

Title

Building The *Dghajsa Tal-Pass* in Grand Harbour
from early times to the present

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Abstract <p>It is natural that as inhabitants of small islands located in between two large continental mainlands, people on the Maltese islands are compelled to adapt themselves to a life with strong attachment to the sea, and have developed a number of skills in relation to the sea including boat building. They developed a number of different sea craft to address the many economical and social requirements, and one of the most notable is the <i>dgħajsa tal-pass</i>, which has been ferrying people across the harbour for centuries.</p> <p>The study aims to describe the evolution of the <i>dgħajsa tal-pass</i>, and its several uses across the years and looks at the close connection it has with the communities surrounding the Grand Harbour, particularly the Cottonera area, up till the present day.</p> <p>It is based on a review of literature, and qualitative research through narrative approach, which involved various visits to workshops of boatbuilders, boat trips and a visit to the Maritime Museum.</p> <p>In doing so the study reveals the general scarcity of documented material about the <i>dgħajsa tal-pass</i> and even less so on the boatbuilding artisanship, which should be considered as a living heritage, and its survival supported and strengthened without losing its authenticity.</p>			
Keywords Dgħajsa Tal-Pass; Boat building; Grand Harbour			

Declaration of Authenticity



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Declaration:

I hereby declare that this research study is based on the outcome of my own research. I, as the author, declare that this research study is my own composition which has not been previously produced for any other qualification.

The research study was conducted under the supervision of Mr Michael Cassar.

Date

Student's Signature

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I have always wanted to explore and discover more about this subject. It was at the beginning that I realised how vast this subject is. The boating industry has always been a protagonist throughout the history of the Grand Harbour, especially of the Three Cities. After reading and coming across detailed information about the area by Mr. Michael Cassar (Academic) I established contact and he joined me several times on-site for discussions on the area. He, also accepted to be my tutor for this long essay; My undertaking would have not been possible without his knowledge and guidance.

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 Contextualising the Study

Malta's timeline starts at around 5200 B.C. when the first stone age farmers came to these shores. It is plausible to say that from these times man had to build some kind of craft to cross over to these islands. From archaeological excavations and studies, like obsidian found in Skorba that must have been imported from Lipari (Trump, 2002) it is surmised that seacraft were already available. Although we have no evidence that these early craft were constructed locally, some kind of maintenance and repair would have been necessary.

Through strategic geographical location in the middle of the Mediterranean, enriched with their natural sheltered harbours, the Maltese islands were undoubtedly attractive to a number of sea-faring traders and empires that roamed the Middle Sea throughout various historical eras. As early as the first century BCE, in his 'Universal History', the Sicilian-Greek historian Diodorus Siculus, described the Maltese islands as three Phoenician island colonies to the south of Sicily "*each of them possesses a city and harbours which can offer safety to ships in rough weather.*" Cited in (Bonanno, 2005, p. 11).

With such a longstanding strong maritime association, one would expect that the boat-building trade in Malta goes back to very early times; However, it was when Malta was under the Order of St John, from 1530 to 1798 that the trade flourished and developed. It is safe to assume that boat building has been vital for the Maltese economy and is probably one of the earliest trades.

1.2 Objective

The National Archives at Santo Spirito, Rabat are rich with documentation relating to the registration of boats and regulations from the time of the Order of St John. There are several references to structures and buildings, like ship sheds, arsenals, and slipways that indicate this to have been a very important activity. In these archives, there are several references to a small boat that originated to offer ferry services across the Grand Harbour, what came to be known as the *dgħajsa tal-pass*.

The *dgħajsa tal-pass* is one of the few seacraft from those times that survived the test of time; Despite technological and socio economical developments that Malta has gone through the ages, scores of these boats still grace the Grand Harbour to the present day. As ferrying across the harbour between

the Three Cities and Valletta is today mainly served by a much larger and modern catamaran, the *dgħajsa tal-pass* is mainly used by tourists who are attracted to its charming and quaint qualities.

The purpose of this study is to use published material for information on the boats and the environs, supported by personal reviews from local boatbuilders and boatmen of *dgħajjes tal-pass* who continue to make a living from them.

The study aims to describe how the construction of the Maltese *dgħajsa tal-pass* developed, its notable features and its contemporary value. This analysis serves as a source of information for guided tours, to provide visitors with an authentic experience of Maltese sociocultural heritage through a progressive commentary on both social and economical development.

2.0 Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

It is natural that as inhabitants of small islands strategically located in between two large continental mainlands, people on the Maltese islands are compelled to adapt themselves to a life with strong attachment to the sea, more than those who reside on the mainland, especially ones far from the coast. Being an archipelago, the Maltese islands further create the need for inter-island connectivity, especially between the two largest islands : Malta and Gozo. According to the French historian Henri Bresc, in 1241 there already existed an established, regular means of sea communication by boat between Mgarr in Gozo and Marfa. At that time it was known as *dgħajsa tal-mogħdija* (Caruana, 2019) and it was used to transport passengers, commodities, and animals. This shows that ferry services, together with the skills and trades related with them go back centuries.

As the Maltese people acquired the skills in boatbuilding and sailing, they started putting them to good use, such as for transport, commerce, fishing and also for corsairing. As explained by Vella (1974), in Medieval times the Maltese were very active in the corsairing industry, as it was arguably much more profitable than other trades such as the exportation of cotton. In fact, Vella (1974) estimates that during the seventeenth century, corsairing accounted for the employment of around half the male workforce of the islands. In order, for such an activity to be sustained there was a need for a number of seacraft.

Muscat (2001) explains that the Maltese gained new skills from the boatbuilders of the Order of St. John, in addition to other maritime trade-related skills. During this time shipbuilding flourished, and dockyards grew in size and sophistication, and boats of all sizes were constructed. The Maltese boatbuilding activity at that time, which was mostly concentrated around the Grand Harbour, produced what Muscat (2001) claims to have been considered amongst the best sea craft of their class and size.

Caruana (2019) explains that the Maltese continued to refine their skills in the maritime industry, augmented by increased demand under British rule. More docks were built by the Admiralty for the Royal Navy base, and is estimated that at times it employed over 14,000 people. In addition to the establishment of a number of ship agents and importers, Caruana (2019) writes that a number of

people set up their own small boat-building workshops in Kalkara Creek, Senglea and Birgu. Most of them specialised in building *dgħajjes tal-pass*, which were used to carry passengers in Grand Harbour, as their services were in increased demand with the growing activity in the Harbour.

2.2 *Dgħajsa tal-Pass*

2.2.1 Term

The Maltese general term for any small boat is *dgħajsa*. This has been in usage for many centuries, and was used to refer to a number of different vessel types with similar characteristics, such as *dgħajsa tal-latini* or Gozo boat, *dgħajsa tat-tagħbija* referring to the cargo boat, and the *dgħajsa tal-pass*, or passenger boat. According to Muscat (1999) it was during the British period that the word *dgħajsa* became associated with the traditional boat used by passengers in the Grand Harbour. It is said that the British servicemen stationed in Malta corrupted the term to *dyso*.

In view of this adopted association, in this essay the author uses the terms *dgħajsa* and *dgħajsa tal-pass* interchangeably.

2.2.2 Origins

The Maltese *dgħajsa* has been incorrectly attributed as being of Phoenician origin. There is a myth that under the Phoenician rule, shipbuilding in Malta thrived. Malta's location in the midst of the Mediterranean Sea suggests that it must have been significant to Phoenician traders. However, so far, not a single Phoenician boat-building artefact from that period has been discovered. There is no information on the appearance of a Maltese boat during the Phoenician era and in Muscat's (1999) view there is no relationship between the *dgħajsa tal-pass* and the Phoenician boat portrayed on a wall relief from the palace of Saragon II.

Furthermore, Muscat (1999) asserts that there is no reliable evidence to back up the claim that the *dgħajsa* is descended from the Venetian gondola. There is a significant difference between a *dgħajsa* and a gondola. The theory of the *dgħajsa* originating from the gondola is rooted in the assumption that when Venetian galleons started visiting Malta in the fifteenth century, they were served with

gondolas to embark and disembark crew and provisions; However, according to Muscat (1999) there was no need to imitate the gondola because by that time Maltese boatbuilders had already created their own style of harbour craft.

Muscat (1999) also makes reference to a Valletta gondola exhibited at the Science Museum in London, and further emphasizes the incorrect comparison between the *dgħajsa* and the gondola. The model is labelled as resembling 'one of the gondolas which were once in common use in Valletta Harbour', but Muscat (1999) claims that such ceremonial gondolas were never produced in great numbers and were totally distinct from their Venetian equivalent and if the name "gondola" can be justified, it is because the stems are rounded and spiral, precisely as the ones on the ceremonial gondola model from Wignacourt that was on display at the Maritime Museum.

The various *dgħajjes* one sees at the Grand Harbour today still feature the graceful double ended open boat design with the distinctive scimitar like stems at both ends, adorned in the colourful schemes, reminiscent of the centuries old *dgħajsa* whose origins are still obscure or subject to debate, but Muscat (1999) is convinced that it is uniquely Maltese, and evolved through the years to address the necessities of different eras.

2.3 Building of the Dgħajsa

Very little to no science or mathematical calculations are applied in the building of the *dgħajsa*. Local boatbuilders work by rule of thumb, and the trade is often inherited through generations, with the son inheriting his father's tools, templates and importantly the name. *"Sometimes they tend to overestimate their capabilities and assert that there are no boatbuilders elsewhere to match their expertise!"* (Muscat, 1999, p. 33). The centuries old tradition may have influenced their belief that they had exclusive 'secrets' in their craft. But a visit to Sicily or Greece would reveal how boatbuilders use systems similar to Malta's.

Muscat (1999) claims that boatmen can detect the builder of a boat from its peculiarities and how it behaves at sea.

In the past there were various boat builders in various harbour localities such as Mgarr (Gozo), Marsa, Vittoriosa and Senglea, but according to Muscat (1999) the builders of the *dgħajsa* at Kalkara were considered to be best. In his book, Muscat (1999) claims that there is only one *dgħajsa* builder left in Vittoriosa, who normally builds and repairs racing boats. However, during the course of the research, the author came across more than one builder in the Cottonera area, despite only one considered the trade as his full time occupation.

3.0 Methodology

3.1 The Study

The primary focus of this research is the *Dgħajsa Tal-Pass*, and its evolution in terms of creation and use. The author attempted to clarify the history of its origins and explain its relationship to Grand Harbour and surrounding areas, and how its construction can vary according to its intended uses. The research methodology is described in the sections that follow, along with an explanation of the procedures and techniques used to answer the following questions: What is the connection between the *Dgħajsa Tal-Pass* and the Grand Harbour and the surrounding communities? Is there still a future for its purpose?

3.2 The Sample

Whilst, as already mentioned, the word *dgħajsa*, is the general Maltese term for boat, and there have been and still are various different boats that can claim to be of Maltese origin and are built through traditional methods, for the purpose of this study, the research focuses on one specific type: *Dgħajsa tal-pass*, even though the shortened term *dgħajsa* is used interchangeably in this essay.

Since the research question revolves around the relationship between the *dgħajsa* and the Grand Harbour and surrounding communities, all primary sources of data had a strong connection with the area, and all of the people interviewed hailed from the area, mostly from the Cottonera.

The choice of subject selection was primarily determined by the apparent resurgence in the popularity of the *dgħajsa* as a quaint water taxi service in the Grand Harbour, along with the author's passionate interest in the *dgħajsa* and the Cottonera area, where she lives.

The research participants included three boat builders, a retired fishermen and rope maker, a boatman, a regatta rower, and a regatta enthusiast.

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The research was performed in a qualitative manner, primarily adopting a narrative approach through interviews, visits to workshops and taking boat trips, to collect stories and experiences which were then examined and analysed to get a deeper understanding of the perception of contemporary actors who still undergo activity relating to the *dgħajsa*.

Primary data collection from interviews and observations was further complemented with secondary sources, from a number of books and other published materials. It became apparent to the author that the *dgħajsa tal-pass* is very much underserved in terms of study and documented research, barring the work of Joseph Muscat a maritime historian who has carried out extensive research on Maltese ships and boats, ex voto paintings, ship graffiti, as well as the navy of the Order of St John, and which has been invaluable, and extensively used for this study.

In addition, the researcher conducted a number of conversations with a number of people who have a passion towards Maltese maritime history, particularly in connection with the Grand Harbour area and who were very willing to share their knowledge and whose guidance was instrumental. Amongst them was a historian and author of many books about the maritime activity in the harbour area, and who very kindly shared information and literature from his personal archive. A retired person who has vast experience in ship modelling for the Malta Maritime Museum in Birgu was of great assistance not only for providing snippets of information but also to introduce the researcher to the boat builders who eventually participated in the research. Although the Malta Maritime Museum in Birgu was closed during the entire period of the research due to an extensive restoration and modernisation project, the curator of the museum provided a private tour to the researcher, and explained various displays and artefacts including old photographs featuring the various uses of the *dgħajsa* in the past.

3.3.1 Qualitative Data

Qualitative methods allow the researcher to study issues in depth with data collection often occurring through open-ended questions permitting “one to understand and capture the points of view of other people without predetermining those points of view through a prior selection of questionnaire categories” (Butina, 2015). Qualitative research can be approached through several methodology choices such as case studies, ethnography, grounded theory, narrative, and phenomenology. Taking into consideration that this research aimed at collecting information from a few individuals whose

lives have a very close relationship with the *dgħajsa*, the researcher felt that out of the qualitative research choices, the narrative approach was the one that would mostly bring out the passion and experience from the stories that the participants shared.

Narrative inquiry is a form of qualitative research in which the stories themselves become the raw data. This approach has been used in many disciplines to learn more about the culture, historical experiences, identity, and lifestyle of the narrator. (Butina, 2015)

By adopting the narrative approach through interviews at the participants' own workshops or on the boat whilst ferrying passengers, the researcher collected valuable data and information through conversations and observation about the *dgħajsa* and its cultural link with the communities in the Southern Harbour region.

3.3.2 Limitations

The study can be subject to a number of limitations, that should be emphasised. Most important is the fact that the number of traditional *dgħajsa tal-pass* builders has seriously dwindled and the sample was inevitably extremely limited in size, even from a qualitative research perspective. In addition, as was discovered during the research, many boat builders, particularly of older generations, are sensitive about their perceived family trade secrets, and therefore there might be a possibility of certain information not being shared with the researcher.

During the interview with the boatman there was a strong emphasis on the ongoing and growing expenses being incurred by the boatmen in running the ferry operation. Whilst there are no obvious reasons why this information should be doubted, there is a potential of it being biased, and being motivated by the *dgħajsa* boatmen in their plea for financial assistance from the authorities.

3.4 Conclusion

The research strategies adopted suggest that the author sought to achieve information that serves as a highly reliable and valid source of information for guided tours. The findings and analysis of the information acquired using the research techniques mentioned in this chapter are presented in the next chapter.

4.0 Results, Analysis and Discussion

4.1 History of Boat Building in Maltese Islands

It is obvious, that people who live on islands must adjust to a life at sea more than those who live on the mainland, especially those living far from the coast. Living on an archipelago of relatively small islands, people living on Malta had an added reason to develop means of inter-island connections.

Due to these realities it was natural that the Maltese had to develop skills related to sea transportation. We have records from the fifteenth century showing that the Maltese absorbed, picked up, and trained in the art of navigation and occupations connected with the sea. These included caulking, mast and rope work, shipbuilding, and sail weaving (Muscat, 2001). Once the Maltese mastered the ability to build boats, they began using them for transportation, fishing, trade, and even piracy and corsairing, which were undoubtedly the most lucrative of all the enterprises practised at that time. Skills and abilities related to the sea had to grow and get more sophisticated as the industry was only going to expand over time (Vella, 1979).

As they gained more experience, the Maltese kept developing and enhancing their boat building abilities. In the 17th century, corsairing is said to have employed around half of the male labour force (Vella, 1979). Diverse maritime boats were required to support such commerce and labour to flourish.

There were already places, mostly located near Birgu, where boats were being built before the Knights of the Order of St. John arrived (Mercieca Simon, 2006). After their arrival, the boatbuilders of the Order transferred knowledge and taught the Maltese various trades that were related to ships and the sea in general. Shipbuilding flourished because those with money would embark on corsairing. Piracy was a hugely profitable endeavour that many people turned to as their main source of income. As a result, many began to construct boats, notably in and around Grand Harbour and its environs. The ships and craft constructed in Malta during this period were considered to be among the best of their size and class (Muscat, 2001).

Under British rule the Maltese continued to improve their skills. By adding new docks, the Admiralty expanded the dockyard. Which was so large that at its peak it employed 14,600 workers (Mercieca Simon, 2006). During the same period, several ship brokers, as well as importers of wheat, timber, wine, and numerous other items, were established. In Kalkara Creek, Senglea and Birgu, a sizeable number of men began to construct wooden boats, such as fishing vessels, and for transportation within and between the islands. Amongst the most popular vessel that was being built was the *dgħajsa tal-pass*, to serve the increasing demand of ferrying people in the Grand Harbour, and also in the neighbouring Marsamxetto Harbour.

4.2 Evolution of *id-Dgħajsa Tal-Pass*

Various printed material such as photographs, postcards, stamps, and local newspapers articles, show the slow but steady growth of the Maltese Dgħajsa. The earliest depiction of the Maltese harbour passage boat is found in the drawing dated 1664 by Dutch artist Willem Schellinks titled “La Fontana Nuova” which provides a 17th century view of Valletta's Grand Harbour. A number of later ex-voto paintings, and works by the Schranz brothers, Brockdorff, Ganni, Caruana Dingli and D’esposito capture the evolution of the *dgħajsa* up to the 1920s, when it reached the final stage that is seen today. Then in the 1965 the outboard motor started replacing human effort as its main source of power. (Muscat, 1999).

4.3 Uses of *Dgħajsa tal-Pass*

A literal translation of the term *dgħajsa tal-pass* is a passenger boat, *dgħajsa* being Maltese for boat, and *pass* being short for *passigier*, passenger in Maltese. Its name clearly implies that the main aim of this small, open, double-ended boat with one or two rowers and with a capacity of up to ten passengers (under updated health and safety regulations, nowadays, has a restricted capacity of a maximum of six) has always been aimed to serve as water taxi. In addition, since it lies low in the water, it is obvious that it is not designed for use in moderately calm, sheltered harbour waters.

4.3.1 Knights Period

Whilst its main purpose is and has always been to serve as a water taxi, ferrying passengers across the harbour, the *dgħajsa* has been used and adapted to cover other specific uses, always limited to the confined shelters of the harbour. It appears that significantly elaborated versions of the *dgħajsa* appeared as ceremonial boats for the Grand Masters. Two models of these ceremonial boats were on exhibit at The Malta Maritime Museum and demonstrate the lavish decoration on the grand master's boats.

After Valletta was built in 1571, the Knights and Grand Master relocated from Birgu, while the Inquisitor, still had his palace there. Whilst there is no documentation, it is believed that during these times a servant was employed to transport ice from the Grand Master's Palace in Valletta to Birgu, on what is believed to be a *dgħajsa tal-pass*.

4.3.2 British Period

During the British period,

“The *dgħajsa* was a common sight in Grand Harbour and for many years there were hundreds of them darting and zig-zagging around British warships. Old postcards dating circa 1900 show hundreds of them lined up in front of the Fish Market wharf and the Marine Customs House.”
Citation (Muscat, 1999, p. 19)

In addition to providing the water taxi service, during colonial times, many *dgħajsa* owners used their craft as a bumboat to sell goods and supplies to British Navy sailors stationed on ships moored or anchored in the harbour. The bumboat was easily recognisable as it had a sloping canopy extending from almost up the stern to the front. This protected the goods from sea spray and the elements. The Malta Maritime Museum has samples of some of the goods that used to be sold, which include cigarettes, sweets, packaged snacks, and souvenirs, such as items of Malta lace, and models of *id-dgħajsa tal-pass* itself which was considered by the British sailors as an iconic symbol of Malta.

4.4 Interviews

4.4.1 Boat Builders

There are currently very few professional Maltese boatbuilders who still use traditional methods to build wooden boats. With the advent of glass reinforced plastics, commonly known as fibreglass, and the many advantages that it provides in terms of flexibility in construction, ease of upkeep and cost-effectiveness, the local boatbuilding industry has gradually shifted away from wooden craft. Despite this, the researcher was able to visit a full-time traditional boat builder at his workshop in Kalkara, who specialises in the construction of *dgħajjes tal-pass*. This boat builder, from now onwards referred to as BoatBuilder1, learned this craft from his grandfather, who began working as a young apprentice constructing boats in the 1950s. Whilst his family ran a very successful marine-related business, unrelated to boat building, he explained that he preferred to keep his grandfather's legacy alive and took up traditional boat building as his professional trade. He is a self-made individual who improved on the foundational knowledge from his grandfather, through a process of trial and error and keen observation. Today, he is the only family member who is still making a career in boatbuilding. His customers are mostly regatta clubs, who order racing boats to compete in the annual traditional Maltese regatta, and boatman of *dgħajjes tal-pass* to ferry passengers across the Grand Harbour. Both of these customers still have specific requirements for traditionally built boats: only traditional wooden boats are allowed to participate in the annual regatta; and a *dgħajsa tal-pass* license to ferry people across the harbour is only issued to traditionally built boats. In the recent past there were attempts to replicate the style of the traditional *dgħajsa* in fibreglass, however registration and licensing have been regulated and limited to traditionally constructed *dgħajjes*. Boatbuilder1 also explained that despite all the advantages of modern boat-building techniques and materials, he still sometimes gets a one off order from a fishing enthusiast who would still want to have a wooden boat built the traditional way.

He recalls the sensitivity of his grandfather about his trade secrets and took all measures to make sure no one saw his sketches or methods. These were considered family secrets and were only intended to be shared within the family. This was very common amongst other boatbuilders of the time, and in the opinion of Boatbuilder1 is one of the reasons for the decline of the trade, as much knowledge and skills were lost within families, with no one ready to take up the trade as a career.

Boatbuilder1 still operates from a very traditional workshop, comprising a small wooden hut with a corrugated metal roof. Since the property is owned by his grandfather, Boatbuilder1 is concerned that he might not be able to retain ownership once his grandfather dies. Situated at the top of a slipway into the sea, the workshop is in an excellent location, as it greatly facilitates the handling and transportation of the boats.

With great pride, enthusiasm and patience the Boatbuilder1 explained in detail the processes that he goes through for the construction of the *dgħajsa*. Initially, he spends a significant amount of time discussing with his client the intended purpose of use of the boat. He then creates a small-scale of the boat, for his client to approve. Once approved, he then draws a full-scale, meticulous plan on the wall of all pieces that will be required to build the boat. This will serve as his drawing board during the whole term of the boat-building. Cardboard templates are then prepared for each piece. These templates are then used to cut the wood in the required shapes. The wood used for the boat is generally ash and oak.

The construction of the boat starts by preparing the spine and skeleton of the base, which will then be dressed by the frame.. A list of the names of different pieces together with various photographs used to build the *dgħajsa* are included in Appendix 1.

Boatbuilder1 explained the particular techniques used, and amongst the most interesting is that of the bending of the wood, which requires great skill. He explained how this technique was initially taught to him using the similar methods used in the culinary world known as ‘bain-marie’. Today, this method has been replaced, by a steamer, where the wood is wrapped in plastic, allowing steam to penetrate and soften the wood. With experience Boatbuilder1 knows how much time he has to allow until the wood can then be bent to the required shape. The present author’s multiple visits to the workshop spanned over a period of 4 months, during which the full construction cycle of a *dgħajsa tal-pass* was monitored. The last stage of the building process before handing it over to the customer is of applying a paint primer coat. It is the eventual owner who would decorate the boat with the final colours and design.

For a different perspective, the researcher visited the workshops of two other boatbuilders, who can be considered amateurs rather than professionals. Both are building a *dgħajsa tal-pass* for themselves, each with a different purpose, one to compete in the regatta, and the other being built as a water taxi for his son. Speaking with the builders and observing the two projects, one could appreciate the differences that go into the construction of these two *dgħajjes tal-pass* to serve different purposes, yet both of them exhibit passion and enthusiasm towards the project.

Boatbuilder2 is building a *dgħajsa tal-pass* to be used for the regatta. Since this boat is intended for competitive sport, the priority of the design has to be in making the boat as fast possible. This means that it has to be slimmer, streamlined and as light as possible. All oak used in its construction has to be kept as thin as possible. Extra wood will result in more weight which make the boat heavier and slower. Boatbuilder2 is a competitive rower and a regular participant in the regatta. He is merging twin passions of boat building and boat racing for his specific needs. The general technique is the same as that used by Boatbuilder1, but he has adjusted the design to make it more sportive and competitive, whilst making sure he keeps within the regatta regulatory guidelines. He does this on a part-time basis, and most of his available time is spent in the shed, with very long hours on some days. Boatbuilder2 estimates that it will take him at least a year to complete the boat.

Boatbuilder3 is a pensioner, who has no prior experience in boatbuilding, but the trade has always fascinated him. A welder by trade, he retired in December 2019, coincidentally when Covid-19 started. He found himself at a loss as to what to do so he decided to challenge himself with what he always considered to be a dream building a *dgħajsa tal-pass*. At the same time, his son has a maritime license and is currently employed with the company offering the catamaran service in the harbour. However he has always hoped that one day he would ferry people across the harbour on his own *dgħajsa*. This was the right opportunity for Boatbuilder3 to embark on his dream project. Boatbuilder3, explained how thankful he is to the guidance provided by Boatbuilder1. This guidance is then coupled with his own dedication and methodical approach.

As the boat being built by Boatbuilder3 will be used to transport passengers, it has been constructed to be strong and stable. The structure of the boat has to be wide, not just to have passengers seated more comfortably, but to make it more stable, when underway and safer during embarkation/disembarkation. The wood used in the construction will also be thicker to make it

stronger, and less prone to damage from chafing and collision. This *dgħajsa tal-pass* will be operated by an outboard motor and not by oars, and therefore the weight is not of that much importance compared to stability and safety.

4.4.2 Registration Boats

These boats are regulated by Transport Malta under Legal Notice 499.52. Small seacrafts are regulated according to their length and need to be less than 24 metres. Once a boat is registered it is given a licence number that needs to be made visible on the front of the boat, this license is known as the “S” license as it always starts with that letter. A *dgħajsa tal-pass* that is to be used to carry passengers is subject to an additional licence which regulates the number of passengers that can be carried on the boat, which in the case of the *dgħajsa* cannot be more than six. This “P” license number needs to be visible at the back of the boat.

All boats need to meet safety standards, such as being equipped with six life jackets on board. When a new boat is registered, the boat is surveyed by the authority and only after passing a stability test can the application be processed and licence granted. The design of the boat is limited to maximum speed of 5 knots, and the outboard motor is generally not more than 9.9hp. The registration of the *dgħajsa tal-pass* has to be renewed annually, costing €2,000 and about €3,500 to cover insurance.

The researcher failed to obtain official data from Transport Malta on the number *dgħajjes tal-pass* currently licensed to operate as water taxis. However, from conversations with the boatman participating in the research, a figure of 49 licensed boats was given. It is interesting to note that Muscat (1999) refers to a fieldwork study carried out in 1975, which found that a total of 27 *dgħajjes* were operating at the time.

4.4.3 Il Barklor

The boatman or rower of the *Dgħajsa tal-pass* is referred to as *Barklor*. In the 18th century their guild was so important that they felt the need to organise themselves into a fraternity. A group of men grouped together by trade for religious aims within the Catholic Church, they would be under a patronage of a Saint. The fraternity of the *barklori*, or oars men, was founded in Birgu on 21st August

1876 in the Church of St. Lawrence under the Via Sacra in Birgu. This fraternity would have a side chapel inside the Church and since the barklori were under the patronage of the Via Sacra not all were represented by a side chapel but all along the aisles. This fraternity used the first side chapel to the right of the main entrance where St Francis statue was today replaced by St Lawrence. The fraternity would meet and pray together, organise and join in processions.

Today the owners *Dgħajsa tal-pass* are members of the Koperattiva tal-Barklori joined together for a common goal. The association's intention under a statute is to offer support to each other, both on an economical and strategic level as they share resources.

4.4.4 Regatta

The first Regatta organised in the Grand Harbour dates back to the 17th century, this was organised by the parishioners of the church of Porto Salvo in Isla dedicated to Our Lady of Porto Salvo well known by sailors, boatmen, and those who earned their living from the sea. Initially, these races were organised on the 2nd July as part of the feast celebrated every year for the Visitation of Our Lady. The prize was a flag referred to as a 'palju', which was presented to the winners in front of the church.

Today, the traditional Regatta races are national events held annually, with the 31st of March being Freedom Day commemorating the withdrawal, of the British troops and the Royal Navy from Malta in 1979 and 8th September known as Victory Day representing several occasions, the Victory over the Ottoman Empire, referred to as the Great Siege of Malta in 1565 and the end of French occupation on Malta in 1800, as well as the surrender of the Fascist regime in Italy in 1943, bringing Italian bombardment of the Maltese Islands to an end.

5.0 Conclusion

Surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea, the Maltese Islands developed a number of different sea craft to address the many economical and social requirements, and one of the most notable is undoubtedly the *dgħajsa tal-pass*, which has been an iconic symbol of the majestic Grand Harbour several years. Despite the availability of modern, more economical and arguably more comfortable means to cross the harbour today, there is no other comparable experience in authenticity as sitting on a wooden bench of an open low boat as that provided by the traditional *dgħajsa*. This study is a very modest attempt to highlight how the *dgħajsa tal-pass* has a special place in the socio-cultural heritage of the communities in the Cottonera area. It helped hundreds of people to make a living throughout the long and interesting history of the area. The author witnessed how this apparent simple boat, requires highly skilled artisanship to build. It is the result of inherited skills coupled with experience and ability to adapt to specific needs.

...‘living heritage’ is inherited from our ancestors and passed on to our descendants. It includes oral traditions, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and the knowledge and skills related to craftsmanship. It is continuously recreated as it is transmitted from generation to generation, and evolves in response to our environment. (UNESCO, 2019)

The author believes the local traditional boat building craftsmanship perfectly fits within the definition of what UNESCO defines as a living heritage. The research revealed that there exists very minimal documented material on the *dgħajsa tal-pass* in general, and even less so on the craft of building it. At the same time, it also appears that the growth in the tourism industry has given a recent upward push in the number registered *dgħajjes tal-pass*, over the past few decades, and this will surely warrant that a holistic effort is needed to support, save and appreciate more this artisanship, without losing its authenticity.

The author believes this essay will be useful to tourist guides, and other stakeholders such as Local Councils of the area, who aim to provide a different experience to visitors and at the same time find the opportunity to promote this living heritage.

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Appendix 1 - Id-dgħajsa tal-pass labelling



Prim
(fig 1)



Rota tal-Pruwa
(fig 2)



Rota tal-Poppa
(fig. 3)



Majjiera
(fig. 4)



Stamnara
(fig 5)



Ċinta
(fig 6)



Tamburett
(fig 7)



Inforra
(fig 8)



Bank
(fig 9)



Pastiera
(fig 10)



Brazzol
(fig 11)



Falka
(fig 12)



Makrunetta
(fig 13)



Hanzira
(fig 14)



Mutur Injam
(fig 15)



Tinda
(fig 16)



Bardnell
(fig 17)



Tamburett
(fig 18)

Prim (Keel - *fig. 1*) - the main length of timber extending fore and aft that serves as the 'backbone' of the boat, being the lowest longitudinal timber, serving as the foundation for the entire structure. It is typically the first element placed on the 'skal'. The entire construction is supported and unified by the 'prim'.

Rota tal-Pruwa (*fig. 2*) - a vertical element rising from the keel and connecting the sides of a vessel at the fore end.

Rota tal-Poppa (*fig 3*) - a strong upright timber at the after end of the keel, ending the hull and supporting the helm.

Majjiera (*fig 4*) - The lower part of a frame that is fastened directly on and over the keel.

Stamnara (*fig 5*) - The upper frame; the futtock, one of its constituent elements. the portion of the frame that extends upward from the bilge turn.

Ċinta (*fig 6*) – A boat's sheer line is made up of a thick, thin band of hardwood that runs the full length of the boat. The sheer line contour strengthens the framework and creates its recognizable curvature. It supports the outside edge of the stringer plank that protrudes from the planking and is below the bulwark (*tappiera*).

Tamburett (*fig 7*) – A tiny deck with a triangle form at the bows.

Inforra (*fig 8*) – a thick horizontal plank that runs the length of the ship from bow to stern. Each deck end beams are supported by the clamp, which runs closely beneath each deck. The clamp is attached to the interior of the frame directly in big vessels, and the beam shelf is affixed to the inner face of the clamp. The beam shelf is attached to the inner side of the frame directly in small boats.

Bank (*fig 9*) – The rower sits on planks in a boat that is positioned amidships. The end of the thwarts are supported by risings inside the boat that run fore and aft.

Pastiera (*fig 10*) – a thick, lengthy coaming that runs fore and aft.

Brazzol (*fig 11*) – a sturdy, naturally angled or cut piece of wood that is used to attach the beams to the sides or frames. Used most frequently to unite and reinforce an angle. There are knees that hang or lodge. While the latter is fastened vertically, the former is fixed horizontally. The quarter knee connects the gunwales to the transom and is fixed horizontally. The hanging knee is fixed vertically to join the deck beams to the sides of a vessel. The breasthook is fixed horizontally, joining the angle where the gunwales meet the stem post. The fore knee or stem knees reinforce the angle between the keel or stem. The stern knee connects the sternpost or transom to the deadwood.

Falka (*fig 12*) – A board that slips in between the "makrunetti" and has a frame on the upper edge and sides.

Makrunetta (fig 13) – a little hard wood piece with grooves on the fore and aft sides to hold the washboards. It holds the detachable washboards and oar pads in place and is attached into the gunwale.

Hanzira (fig 14) – a detachable flat piece of wood that is fashioned like a bow or butterfly. Two metal pins are used to secure it in place on the gunwales next to the sternpost. The last detachable spray board slips within.

Mutur Injam (fig 15) – a piece of wood at the back of the boat protruding on which in modern times the oars have been replaced by a small outboard motor.

Tinda (fig 16) – a canvas awning covering the deck, offering protection from the elements.

Bardnell (fig 17) – A boat's top edge side, a wooden piece attached to the tops of the upper futtocks running fore and aft. This strengthens the boat.

Tamburett (fig 18) – A tiny deck with a triangular shape at the bows.

Appendix 2 - HND TG Long Essay Tour Itinerary (Points for tour)

Organised over a 90-minute walking tour, starting from Kalkara Creek and ending at Dockyard Creek by the Freedom Monument. Walk includes some short ascents and descents, together with a few steps; This tour is not recommended for people with mobility problems. Comfortable walking shoes are highly recommended.

The route will be as follows:

2.1 Kalkara Creek

- I. A short introduction on the tour;
- II. Malta being an island – in the Mediterranean – seacraft over 7000 years ago;
- III. Initially people chose to live more in the centre of the island due to security, especially from the threat of corsairs.
- IV. introducing our location and the harbour area;
- V. This changed with the arrival of the Order of St John, and their origins.
- VI. Link to what we see today, not what the entourage of the Order saw on arrival.
- VII. Discuss the area before and after the arrival of the Order;
- VIII. Under British rule, the area continued to flourish – Admiralty House – with the arched red windows.
- IX. Under the British in 19th Century adjacent creek served as a dockyard, over 14,000 people worked in this area.
- X. Today Palumbo a super yacht maintenance company, MSC Ship repair yard has bought shares and is using these facilities for docking cruise liners. The Three Cities going through a full Harbour regeneration programme, with continuous infrastructural works being organised as can be seen around us.
- XI. Introduce the subject of our tour – the Dgħajsa tal-pass
- XII. Although one would think that with the evolution of transportation and now the introduction of harbour ferries in 1906 the dagħajsa tal pass would be faced out, it has still managed to survive and today is not only still used by locals to cross back and forth the from the Three Cities to Valletta but also by tourists.

2.2 Walk to a Dgħajsa tal-Pass beside Andrea Delceppo's Boatyard

- i. The Maltese dgħajsa has been incorrectly attributed to be of Phoenician origin. Muscat argues that archaeological studies do not back this up.
- ii. When looking at the Dgħajsa some people connect it to the Venetian Gondola but this is also contested by Muscat, who avers there is no reliable evidence to back up the claim. There is a significant difference between a dgħajsa and a gondola. The theory of the Dgħajsa originating from the gondola is rooted in the assumption that when

Venetian galleons started visiting Malta in the fifteenth century, they were served with gondolas to embark and disembark crew and provisions. However, according to Muscat (1999) there was no need to imitate the gondola because by that time Maltese boatbuilders had already created their own style of harbour craft.

- iii. The first reference to the Maltese harbour passage boat was a picture by Schellinks a Dutch painter and draughtsman of landscapes and marine scenes.
- iv. Stems at the end that we refer to as the 'Rota' but in the gonodola, these are more circular and decorative, whilst on the Maltese Dgħajsa tal pass they serve as a support for passengers to get on and off the boat.
- XIII. These boats are registered at Transport Malta, 'S' Sports – 'P' Passengers. They cost €5,500 a year in annual licences and insurances. Link to move to the next point - But before one can register a boat this needs to be constructed.

2.3 Building of the Dgħajsa – Andrea Delceppo Boatyard

- i. Introduction Andrea – family;
- ii. Boat - Very little to no science or mathematical calculations are applied to the building of the Dgħajsa. Local boatbuilders work by rule of thumb, and often the trade is inherited through generations, with the son inheriting his father's tools, templates and experience.
- iii. Craft – not taught in Malta.
- iv. Boat Building – learn from Client; Tal Pass more sturdy; Regatta racing, light;
- v. Go through how a boat is built – i. Scaled Model; ii. On the wall – Form tal-ħajt or tal-blata forma; iii. Templates are cut in plywood; iv. Actual pieces are prepared from Ash - fraxnu;
- vi. Indicate the main parts – 'Prim' – backbone of the boat – supports and joins all the structure over 30 different pieces; 'Roti' (tal pruw) and 'Rota' (tal poppa) at the end.
- vii. 21 feet – 6.5 metres – width according to usage
- viii. Techniques, bending of the wood – and how Andrea improved this describing the technique he is using today.
- ix. Four Months to complete – painting is done by the owner..
- x. Andrea – continues to develop his woodworking, skill form for the décor
- xi. Link to the next - different trades, involved and next introduce Guzi Callus

2.4 Walk to 'ropeman' Callus – rope maker

- i. Fishermen with his brother, started at the age of 12, normally 14...
- ii. Fregatina boat in his garage, surrounded with the different fishing equipment; Lamp in front for Kavalli; Net for Octopus;
- iii. Introduce rope making technique for the oars
- iv. Referred to as Strop tas-7 explain how today this has developed to 18

- v. Rope – strands of nylon; measure lengths ghama u nofs
- vi. Double lengths, prepared like bobbins
- vii. Start pleating 5 / 4 by taking from one side to the other
- viii. Skalm and show the oar and how this is attached – length of the skalm from a regatta to Dghajsa tal pass...
- ix. Link to the next – we have seen a few of the skills, but what are these boats used for..

2.5 Walk to Toqba

- i. Why it is used, passengers;
- ii. Emigrants leaving Malta... my husband's family who had emigrated to Australia towards the end of the 1950's for better opportunities.. had used these boats to get on the ships... similar to the sailors of the British Navy.
- iii. Bumboats – used during the British rule.
- iv. Passengers / Sports and introduce Regatta.
- v. Regatta – give a full history and how this race is still organised today.

2.6 Go up from Toqba - Barklor

- i. The boatman or rower of the dghajsa' tal-pass is referred to as Barklor.
- ii. A strong man, considering he had to row the boat all day... outboard motors only started towards the end of the 19th century and introduced in Malta in 1965.
- iii. Dominant by men, with no women registered, although the Regatta does have one race where females participate.
- iv. Today – these men require a boat licence. Until a few years ago the building opposite the Admiralty House was used as a Maritime training centre, but today they have grouped all courses on one campus in Paola.
- v. In the 18th century this trade was so important that the people felt the need to organise a fraternity and if you follow me we will be going to where they used to meet.

Passing through Birgu.

2.7 Oratory of St Joseph

Outside

- i. Introduce the Fraternity.
- ii. Explain the procession on the feast day of St Lawrence on 10th August.. one of the very few festas that is organised on the actual day of the feast.
- iii. Considering today is not the 10th ... we will have to do with the following

Inside

- i. Band – Guard of Honour – Confraternity Starting Santa Caterina – rope makers.... Medals... all the rest of the confraternities, Capuchin & Dominican Friars, Choir, Musicians, Clergy, Grandmaster & Knights.
- ii. What they wore, show the unit – mannequin with the medal and then the unit showing the robe.
- iii. Spalliera – part of the boat décor with St George.
- iv. We also find in this Oratory a Greek Chapel – due to the number of Greeks that had come over from Rhodes.
- v. True copy, of the deed handing Malta over to the Order..
- vi. Original - La Vallette Hat and sword that he presented to the Blessed Virgin after the great victory of the Great Siege in 1565.
- vii. Altar – Blessed Virgin of Damascus – currently for restoration.
- viii. Introduce next stop – Church of St Lawrence through the altars where the fraternity for the ropemakers and barklori met to pray together.

2.8 St Lawrence Church

- i. Main altar Mattia Preti painting: The Martyrdom of St Lawrence – St Johns Co-cathedral.
- ii. Side Entrance chapel to the right - Altar dedicated St Catherine - connection rope makers made, St Catherine due to the wheel.
- iii. Via Sacra – Barklori but used the side chapel to the right of the main entrance – today the altar has been replaced with St Lawrences statue.

Start concluding tour and move to the last stop

2.9 Barklori Landing Place by the Birgu Waterfront

- i. Dghajsa tal Pass being on Malta's Emblem between 1975 and 1988 for 13 years. New elected government decided to replace as was not heraldic.
- ii. Monument Freedom Day - 31 March 1979 - is a Maltese national holiday celebrated annually on 31 March 1979. This is the anniversary of the withdrawal of British troops - 15 Public holidays in Malta out of which 5 are national holidays only Cyprus in the EU have more Public Holidays – making Malta not just interesting to visit on Holiday, but also a good place to live in!

2.10 Photos organised during walking tour



Appendix 3 – Notes from interviews

3.1 Ropeman (Kurdar)

I met ‘ropeman’ at his workshop under the fortifications of Birgu by Kalkara Creek. ‘the ropeman’, an 86-year-old recounted that all his life he has lived in the Harbour Area. As his family were fishermen, even during the Second War when most Local people moved out from the Harbour area to seek safety from the heavy bombing, his family chose to continue living there. ‘Ropeman’ started fishing at a very young age, he recalled how at the age of 12 although the school was obligatory till the age of 14 he was already joining his father and brother on their ‘kajjik’. He would hide and sleep on the Kajjik so that when his father went out to sea he would already be on board.

At his workshop, he still has ‘tools’ that they used during fishing, like a net used for catching octopus and described how they would put a crab inside as bait. He then went on to the Lampara, a technique where they would put a lamp in the front of the dghajsa to fish for Kavalli.

The family was also involved in rope making. Although most historians always refer to the French Curtain as the Sur tal Kurdari, this was a guild that was organised all along where one would find a stretch of quay, as down by the Kalkara Creek.

As the years went by and ‘ropeman’ started getting old, he stopped going out fishing alone as both his father and brother had passed away, and his son was not interested in pursuing his father’s profession. This allowed him to start focusing more on rope making, more specifically on the technique of ‘strop ta tas-7’ that is used to attach the oars to the dghajsa’s skalm.

The technique followed to prepare this rope referred to as the Strop tas-7 starts by first taking the nylon strands from discarded ropes. He then prepares lengths of ‘qama u nofs’, qama being a linear measure from the end of one arm extended horizontally to the end of the other. As the name implies these were normally prepared in threads of 7 that are double, very similar to the preparation of bobbins in lace making. But as nylon has become finer and thinner, and ‘ropeman’ has changed his formula and, to ensure strength he now prepares 9 threads, also doubled, therefore making a total of 18 lengths. These are then divided into two sets, that of 5 and 4 then braided together always working your way from the outer to the inner. All made by hand and with great patience and skill.

kurdar the charges a minimal fee of just €10 per set of 'strop tas-7'. He explained, that as his material is all recycled material at no cost to him he doesn't feel he should overcharge, as costs are only to cover his manpower. He is currently, passing on his technique and teaching this trade to a local boy from Birgu's Regatta club to continue supporting in preparing these ropes that are required for the rowers participating in the Regatta races.

3.2 Regatta Enthusiast

The author met a 'Regatta Enthusiast' at the Parish Church of the Immaculate Conception in Bormla. He is involved in all the local activity and since we met on the 13th December, together with his colleagues he was giving a hand in storing the decorations, as the Village Festa had just been organised on the 8th of December.

The 'Regatta Enthusiast' started by giving me a background knowledge of how the regatta in the Grand Harbour was first organised, dating back to the 17th century, when this was organised by the parishioners of the church of Porto Salvo in Isla dedicated to Our Lady of Porto Salvo well known with sailors, boatmen, and those who earned their living from the sea. Initially, these races were organised on the 2nd July as part of the feast celebrated every year for the Visitation of Our Lady. The prize was a flag referred to as a '*palju*', which was presented to the winners on the church parvis.

Over the years, the neighbouring localities started adopting this also as part of their outdoor celebrations for the village festa, until they all joined and this started being organised as a competitive race in 1955 between the harbour localities.

Today, the traditional Regatta races are held on two of the five public holidays in Malta celebrated as National events, being the, 31st March (Freedom Day) and 8th September (Victory Day). The localities are all distinguished by different colours, noted at the time of writing. Cospicua (light blue), Kalkara (green), Marsa (Red and Blue), Marsamxett - Valletta (yellow), Senglea (red and yellow), Vittoriosa (red), Birzebbugia (red, white and blue) and Siggiewi (orange). The event is made up of 10 races, each of 1,040 metre length in the Valletta Grand Harbour under two different categories, using typical traditional Maltese boats like the 'frejgadini', 'kajjikki', 'dghajjes tal-pass and tal-midalji'. The first three placings in each race are awarded a number of points and at the end of the Regatta, the club with the highest number of points, in the respective categories, is presented with the Aggregate Shield.

The difficulty that the committees of these clubs, encounter nowadays are that it has become very expensive for them to run their teams. 'Regatta Enthusiast' recalls that before the local rowers used to train daily and compete among themselves to be selected to represent their club. Today, they expect monetary compensation, especially if they are aspiring to win the shield. So the club need to

generate revenue, most clubs have a very good location as they are by the shore and therefore their premises are rented by restaurateurs.

3.3 Boatman

The interview with the Boatman actually took place during a crossing from Birgu to Valletta and back.

The boatman explained the problems that they face, mainly the expenses for the upkeep of the dgħajsa. The 'dgħajsa' is taken ashore for several weeks for maintenance, antifouling, sanding and a fresh coat of paint and oil is applied by himself to try and keep costs low, the only expenses being the material. These are not the only expenses but there is also insurance and annual licence for the boat that amounts to some 5,500€ annually.

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The boatman explained that to be represented with the different authorities they had felt the need to form a co-operativa. Currently they are in constant contact with the authorities as Transport Malta is exploring the possibility of moving their current landing place in Valletta near the Old Customs House to a location closer to St Elmo. This is not being well received by the Boatmen as people using this service will no longer be close to the lift that currently joins this area to the Upper Barrakka Gardens. He iterated that he felt that they were at constant attack by the large ferry boats that continue to lobby to be exclusive operators in the area.

Appendix 4 – Notes to support tour

Regatta

The first Regatta organised in the Grand Harbour dates back to the 17th century; this was organised by the parishioners of the church of Porto Salvo in Isla dedicated to Our Lady of Porto Salvo well known with sailors, boatmen, and those who earned their living from the sea. Initially, these races were organised on the 2nd July as part of the feast celebrated every year for the Visitation of Our Lady.

The prize was a flag referred to as a '*palju*', which was presented to the winners in front of the church. The other surrounding cities also adopting this until it developed into a competitive race between these communities, and, still very popular up to the present – with eight different localities taking part.

The traditional Regatta races are national events held annually, with the 31st of March being Freedom Day commemorating the end of the military base in 1979, and 8th September known as Victory Day representing several events: Victory over the Ottomans Empire, in the Great Siege of 1565, and the end of French occupation on Malta in 1800, as well as the surrender of the Fascist regime in Italy in 1943, bringing a halt to the Italian bombardment of the Maltese Islands.

Different races are organised, according to the different boats and number of rowers, 4 , 3 or 2, given different points accordingly... with the overall winner being the team that gets the most points and is given a shield. This year Bormla got the shield..

Today, rowers are paid to compete, and a bonus is normally offered to the winning team... Regattas generate revenue, certainly not at the scale of footballers but these clubs have seen the opportunity to earn money by leasing out parts of their premises, to pay for the upkeep of their club..

Fraternities

A fraternity being a group of men that through their trade guild grouped together for religious aims within the Catholic Church. They would be under a patronage of a Saint. The fraternity of the *barklori*, oarsmen was founded in Birgu on 21st August 1876 in the Church of St. Lawrence under the Via Sacra in Birgu. This fraternity would have a side chapel inside the Church and since the barklori were under the patronage of the Via Sacra they were not all represented by a side chapel but all along the aisle. This fraternity used the first side chapel to the right of the main entrance where St Francis statue was later replaced by St Lawrence. The fraternity would meet and pray together, organise and join in processions.

Today the owners of *dgħajjes tal-pass* fall under the Koperattiva tal-Barklori where separate individuals join together with a common goal. The association's intention under a statute is to offer support to each other, both on an economical and strategic level as they share resources.

Ex-Votos

A votive offering to a saint or to God is known as an ex voto. Although this form of giving has been made in many other religions, the word is most frequently thought to apply primarily to Christian versions. The Latin word ex voto, short for "from the vow made," means "from the vow fulfilled." The sacrifice may also be done out of appreciation or devotion. This is abbreviated on the ex-votos as VFGA VOTUM, FECIT, GRATIAM ACCEPIT.

The history of vows in Malta dates back to the Neolithic Temple Era, as is the case with ancient Greek, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian civilizations, as demonstrated by archaeological evidence, with inscriptions that unmistakably reveal they were things presented as promises to the gods. As an illustration, we also come across Homeric portrayals of deities helping people in terrible situations.

The Catholic Church also embraced the practice of making vows. A votive offering is fundamentally a material expression of thanks for God's assistance at a time of need. It could also be a symbol of adoration for God and His saints. In Christianity, where God human form to rescue humanity, the bond between God and man is important. The basis of the Christian faith is the love of God as a kind and forgiving Divine Father. In fact, the phrase in the Lord's Prayer's "Our Father who art in Heaven" crystallizes this.

There are several kinds and styles of ex votos at churches and other places of worship across the Maltese Islands. Additionally, entire churches have been constructed and paid for in order to carry out a commitment; the building itself is an ex voto.

Paintings are by far the most prevalent type, followed by metal representations of human parts, infant garments, medical equipment (crutches, casts, etc.), handcuffs, fragments of sea vessel sails and ropes, donations of money, and lamps made of gold, wax, and oil.

The "Madonna dell' Arco" votive paintings in Naples, which belong to the 16th century, are the oldest votive paintings known to date. Malta's unwritten religious history is preserved in numerous churches, much as in other Christian nations in the Mediterranean, with paintings that depict graces received and devotions. These paintings typically show miraculous events that lead to the patron of the piece's survival. The earliest were created on panels in Naples, whereas the canvas medium was used in Malta, which contributed to the good preservation of these masterpieces.

It's significant to note that the earliest ex voto in Malta dates back to the the'marine' era. In the Maltese Islands, the oldest dated Ex Voto. Our Lady of Graces Sanctuary Museum, abbr. Michael Buhagiar's generosity.