

Grech's narrative style is at its best when he recounts moments of greatness or drama, as when he discovers his young friend dead near the Sliema post-office, or when his mentor, the admirable Father Alexander, is found crushed under the rubble. The incident which most impresses, however, is the one wherein Grech and his mother witness (unwittingly at that moment) the releasing of a stick of bombs which kills his brother, his mother uttering words which turn out to be so sadly prophetic. The way he handles this very difficult passage pays tribute to his skill.

The book is well rounded-off with very good photographs (some of them previously unpublished) and some appendices which are more interesting to a war-historian than to the general public.

Charles B. Grech's *Umbrellet* is a delightful book, satisfying beyond most expectations, and it appeals to a wider range of readership than any other book dealing with the way. The greatest compliment I can pay Mr. Grech is to repeat the words of an author friend of mine:

It's a book I wish I'd written myself.

C. CARUANA CARABEZ

LUTTRELL, ANTHONY (Ed.)

Hal Millieri: A Maltese Casale, Its Churches and Paintings

Maltese Social Studies, No. 1.

Malta, Midsea Books, 1976. 144pp. Illustrated.

The recorded history of the small *casale* of Hal Millieri spans almost 300 years. The *casale* itself is first mentioned in 1419 and it seems to have been abandoned around 1700. Indeed the last recorded birth there took place on 14 July 1711. Since then it, together with its churches, lay relatively unnoticed in the rolling plain in the south-eastern corner of the Island.

The church of the Annunciation is the best surviving

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example of the typical Maltese countryside church, of which no less than 430 were registered during Dusina's Pastoral Visitation of 1575. Its stylistically striking frescoes, priceless examples of late Medieval Maltese art, contain some unusual iconography and whose importance had been amply demonstrated by Gervaise Mathew in the late sixties.

Anthony Luttrell, the editor of the excellent *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights* (London, 1975), has again assembled an array of experts whose contributions make up *Hal Millieri: A Maltese Casale, its Churches and its Paintings*, the first in the series of Maltese Social Studies published by Midsea Books.

Dr Luttrell's concise topographical and historical introduction to the Hal Millieri complex provides an indispensable and comprehensive framework for the other studies and traces the vicissitudes of the *casale* and its churches right up to the present.

Godfrey Wettinger's *The Village of Hal Millieri: 1419-1530* is a most solid and precious piece of historic detective work and perfects the technique he had previously used in his study on the lost villages of Malta published in *Medieval Malta* by restricting his attention to just one of the sixty villages that were to be found then on the Island. Dr Wettinger's indefatigable research in notarial and parochial archives, militia rolls and angara lists enables him to draw up a fascinating portrait of a homogeneous peasant community where the growing of crops and animal husbandry seem to have been the main concerns; indeed the author has only managed to find one solitary reference to a craftsman in the *casale*.

Amongst Dr Wettinger's other contributions, his *Artistic Patronage in Malta 1418-1538* particularly stands out. His study of wills and financial records help him to throw much needed light on the method of artistic patronage in late Medieval Malta. This period marks the emergence of the first native painters one of whom, Giovanni de Saliba married the sister of the famous Sicilian artist Antonello da Messina.

The frescoes at the Church of the Annunciation are described in detail by Genevieve Bautier Bresc, an expert in late Medieval Sicilian painting. Dr Bresc discusses these outstanding exemplars of Maltese art in their Sicilian and continental contexts. This study is beautifully complimented with the integral text of the restorer of the frescoes, Paola Zanolini.

Mario Buhagiar's *The Annunciation Church at Hal Millieri* includes a meticulous description of the surviving structures and the clearance of the site. The third and longest part of his study puts the Church in the context of Medieval Maltese Church Architecture and is a particularly useful contribution.

Tony Mangion in his paper *Religious Life at Hal Millieri 1575-1975* comprehensively treats of the population of the *casale* and its decline. He also analyses the architecture of the churches of the Annunciation and the Visitation and their liturgical furnishings, the cemeteries and their precincts together with the incomes and expenditures of the chapels. Mangion also provides three interesting appendices: *The Churches of St John and St Michael, Births at Hal Millieri: 1567-1711* and a *List Of Pastoral Visitations*.

The present volume is a substantial social and economic study of a particular Maltese *casale*. It succeeds admirably in testing broad theories on a narrow front through a deep and detailed case-study. It certainly meets the editor's declared aim of providing fresh insights and suggesting new materials and methods of approach to Maltese history in the Late Middle Ages particularly in the face of the comparative dearth of local records.

Hal Millieri informs the scholar and entertains the intelligent reader. It does for this *casale* on a small scale what le Roy Ladurie was to do in 1978 for Montailou, that is bring a dead, abandoned community back to life. The book itself is an all too uncommon example of a collection of learned papers, distinguished in their own right, but where the sum of the total happily exceeds that of its precious parts.

LOUIS J. SCERRI

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