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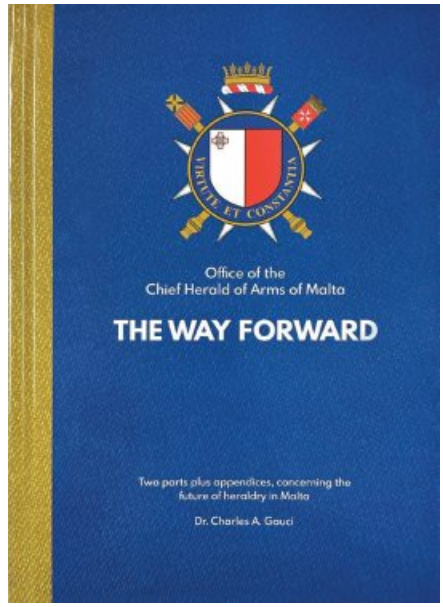

Charles A. Gauci, *The Way Forward: Two parts plus appendices, concerning the future of heraldry in Malta*, Kalkara: Heritage Malta Publishing, 2023. 172pp, colour illustrations. Hardcover ISBN 978-9918-619-52-8. €25.

Malta is the home of the world's newest heraldic authority, and this volume by its Chief Herald in both its title and subtitle purports to discuss the future of Maltese heraldry. The book is divided into two parts – the first part, almost 60% of the work, is devoted to a detailed discussion of who is entitled to succeed to noble or feudal titles in Malta, and how such succession should be determined; the second part is a brief introduction to heraldry with particular reference to Maltese-specific features. The current regulations governing the Office of the Chief Herald of Malta are reproduced in an appendix.

Part One is divided into six sections. Section One surveys the different types of Maltese hereditary honours and deals with the efforts by British authorities in the 1870s and 1880s to regulate succession. The conclusion is that the list of titles thus produced was not exhaustive, and any current claim to inheritance of Maltese honours must be proved with reference to the original grant. Section Two examines some specific examples of titles which were not included in the British list. Section Three discusses succession to honours via regular primogeniture, irregular primogeniture, and nomination. Section Four is a case study of a particular succession dispute which went all the way to the Privy Council (twice!). Section Five discusses lands held by feudal tenure, which in Malta carried the personal title of *barone*. Section Six recounts the histories of various assemblies and committees which claimed to represent or regulate the Maltese nobility, concluding that none of them were fully representative or empowered to regulate, and thus as Chief Herald he is not bound by their decisions on succession to honours when devising arms.

Having waded through detailed discussion of the "quirks and nuances of hereditary honours in Malta" (p. 9), it is easy for the reader to have forgotten that in the Introduction

the author pointed out any heraldic recognition of Maltese (or foreign) noble titles is purely for historical purposes, and any reference to such in official documents from the Office of the Chief Herald does not constitute official recognition (though this point is laboured in Part Two). Indeed, in Malta official recognition of titles of nobility was abolished by an act of 1975, and a court ruling from 2004 reiterated that noble titles may be used socially without restriction, because society essentially does not care about them. To an outsider there appears to be a certain tension, if not outright contradiction, between official non-recognition of titles, and a state official (the Chief Herald) being concerned with determining correct succession to such titles before recording them. But perhaps the mandate to preserve the country's intangible cultural heritage carries all before it.

Part Two, entitled "A system of Maltese heraldry" declares its scope is "to review the basic rules of heraldry, and highlight how they are now being applied in Malta" (p. 130), yet for some reason all such material is relegated to an appendix. The preceding pages offer some disconnected snippets of heraldic interest (which paragraphs appear to be lifted verbatim but in a different order from a 2019 article by the author)[3], followed by the guidelines for the granting or registration of arms that are followed by the Office of the Chief Herald of Malta. In the appendix, after an introduction to armory that will be unnecessary to most readers of this journal (parts of the shield, tinctures, ordinaries and the like), we get to specifics of Maltese armorial practice.

The Chief Herald (who incidentally has appointed one subordinate, Mdina Pursuivant, who also acts as Registrar) has decided that Malta will, in general, follow British heraldic practice. Blazon is the same as in the Anglophone world, with the proviso that repeated tinctures are expressed as "of the second" etc. When published in the *Malta Gazette* however, blazons are also translated in Maltese. Coronets of rank already existed for Marquis, Count, and Baron, similar to those used in the UK though without the cap of maintenance. To these the Chief Herald has added a coronet for an untitled Maltese noble, consisting of a circlet with five visible pearls. Although reference was made in Part One to the coronet of a patrician (a plain circlet of gold, p. 31) this is not mentioned here. Supporters were introduced to Malta under British rule, and will henceforth be only be granted to nobles, holders of high offices of state, or holders of first-grade appointments in Maltese or foreign orders, including Companion of the National Order of Merit and Members of the Xirka Ġieħ ir-Repubblika. Four different types of helmets are prescribed depending on rank: Head of state (regardless of gender), male nobles, Knight-Grand-Cross equivalents, and the usual closed-visor helmet in profile for all other males. Females other than the head of state are not to be permitted the use of helmets or crests, and usually display their arms on a lozenge (married women) or oval (unmarried women), which in the case of an unmarried lady is surrounded by a garland of roses and a bow. The author does not specify any rules for the exterior ornaments of the arms of a married woman, or indeed for grants to clergy, though such grants are mentioned in the text (p. 134).

In terms of marshalling arms, Malta allows the quartering of paternal and maternal arms, without the necessity of descent from an heraldic heiress. Cadency has hitherto not been used, however the Chief Herald now insists on it for new grants and registrations. The English cadency marks (label, crescent, mullet etc) are used for male arms, though this may be extended to female armigers when equality laws take effect.[4] Marital arms

3 Charles A. Gauci, "A short essay on heraldry in Malta", *Melita Historica,* vol. XVII no. 4 (2019)

4 See entry vol.1/R0047/2023 in the Maltese Register of arms for an example of a female heir using a label.

are denoted via impalement. Illegitimacy can be denoted on request of the prospective armiger by a baton sinister or border chequy, or turning the helm to face the sinister. An adopted child may bear the arms of either their natural or adoptive parents; in the latter case they may optionally display two links of a chain to indicate the adoptive bond.

Given the concentration of the first part of the book on the intricacies of succession to noble titles, it perhaps no surprise that the Chief Herald has devised a system which differentiates between the holder of a title, their heir, younger children of the title-holder, and other relatives. In the case of males this involves a coronet immediately on top of the shield, and another on top of the helm, together with minor differentiation of the helm. For female arms a similar approach is used, though without the helm the result is one coronet floating above another.

The book closes with three appendices – a list of the Chief Herald's other books, a list of books and manuscripts relating to Maltese heraldry, and a copy of the legislation governing the Office of the Chief Herald. What it lacks however is an index, though one has been prepared along with a list of plates, and can be downloaded from the website of the Office of the Chief Herald.[5] An immense amount of research has gone into Part One in particular, which is reflected in the 25 pages of notes, however their usability could be improved. They are presented as endnotes placed at the end of the part, rather than of the book, which results in the traditional "finger in the back of the book" reading posture, though the author has taken pains to make these notes easier to find with a heading of "Notes and References" in the lower right margin on all such pages. They are also presented in footnote-size type, which makes reading them something of a chore, especially when faced with a wall of text. Note 27 is the worst offender in this regard – an entire page of names and dates separated only by solidi (/). This would have been better presented as a table in an appendix. Quotes in Latin or Italian which appear in the notes or in the main text are frequently left untranslated, which is obviously not ideal if one's command of those languages is rusty or non-existent. The book itself is high quality, with a hard cover, glossy pages, and handsome pedigree charts. There are 48 illustrations, though for some reason not all of them receive a plate or figure number. Sadly most of the colour emblazonments of arms have not been reproduced at sufficiently high resolution, so they appear pixelated or blurred. And though the front-matter credits the work of editors, I found a typographical, grammatical, or formatting error every few pages, which is necessarily distracting. Perhaps one of the most egregious errors is the diagram of furs shown on p. 137 where the different shields are labelled "Gules, Azure, Vert, Purpure, Sable, Argent" rather than "Ermine, Erminois, Ermines, Pean, Vair, Counter-vair".

Malta has had a long and complicated history, and it not surprising that this is reflected in its heraldry. The foreword refers to a "confused local [heraldic] situation" and "misconceptions influencing the composition and inheritance of … arms" (p. 7). It would have made for a stronger argument if these issues were made explicit, and even why an heraldic authority for Malta was established. As an outsider it would also have been helpful if the work began with a section orientating the reader to the various regimes which had ruled Malta, and its heraldic and hereditary honours, rather than jumping straight to the British Report of 1878. Nevertheless, this book is a valuable starting point for anyone interested in learning more about the heraldry of this island.

Philip Allfrey

5 https://maltaheraldry.mt/resources.