peloponnesian peninsula of Greece. In effect, the Grigal is not a NE wind. We shall examine this detail later on. The sight of the large waves breaking all along the north-eastern and eastern coast of Malta is an annual occurrence during the late autumn and early winter months and can last up to three consecutive days. The entrance and approaches to Grand Harbour and Marsamxett Harbour are spectacular on days like this, with waves going above the breakwater and spray rising as high as the upper reaches of Fort Ricasoli. The same can be said of the entrance to Saint Paul’s Bay and the traditional place of the shipwreck on the islet of Selmunett, or else at Qawra point on the other end of the bay. On the east coast, the peninsula of Munxar at Saint Thomas Bay offers another spectacular sight, more so because of the extensive undersea sandy reef that goes out some distance and creates a complex of currents in the area.
All these phenomena point to two important details which we must consider, namely, the exact direction of the Grigal wind and the point where Saint Paul’s ship could have been driven by the storm.

Our aim is not that of providing any conclusion of certainty regarding these matters. Many others have tried to do so before us and have not succeeded satisfactorily. Indeed, I think it is impossible to conclude exactly as to where Paul’s ship foundered in Malta. Two thousand years have passed and the geological layout of the Maltese islands has been transformed, at least in places where the friable globigerina limestone has been easily eroded by sea action. Tectonic movements have also played their part in subsidence of parts of the coast, which maybe at the time when Paul was shipwrecked, were just below or above sea level. One thing has not changed, namely the yearly occurrence of the Grigal and the pattern of the typhonic wind that brought Paul’s ship from Crete westwards to Malta.

Maybe one could state that the same wind could have carried the ship NW to Mljet in the Adriatic. This is another possibility that has to be examined, but I am not in a position to do it. Although I have visited Mljet personally twice, I have not experienced the Jugo SSE gales in the Adriatic. To come to the conclusion that Paul’s ship entered the Adriatic is an assertion that needs more convincing proof.

Our analysis will proceed by following Smith’s narration of the journey of Paul and his 276 companions from Caesarea on the coast of Palestine, to Sidon, and on to the port of Myra in modern day Turkey. The next leg of the journey saw Paul change vessel and embark on an Alexandrian grain ship on his way to Rome. The adverse winds made them arrive at Knidos, the south-westernmost tip of the Anatolian peninsula, and from there reach the island of Candia, or Crete, skirting it southwards by Cape Salmone (Akra Plaka) and proceeding along its southern shore to Fair Havens. An attempt to winter in the harbour of Phoenix by rounding Cape Matala ended in tragedy when a gale blew down on the coast from Mount Ida (Psiloritis) and led the ship out to sea towards the islet of Gavdos. From there the ship was carried westwards to Melitē (Malta) where it was shipwrecked at a point on the eastern or north-eastern coast of the island, in a place “between two seas” and in full view of a bay with a beach.

How could an ENE gale have brought Paul’s ship from Gavdos to Malta? Should it not rather have led it, as Luke rightly states, on the Syrtis Banks in North Africa? Smith explains how the sailors managed to manoeuvre the ship in such a way that it was actually carried westwards along the deeps of the central Mediterranean basin between Crete and Malta, and above the Malta Escarpment that marks the beginning of shallower waters leading to the east coast of Malta.

The journey from Caesarea to Crete

In Acts 23:33-35, Paul is taken under strict Roman custody from Jerusalem to Caesarea Marittima on the Palestinian coast. It was A.D. 58, and Paul was under custodia cautelaris in Herod’s pretorium, close to Herod’s palace, in order to appear in front of the Roman governor, Marcus Antonius Felix, accused by the high priest Ananias and Tertullius, a Jewish lawyer, of having defiled the Temple by admitting Gentiles in it. Felix was succeeded by Porcius Festus, and left Paul imprisoned. In front of Festus, during a second trial, Paul, who was a Roman citizen, made an appeal to Caesar and thus Festus decided to send Paul over to Rome to be judged by the imperial tribunals. Caesarea was an artificial port constructed by Herod the Great in 21 B.C. Its remains have been unearthed and are now an Israeli National Park. The remains of the ancient harbour are still visible, and mark the place where Paul left in the early autumn of A.D. 60 on his fateful journey from Palestine to Rome.
The rest of the pages are omitted from this book review.