

Ship Graffiti in Malta 1500–1900

Joseph Muscat

The tradition of incising graffiti into stone or rock is immemorial and spans cultures. Graffiti found on the walls of holy places are intimately connected with the religious culture of *ex-voto* offerings. Many of these depict ships, and indeed it is a fascinating exercise to compare ship graffiti from various countries. It is as if the same hand incised the same graffiti everywhere, as if they were a common heritage among sailors¹.

Of course, other motifs and images can be found in Maltese graffiti, but the focus here will be on representations of ships during the period in Maltese history stretching from 1500 to 1900².

It may be supposed that ship graffiti were so popular in Malta because of its geographical position in the centre of the Mediterranean. Undoubtedly, the maritime traditions of the islanders and the proportion of the population employed in this sector was a contributing factor. Additionally, the soft globigerina stone extensively employed in Malta for the building of temples, churches, prisons, fortifications, public and private buildings is a medium that lends itself to the incision of graffiti, and further explains the high incidence of such graffiti in a relatively small space.

Ships, especially in ancient times, were an integral part of human existence and their depiction in graffiti may be seen as an expression of deep personal affinities and callings. This helps to justify the granting of scholarly attention to a relatively neglected tradition. There is now greater appreciation of the necessity for the graffiti's preservation, and during these last twenty years restoration work on public buildings,

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1. J. Muscat, *Ship Graffiti – a comparative study* in A. Bonanno and A. Espinosa Rodriguez eds. *Journal of Mediterranean Studies*, vol. ix, no. 1, (Malta, 1999), 74 et seq.
 2. For a description of Maltese ship graffiti prior to 1500 see J. Muscat, *Il-Graffiti Marittimi Maltin* (Malta, 2002), 51 et seq.

especially church facades and other walls, has uncovered numerous graffiti of ships³.

Here it might be noted that the Italian word *graffito* came to be used to indicate the casual scratching onto walls of words and symbols, as found first in Rome and Pompei. Later it was applied to diverse kinds of illustrations or inscriptions on stone in other parts of the world.

In my opinion, a good number of graffiti on church walls could be classed as *ex-voto* offerings, even though they lack the characteristics by which votive acts are typically identified. Paintings containing the VFGA or *Votum Fecit Gratiam Accepit* in an inscription or in a cartouche are rightly recognised as prime examples of such offerings, together with quantities of other material donated to saints in acknowledgement of favours and graces received. These include lengths of ropes, pieces of tattered sails, chains, slaves' handcuffs, cannon balls, and bomb shells, as can be seen in various small churches in Malta and Gozo. Most of these are offered by those in peril of the sea or at risk of an attack by Muslim corsairs or some other calamity. Even if one can never trace a single written document which says that individual offerings were *ex-voto*, circumstantial evidence suggests that they were. What alternative purpose could be attributed to such items hanging in sacred places? Graffiti of ships may well have been intended in appreciation of what was perceived as saintly or divine intercession: in certain cases, the poor man's *ex-voto* offering, so to speak. Anecdotal evidence bears this out. In the Maltese village of Żebbuġ, an old woman who lives in the vicinity of Our Lady of the Forsaken (*Il-Madonna Ta' l-Abbandunati*) said that ever since she was a young girl she heard people saying that the graffiti on the façade were an act of devotion, a substitute for those who were not able to afford to buy a candle or to commission a small *ex-voto* painting.

One might insist that graffiti of ships might have been inscribed casually on the exterior of churches, without any religious purpose, as if in the manner of a visitor or a schoolboy idly inscribing his initials

3. Since publishing his book *Il-Graffiti Marittimi Maltin* in 2002 the author discovered enough new graffiti to justify the preparation of another book.

on a monument. Under such circumstances graffiti would not qualify as acts of piety. But if the graffiti on exterior walls of churches compare well with those found on the interior walls, one must ask if the latter were casually inscribed too or put there as part of a ritual to thank God and His saints for graces received. Surely no priest would allow any defacing of the exterior or interior of his church, if the graffito was not accepted as being an *ex-voto*⁴. But how then are we to explain ship graffiti on prison walls, private houses, bastions and other places? Here we must accept the fact that man is inclined to leave his mark in some way or another. In these cases one cannot accept the graffito as an *ex-voto*. There is no religious purpose to such an act; they may indeed be just casual incisions.

Whatever the intention behind them, it is interesting to note that the sites surveyed in Malta and Gozo for the purpose of this study showed an overall preponderance of ship motifs; no other motif compares in terms of quantity. In the case of churches and chapels all exterior and interior walls examined sometimes abounded with ships. This, indeed, is another argument in favour of interpreting such graffiti as *ex-voto* offerings. Who would otherwise permit such markings if they were not part of a well-established cult?

For the purpose of this study, out of 57 sites where ship graffiti were discovered, only 18 are represented. From those 18, 42 plaster casts were made, and exhibited in October 2004 in the old chapel of Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat, which now forms part of the premises hosting the National Archives. The following shows the list of sites:

Churches in Malta:

- 1 Saint Theresa Church, Bormla.
- 2 Church of the Visitation, Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ.
- 3 Our Lady of the Forsaken (*Madonna Ta' l-Abbandunati*), Żebbuġ.
- 4 Church of the Annunciation, Żebbuġ.
- 5 Saint Mary Church, Ha1 Muxi, Żebbuġ.

4. A. Luttrell, *Hal Millieri: A Maltese Casale, its Churches and Paintings*, (Malta, 1976), 81; *Ex-voto marins dans le monde de l'antiquite*, (Paris, 1981) 185, P. Cassar, *The Nautical Ex Votos of the Maltese Islands*, in *Maltese Folklore Review*, (Malta, 1966), I, no. 3.

- 6 Our Lady of Sorrows Church, Żebbuġ.
- 7 Parish Church, Żebbuġ.
- 8 Church of Our Lady of Good Hope (*Ta' l-Isperanza*), Mosta.
- 9 Saint Blaise Church, Siggiewi.
- 10 Church of the Immaculate Conception, Wied Gerżuma, Rabat.
- 11 Cemetery of Saint John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta.

Churches in Gozo:

- 12 The Old Parish Church, Qala,
- 13 Parish Church, Għajnsielem.
- 14 The Cathedral.

Public Places:

- 15 The Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu
- 16 Archaeological Museum, Gozo
- 17 Old Prison, Gozo.
- 18 Crafts Centre, Gozo.

It will be noticed that the greatest number of ship graffiti were discovered in Żebbuġ⁵.

In a ship graffito one normally sees the outline of a basic hull drawn with just a few lines. Occasionally, some graffiti are almost indistinct representations of ships. Yet they remain important as a testament to religious and other sentiments expressed through the ages, and indeed the number of ship graffiti incised on a church wall might well denote its degree of popularity or the perception of it as a place to give particular thanks for graces received⁶.

When details were included, they were often drawn without respecting proportion; the poor draughtsmanship, however, did often draw attention to important features of marine engineering. It is to be

5. All the ship graffiti found at Żebbuġ are published in J. Muscat, *Graffiti Marittimi f'Haż-Żebbuġ*, (Malta, 2003).

6. While, for example, on the walls of the Ta' l-Isperanza Church at Mosta only one ship graffito was found on those of the Church of the Visitation at Żebbuġ were discovered a great number of them.

expected that the quality of execution would vary. Some graffiti are rudimentarily expressed, and yet others are sufficiently intriguing to have warranted publication in these pages. Some graffiti of galleys, for instance, show excellent proportions and they must have been executed with a steady, practised hand, and not by a child or by someone who had never seen a galley in his life.

It will be noticed that most of the time graffiti were not incised with any attention to perspective. A three-dimensional effect, showing especially the sterns of ships, was occasionally attempted. The graffiti were never incised on walls as a decorative element, and visibility and prominence were not primary factors; indeed, the lightly incised representations cannot be seen from a distance of one or two metres. Graffiti were not required to be either elaborate or prestigious.

Graffiti of ships bear witness to problems faced by people who experienced or anticipated dangers at sea. It bears repeating that the graffiti under consideration here were not the result of casual scribbling or the work of those who had nothing better to do, effected as a reminder that “Kilroy was here”. They present humble but intense evidence of the vicissitudes of people whose identity will never be known. Unsurprisingly, it was not possible to uncover one clue about the identity of those responsible for these graffiti.

Most probably the authors sought to depict the ships they worked on or knew well; they recorded what they saw. The graffiti do not provide technical knowledge of marine design; yet they are a fair and basic depiction of different types of vessel – though it must be said that attempting to date the graffiti on the basis of the ships they depict or on the age of the building they adorn is a fraught and inconclusive enterprise.

With the increasing knowledge about ship graffiti and with the discovery of further great numbers of similar incisions locally and elsewhere, one has to treat them as a common heritage of humanity.

The study of graffiti requires some method of copying the representations for further investigation away from the place of their discovery.

Recording ship graffiti in Malta is facilitated as the system of local building uses a standard height of eleven inches for the stone

blocks. The height from the ground can be easily indicated by counting the relative stone courses. Unfortunately one still comes across the odd article discussing graffiti without revealing either the site or the precise indication of their location on a wall. Such an unsatisfactory method of recording ship graffiti leaves much to be desired and does not help the researcher who might like to make his own investigations.

Different researchers developed different methods of copying graffiti. The old method of rubbing is unsatisfactory nowadays when photography can be employed with much better results. Tracing graffiti on transparencies might work so long as no “extra” details are added. Rubber moulds were attempted, but again any parts of graffiti which were not perfectly cleaned did not appear on the mould. There were attempts to enhance the incisions of graffiti by applying pencil marks or graphite. Highlighting graffiti by employing white ink with a roller on black paper produced good results⁷. The method applied in the production of the plaster casts for the exhibition in Rabat involved the application of modelling wax to the graffito, and subsequently plaster was poured on the impression in wax, giving excellent results⁸.

The methodology necessary for the correct recording of graffiti is a slow process and one must be careful not to touch them up more than necessary. Any such intervention may lead to incorrect interpretation and speculation.

The interpretation of graffiti can be conditioned by the sensitivity of the researcher. Studies of a ship graffito at Tarxien, for instance, led to contrasting interpretations⁹. One must of course take into consideration the state of preservation of the graffiti through the ages, and avoid categorical conclusions. Nor should one be too optimistic in seeing what the bare outline of a hull of a ship does not show. The specialist may read more into a graffito than is really there, while the non-specialist may be unable to identify the type of ship depicted.

7. See method applied in Cahingt, H. *Les Murs qui Parlent – Le Navire en Graffiti*, (Dieppe, 1990).

8. The representations of the graffiti found in this study were photographed from the plaster replicas produced by the author.

9. See Muscat, *Ship Graffiti – A Comparative Study*, 92, fig.1

Consequently the exchange of opinions and interpretations is essential in work on the graffiti.

Hence, with special reference to the graffiti exhibited at the National Archives, Rabat, one can advance some considerations after an attentive examination of what they depict and of their context. A photograph of each, with an accompanying description, is given below. Some of them are detailed; others are indistinct. One must keep in mind the inevitable damage to the stone surface because of the ravages of time and the negligence of men. Unfortunately good graffiti have been damaged and recent superimpositions in some cases defaced the original ones to a great extent. This can be said of the majority of the graffiti sites in the Maltese Islands.

At the 18 sites examined only three non-maritime images were found. It is interesting to note that in this collection of graffiti one can see the smallest ship graffito ever found in the Maltese Islands up to now. It is only 1 cm long (see graffito 13). One of the largest graffiti ever found was also reproduced (see graffito 27).

Among the kinds of ship identified there is the lateen-rigged brigantine; in the graffiti, one is equipped with three masts and another one with two. It is interesting to note that one brigantine is represented towing its caique. The galley of the Order of St John is shown more than once and in detail, with the hull, oars and cabins in the stern all quite distinct.

The early 16th century carrack depicted on a block of stone in Gozo is an impressive and rare graffito; the bows are slightly defaced, however, because the stone is badly damaged at that point. The carrack is towing its brigantine, whilst the hull in this particular graffito is richly decorated¹⁰.

This collection of ship graffiti shows at least three galleons, with one found at St Theresa church in Bormla being in a class of its own. I must emphasize the fact that certain graffiti were incised by expert hands¹¹.

10. For details about the carracks of the Order see J. Muscat, *The Carrack of the Order*, (Malta, 2000) and J. Muscat, representations of the Carrack Sant' Anna in G. Cassar, *Sacra Militia*, (Malta, 2002), Issue no.1, April, 40–48.

11. For a description of the galleon see J. Muscat and A. Cuschieri, *Naval Activities of the Knights of St John 1530–1798*, (Malta, 2002), 20 et seq.

The lateen-rigged *tartana*¹², being a popular merchant ship among Maltese *padroni*, features at least four times in this collection of graffiti. It may be dated to the first half of the 18th century when this type of ship was employed quite often in voyages round the Mediterranean. Square-rigged vessels are shown also and among these one can see the great warship represented on the walls of the chapel at Hal Muxi, Żebbuġ. Also shown is a third-rate ship-of-the-line of the Order of St John and perhaps also the Maltese two-masted *vascellotto*¹³, which was primarily a merchant ship.

The great Maltese 19th century merchant ships are represented also, with a deeply incised graffito of a *navi* and another one showing a wine schooner¹⁴.

The smallest ever discovered ship graffito at Żebbuġ represents a *fregatina* under a lateen sail. Maltese ship graffiti are more often than not decorated with pittings which do not necessarily represent gun ports on ships. Such pittings might stand for a system of accounting for the passing of time. They recall similar decorations to be found in Maltese ancient temples.

The frequent representation of the flag of the Order of St John is a good indication of its influence on Maltese life. Sometimes the great standard of the Order is shown hoisted on the stern of ships but the common flag can be seen also at mastheads, and sometimes the burgee and the pennant are represented too. On one graffito one can see the flag of Grand Master Cottoner.

Some additional incidental remarks may be given here. The sight of a graffito of the Devil at Żebbuġ does not necessarily indicate the presence of satanism. Indeed, among the hundreds of graffiti studied in the Maltese Islands I came across only three such representations¹⁵. The human figure incised at Żebbuġ might represent a saint or a sinner. Similar graffiti found elsewhere can be counted on the palm

12. NLM 223 s.v. *Tartana*

13. NLM 223 s.v. *Vascellotto*

14. A good number of Maltese 19th century merchant ships are represented in the Maltese *ex-voto* paintings found in the churches of the Maltese Islands.

15. The representation of the devil was found amongst the graffiti discovered on the walls of the San Girgour Church at Żejtun and St James Church in Valetta.

of one hand¹⁶. The tiny representation of an anchor found on a broken surface of a stone block might be a small part of a sizeable ship graffiti, although elsewhere I came across other anchors represented separately from graffiti of ships.

Looking at the plaster impressions of ship graffiti which were exhibited at Rabat might help to introduce the subject to various people but to see the ship graffiti themselves in situ on church walls or elsewhere will induce people to think and ask questions about their significance. To those initiated in the subject they represent an eloquent witness to past lives and circumstances, and they might even suggest that stones do talk if one would only care to listen!



Graffito 1: Church of the Visitation at Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

The ship depicted here is not easily identified. The bows show the tall fore stem with its long spur, and we can also see a high stern with some decorations on the side. The hull is quite low in the water and there is one wale running from bows to stern denoting the presence of a deck.

There are few oars in the water. However, the vessel has two masts rigged with square sails. We can see the crescent at the head of the foremast and the cross just above the spur. Unfortunately the various vandals' marks superimposed on the graffiti of the ship ruined its overall pleasing effect.

16. The human figure appears on the walls of a private house at Żejtun, at the Inquisitor's Palace in Birgu and at the Church of the Visitation at Żebbuġ.



Graffito 2: Cemetery of St John Church, Valletta

This badly damaged graffito represents a galleon, showing a high forecastle with its cutwater and beak head, the waist, the quarter and poop decks. There are several horizontal lines on the hull and there is an indication of the mainmast with its shrouds, but one can hardly see a trace of the other masts

or their sails, except part for the jib-boom.

Graffito 3: Cemetery of St John Church, Valletta

The galleon of the Order depicted in the graffito shows a fairly good profile with a raised forecastle, the waist, quarter and poop decks. The cutwater and beak head at the bows are slightly out of proportion with the rest of the image. A closer look reveals the gammoning holding the bowsprit in place. As the graffito is defaced by various incisions, the sail arrangement is indistinct although one can see the topgallant sail in place. The straight main mast, indicated with a deep incision, must have been done with the help of a ruler. Some shrouds of the masts can be seen but the flags at the bowsprit and at the head of the mainmast cannot be made out. In the right hand top corner one can see a graffito of another small vessel.

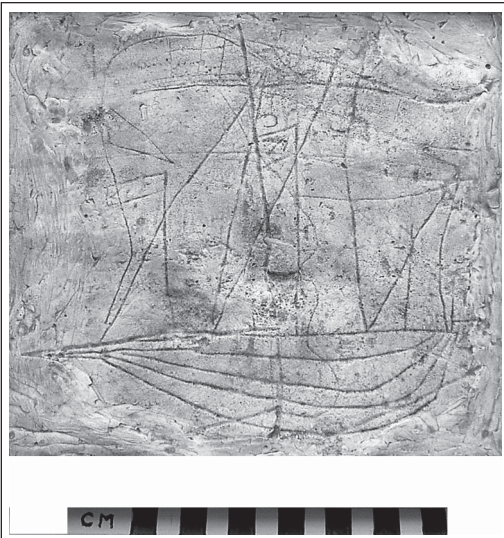


Graffito 4: Old Prison, Gozo

This quite indistinct ship graffiti performed with deep incisions appears to be the work of an experienced person. It shows a mainmast fully rigged with square sails and the mizzen is provided with a lateen sail. The lower sail of the mainmast is furled to its yard and the other ones show the sail cloths. The queer spur at the bows is rather anachronistic and the stern is provided with an unusual type of cabin. The flag hoisted at the stern does not show any distinguishing marks while the hull is marked with a great number of incisions which could be decorative, though they may also represent some type of time computation system.



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*Graffito 5: Church of the Visitation at Wied Qirda
Żebbuġ*

The graffiti of this unidentified three-masted ship shows a rounded hull with three incisions representing most probably the strakes of the freeboard; at the bows one can see a short bowsprit. The masts are rigged with lateen sails and there are unidentified flags at the head of the fore and main

masts. Although the graffiti lacks detail, one can appreciate the proportions in the sail area of the three masts.



Graffito 6: St Blaise Church, Siggiewi

This deeply-incised graffito most probably represents the Maltese *tartana*. It is shown as having a high freeboard and a raised stern but the bows leave much to be desired. The three masts are equipped with lateen sails and there are pennants flying at the heads of the fore and main masts. The shape of

another flag shown between the masts cannot be explained. The deep pittings on the hull may carry an unspecifiable special meaning, apart from being an element of decoration.

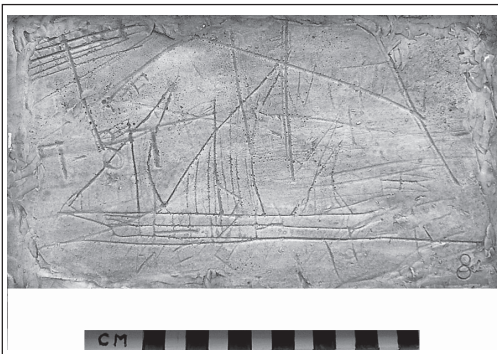
Graffito 7: Church of Our Lady of Sorrows, Żebbuġ

The graffito is badly defaced, but shows the low freeboard of a ship with a raised stern and the bow. One can see the mainmast which flies, at its head, the flag of the Order and perhaps the foremast; both masts are equipped with their shrouds.



Graffito 8: Qala Church, Gozo

This deeply incised graffito shows a good profile of an early 17th century galleon. Unfortunately one can see only the foremast as the other masts, together with their sails, must have faded away over the years. The hull profile shows the forecastle, the waist, the quarter and poop decks; at the bows one can see the beak head and the cutwater. The main wale on the hull indicates the presence of the gun deck but the pittings do not necessarily represent the gun ports but are an element of decoration as normally found on Maltese ship graffiti.



Graffito 9: The Church of the Forsaken, Żebbuġ

The vessel could well represent an 18th-century three-masted Maltese brigantine. It is rigged with lateen sails on the three masts. The hull is provided with a spur at the bows and a raised stern surmounted by a burgee of the Order. The flag of the Order flies also at the fore mast and there may be another similar one at the main. Unfortunately the graffito is badly scratched but shows excellent proportions between the hull and sails area. On the bows one can see the representation of a gun pointing forward.



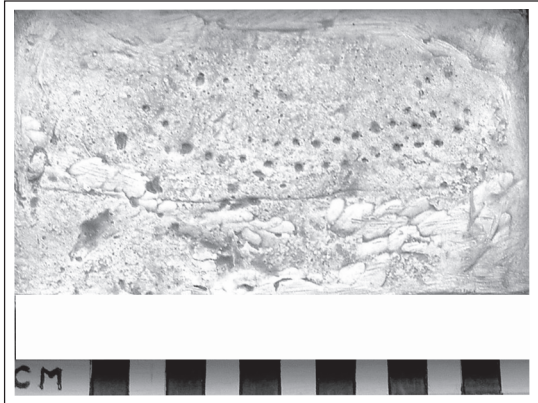
Graffito 10: Church of the Visitation, Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

The deeply incised graffito shows a square-rigged vessel having three masts and a bowsprit. There are two square sails on the fore and main masts. The mizzen is rigged with a lateen sail while there are two sprit

sails on the bowsprit. The profile of the ship shows a raised forecastle and high stern which carries on it the standard of the Order. The square sails are complete with their cloths while one can see the shrouds on the fore and main masts and the main wales on the hull.

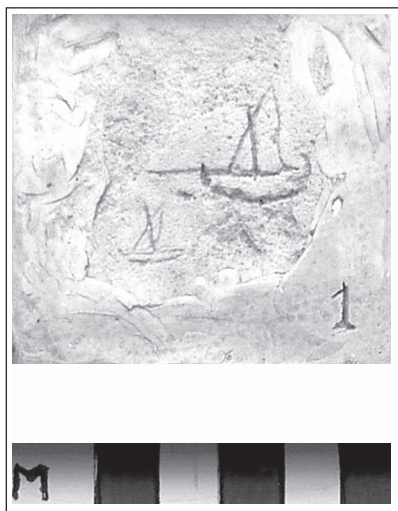
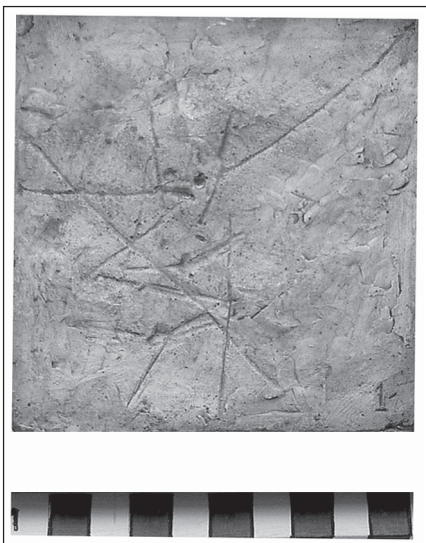
Graffito 11: Church of the Annunciation, Żebbuġ

Looking attentively at the graffito one can see the shape of a ship's hull delineated by a number of pittings to show the hull. Maybe the graffito was never completed or it was meant to be left in its present shape.



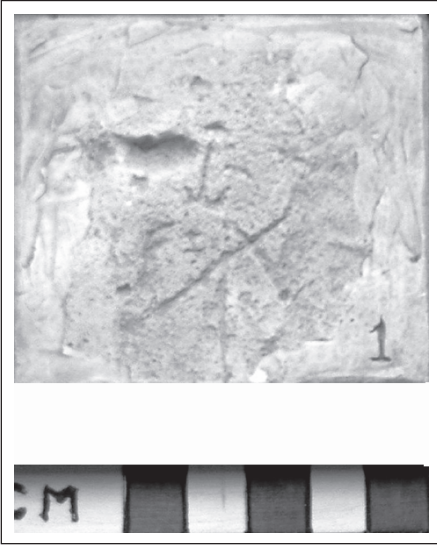
Graffito 12: The Church of the Visitation, Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

The representation of the Devil in Maltese graffiti appears only three times. This one must have been incised by one of the *Dejma* soldiers who had nothing else to do and who resided in the barracks situated opposite the church. The deeply marked eyes and mouth are surmounted by the tall pointed ears and apparently the figure holds a spear on his right shoulder and another one in his left hand.



Graffito 13: The Church of the Visitation at Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

This is the smallest ever ship graffiti found in the Maltese Islands up to now. It may represent a *fregatina* rigged with a lateen sail having a tall fore stem at the bows. One can appreciate, notwithstanding the size of the graffiti, the correct proportions between hull and sail. The upper slightly greater graffiti shows a similar vessel having a bowsprit at the bows and a partly reefed lateen sail.



Graffito 14: The Visitation Church at Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

The graffito shows a tiny anchor having an iron ring and two flukes. Beneath this anchor there are a few other incisions but as the stone area is badly weathered, one can hardly make out any other images.

Graffito 15: Church of the Visitation at Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

This deeply incised graffito of an unidentified ship shows a high freeboard with one wale on it, an indication that it carried one deck. The vessel is equipped with two square-rigged masts having a long bowsprit and a flag with two vertical sections.



Graffito 16: Archaeological Museum, Gozo

The incision found on a block of stone shows an early 16th-century carrack towing its great boat or brigantine in its wake. The graffito shows a typical carrack with a substantial hull, a high

forecastle and a stern decorated with simple geometrical elements. The thick main and the mizzen masts are slanting backwards with their respective yard and antenna, which can hardly be seen. Part of the fore mast with its sail can be seen but the rest is lost because of the damaged area of the stone block. It will be noticed that the rudder is seen complete with its pintles.



Graffito 17: Our Lady of Sorrows Church, Żebbuġ

The graffito represents a square-rigged ship having a high forecastle, the waist and the poop deck with a three-dimensional stern complete with the balcony and windows. The scroll type of figurehead looks somewhat out of proportion in respect of the bows. The bowsprit is visible also. The fore and main masts are equipped with their square sails but they are erroneously depicted as they face the stern.

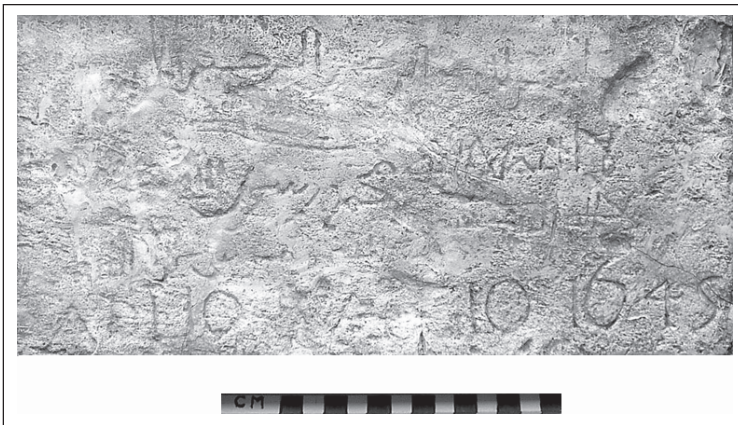




Graffito 18: Church of the Forsaken, Żebbuġ

The deeply incised graffito shows most probably a Maltese *tartana* equipped with three lateen rigged masts. The high freeboard of the hull is marked with one line suggesting that the vessel was built with one deck. The pittings shown do not represent the gun ports as two of them can be seen on the lower part of the mizzen sail. They must have some other connotation. The spur on the cutwater, the slightly raised stern and the rudder can be clearly distinguished on this graffito.

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Graffito 19: The Inquisitor's Palace, Birgu

The graffito was probably the work of a slave, who after converting to Christianity returned to his former beliefs with the result of being imprisoned for abjuring his faith. The inscription shows the year 1645 and the Muslim act of faith: In the name of Allah, Mohammed is the prophet of Allah . . . there is no God but Allah . . . and Moses . . . of Allah.

Graffito 20: Parish Church, Żebbuġ

In a room on the roof of the church housing the mechanism of the church clock, there is a graffito which shows a great warship of the Order of St John having very interesting details, including



the scroll type of figurehead, the forecastle, the waist, the poop deck and the three-dimensional presentation of the stern showing a good amount of decorations. The masts are shown complete with their square sails, with a sprit at the bows and a mizzen one furled to its antenna together with its topsail. The huge standard of the Order is hoisted at the stern and one can see other flags of the Order on the mast heads. The hull is decorated with slanting lines and other marks. The masts' shrouds are noticeable in various parts of the graffito. The score block is broken in two but it is still in its place.



Graffito 21: Church of the Visitation at Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

Though significantly defaced, this graffito of a 17th-century galley of the Order of St John presents a good example of work done by an experienced member of the crew.

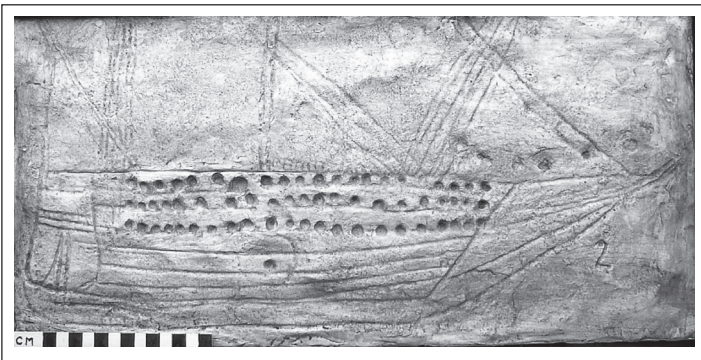
The low hull, the oars, the *rambata* and the long spur at the bows and the high stern cabin, together with the lateen sail spread on the fore mast, are the normal characteristics of a galley. The flag of the Order is hoisted at the *calcese*, or mast head of the fore mast. The main mast is shown with its shrouds but its antenna and sail can hardly be deciphered. The pittings beneath the *rambata* and on the hull at water level cannot be accounted as an element of decoration but rather as a means of computing time. One can also see the huge lantern on the lightly decorated cabin.



Graffiti 22: The Cathedral, Gozo

The deeply incised graffito, which has suffered badly through the weathering effect on the stone, shows a Maltese *tartana* having a fairly high freeboard, the spur on its

cutwater at the bows, a high stern together with three lateen-rigged masts. The sails show a number of cloths and there is an unusual flag at the head of the main mast showing, probably, the St. Andrew's cross. The mizzen mast is too much astern to be realistic.



Graffiti 23: Church of the Immaculate Conception at Wied Gerżuma, Rabat

Most probably the graffito represents an 18th-century Maltese *tartana*. It has an elongated spur at the bows, a flat stern and it is rigged with three lateen sails on three masts. On the high freeboard of the hull, there are three rows of pittings which could have never represented gun ports, and below these there are five horizontal incisions from stern to bow representing its strakes. At the stern one can see an attempt to show the rudder, the *dragant* and the windows of the master's cabin, while at the bows the cutwater is clearly indicated with at least five incisions joined together at the tip of the spur.

Graffito 24: Crafts Centre, Gozo

This deeply incised great graffito represents a great local 19th-century merchant ship known locally as a *navi*, showing a high freeboard, one main wale (because the



vessel was equipped with one main deck), three masts rigged with square sails, having a top sail on the spanker, staysails and jibs. The lower sails of the main and fore masts are furled to their yards. All sails are shown with their respective number of cloths and apart from some rigging, one can see an attempt to represent the shrouds too.



Graffito 25: Saint Blaise Church, Siggiewi

The deeply incised but badly weathered graffito shows just the presence of three lateen-rigged masts and a portion of the hull. Maybe the rest of this graffito was obliterated by the plaster pointing of the stone. The sails are shown with an indication of their cloths and perhaps an unidentified small flag at the fore mast and

a blank large one at the stern can be made out.

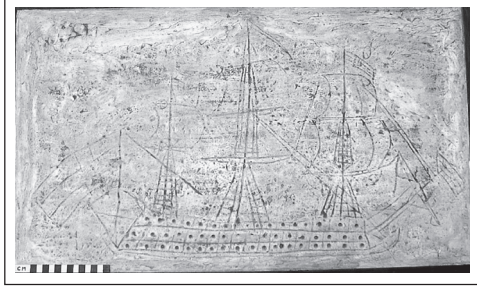


Graffito 26: Parish Church, Żebbuġ

This lightly incised graffito represents a galley of the Order of St John having a very low freeboard, a long spur, a *rambata* at the bows, a high stern cabin and three lateen-rigged masts. The huge standard of the Order appears on the stern. The sails are very faintly visible although the fore and main antennas can be seen fairly well.

Graffito 27: Saint Mary Church at Hal Muxi, Żebbuġ

The graffito represents a square-rigged warship of the Order of St John having three decks, showing a three-dimensional stern and a scroll type of figure head at the bows. The three masts are rigged with square sails, a lateen one at the mizzen and a spritsail at the bowsprit. A great standard of the Order flies at the stern while other similar flags are hoisted on all masts and at the bowsprit. The pittings shown on the hull do not represent the gun ports but were intended as a decorative element.



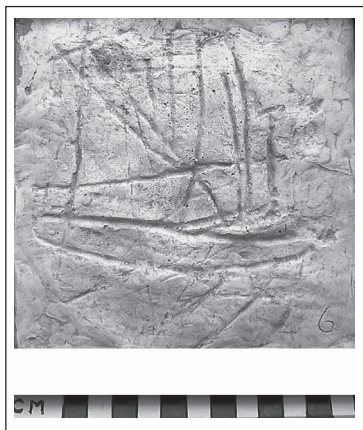
Graffito 28: Church of the Visitation at Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ



The one-mast, lateen-rigged vessel is equipped with oars, has a low freeboard, a raised stern and a long bowsprit. The V-shaped stern is probably an attempt at three-dimensional representation. The vessel was provided also with a jib at the bows.

Graffito 29: Old Prison, Gozo

At the entrance of the place and on the wall behind the guides' desk, there is a deeply incised graffito of an unidentified vessel. One can see a fairly high hull, a lateen sail and perhaps a few oars in the water. The several upright incisions can hardly represent masts. There is perhaps the flag of the Order or the main mast.



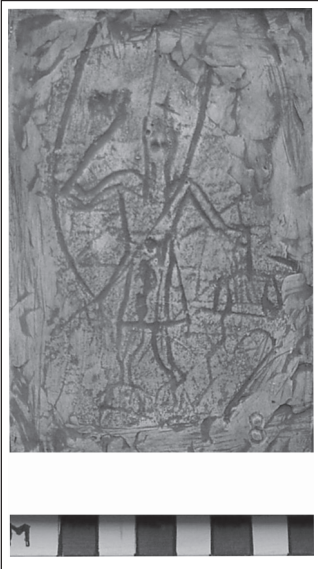
Graffito 30: The Church of the Forsaken Żebbuġ

The unidentified vessel with a low freeboard is equipped with three lateen-rigged masts and eight oars on each side. There is the flag of the Order at the fore mast but the chequered one at the bowsprit cannot be deciphered. One can see neither the sails nor the rigging on the masts.

Graffiti 31: The Church of the Visitation at Wied Qirda, Żebbuġ

The graffito shows a deeply incised hull of a vessel with a high freeboard and a rounded keel. The two masts are rigged with a square sail on each and the foot of the main one rests on the keel. While the bows are pointed the shape of the stern is partly obliterated.





Graffiti 32: The Church of the Forsaken, Żebbuġ

This unusual and enigmatic representation of the human figure shows a man dressed in a tunic worn down to the knees, holding an object in his left hand and something else in his right one. The figure and the motives behind its depiction are open to interpretation.

Graffito 33: St Theresa Church, Bormla

This graffito represents a galleon of the Order of St John which shows some very interesting features. The graffito shows an excellent profile of a 16th-century galleon complete with its gun ports, strakes, high stern surmounted with a battle standard and the great lantern decorated with the eight-pointed cross. The bows show the forecastle and the beak head without a figurehead. The main and fore masts are completed with their square sails and shrouds. The mizzen mast is in place but without its antenna. The bowsprit is partly defaced.



Graffiti 34: Church of the Annunciation, Żebbuġ

One can see a lateen-rigged vessel to the left and another one in its wake. In their midst, one can perceive a chequered square, with no very apparent or clear connection between the three figures. The first vessel is equipped with a raised bow and stern; the lateen sails are in place. Beneath the hull there are slanting parallel lines unconnected to the main figure. The lightly incised vessel seen to the right of the first vessel is almost identical to it.



Graffito 35: Saint Theresa Church Bormla

The two-masted Maltese lateen-rigged brigantine is shown towing its caique at the stern. The high fore stem is clearly shown at the bows, together with its spur or *sperone*, while at the stern

one can perceive the rudder. The two lateen sails are set in place and the flag of the Order of St John is hoisted at the head of the main mast. The sails are represented with their respective number of cloths. The hull shows two wales running from bow to stern.



Graffiti 36: Ghajnsielem Church, Gozo

The deeply incised graffito represents, most probably, a late 19th-century two-masted wine schooner. The excessively high freeboard shows the profile of a clipper at the bows with a rounded

counter at the stern. The sheer strake is clearly represented. Note how the masts are shown with their feet resting on the keel. Two spanker sails are rigged on both masts with a small topsail at the main and two or three jibs at the bows. The chequered fore spanker might show a method of decoration while on the main sail there are lightly incised similar decorations.

Graffiti 37: Saint Theresa Church, Bormla

Most probably the graffito shows an early 18th-century two-masted Maltese *vascelotto* or small warship. Such a vessel operated by Maltese masters was employed mostly as a merchant ship rather than as a warship. One can notice the high freeboard, a decorated stern and the beak head at the bows. The

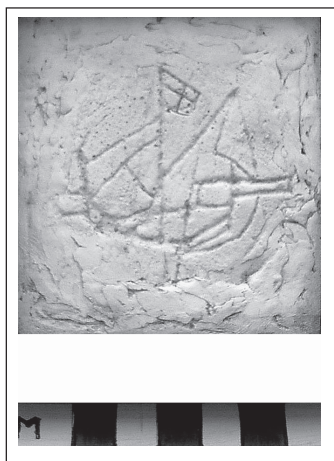


excessively large flag of the Order at the stern is out of proportion with the rest of the vessel. One can see the sail yards on the two masts with the bowsprit rigged with its stays to the foremast. At the head of this mast, there is another flag of the Order, while a pennant flies at the main. One can see the principal wales of the hull and the windows of the master's cabin at the stern.

Graffito 38: Saint Theresa Church, Bormla

This graffito is almost a replica on a reduced scale of the one showing a two-masted Maltese lateen-rigged brigantine (see also Graffito 35). This one lacks the details of the fore stem and its spur

and the rudder at the stern. It shows two wales, and two masts rigged with lateen sails which are shown with their cloths. The flag of the Order is hoisted at the head of the main mast.



Graffito 39: Old Prison, Gozo

This small graffito represents an unidentified vessel which flies the flag of the Order at the main mast.

Graffito 40: Old Prison, Gozo

This badly defaced, deeply incised graffito could have represented a square-rigged ship but unfortunately the hull has disappeared completely.





Graffito 41: Saint Theresa Church, Bormla

The graffito represents a two-masted lateen-rigged vessel, perhaps a 17th-century galley of the Order of St John but the detail on the hull leaves much to be desired. Besides the two lateen sails represented with their cloths, the vessel is provided with several oars, the colours of perhaps Grand Master Cottoner at the fore and an unidentified one at the main; there

is the standard of the Order at the stern. Unfortunately the graffito carries several later marks of vandalism.

Graffito 42: The Church of Our Lady of Good Hope, Mosta

On the back wall of the church, there is a graffito showing the hull of a ship and a mast but the rest of the vessel has been defaced.

