

Greek Words in Maltese Harbour Toponymy

By John Vella*

The study presents place names and site names (toponyms) found in the Maltese islands and which comprise Greek words or have origins in the Greek language. With a focus on maritime connections, it presents historic events which would have brought harbour communities in close encounter with the Greek language and culture. Through a multidisciplinary approach the study analyses placenames and site names still used or found in historical documents, backed by archaeological evidence, oral tradition, cartography, other knowledge, and studies. Findings show that in the Maltese islands, placenames mirroring or containing Greek words occur at sea inlets and creeks which could have served as harbours; however, the occurrence of both place names and site names is higher in the south of Malta and around its ancient harbour, witnessing to higher contacts between the two cultures. The study concludes that connections between the Maltese islands and the Greek cultures happened mostly in maritime harbours owing to events in history which gave importance to the use of the Greek language or Greek maritime terminology.

Keywords: Greek, harbour, Malta, maritime, Mediterranean, toponyms

Introduction

The debate about the colonisation of the Maltese Islands by the Greeks has for long been a matter of debate in Maltese historiography. Although history was kept as a reference to this study it presents historical events as circumstances which would have led the Maltese to adopt Greek words for places and sites on the Maltese Islands. The study presents a number of placenames (toponyms) and site names found in the Maltese islands which appear to have a maritime connection, and which comprise Greek words or have their origins in the Greek language. By focusing on the maritime activities and connections which could have arisen from them, the study presents historic events which would have brought Maltese communities or mostly harbour communities in close encounters with the Greek language and culture.

Most of the connections or circumstances which would have brought Greek people, language and culture to the central Mediterranean were wanderings and travel forced by events in different parts of the Levant or the east Mediterranean basin. Following such was navigation, to explore and exploit the opportunities presented at other lands and areas of the Mediterranean Sea, amongst which the central Mediterranean and their crossroad islands: the Maltese islands. These include travel for reasons of commerce and maritime activities.

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The search for evidence and material sustaining the discussion were found among classical publications, historical documents, archaeological artefacts and finds, oral tradition, cartography, knowledge across different disciplines and scholarly studies. The study shows that more than a matter of colonisation Greek influence and presence in Malta left its mark at places of frequent interactions between the two cultures. These were particularly possible at Maltese harbours and harbour areas facing north-east to the Greek islands and mainland, with the exception of the Gozitan inlet which faces west.

Literature Review

Connections between the Maltese and Greek cultures started early.¹ Evidence for contact may also be observed through similarities found in megalithic age artefacts and architectural features produced by the two cultures (Sagona 2015, p. 90, Vella 1995). As people met, they shared ideas and knowledge which helped produce identical or quasi-identical artefacts, structures and practices. As people travelled and as others started sailing the seas, the possibility of movement of artefacts between cultures was facilitated. The presence of pottery from Greek cultures in Malta is an example of how they could have, intentionally or by chance, met. Although there is no evidence of the language being used on the Maltese Islands in the megalithic age, similarities in artefacts, built structures, ritualistic art, statues and statuettes could tell about their contacts. Remnants from the Bronze Age and authors of Classical Antiquity demonstrate that the Maltese Islands experienced more arrivals and settling of communities from different parts of the Mediterranean, amongst which Greeks.

Classical Greek authors and geographers like Homer (Homer 1919, I: 85), Strabo (Hamilton and Falconer 1854, Book V, Ch. 3, Strabo and Meineke 1877, Book 17 Ch 3, verses 57–8),² and Ptolemy (Nobbe 1843, Book IV, Ch 4. Greek text: Book IV, Ch 4, 246), mentioned Maltese lands in epic poetry (Vella 2017a, pp. 51, 55, 58, 61, 62, 65 and 66), historiographic and geographic works intended to inform travellers and navigators about the Mediterranean (Vella 2022, p. 5). The earliest contacts with the Greek culture are documented as far as the Bronze Age (Vella 2017a, pp. 50–51). Homer's *Odyssey*, as a record of oral history, narrates that Ulysses (Odysseus), shipwrecked on Maltese lands, was taken by Calypso to fetch tools and wood to build a boat and return home (Vella 2017a, p. 53). Homer tells that in the southern part of Ogygia was a maritime community able to provide such craftsmanship, necessities and services (Vella 2017a, p. 53).³ Considering that at the time the sea-level was lower and the Maltese archipelago formed one large island (Vella 2017a, p. 51, Micallef et al. 2013, pp. 129–147), those who

¹By *Greek cultures* the author includes cultures which developed on the mainland and the islands such as Crete (ex. Minoan), the Ionian, Aegean, and Cycladean islands.

²Quote from Strabo: 'ἔστι δὲ καὶ Μελίτη νῆσος ἐν πεντακοσίοις σταδίοις ἀπὸ τῆς Κοσσούρου' (Translation: 'Melite, an island, is 500 stadia distant from Cossuros.')

³Quote from Homer's *Odyssey* Od. 5. 237–38: "ἦρχε δ' ὁδοῖο νήσου ἐπ' ἐσχατιῆς," Hom. Author's note: The detail of Ogygia being an island is important to date the *Odyssey*.

came into contact with Ulysses and other Greeks navigating Maltese waters were well aware of each other's presence. Once the sea rose and flooded the valleys now forming the Malta Grand Harbour, such maritime communities moved altogether or in their majority to transform newly formed sheltered creeks into well-equipped harbours with resources and services necessary for daily port activities (Vella 2022, p. 21, Micallef et al. 2013, pp. 129–147). Such destination harbours became known to different peoples and cultures, who called them with different names, tried to interpret them in their own language or assimilated them phonetically to names accommodating their understandings. Considering that since time immemorial the Maltese Islands came into contact with a myriad of Mediterranean and non-Mediterranean cultures, it is anticipated that in one way or another Maltese communities absorbed and learned from all to enrich their own culture, and language with new vocabulary through the ages.

Maltese language, which Vella maintains, is a distinctive language coming from NorthWest Semitic languages (Vella 2017b), had for centuries enriched itself with vocabulary coming from the classical languages Greek, Latin and Arabic (Luttrell 1975, p. 24, Aquilina 1976, p. 23, Mifsud 1995, pp. 20, 23, 49 and 228), and the different European languages it came into contact with through colonisation, commerce, education, religion, tourism and lately the media.

Malta and the Greeks

The Canaanites, whom Greeks, and consequently Maltese, call with the exonym Φοινίκη (*Phoinikē*) and Fenici (Crawley Quinn 2017), reached Maltese lands in c.1200 BC, paving the way to a trading colony (Vella 2017a, pp. 51, 54 and 54 footnote 32). Considering that the Phoenicians reached Maltese lands from a distance twice or more that from Greek lands, then Greek peoples would have reached Maltese lands earlier than the Phoenicians (Vella 2017a, pp. 51 and 61),⁴ but not colonise them for trade or warfare. It was by the mid-eighth century BC, after the Phoenicians strengthened their presence in Malta that the Greeks started setting up colonies in Sicily.

As a record of oral history, Homer's *Odyssey* confirms that the Greeks knew Maltese lands centuries before the changes in sea-level (in c.1000-900 BC), but by Homer's age they could not recognize the coastal landscape or find earlier settlements which were by then submerged (Lambeck et al. 2006, Micallef et al. 2013, pp. 129–147, Vella 2017a, pp. 51 and 61). In Malta changes in sea-level left consequences and communities dedicated to maritime activity or living on the coast had to move inland and restart at newly formed creeks and inlets (Vella 2017a, pp. 51 and 61, Vella 2022, p. 21). An example of changes after the flooding, which Vella (2021) calls the second phase of the Phoenician era (post c.1000-900 BC) in Malta (Vella 2022, p. 21), is the Bormla harbour which transformed into Malta's main commercial harbour equipped with craftsmanship, services, shipbuilding and repair facilities, which developed according to the

⁴Much of the questions in this area could be resolved by an identification and study of ruins and structures existing on the ancient Maltese coastline. Such a survey could be aided by the use of seabed-scanning technology followed by closer observation as underwater archaeology.

necessities of rulers and commerce in the Mediterranean (Vella 2022). Malta became a port of call (Bonanno 2005, pp. 20, 56, 57 and 202, Vella 2022, pp. 5 and 7) and Greek presence would have been high for commerce and other purposes even during the Phoenician colonisation of the islands. The Greeks' stronger presence in Sicily made the Maltese Islands less important for them once commerce and peaceful navigation were not disrupted.

Destination Identification

Evidence to the Greek peoples' knowledge about the Maltese islands are also names with which they identified them. Once the memory of Ogygia was relegated to the past, Greek navigators identified the Maltese Islands in a way they understood and articulated. They identified them as, Melite, Gaulos or Gaudos (Sagona 2015, p. 174, Ciantar 1772, pp. 370–371), and Ephaestia (Ἡφαιστεία); or Hephaestia (Graevius 1725, Caruana 1882, p. 2).⁵ Some also attributed the toponym Hyperia for one of the Maltese islands away from Sicily (MacBean 1773, see *Hyperia*). Malta, as Μελίτη (Melite) was adopted by the Greeks from the *mlt* used by the Phoenicians for its destination harbour (Tempio 2008, pp. 121–122; Vella 2022, pp. 20, 29 and 31).⁶

Distinctive toponyms survived through vernacular language and oral lore of common people until they were recorded in writing (Vella 2022, pp. 12–13, Vella 2017a, pp. 49–50, 51 and 66). It is acknowledged that Greek authors used or translated Phoenician texts by either changing the placenames to a new Greek name meaning the same thing as in Phoenician (semantic translation) (Demetriou 2012, p. 20) or else tried to imitate as much as possible the phonetic sound of the original (literal translation/phonetic transliteration) (Mheallaigh 2013, p. 203, Whitmarsh 2011, p. 88, Bernal 2020). The *mlt*, which became Malta (Cornelii 1627, p. 349),⁷ and Melite/Melita for Greek and Latin authors (Angelus 1401–1427, p. 156, Strabo 1829, p. 42, Strabo and Meineke 1877, KJBV Acts 28:1),⁸ is interpreted as deriving from the Phoenician 'maleth' meaning 'καταφύγιο / καταφύγη' (Bres 1816, p. 47; Busutil 1971, p. 305; Bekker et al. 1888–1890, Vol 1–2, Book V, Chapter 12 Sections 1–4; Liddell and Scott, 1901, p. 780): a place of shelter, refuge, port or haven (Bres 1816, pp. 46–47, Ring et al. 1994, pp. 412–413, McKendrick 1968, p. 105, La Revue Maritime 1956, p. 320, Danver 2010, p. 163). Vella (2022, pp. 6 and 20) maintains that the Malta toponym has roots in Semitic languages as Phoenician and would have been 'malath' (Bres 1816, p. 47). His analysis of the harbour city toponym maintains that the toponym Bormla results from the addition of the Arabic word for harbour 'bur' to the Phoenician 'malath' or vernacular 'mlat/mlath' (Vella 2022, pp. 20–21). Confirmation of such a phenomenon, where an Arab word is later added to an earlier toponymic word, is

⁵In Abela GF see column 93, under section titled 'De parva Insula Hephaestia, hodie Comino - Notitia Undecima' (About the small island of Hephaestia, today Comino – Eleventh News).

⁶Referring also to the later Arabic مَلَاذ (malād) meaning refuge, shelter in English, and *kenn* in Maltese discussed in Vella (2022).

⁷Quote: 'vulgo Malta dicta' (popularly known as Malta).

⁸The Bibliothèque nationale of France dates Angelus's life between 1360 and 1410.

observed in other Maltese harbour toponyms described in this study.

Naming a destination harbour implies that the Greeks or those writing in Greek included the islands on maritime routes as they saw their importance. It was the founding (c.814 BC) and rise of Carthage (post-650 BC) as a maritime military power that compromised the peaceful presence of Punic and Greek people and their growth of trade and calls in Malta (Bonanno 2005, p. 103). The concentration of people near harbour areas forming large towns is maintained by both Bonanno (2005, p. 115) and Vella (2022, p. 7), hence strengthening the argument that during the Phoenicio-Punic period (c.1200 - 218 BC) and mostly in peaceful times people aggregated also nearer to the sea at sheltered and other manageable inlets.

Scilace of Carianda (known as Skylax or Scylax) a Greek navigator, geographer and cartographer, living between 516 BC and the mid-5th century BC, provided the oldest geography book known to survive till present. He described the Maltese islands as inhabited by Carthaginians adding distances, and

“Μελίτη πόλις και λιμην, Γαυλος πολις [...]”

Melita urbs cum portu, Gaulus urbs, [...]. (Gronovio 1697, p. 118, Müller 1855, p. 89, Caruana 1899, p. 206)

[Melita city/town and harbour, Gaulus city/town, [...]”]⁹

From the sixth century BC, Carthage supported by the Etruscans waged wars with the Greeks in Sicily, and Malta’s ancient harbour and sheltered creeks would have served as temporary ports for Carthaginian vessels defending the Island or preparing attacks on Greek harbours in Sicily (Bonanno 2005, pp. 73–75). Such turbulent times would have seen less Greek vessels approaching harbour (Bonanno 2005, p. 73). In spite of wars the Carthaginians left a little less than two thousand soldiers to protect the island of Malta (Livii 1548, p. 68), showing that they attributed less military importance to the island of Malta at the time (Bonanno 2005, p. 115). Consequently, surrender to the Romans by the garrison commander would nonetheless be deemed as a wise decision to save lives, even if they ended up imprisoned and sold as slaves (Livii 1548, p. 68).¹⁰

During the Carthaginian period, Lycophron (330-325 BC) and Callimachus (c.310-c.240 BC) mentioned the Maltese islands as places where Greeks settled or stayed for some time (Lycophron 1921, pp. 1027–1033, Callimachus 1921, Bonanno 2005, p. 7). This implies that prior to the Punic Wars with Rome, some small Greek communities resided in the Maltese Islands. Trade and travel by

⁹The word *και* translates to *et* (and) in Latin not *cum* (with) as presented by Gronovio (1697).

¹⁰Quote: “A Lilybaeo, COS. Hierone cum classe regia dimisso, relictoque; praetore ad tuendam Siciliaeoram ipse in insulam Melita, quae a Carthaginiensibus tenebatur, traiecit. Advenienti Amilcar Gisgonis filius praefectus praesidii cum paulo minus duobus millibus militum, oppidumque, cuius insula, traditur. Inde post paucos dies reditum Lilybaeum: captivique; et a consule et a praetore, praeter insignes nobilitate viros, sub corona venierunt.”

Translation: “From Lilybaeus, COS. Hiero having disbanded the royal fleet, and left; he himself crossed over to the island of Malta, which was held by the Carthaginians, to the defense of Sicily. On his arrival Amilcar the son of Gisgo, the commander of the garrison, with a little less than two thousand soldiers, and the town of which island is reported. Thence after a few days' return to Lilybaeum; and the prisoners; were sold under the crown both by the consul and the praetor, in addition to distinguished men of nobility.”

Greek vessels could have been disrupted by the Punic Wars (264-218 BC) and restored once Carthage lost Sicily and the Maltese Islands to the Roman Empire in 218 BC (Bonanno 2005, pp. 76 and 123); permitting Greek merchants and travellers navigating Maltese waters to meet and mingle more with locals and others who stayed there. It also led the Maltese culture, influenced by Phoenician culture, to experience more the use of Greek. Examples of such a practice come from inscriptions found on the second century BC Cippi of Melqart-Herakles (Bonanno and Militello 2008, pp. 20, 105, 116–118, Crawley Quinn and Vella 2014, p. 233),¹¹ coins (Bonanno 2005, pp. 25, 35–36), and a bronze tablet dated to the third and second century BC or later, when the Maltese Islands were already under Roman rule (Bonanno 2005, pp. 25 and 81).

Although Greek was used among the highly educated Roman society and administrative circles, it is unknown whether it was used by Roman citizens who resided or frequented the Maltese Islands. The common people continued to use their own vernacular and enriched their language with vocabulary from languages, even of non-Semitic origin like Greek and Latin, they came into frequent contact with. The absence of written Maltese could be attributed to common Semitic roots it enjoyed with Phoenician, permitting easy understanding between the two. The fact that locals did not speak Greek or Latin (KJBV Acts 28: 2),¹² however, does not imply that none were able to communicate with either Greek or Latin speakers they met. Knowledge to communicate with different languages was particularly possible in harbour areas and among communities where people from different countries met on a daily basis.

Coins Which Speak

Besides archaeological finds carved in stone or pottery, coins show that between the late 3rd century and second century BC (Sagona 2015, p. 175), the Phoenicio-Punic community on Malta tried to show its superiority on the island by minting coins with the *ANN'NN* toponym, but contemporarily, in the second century BC, the Greek or Graeco-Romans minted coins with *MEAITAIΩN* (Melitaion) (Sagona 2002, Bonanno 2005, pp. 25, 86, 142, 155–160, 253, and 268–269, Bonanno and Militello 2008, pp. 139–140), possibly indicating superiority in the harbour area favoured by its becoming a Roman port-of-call (Vella 2022, pp. 5, 20–21). It appears that the Punic dream of dominating the islands faded away as Carthage lost the islands (218 BC) and was consequently destroyed in 146 BC. This led the Greeks or Graeco-Romans in the 1st century BC to also mint coins for Gozo with *ΓΑΥΑΙΤΩΝ* (*Gauliton*), which enjoyed a better status with Rome (Bonanno 2005, pp. 36–37):¹³ perhaps taking opportunities

¹¹ A Cippus is at the National Museum of Archaeology, Valletta, Malta while a second one is at the Louvre, Paris, France.

¹² In *KJBV Acts of the Apostles*, Chapter 28, verse 2, Luke calls them ‘οι δε βάρβαροι’ and the barbarians’, a phrase repeated in Stephens’s 1550 Textus Receptus, Scrivener’s 1894 Textus Receptus, the Byzantine majority of Bible versions, the King James Bible Version, the American Standard Version, the Noah Webster Bible and the Darby’s English Translation.

¹³ See the description and image in Bonanno (2005, pp. 36–37).

arisen from the loss of support from Carthage to the Punic people still living on the Maltese islands.

From what Lycophron and Callimachus (c. 330 - 240 BC) wrote, it is difficult to state whether the Greeks established themselves as a colony in the Maltese islands by the third century BC, in between the Punic and Roman transition of power, or even later with the blessings of the Roman Empire. The minting of coins with Greek script would however explain that Greek presence and language were gaining importance. Putting the name of a place such as a destination harbour (Melitaion) on coins was a clear attempt to show presence, superiority and authority, even if the Romans ruled the Maltese Islands. It was a way to show distinction from the Punic cultured communities and authorities still influential among the population. Distinction between Graeco-Roman authorities using the toponym of the destination harbour Melite/Melita (MLT) respectively, and the Phoenicio-Punic using ANN (aynuna) for the whole island, especially on coins, as a symbol of power and trading tool, were significant. Behind striking coins for use on Maltese, and consequently Gozitan territory, during the same period, was a valid motive.

If it were not for colonizing the Maltese archipelago or parts of it politically or militarily, the coinage would have been used to strengthen and dominate commercial activity which, with the arrival of further opportunities born out of the expanding Roman Empire, was booming at ports of call (Sagona 2015, p. 222). Such activity would have made the harbour, as a Roman port of call, important to maritime and commercial activity growing in the first centuries of Roman domination. This would have led to its identification in Greek and Latin authored works causing the destination harbour toponym to become the name of the town and then the island, subsequently eradicating the Punic toponym ('NN) for the island of Malta. If this was so, then it may indicate that the Greeks could have 'colonised' the destination harbour and its activity in a commercial manner, permitting and facilitating Greek navigators and travellers to reach Malta, trade, and even settle there. The decline of the Punic power at sea added to this would have made the harbour a vibrant cosmopolitan site with Greeks, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans and Maltese living and working together, and interacting with others who reached the harbour for some reason. The usefulness of the Maltese harbours during the Roman era, is observed by classical authors and geographers of the first century BC to the second century AD like Strabo (Strabo 1856, Book 17, Chapter 3, verses 57–58, Strabo 1903) Pliny (Pliny the Elder 1855, Book 3, Chapter 14 (8)), Diodorus Siculus (Oldfather 1939), Ptolemy (Nobbe 1843, Book IV, Ch 4, 246) and the *Itinerarium Antonini Augusti* (Pius 1735, pp. 518 and 520).

In the first century BC, Diodorus wrote

καὶ πρώτη μὲν ἐστὶν ἡ προσαγορευομένη Μελίτη, [...], καὶ λιμένας μὲν ἔχει πολλοὺς καὶ διαφόρους ταῖς εὐχρηστίας, [...].
 'The first one is that called Melitê [Malta], ... it possesses many harbours which offer exceptional advantages'

And

μετὰ δὲ ταύτην τὴν νῆσον ἔστιν ἑτέρα τὴν μὲν προσηγορίαν ἔχουσα Γαῦλος, πελαγία δὲ καὶ λιμέσιν εὐκαίροις κεκοσμημένη, Φοινίκων ἄποικος.

After this island there is a second which bears the name of Gaulus, lying out in the open sea and adorned with well-situated harbours, a Phoenician colony. (Oldfather 1939)¹⁴

Diodorus even as a historian pointed out the importance of harbours or creeks where navigators could seek shelter from the open seas especially during rough weather. Consequently, seeking the Greek influence through harbours was a natural choice to start with as a focus for this study.

Methodology

The study starts by identifying and analysing historical circumstances and events which could have connected the Maltese and the Greek cultures. It used evidence from historical documents starting from antiquity and classical times, archaeology, documents found in public or institutional records like notarial archives, church records, historical publications, travelogues and others intended for navigation, and language. Language as a source of contact was also used in archaeological artefacts, in official records, poetry, cartography and geographic works. The focus was mostly on toponyms (placenames) and site names at Maltese maritime harbours having a Greek word in them or which are of Greek origin.

After mentioning and analysing briefly the toponyms found in Malta and Gozo, the focus turns to that of Malta's ancient harbour, Bormla, where shipbuilding and repair activities can be traced back to medieval, classical and ancient times (Vella 2022). An analysis of each occurrence is presented and briefly discussed. From the findings the study concluded that the harbour indicated as the most influenced by the Greek culture is the ancient destination harbour of Bormla where most linguistic evidence can be traced through written documents, strengthening the veracity of research and oral lore in the absence of evidence destroyed by time and development. The Maltese placenames and site names discussed are in alphabetic order: Bullumeni, Gaulos and Gaudos, Melite (Malta), Mandra, Marsa, Marsaskala, Qormi, and Xlendi. Other words connected to harbours or the maritime are listed in a Table.

¹⁴The Greek text is in Diodorus Siculus, *Diodori Bibliotheca Historica*, edited by Bekker, Dindorf and Vogel, liber V, chapter 12, sections 1–4.

Findings and Discussion

Destination Gains Priority

Destination harbours as ports of call were most likely to receive attention from authors of works intended to inform travellers and navigators. Their activity helped them become cosmopolitan places receiving knowledge and cultural influences which grew stronger and lasting when people came into frequent contact with each other. It is the coming together of Maltese and Greek cultures that forms the basis of this historical study discussing Greek words found in Maltese harbour toponymy.

If through navigation and in search of new lands for habitation, the Greeks discovered and reached Maltese lands in the Bronze Age, they would have used names to identify them. By calling the whole Maltese landmass Ogygia (locally called *Ggantija*), Homer showed that the Greeks had for long been aware of Maltese lands even if by his time Ogygia became only a memory narrated through oral lore (Vella 2017a, pp. 51, 55, 58, 61, 62, 65 and 66). After Homer's times (late eighth or early seventh century BC) (Croally and Hyde 2011), p. 26), the Greek toponym *Melite* is first recorded in the sixth century BC by Xenophanes of Colophon to describe sea fossils found on the islands (Karsten 1830, pp. 178–179). If Xenophanes visited during his life time, he would have reached the Maltese Islands during the Phoenician colonisation, suggesting that Greek vessels kept reaching Malta. Vella maintains that the toponym *Melite* and *Melita* used by classical authors writing in Greek and Latin respectively, derived from the Phoenician MLT (maleth/malath/mlat) used as toponym of the destination harbour not of the Island which the Phoenicians identified as ANN (Vella 2022, p. 20). A practice still common among maritime people is that they used and still use the name of harbours as points of departure and arrival for navigation. This explains why classical authors, geographers and nautical works referred to the destination's island, its city and its harbour as Melite or Melita. It is through navigation that the Melite (Lat. Melita) toponym would have become popular among those sailing the Mediterranean. While the MLT was an endonym used by locals and Phoenicians for the ancient harbour, Melite was an exonym by which Greek, and consequently Latin authors, assimilated the Semitic MLT, making the destination or port of call Melite/Melita known throughout the whole of Classical antiquity.

Consequently, the use of Melite/Melita for the whole island was facilitated as the Roman and Latin world promoted what it inherited from the Greek culture and set aside those which they considered as inferior cultures and languages. While the two cultures intended to make their toponym endure the ages and circumstances by minting coins with the toponym of their choice, the Roman world followed by the Byzantines succeeded to minimise and silence the use and recognition of the Phoenician toponym ANN.

Medieval Era

Greek and Roman (Latin) interpretation of placenames did not always reflect or articulate placenames the same way which locals did in their vernacular language. Phonetics found in Greek and Latin could not assimilate or reproduce phonetics found in, for example, Semitic vocabulary and placenames. In maritime usage, however, ruling cultures and locals had frequently come closer by adopting common vocabulary understood by both sides or else conjoined or combined words found in local vernacular and the language used by the ruling authorities. Examples of such an occurrence in Malta, presented in this study, lead back to the medieval era and survive to this day. The composition of these toponyms tells a history which is not documented in writing as none or rarely do narratives of history or subjective historiographers tell how a toponym came into being. Toponyms, from a historian's perspective, can nevertheless tell their own history (Vella 2022, pp. 4 and 21).

Stand Alone Greek Toponyms

Among the toponyms which stand alone as being a single word of Greek derivation are the toponyms applied to Malta and Gozo, by classical authors, that is Melite for Malta, Gaulos or Gaudos for Gozo (Strabo 1856: book 17, chapter 3, verses 57–58, Vella 2012, p. 5), and that of Haephestia applied to Comino (Graevius 1725),¹⁵ the smaller island in between them. The derivation of Melite was discussed earlier in this study, and accepted as a phonetic transliteration of the Phoenician MLT (maleth/malath/mlat). Gaulos for Gozo was considered as the Greek interpretation of GWL or Gawl, which refers to the *gauloi*:¹⁶ “a round-built Phoenician merchant vessel” (Vella 2012, p. 5, Hartley 2004), and which consequently led to the mention of Gauliton on coins. Gaudos, as recorded by Strabo (Strabo 1924, pp. 103–104 and 193–195: Book VI, Ch II, 11 and Book VII, Ch III: 6) is however a closer phonetic transliteration of the vernacular toponym Għawdex. Considering the Gaulos's link to a maritime vessel, there stands out another toponym connected to a Greek maritime vessel in the island of Gozo. It is the toponym of the once fishing hamlet called Xlendi. Xlendi took its name from the early eighth century Byzantine galley warship called *Chelandion* (Greek: χελάνδιον) (Pryor and Jeffreys 2006, pp. 166–169), which the Arabs later called *shalandī* and which in Maltese vernacular is Xlendi (shlen-dee) (Pryor and Jeffreys 2006, p. xlvi–xlvi, 168–169, 190, Agius 2001, p. 55). The Gozitan inlet of Xlendi is the only inlet facing west among the inlets mentioned in this study. Since the Greeks had established Neápolis (Νεάπολις, now Nabeul, Tunisia) in the fifth century BC, it is assumed that Xlendi would have been the inlet frequented by Greeks ever since the establishment of the colony and which would have survived up to the Byzantine period.

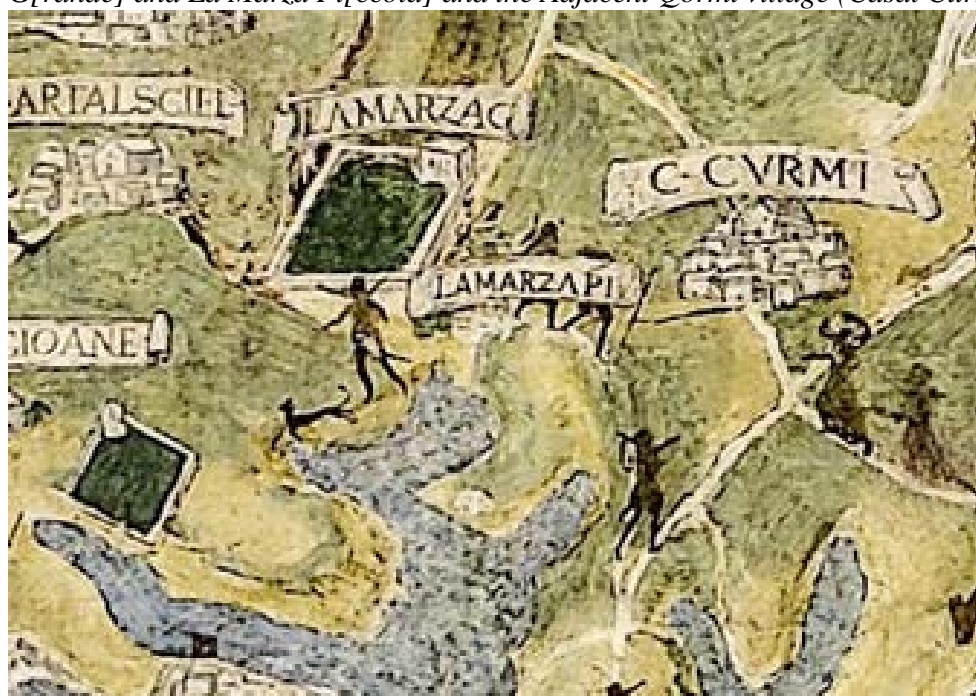
¹⁵About Comino, Graevius (Vol. 45, 1725) referred to the original text by Abela (1647).

¹⁶The Mariners' Museum and Park, The Ages of Exploration, Phoenician Ships: <https://exploration.marinersmuseum.org/watercraft/phoenician-ships/>.

Qormi and Marsa

Qormi is the toponym of an ancient village in the island of Malta. It stands at what was the innermost reach of the Grand Harbour waters and only round 5.8 kilometres away from the capital Mdina. Vella (HCR 2012) maintained that the toponym Qormi derives from the Greek word ὄρμιοι (hormos / hormoi) which means anchorage (Vella 2012, p. 3). The noun ὄρμος (órmos) in Greek also means inlet, bay and moorage, in a plural form,¹⁷ thus indicative of many moorings and anchorage possibilities existing in that part of the sea inlet back in time. Such use of the place are remains of warehouses used prior to the 5th and 6th century AD during the pre-Byzantine era (Gambin 2004, p. 118, Gambin 2005, pp. 49–54). It seems that between the 6th century and the arrival of the Arabs in AD 870, the shallow waters which permitted sea-going vessels to reach the shores of Qormi changed due to siltation coming down the valleys from higher land and owing to a lowering of sea-level (Sivan et al. 2004, pp. 324, 325 and 328) which turned the site into a large area of shallow marshlands. By the sixteenth century, the inner site already heavily silted and packed with vegetation was distinguished as La Marza G[rande] (the large Marsa) and the external part as La Marza Pi[ccola] (the small Marsa) (Perez d'Aleccio 1575-1580)¹⁸ (Figure 1). A century later Coronelli (1689 (map) mentions only La Marsa Piazzola, probably owing to increased siltation.

Figure 1. Detail from Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's Fresco Depicting the Arrival of the Ottoman Fleet - 18 May 1565, Showing the Old Marsa Sites as La Marza G[rande] and La Marza Pi[ccola] and the Adjacent Qormi village (Casal Curmi)



¹⁷Second Declension noun in the Nominative Plural form.

¹⁸The fresco is that depicting the arrival of the Ottoman Fleet dated 18 May 1565, at the Grand Masters' Palace, Valletta, Malta.

In the beginning of the twentieth century the British colonial authorities filled in all the shallow waters from the shores of Qormi to Porto Nuovo, between Church Wharf and Jetties Wharf (Marsa). This land-filled area is nowadays known as *Il-Marsa ta' l-Ingliži* (The English Marsa) which the British developed as a racecourse surrounding several other sporting facilities they called the *United Services Sports Club*, later known as the *Marsa Sports Club*.¹⁹

To the east of Qormi is a village called Marsa. It developed along the shores between the old Qormi shores and those on both sides of the Malta Grand Harbour. Marsa however is no new village as some may think. Its name can be attributed to the Arabs, who identifying it as the eastern part of Qormi Arabised the toponym Qormi to Marsa, also meaning anchorage, berthing and mooring place (Vella 2022, p. 6, Busuttil 1900, see 'marsa'). Although both toponyms refer to the same place, it must be acknowledged that the accessible shallow waters experienced during the classical period were no longer practicable in the medieval period when Malta went under Arab rule (870 AD). Siltation over centuries would have led the Qormi moorings impracticable and drove practices and facilities eastward as the mooring possibilities and shore facility moved. Thus while the Qormi inlet would have been functional till the late Roman era, it would have become redundant by the arrival of the Byzantines in AD 535-36, and the Marsa shore were the only accessible by sea by AD 870.

Considering that Greek was still used in the Roman (218 BC - AD c.450) and Byzantine rule (AD 553 - 870) in Malta, it is highly possible that while sections of the population referred to the village with its Greek toponym Qormi, ὄρμος (hormos) (mooringplace) Plato (Plato 1892, vol. vi) / ὄρμοι *hormoi* (Aeschylus 1851/1894), the Arab era (870 -1091) and their presence till c.1250 (Wettinger 1995, pp. 34–39, Vella 2022, p. 17) facilitated the use of *marsa* alongside the Qormi toponym. The Norman rule (1091 - 1130) in Malta and Sicily facilitated the use of Byzantine Greek at administrative levels, and could have helped the use or perpetuation of Greek words alongside the vernacular language (Maltese), and vocabulary added through the Arab influence.

Greek and Arabic Come Together

The word *marsa* is also found at other sea inlets around the Maltese islands. In these cases it is added to another word. Placenames including *marsa* are Marsascalea/ Marsaskala, Marsamxett, and Marsaxlokk in Malta, and Marsalforn in Gozo.²⁰ The toponym discussed in this research is however that of Marsascalea or Marsaskala.²¹ Assuming that the *marsa* term was added during the Arab occupation, there remains the second part of the same toponym which is 'skala' or the Latinised version 'scalea'. The word σκάλα (*skala*) in maritime Byzantine Greek

¹⁹Marsa Sports Club website: <https://www.marsasportsclub.com/>.

²⁰Marsamxett, derives from two semitic words: the Arabic *marsa* and the Maltese *mxett*, which together mean a harbour where one can winter and graze the cattle or herds (Said 2006). Marsaxlokk is the harbour in the southeast of the island thus facing the scirocco (xlokk). Marsalforn is a reference to the lime kiln which in the past existed at that harbour.

²¹Marsaskala is a seaside village in the south of Malta.

suggests a wharf or landing place, thus a small inlet where one could land (Hartley 2004, q.v. ‘scala’ and ‘skala’, Sophocles 1900, p. 991, q.v. skala; Treccani see ‘scalo’ m.).²² The addition of the Arabic *marsa* in front of *skala* indicates the same meaning intended by the Greek word: a place where one could land.

Bullumeni and Melite

A similar occurrence is met at the ancient harbour city of Bormla, where a site called *Bullumeni* was recorded back in 1373 (Wettinger 2000, p. 72). Through a deep analysis of different sites at Bormla, Vella (2022, p. 15) maintains that *Bullumeni* is a colloquial derivation of both Arab and Greek words that refer to ‘harbour’, that is the conjoining of بـور (bur)²³ and λιμένα (liméni) (Vella 2022, p. 15).

While the Arab *bur* indicates shelter, haven, or port; the Greek λιμένα (liméni) as the dative singular of λιμήν/ λιμάνι (limen/limani) translates as ‘to the port / harbour’, with both words indicating a port with moorings where ships can load and unload, and a sheltered harbour where neither waves nor currents could stop its daily operations. The *Bullumeni/Burlimeni* site name is therefore a doubling of the Greek word for *harbour* in Arabic: an occurrence similar to what was earlier noted about the toponym Marsaskala.

Such conjoining of words having the same meaning in different languages, is also reminiscent of what Vella (2022, p. 20) maintains about the origins of the toponym Bormla, where the addition of the Arabic *bur* was added in front of the Phoenician *mlt* meaning refuge, shelter, haven, or port, giving birth to the present toponym of the said city from *bur+mlat* (Vella 2022, p. 20). Thus the occurrence of placenames and site names meaning *refuge*, thus Diodorus’s καταφυγήν (Bres 1816, p. 47, Busuttil 1971, p. 305, Bekker et al. 1888–1890, Book V, Ch 12 Sect 3, Liddell and Scott 1901, p. 780), at the same place strengthens the credibility of the Bormla harbour being the ancient Phoenician ‘maleth / malath / mlt’ and the Greek Μελίτη (Melite). It is also the reason why the Latin *tegimen* meaning shelter (Vella 2022, pp. 6, 15–16, 20 and 24 endnote 54), the *Ta’ Ġebel el Ban* site indicating the safe haven (Vella 2018, p. 93),²⁴ and the λιμένα discussed in this section all happen there.

Mandra - The Enclosed Harbour

Another site name which also occurs at Bormla is *Mandra* (μάνδρα), which literally means a pen normally for keeping livestock, an enclosed space, or a place closed by a partition (Bailly 1935, p. 1224, ‘μάνδρα’; Busuttil 1900 ‘mandra’). In nautical terminology *mandra* indicates an enclosure or sheltered safe place where

²²Translation of Treccani Dictionary online: from Latin *scala*, which in Byzantine Greek *skála* turned to mean a stone staircase which at the wharves of maritime ports served for landing/disembarkation.

²³In English phonetics ‘bur’ sounds as ‘boor’.

²⁴Quote: “the site known as Ta’ Ġebel el Ban”. In Arabic the toponym of the site means “the hill of the mainland” thus a prominent landmark indicating the safe haven or harbour of shelter for navigators.”

sea vessels were kept, also called *μανδρακι* (*mandraki*) (Vella 2022, pp. 9–10, de Graauw 2022).²⁵ The Mandra is mentioned in Lafreri's 1551 map (Ganado and Agius-Vadala' 1994, Balbi de Coreggio 1568, pp. 29, 30, 31, 61, 63, 70, 75 and 79, Ganado 1984, pp. 125–161 Plate IV, C: 139, Plate VI, E: 141, and Plate IX, K: 144)²⁶ and recorded in diaries of the 1565 Great Siege by Balbi de Coreggio (1568, pp. 29, 30, 31, 61, 63, 70, 75 and 79.) and Bosio (1602, pp. 519, 598, 603, 609, 615, 621, 622, 630, 631, and 709). In 1575-1581 Perez painted it in his frescoes at the Grand Masters Palace (Valletta).²⁷ It features prominently in cartography representing the 1565 Ottoman siege as *Mandrache*, *Mandrace*, *Mandraki*, *Mandrage* and *Mandrakion* (Ganado and Agius-Vadala' 1994, Vol I, pp. 32–33, 105, 105 n.11, 108, 126, 300 and 306, 346, 346 n.4, 357, 358 n.18, 364, 364 n.5, 412, 415 and 417, and respective Maps on Vol. II, pp. 36-37, 54, 57, 94, 95, 109, 112, 114, 126, 129, and 131). It referred to an 'internal harbour' (Corazzini 1906, Vol. V, pp. 43–44, Notarbartolo Malingri and Chighizola 2008, p. 137, Sau 2010, p. 141, Treccani, 'mandràcchio', Franzese 2010, No. 110, Vella 2022, pp. 10 and 14)²⁸ or a *closed place* similar to that of Constantinople (Vecchj 1895, p. 129, Ganado and Agius-Vadala' 1994, Vol. II, Map 71) and the *Mandracium* at Carthage (Le Beau 1784, XLII, p. 191, Gertwagen and Jeffreys 2012, p. 4, Evans 2000, p. 129, Holcroft 1653, I, p. 21). Other cartographic works mention it as *Mandraco*, *Mandracho*, (Nelli 1565, Ganado and Agius-Vadala' 1994, Vol. II, Maps 2-7)²⁹ *Mandrachio* (Ciantar 1772, p. 87, Collignon 1660-1669 (map), Abela 1647, I, pp. 18–19), and *Mandarage* (De Saint Non 1784, p. 106 (map), Grognet 1799 (map)), and features pictorially on other maps dating between 1565 and 1799 (Zenoì 1567-1569, Braun and Hogenberg 1572-1617, p. 122)³⁰ (Figures 2 and 3). Among the different features attributed to places called Mandra, are that besides being a *gathering place* it includes the provision of services and facilities for loading and unloading (Franzese 2010, No. 110). It is also described as the place where small sea vessels can be moored, thus a sheltered dock (Preciuttini and Sbarbaro 2014, see *Darsena*). The Mandra is also recorded

²⁵Quote from de Graauw (2022): “*lekanion*, **mandraki** (Latin: *navaculum*?; FR: *darse*, *bassin portuaire*; GB: *dock*, *harbour basin*): enclosed area of water used for loading, unloading, building or repairing ships.”

²⁶In Ganado and Agius-Vadala' (1994, Vol. II, 3), see also ‘The method of the Turkish bombardment’.

²⁷See fresco ‘*Assedio e Batteria di S. Elmo - A.D. 27 Maggio 1565*’.

²⁸Quote from Treccani, *Enciclopedia Italiana*: “**MANDRACCHIO** (da *mandra*). - Con antica voce italiana, comune tra i marinai, si chiamava così uno specchio d'acqua piccolo e chiuso, riservato in alcuni porti a stazione di lance, di chiatte, di barche e, in genere, di bastimenti minuti, nel quale essi erano quindi radunati come in *mandra*, e in maniera da ingombrare il minore spazio possibile, senza intralciare le manovre e gli attracchi delle navi maggiori. Il nome e il recinto, se non la funzione, rimangono tuttora in alcuni porti d'Italia (Genova, La Spezia, Napoli, ecc.) o di vecchia tradizione italiana, come Rodi e Malta.”

Quote from Sau (2010): “*Mandràcio*, *Mandrachio*, *Darsena*. La parte interna del porto. E' quella parte del porto che a Isola protegge le imbarcazioni [...]. (Translation: *Mandràcio*, *Mandrachio*, *Darsena*. The inner part of the port. It is that part of the port that protects boats in Isola.)

²⁹The maps by Nelli show the Bormla harbour as the *Porto Principale* (the main harbour).

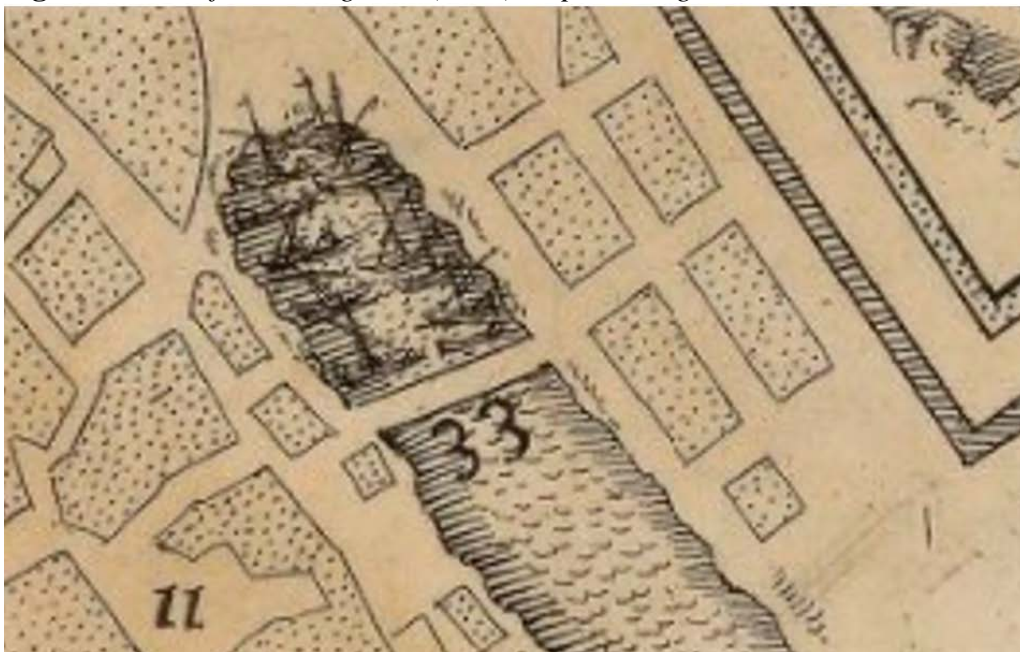
³⁰Zenoì's map shows the ‘*mandrace*’ at Bormla, and Braun and Hogenberg's map shows ‘*Le Mandarage*.’

in the 1687 ecclesiastical records called *Status Animarum* as a quarter within the parish boundaries was identified as *Manderagij* and *Manderagium* (Fiorini 1986, p. 49).³¹

Figure 2. Detail from Map by Frans Huys (c.1565) Showing the Mandra at Bormla (right), and the Chain Blocking Entrance into the Harbour (left) at the Tip of the Two Peninsulas on Each Side of the Bormla Harbour



Figure 3. Detail from Collignon's (1660) Map Showing the Mandra at Bormla



³¹In Fiorini (1986) see section mentioning the Bormla Parish Church *Status Animarum* for the year 1687.

Like ὄρμος, the term Mandra (μάνδρα) is sometimes explained as a reference to an internal part of a harbour, a mooring place, a darsena and mandracchio (Corazzini 1894, pp. 223–225, see *Porto*). Terminology such as *mandra*, *internal harbour*, *closed place* and *enclosure* attributed to ancient harbours and, in this case, to Bormla, lead to a further inquiry. The question here is whether the Bormla harbour qualified as a naturally closed harbour, that is what Pseudo-Skylax (Pseudo-Skylax 1878 (2015/2017), paras. 29, 33, 47, 58, 67, 88, 98, 99, 103, 104 and 106, Shipley 2010, Blackman et al. 2013, pp. 33–34, 186, 194, 200, 211–214, 216, 217, 265, 323, 349, 364 and 420, Mauro and Gambash 2020, p. 57, de Graauw 2020, pp. 10 and 30) and Strabo (1903, 14.6.3, 17.1.6, and 17.1.9) mentioned as a ‘κλειστός λίμην’ (kleistos limen/closed harbour), or whether the closing happened owing to some man-made means or structure such as a mole or a chain (de Graauw 2022).³²

Case for a Limên Kleistos?

The existence of the Mandra and its interpretation as a *closed place* or *internal harbour* opens further the discussion about the inner Bormla harbour prior to the arrival of the Hospitaller Order in 1530. The Mandra as shown on the earlier mentioned maps refers to the inner enclosure which is evidence of a man-made closed space. The question rests on whether an outer area of the sea was considered closed owing to its narrow natural geography or another man-made object such as a chain. If the Bullumeni (bur+limeni) site name was recorded in 1373, then the enclosed space or Mandra could have existed since classical antiquity and the early medieval period, when Greek was in use: possibly be the Byzantine period (AD 553-870). The Mandra as an enclosed space, was separating the inner enclosure for small vessels from that where the larger merchantile vessels would have harboured to load or unload merchandise and people travelling on the same voyages. The separation of such sea space and adjacent wharfs at Bormla was observed by Vella (2022, pp. 11, 12). It could therefore indicate that earlier than the modern age, the Bormla harbour could have had facilities with which to close access to the harbour or what is a κλειστό λιμάνι (kleisto limani) / λίμην κλειστός (limen kleistos) (Ginalis 2014, p. 29 fn 75). These are however not yet traced in historical publications concerning Maltese history, except in the sixteenth century and the 1565 Ottoman siege when the two headlands of the creek leading to Bormla were heavily developed as two new fortified cities: Isla (Senglea) and Birgu.

Coastal towers recorded prior to the modern age, that is pre-1500, were documented and located in the Maltese harbour (Vella 2022, pp. 11, 12, 13 (fig.4) and 14, Vella 2016, pp. 59–60). No document pre-dating the sixteenth century mention a closing of the harbour by a chain (Rougé, 1966, pp. 116–117), even for military purposes (Gerkan 1924, pp. 110–114), had yet been found. It is only after the governing Hospitaller Order (1530-1798) engaged in the building of massive

³²Quote de Graauw (2022): “limên kleistos (pl. limenes kleistoi) (Latin: portus; FR: port fermé; GB: closed port): intra-muros port connected to the city, protected by the city walls and with a narrowed entrance closable by means of doors and/or a chain”.

fortifications that the full extension of the creek leading to Bormla and the harbours on both sides of Valletta became fortified and possible to close (Blackman 2008, p. 654, Lehmann-Hartleben 1923).

By excluding the developments occurring in Maltese harbours after 1530, the only harbour which could have acted as a closed harbour prior to that age was the inner part of the Bormla harbour, thus the narrow section including the Mandra, Vella (2022) defines the area as the sea space for commercial vessels and the Mandra for vessels belonging to the locals (Vella 2022, p. 12). The features survived for centuries and can be observed on medieval and modern age cartography. It presents characteristics attributed to a λιμὴν κλειστός (limen kleistos): that is a harbour with a naturally narrow entrance, and which was gradually provided with moles to protect an inner basin and supplied with a quay or wharf where vessels could load and unload cargo and people (Mauro and Gambash 2020, pp. 59–72, and 81).

Proof of harbour activity at the Bormla harbour since at least classical antiquity is deduced from excavations made in the mid-19th century (Smith 1848, p. 285, Vella 2018, pp. 88–96). The development of the Mandra at Bormla cannot yet be dated, even if the word itself echoes the Greek language and maritime terminology used by classical and medieval authorities ruling the Maltese Islands. The Mandra could have been larger than what is shown in medieval and modern age cartography and would have extended further inland beneath the open spaces now called *Pjazza Gavino Gulia* and *Wesgħat il-Knisja tan-Nativita'*. Assuming that the area was formerly a bay, it would have become impracticable owing to silt accumulating from the large catchment area and valley leading to it. If the deposits under this area are undisturbed they could render more tangible evidence than presently available.³³

Since remains of built structures from the early medieval or classical period, were either removed, recycled, integrated into newer structures, lost or destroyed owing to development, the post-war clearing of debris, or are still buried under the urbanised areas or submerged under the sea, the matter demands further research in archives not yet accessed or researched by scholars writing about Maltese history, serious archaeological surveys with the use of modern technology capable to reveal what lies beneath the urban and rural spaces, and the sea of the Bormla harbour and its adjacent creeks.

Some Terminology

Two Maltese words linked to harbour activity are ‘moll’ and ‘skal’. *Moll* which means jetty extending into the sea derives from the Greek word μώλος / μόλος (mólos) (Hartley 2004). *Skal*, deriving from the Greek *skala*, refers to a man-made slipway which provides maritime vessels the facility to land (de Graauw 2022).³⁴ Some other words heard among maritime communities are listed

³³Modern technology such as the ground penetrating radar can be significantly helpful.

³⁴Quote from de Graauw (2022): **skala** (Latin: scala; FR: appontement, débarcadère; GB: wharf, landing stage; US: pier, landing stage): structure to load and unload ships, usually on piles (e.g. finger pier).

in Table 1, in Greek alphabet, accompanied by their Greek phonetic and meaning, the Maltese word and its meaning to the Maltese maritime community.

Table 1. *Some Greek Words Used Among Maltese Maritime Communities*

Greek	Phonetic	English meaning of Greek term	Maltese	English meaning of Maltese term
Άσπρος	aspros	white	aspru	'a white sea' – refers to a calm sea with a flat surface, the reflection of which above the horizon is white and solid rather than the usual bluish hue. ³⁵
Κάβος	kavos/kabos	cape	kap	cape of land extending on the sea
κουρσάρος	koursáros	corsair	kursar	corsair
κοχύλι	kochýli	sea-shell	kočċla (singular) / kočċli (plural)	shells and molluscs stuck to the bottom of sea vessels ³⁶
λείος	leíos	smooth (sea)	lixx	smooth / calm sea
μόλος / μόλος	mólos	breakwater, jetty	moll	construction onto the sea
παραλία	paralía	beach	plajja	beach
πόρτο	porto	small harbour	port	harbour
σκάλα	skala	quay, landing place	skal	slipway, a sloping ramp on which boats can be pulled in and out of the water.
βράχιον	vrahkion / brachion	rock	barkun	barge

Greek Connections at Bormla

As the sea level changed and the Bormla harbour flooded during the Phoenician era (Vella 2017a, p. 61, Vella 2022, p. 21), it attracted navigation and commerce. Greek vessels would have used it on their trade routes and travel through the central Mediterranean. Throughout the Roman era, the use of Greek became frequent. Although the Acts of the Apostles, thought to be written by St. Luke referred to the locals as non-Greek speakers (KJBV, Acts 28: 2 and 4), it is however acknowledged that people whose activities were at harbours would have learned to communicate in either of the classical languages. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire, the Eastern Empire known as the Byzantines took the Maltese islands in AD 535-536.

Apart from exercising power, authorities and institutions used Greek or Latin among other for administrative and ceremonial purposes, and this could have facilitated acceptance among the most exposed communities. From the Byzantine (c.500-869 AD), Norman (1091-1194) and Hohenstaufen (1194-1266) rules till 1516, the use of words such as 'Mandra' were facilitated as Greek was an official

³⁵From *Il-Miklem*, see 'baħar abjad'.

³⁶From *Il-Miklem*, see 'kočċla'. <https://www.ilmiklem.com/koccla/>.

administrative language of the Sicilian Crown, and as such Greek terms became common among Mediterranean maritime powers such as Genoa, which harboured their fleet at Malta for years. For two centuries the Arabs ruled Sicily (827-878) and Arabic as an official administrative language ousted Latin completely but not Greek, which in north Sicily kept being spoken (Linguistica Siciliana 2007). Concurrently the Sicilian language enriched itself with Arab vocabulary. Since Malta formed part of the Sicilian domain, it was important to find proof of the Greek-Arab influence which evidences for the harbour function at Bormla.

Bearing in mind that Bormla was for centuries the destination harbour for vessels arriving in Malta, travellers, traders, navigators and crews, the Byzantine rule would have facilitated contacts with the Greek world and culture. Among these were monks who, during the iconoclastic periods (AD 726-787 and 814-842), fled from the centres of power to safeguard treasures and other objects of cult associated to their belief which would have been destroyed forever (Vella 2016, pp. 56, 58–59). Just a few metres away from the seashore is an ancient rock-cut church dated to the end of the eighth and the beginning of the ninth centuries (Vella 2016, pp. 56 and 73). It was recorded that besides the ritual Byzantine objects inside the church were many statuettes of Greek origin and that next to the church there was also a burial ground which among other contained a tombstone inscribed in Greek with the name of a lady named Crispia presumed to have been a wealthy or noble person living in the area (Ciantar 1772, p. 319, Caruana 1882, p. 166, Grech 1954, p. 2, Vella 2016, pp. 53–54). Another connection to the Greek culture arrives from a large icon of the *Theotokos* surrounded by Byzantine saints (now presumed lost, stolen or misplaced) which existed at the same rock-cut church and which was recorded in the parish inventory of 1700 (Ciantar 1772, p. 216, Cassar 1949, p. 14, Vella 2016, pp. 50 and 73).

Connected to the same church is a triangular inscription in Greek described by Ciantar (1772) which showed the script:

‘ΙΩΝ ΕΥΨΟΡΕΘΕΩ ΕΥΣΕΒΙΑΣ ΗΘΙΝΕ ΗΜΑΣ ΕΞΕΝΟΣΑ ΙΚΑΙΑ
... ΟΥΣΙΕ ΥΓΕΡΘΕ ΕΚΑΙΥΓΙΡΑΓΑΘΕ. ΤΩΝΧΕΤ. ΣΤΑ-
ΟΤ. ΣΩΓΤΗ. ΕΚΓΛΑΨ ... ΘΑΣΟΤ. ΑΝΑΣΤΑΣΕΟΣ ΔΥΘΗΜΕ ... ΘΑΝ ... ΟΝ.’³⁷

Another archaeological find at Bormla, which the author witnessed personally, is an inscription found underneath a private residence which showed features of an ancient threshing floor or mill, in Triq San Lazzru. It consisted of an inscription carved into a block of Maltese limestone (Vella 2016, pp. 50, 52–53 and 56–57).

There are yet no records of Greek connections during the Arab rule of Malta, however as the Maltese Islands became part of the Sicilian monarchy, Greek was again used among administrative ranks of the kingdom. Maltese toponyms and site names underwent modification and Arabisation during the Arab rule, added terms as *bur*, *marsa* and other vocabulary to earlier or contemporary toponyms. Together *Mandra* (μάνδρα) and *Bullumeni* (Bur-limani) provide evidence for Greek influence in Sicilian Malta, particularly at the Bormla harbour. Other, but indirect, contacts with the Greek world happened during the thirteenth century when the

³⁷The inscription is quoted from Ciantar (1772, pp. 531–533, Lib. II, Not. XXXIII).

Genoese present in Malta armed and equipped vessels (Belgrano, and Imperiale di Sant'Angelo 1901, L, LIV) organised raids and attacks on the Venetian colonies of Corfu (De Negri 2003 (Rep. 2007), p. 329) and Candia (Belgrano and Imperiale di Sant'Angelo 1901, see Annales Ianvensis 1223, LIV, De Negri 2003, p. 330).

Conclusion

The study showed that Maltese toponyms and site names of Greek origins owing to their mirroring or actually containing Greek words occur at sea inlets and creeks which could have served as harbours or safe havens for navigating and maritime people (Figure 4) The occurrence of both toponyms and site names resulted higher in the south of Malta and around its ancient harbour, known as Bormla. All such harbours and inlets lead to the open sea facing the north-east to east-north-east direction: the navigation route to Greek lands and islands, with the exception of the Gozitan inlet which faces west.

Figure 4. Map of the Maltese Islands and the Harbour Sites with a Greek Toponym or Site Name



Figure 5. Close up of the Southern Part of Malta Where the Greek Place and Site Names Occur. Map Showing (from left to right) The village of Qormi (Q) and its Ancient Shoreline (S, yellow line), Marsa (M) and the Reclaimed Sea Area (R), the Inner Bormla Harbour Area (circled in yellow) and the Inlet of Marsascala (C). Courtesy: Google Maps and Google Earth



These finds show that contacts between the two cultures had a higher occurrence at maritime destinations such as harbours, ports of call and safe inlets. (Figures 4 and 5) Maritime communities were those who kept using such toponyms and site names through the centuries, and their use was recorded on documents as those mentioned in this study and works cited by the research. Events in history had however heightened the importance and use of the Greek language and Greek nautical terminology in the Maltese islands. Although coins and tangible artefacts can be dated with ease, the toponyms and site names could not be dated with precision even if the Maltese islands had for centuries experienced the use of Greek and were ruled by a Greek empire as that of the Byzantines. Greek presence more than colonisation could have happened prior to the Phoenicians' stronger arrival on the Maltese islands, but archaeological finds as the *cippi* and the minting of coins point to a commercial supremacy between the second and first centuries BC, first in Malta and later in Gozo, and which however was shadowed by the fast-growing Roman Empire even in the Maltese Islands. The toponyms and site names identified are therefore a heritage which can tell more about the meeting of the Maltese and Greek cultures in history.

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