

THE MALTESE *RAZZETT*: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ETHNIC FARMHOUSE WITHIN A MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT

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The article has been delivered on 03.07.2022, reviewed on 04.05.2023, accepted for publication on 07.08.2023

DOI: 10.53548/0320-8117-2023.2-211

Introduction

The Maltese *razzett* (farmhouse) is perhaps one the most important examples of ethnic architecture that dominates Malta's rural landscape. The historical and archaeological evidence demonstrates that, for many centuries since the late Middle Ages this vernacular structure served as an abode for humans and animals sharing common parts of its domestic network, such as the central courtyard. Apart from being a peasant family dwelling and a shelter for its animals, the *razzett* likewise served as a storage place for crops and farming gear. The study and appreciation of the Maltese farmhouse is a relatively recent phenomenon which traces its origins to the last quarter of the twentieth century when urban development in Malta started threatening the future of the country's vernacular architecture. It was also during the same period when native structures like the *razzett* began to be considered as an integral part of Malta's national identity and a key pillar of its unique heritage. However, at that time architectural experts had the tendency to appreciate the Maltese farmhouse mostly from an architectural perspective, often neglecting its human dimension. The principal objective of this paper is to analyse this prominent indigenous structure from an anthropological perspective, focusing on the relationship between the dwellers and its domestic network. Besides, this study explores the underpinning social, economic and cultural implications of this indigenous dwelling, the degree of privacy the household members could enjoy when strangers or visitors were in attendance, and the security it offered against potential intruders or pilferers. The *razzett* certainly cannot be studied in isolation, therefore contextualizing this structure within its wider environment would give us a stronger picture of its anthropological identity. Within this framework, the present paper examines the correlation between the farm-

house (and its dwellers) and the rest of the village community: the neighbouring *rziezet* (plural of *razzett*), the village church, the streets and the village square (*piazza* or *misraħ*). In other words, the connection between the family's microcosmic domestic environment and the macrocosmic world outside the house is crucial.

The *razzett* within the context of Maltese ethnic architecture

The Maltese Islands, situated in the central part of the Mediterranean Sea, between the island of Sicily and North Africa, have served as a haven for different human communities since Prehistoric times. The first settlers who occupied these islands in late Neolithic times apparently arrived from Sicily, followed by other Prehistoric and Bronze Age people who hailed from other parts of the Mediterranean region¹. By the late eighth century BC the archipelago was occupied by the Phoenicians and then by the Carthaginians, while by the final decades of the third century BC it became a possession of the Roman Empire². In the Middle Ages, Malta and Gozo became the playground of various European dominations, including the Arabs, the Normans, and the Aragonese³. Between 1530 and 1798 they became the island-*Convento* of the Knights Hospitallers of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Rhodes, and Malta. For the first time in its history Malta was ruled by a chivalric organization with sovereign powers⁴. After only two years of French occupation, in 1800 the Maltese Islands became a British colony, a status maintained until 1964 when they acquired political Independence and became a sovereign State with a democratically elected government. In 1974 Malta became a Republic, having its own Head of State (or President of the Republic). In 2004 it joined the European Union as a full Member.

The islands' ideal geographical position, their favourable climate and sheltered harbours are three principal reasons which have rendered the archipelago as a sheltered area, an ideal maritime hub, a formidable military base and, above all, a place of habitation for sedentary human communities to develop and foster⁵. Therefore, it's no wonder that the Maltese Islands still enjoy a unique cultural heritage which is manifested in a plethora of monuments and relics encompassing all historical periods, from Prehistory to our own times. *Palazzi*, grand houses, churches and cathedrals, fortifications, towers and other military systems, as well as various examples of ethnic structures characterize not only Malta's various towns and villages, but also its rural landscape. Collectively, these monuments and

¹ Trump 2004, 10-55.

² Bonanno 2005, 8-9.

³ Dalli 2006, 13-30.

⁴ Blouet 1993, 60-88, Freller 2010, 17-33.

⁵ Brullo *et al.* 2020, 7-13.

the material culture bequeathed by our ancestors constitute the embodiment of a nation with its distinct culture and identity, a people with an amalgamation of Semitic, European and Anglo-Saxon traits but, above all, Mediterranean⁶.

The ethnic *razzett* forms an essential part of Malta's vernacular legacy. It occurs in most rural areas in Malta and Gozo. Other examples of ethnic structures include the *girna*, the hybrid hovel, the cave-dwelling, the windmill (*mithna tarrih*) and the wayside churches⁷. From an architectural viewpoint, the *razzett* varies in form and dimensions, many of which consist of small humble abodes whilst others follow a more complex plan. Yet, despite such differences, the Maltese farmhouse has a set of basic characteristics which occur in most existing examples. These are:

- a) a central courtyard (*bitha*)
- b) an uncovered staircase (*tarag*) often located in the courtyard
- c) an introverted dwelling
- d) an austere façade
- e) a flat roof (*bejt*)
- f) a dwelling that permitted human and animal cohabitation
- g) a water cistern (*bir*; plural *bjar*)
- h) a cart-room (*remissa* or *sqifa*)
- i) an *għorfa* (plural *għorof*) (private room/s) in the case of two-storey structures, and
- j) high perimeter walls.

In a way, the above characteristics cast light on the rapport that the *razzett* had with its immediate natural environment. They also demonstrate the owner's awareness and knowledge of Malta's typical Mediterranean climate marked by hot and dry summers and cold and rainy winters. Hence, although they do not follow any formal architectural style, so much that our historical and notarial records hardly ever indicate who designed, planned or erected them, the emphasis that the dwellers put to live in dwellings that were concretely fit for all seasons, cannot be overlooked. These houses were built in perfect harmony with the surrounding landscape and in conformity with local climatic conditions. The peasants built their *rzezet* in a way to maximize the utilization of the available physical and natural resources, such as light, ventilation, rainwater, the sun, the wind, and the land potential⁸.

⁶ Buhagiar 1991, 13-27.

⁷ Fsadni 1992, Said-Zammit 2016, 69-132; 2022, 230-234.

⁸ Jaccarini 2002, 20-33.

The *razzett* as a Mediterranean vernacular abode

The study of the Maltese *razzett* must be contextualized within three important and interdependent aspects:

a) *the temporal*: the Arab occupation of the Maltese Islands in the late ninth century AD had a dramatic and long-time impact on the native culture. Even when Malta and Gozo were occupied by different later European dominations, such as the Normans and the Aragonese, Semitic culture in Malta persisted and continued to influence its inhabitants in several aspects, such as language, religion, agriculture, local toponymy and architecture⁹. Some of these Semitic traits still survive and form a fundamental part of Malta's national culture and identity. For instance, Maltese language is claimed to be the only Semitic language in the world written in the Latin alphabet. In architectural terms, in its general plan and characteristics the native farmhouse bears similarities with other counterparts in North Africa, Sicily, South Italy, Andalusian Spain, Greece and the Hellenic islands, the Near East and other parts of the Mediterranean region¹⁰. One of the main features that characterizes vernacular dwellings in the Mediterranean region is the central courtyard (fig. 1).

b) *the spatial*: through the centuries, the geographical position of the Maltese Islands has been a key contributor to the evolution of the country's particular culture and identity. Being an island and prone to various cultural crosscurrents, it's no wonder that Malta's ethnic architecture comprises cultural and stylistic elements that cast light on its historical past. For instance, the archaeological evidence demonstrates that, although the *razzett* has a basically Semitic plan, yet architectural or stylistic accretions pertaining to later historical periods cannot be overlooked. Hence, in this regard the spatial and temporal dimensions are intimately interchangeable.

c) *the Mediterranean climate*: it is fundamental to mention that most of the countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea, or which form an integral part thereof, practically share a similar climate. Climate is important not only in terms of temperature, humidity, rainfall and so on, but also in terms of culture and *modus vivendi*. The archaeological evidence has demonstrated that the typical Mediterranean climate often had a remarkable impact on the way people lived and how they built their dwellings¹¹.

⁹ Wettinger 1982, 1-48; 2000.

¹⁰ Atroshekno and Grundy 1991: 45, 84-85, 128-129, Sigalos 2003, 195-221, Hole 2007, 120, Said-Zammit 2016, 89.

¹¹ Said-Zammit 2016, 84-89, Said-Zammit 2021, 73-120.

Within this geographical, historical and cultural framework, one may deduce that the *razzettis* much more than a *Maltese* dwelling; it is also a vital part of this *Mediterranean* cultural milieu.

The *razzett* and its historical roots

While as a structure the Maltese farmhouse is reminiscent of typical North African, Near Eastern and southern Mediterranean vernacular architecture, the term *razzett* is etymologically derived from the Sicilian dialect *rizettu*, hence from the Italian *ricetto* or Latin *receptus*, which means a place of shelter or refuge. This linguistic detail is yet another clue of the cultural crosscurrents to which Malta and its inhabitants were frequently exposed; in this sense we are dealing with a Semitic type of architecture labelled with a Sicilian dialectical term. After all, in its long-time history Sicily, like the Maltese Islands, also underwent through various phases of colonization since the Prehistoric era.

In the absence of historical and archaeological records the proper origins of the Maltese *razzett* are not clear enough. However, a comparative analysis between the earliest native *rzezet* and *giren* clusters suggests the possibility that the former could have been an architectural evolution from the latter. This hypothesis is corroborated by the fact that:

- a) while the *razzett* was dominated by a central courtyard, *giren* clusters were enclosed by a dry wall open air precinct where animals were often kept (fig. 2)
- b) while the rooms of the ethnic farmhouse were generally independent from each other and hardly ever interconnecting, the *giren* of a single cluster were also often autonomous units. This implies that, in both cases, activities could occur synchronically within the building or cluster without interfering with each other
- c) both the *razzett* and the *giren* complex are examples of introverted vernacular structures
- d) the two examples served as a place of human and animal cohabitation, and
- e) they share common architectural features such as lampholes, rock-hewn cupboards, mangers and double walls.

The archaeological evidence suggests that, like what occurred elsewhere in the Mediterranean region in the late Middle Ages, for example in Greece and the Greek islands¹², the most primitive native *razzett* consisted of a single-storey structure¹³. Two-storey farmhouses were presumably a later development in Maltese vernacular architecture which, according to historical late Medieval records, were apparently intended to accommodate wealthier peasants¹⁴. They were also a

¹² Aalen 1984, 56-72.

¹³ Said-Zammit 2016, 80-81.

¹⁴ Catling 2013, 12-19, Said-Zammit 2016, 98-99.

means to start separating vertically humans from animals and the dwelling's economic and public areas from the more private and intimate ones of the *għorfa* (fig. 3).

The *razzett*: its form and characteristics from an anthropological perspective

For a long time academics and experts in various countries have studied vernacular architecture from a purely architectural perspective, often overlooking the fact that these were also utilized by humans for a plethora of reasons. For example, the term *farmhouse* implies that this was also a peasant *dwelling*. Omitting the human dimension from these structures and focusing only on their architecture and construction methods, as if they were just relics of antiquity or museums, leaves us with an incomplete picture of what native architecture is all about.

Malta is certainly not an exception! Apart from the fact that the study of Maltese ethnic architecture is a relatively a phenomenon that saw its origins in the second half of the twentieth century, for several decades scholars had the tendency to focus only on the general architectural characteristics of these buildings: their plan, style, features, construction methods and roofing, and the quality of the limestone. It was towards the end of the twentieth century when the social and human dimension of these structures started being valued. This coincided with a time when the Malta's vernacular heritage was already passing through a period of decline and abandonment due to modern urban development in various parts of the country. A seminal academic contribution, which perhaps constitutes the first real attempt in the Maltese Islands to study vernacular architecture from an anthropological perspective, applying also a space syntax approach, was authored by Said-Zammit in 2016¹⁵.

The present study utilizes the available historical, archaeological and ethnographic data to analyse the *razzett* from an anthropological point of view, without excluding however its architectural value, general plan, and domestic network. After all, architecture and planning – whether vernacular or formal – comprise an integral part of human expression as these shed light on the specific needs, tastes and aspirations of an entire society.

The central courtyard

From an architectural perspective one may consider the *razzett's* central courtyard as the dwelling's backbone¹⁶. Four principal reasons suggest this:

- a) at groundfloor level it connected all or most of the surrounding rooms

¹⁵ Said-Zammit 2016.

¹⁶ Jaccarini 2002, 18, Mousù 2007, 76-77, Said-Zammit 2018, 38-42.

b) it linked the groundfloor with the *ghorfa*(the dwelling's upper storey) via an open staircase

c) it served as a point of contact with the outside world, and

d) it provided light and ventilation to the rest of the dwelling.

It was customary for central courtyard dwellings in the Mediterranean and the Near East, including the Maltese *razzett*, to have autonomous spaces at groundfloor level, hence the complexity of the structure's spatial network. This implied that to traverse from one room to the other, a person had to pass through the central courtyard in the first instance. In the absence of interconnecting rooms, no alternative routes were available, which made internal communication more intricate and less flexible (fig. 4).

In this regard the central courtyard was the only magnet that linked not only the rooms, but also people and/or animals together. The archaeological and ethnographic data suggest that the groundfloor rooms could have been multipurpose, but they were spaces generally intended for storage, living and to provide shelter to the household's animals, such as goats, rabbits, and chickens. The courtyard and the surrounding rooms were, therefore, the family's economic and social quarters of the entire building.

The central courtyard was also a place which bridged together the household members during most of the day for a wide spectrum of activities. These included food preparation, cooking and dining, laundering clothes, socializing, and even praying. At a time when in Malta there was still no compulsory education, it also served as a place where children passed some of their time to play together or with their parents¹⁷. The ethnographic evidence further shows that most of the daily activities carried out in the courtyard were female oriented, hence one can argue that this part of the *razzett* was a dominantly female space. This has been corroborated by comments and descriptions made by eighteenth and nineteenth century travellers, who noted that the central courtyard of the native farmhouse was a place where women also enjoyed some of their pastimes, for example spinning, weaving and needlework¹⁸.

Given its immediate location near the dwelling's main door, the central courtyard was the household's link to the outside world. Whenever strangers or relatives were in attendance, it was here where they were welcomed and accommodated. It also served as a venue for special family occasions like weddings or chris-

¹⁷ Said-Zammit 2016, 139.

¹⁸ Angas 1842, 16.

tenings¹⁹. Most bartering and other business transactions were similarly carried out in the courtyard²⁰.

What has been mentioned for the family members applies also to the household animals because it was through the courtyard that the latter had to traverse to leave or enter the building or else be transferred from one area to the other of the same place. At a time when the Maltese peasant family was often self-subsistent, the ownership of beasts of burden and farming animals was fundamental to the household's economy and daily life. The former, like the donkey or mule, were used for ploughing or for the transportation of goods and/or agricultural products. The latter (mostly rabbits, chickens and goats) were needed for human consumption like meat, milk, eggs, wool and hides. Surplus products could have found their way in the local markets through which it would have been possible for the household to generate extra income.

In this regard it can also be argued that this part of the building comprised the dwelling's public area. When privacy was needed in any of the groundfloor rooms, one simply had no other alternative but to keep the room's door shut.

In case of two-storey *rzezet*, access to the *għorfa* was generally through an uncovered staircase, oftentimes of the linear form, placed on one of the sides of the courtyard. The *għorfa* comprised the family's private rooms to which strangers hardly ever had any access, except for special guests like the village or parish priest, for example when his presence at home was required to provide spiritual advice to the family or to administer the *Viaticum* (Last Rights) to an agonizing household member. Hence, the open staircase was the nexus between the dwelling's public and private quarters. Needless to say, an uncovered staircase would have created a degree of discomfort for the dwellers especially in winter due to rain and cold weather (fig. 5).

The foregoing analysis intimates that the importance of the central courtyard of the autochthonous *razzett* goes beyond its architectural dimension. The correlation between the central courtyard and the local climate cannot be discarded; the evidence has revealed that the stonemason made emphasis on this particular aspect too. For example, apart from the fact that the courtyard was planned in a way to provide the best internal ventilation and natural light possible, at least at groundfloor level, it was also here where the underground *bir* (water cistern) was generally located for rainwater storage. However, archaeological and ethnographic investigations also demonstrated that the central courtyard was also a vibrant place of human activity, where people acted, reacted, and transacted. Like-

¹⁹ Said-Zammit 2021, 244.

²⁰ Said-Zammit 2021, 254.

wise, it was this part of the house which oftentimes witnessed the copresence of humans and animals during the day.

The razzett as an introverted dwelling

In conformity with vernacular Mediterranean architecture, the ethnic *razzett* was characterized by a simple and austere façade²¹. Apertures were kept to a minimum and were generally low and of restricted dimensions. It is also to be noted that the traditional Maltese timber or masonry balcony (*gallarija*), a platform that projects from the wall of a building and is enclosed by a parapet or railing or a timber box, is not an original feature of the *razzett*. So any balconies that appear today on the façades of converted farmhouses are a later, if not recent, accretions.

Besides that the stonemason made very little use of the façade, from a stylistic viewpoint it hardly ever contained any architectural or sculptural embellishments. The emphasis was, therefore, to keep the dwelling's façade as humble and austere as possible (fig. 6). This type of frontage gives the visitor the impression of a military structure rather than a peasant dwelling, a feature that drew the attention and curiosity of various sixteenth to twentieth century travellers and explorers²².

There is archaeological evidence that some architectural embellishments on the façades of Maltese farmhouses started to emerge from the seventeenth century onwards, but these occur in exceptional cases. The commonest type of adornments consisted of ornated doorframes which often emulated those of contemporary more affluent urban dwellings²³.

The façade's architectural simplicity and austerity shed light on the *razzett* dwellers: their frugal life, their economic level of wealth, and their social aspirations. The peasants and the destitute, with their restricted disposable income, did not have the means to alter or embellish their houses to suit fashion, like what the more affluent did. Additionally, the restricted number of apertures on the building's façade makes the *ethnic razzett*, like its other Mediterranean counterparts, an introverted dwelling, one that focuses on the inside rather than the outside, what occurs within the domestic domain rather than beyond its main door or gate²⁴.

The bejt (roof) and the bir (water cistern)

Two other important elements that constitute a vital part of the *razzett's* Mediterranean identity are the *bejt* and the *bir*. They are being considered to-

²¹ Jaccarini 2002, 45, Said-Zammit 2021, 39, 82.

²² Quintin 1534, B2, Skippon 1732, 622, Luke 1949, 168.

²³ Said-Zammit 2016, 109.

²⁴ Bintliff 2012, 467.

gether under this section because of their intimate connection. In the climatic context of arid countries and regions like Malta, Sicily, Tunisia, Andalusian Spain and the Greek islands, the two features here under review were technically speaking a *sine qua non*.

Although historical records have revealed evidence that some houses, including rural abodes, apparently had a pitched roof²⁵, the archaeological evidence suggests that, in the context of Malta's particular climate and cultural identity, most of the dwellings – whether urban or rural – had a flat roof, what in Maltese is known as *bejt*, certainly another reminiscent of the island's Semitic past. In fact, it is interesting to note the semantic change of this particular term, since in Arabic *bejt* (بيت) literally means a *house*. Notwithstanding the change in meaning, the term *bejt* remained a constituent element of Semitic architecture.

Ethnographic and archaeological data suggest that the roof of the Maltese vernacular farmhouse not only had a primary utilitarian function, but also a major economic and social purpose. Collectively these three interdependent aspects uncover part of the self-sustaining identity and character of the local peasant family.

Due to Malta's dry climate the flat roof was undoubtedly of great benefit for rainwater catchment. It was this part of the building that channelled rainwater to a system of lead or ceramic pipes connected to the *bir*. Water cisterns varied in shape and size; some were pear- or bell-shaped, with others having a rectangular or an irregular plan. Some were small, but others were more extensive and could hold thousands of litres of rainwater that served the household in the long term not only for human and animal consumption, but also for clothes laundering and watering of indoor plants.

The Maltese Islands enjoy more than three thousand hours of sunshine annually (certainly one of the highest rates in Europe), ranging from an average of above five hours of sunshine per day in December to around twelve hours per day in July-August. Consequently, Malta receives roughly twice as much sunlight as to northern European countries²⁶. Due to this climatic advantage the flat roof was therefore an ideal place for the drying of clothes. From an economic viewpoint, this part of the farmhouse was also utilized for the sun drying of certain agricultural products, such as tomatoes, onions, figs and pumpkins²⁷. Some foodstuffs, like tomatoes, could be consumed over a long period since they were preserved in sea salt (fig. 7). They were usually intended for family consumption, however it is also possible that some could have been sold in the local or village market through which the peasant family earned some extra income.

²⁵ Quintin 1534, B2v, Fiorini 1991, 321-352, De Lucca 1995, 46, Said-Zammit 2016, 83, 151.

²⁶ Brullo *et al.* 2020, 16-20.

²⁷ Jaccarini 2002, 14.

The ethnographic evidence has further demonstrated that the roof, like the courtyard, was also a place of family gathering, especially during summer evenings when the weather was warmer and the day longer. It was a place which integrated the household members – parents and children – to talk, socialize, and even pray together. At a time when Malta had less urban development than today, the roof offered amazing and unique views of the islands' rural landscape and surroundings. Such observations were also documented in the memoirs of various eighteenth and nineteenth century foreign visitors and commentators²⁸.

The dwelling's water cistern was generally located at underground level below the courtyard. However, there are instances where the wellhead of the *bir* was situated inside one of the groundfloor rooms or even just outside the building's main entrance. It is to be noted here that the Maltese term *bir* (plural, *bjar*) is a purely Semitic word deriving from Arabic (*bir* - بئر) which bears the same meaning. This is yet another testimony not only from a linguistic perspective, but also in the context of Mediterranean vernacular architecture.

The available evidence demonstrates that the water cistern was technically speaking the surface quarry from which the building stone for the above dwelling was originally extracted. Once the structure was ready and no further stone excavation was required, the quarry was converted into a water cistern and covered by stone slabs to form the central courtyard's floor. This suggests how the peasants made the best use of the surrounding environment and physical resources (fig. 8).

The fact that in many cases the *bir* was located just underneath the central courtyard may also have had symbolical connotations. Just as the courtyard was the abode's main artery that integrated humans and animals, dwellers and visitors as well as members of the same household, the *bir* was the space where potable water – the main resource of human and nonhuman life – was stored²⁹.

Storage

One may get the impression that in a typical Maltese *razzett* storage space was restricted due to its size and the substantial number of dwellers and animals living within its spatial network. However, the archaeological evidence demonstrates otherwise. Besides, the *razzett* contained spaces that were specifically intended for this purpose. Hence, for the storage of crops, tools, farming gear, and so on, the stonemason made the best use of the available internal features to create the storage space required.

The main space within the domestic network of the farmhouse that served storage purposes was the cart-room (*remissa*). It was here where most of the

²⁸ Skippon 1732, 622, Angas 1842, 16, Said-Zammit 2016, 83-84.

²⁹ Treitler and Midgett 2007, 140-141, Ballestero 2019, 417.

farming gear, including the cart, was usually placed. It also gave shelter to the family's beasts of burden, for instance the mule or donkey (fig. 9). The *remissa* always formed part of the *razzett*'s groundfloor spatial network, usually characterized by an independent access from the public street, but which internally may have led to the central courtyard. The term *remissa* derives from the Italian language *rimessa* which means a coach-house. On other occasions the local peasant community also referred to it as *sqifa*, this being the Semitic version of this part of the building.

The closet underneath the open staircase, which from the courtyard led to the *għorfa* was also often utilized for storage purposes, unless it was used to keep animals such as rabbits or chickens (fig. 10). This space was left either open (hence, visible to the naked eye) or else was concealed by a timber gate or curtain³⁰.

The thick masonry walls of the building, which in their own nature were primarily intended to ensure the structure's solidity and to maintain a comfortable internal microclimate all the year round, also offered pockets or areas intended for the stowage of clothes, personal items, kitchenalia, foodstuffs and other family possessions. In such cases the stonemason excavated parts of the wall to create rectangular recesses. Such stone-hewn cupboards (*armarji*) were usually complemented with shelves to organize better the stored items. The evidence shows that these cupboards could have been left open, with their contents being visible to the visitor's eye, or else were enclosed by a timber door or curtain to conceal their interior. The size and shape of the *armarji* varied in size and thickness and perhaps according to the dwellers' specific needs (fig. 11).

Security

The history of criminality in Malta goes back to several centuries as our late Medieval and early Modern records indicate. Criminal cases occurred both in the urban centres as well as in the villages and remote hamlets. Such cases varied from murders and thefts to violent assaults, sexual and financial crimes, quarantine evasions, and escapes of slaves and convicts³¹.

To safeguard their house, family members, animals and other possessions the peasants did their utmost to ensure the highest level of security in and around the *razzett*. For instance, the perimeter wall enclosing the central courtyard, at least the part abutting the public street, was usually high enough to hamper potential intruders from climbing up the ladder and gain access to the property's inside³².

³⁰ Said-Zammit 2021, 95.

³¹ Knepper 2009, 385-388, Pullicino 2016, 28-30.

³² Jaccarini 2002, 15, 95.

At a time when glass windows were not yet in fashion in the native farmhouse, apertures were usually closed by lockable timber doors or shutters. Security was also ensured through other features like door locks (*serraturi*), latches (*ganġetti*), and crossbars (*staneg*). Most of these were generally made of iron and were produced by the local or village blacksmiths, although there are examples of timber door bars as well (fig. 12).

Conclusion

The foregoing investigations have demonstrated that the ethnic *razzett* of the Maltese Islands is much more than a relic of the past or a lifeless structure. The anthropological and ethnographic approach used in this study has provided a more comprehensive picture of the native farmhouse highlighting the intrinsic and inevitable relationship between the peasant dwellers and its domestic network. In this regard one has to consider the *razzett* not only as part of the Maltese vernacular heritage, but also as an abode where people and animals lived and conducted their plethora of daily activities, from sunrise to sunset. As a home it offered shelter, safety, security, privacy, storage, work, leisure and encounter. It was also a place where family members prepared and cooked their food, dined, prayed and shared their intimate life. The main door of the house and the contiguous courtyard were often the family's point of encounter with the outside world and visitors³³.

The foregoing analysis has likewise revealed that as an architectural expression the *razzett* goes beyond the frontiers of the Maltese Islands. Its general plan is reminiscent of Mediterranean vernacular architecture, but through the centuries since the late Medieval Period the natives modified it to their specific needs, aspirations, and way of life. They adapted its plan to suit the local climatic and environmental conditions. This Maltese-Mediterranean identity of the ethnic *razzett* is evidenced through this milieu of cultural, linguistic, architectural, and ethnographic crosscurrents. It further demonstrates that the Maltese vernacular heritage has to be appreciated and studied in a much wider context.

In this day and age of urban sprawl in different parts of Malta and Gozo, the *razzett* entered a new reality, far away from the humble and quiet life of the Maltese peasant family of days and centuries gone by. With the urban development that characterized the Maltese Islands since the second half of the twentieth century many farmhouses today no longer enjoy their former landscape and environment because they have ended up surrounded by more modern structures, including houses, apartments, garages and shops of all kinds. Several others, unfortunately, experienced a more pitiful fate since they were literally demolished to

³³ Said-Zammit 2020, 285-291.

make way for more modern buildings. Through these last sixty years many of those that have survived were converted into luxury dwellings to be occupied by locals and foreigners. Conversion of these peasant dwellings implied different levels of structural changes, from minor alterations to more extensive ones: the demolition or erection of internal walls, the blocking of original or opening of new apertures, the building of additional rooms, and sometimes the roofing of the central courtyard or sections thereof.

The destiny of many other *rzezet* in Malta and Gozo is uncertain; they lie in an abandoned state waiting to be converted and inhabited or, even worse, to be knocked down to make space for newer structures. Though conversion of these humble dwellings is commendable as long as the contemporary house owner strikes a balance between the past, the present and the future through the alterations committed in the building, it's a pity that apart from some sporadic examples, no real or serious attempt has ever been made till now to conserve a representative sample of these native structures to be restored to their former glory, in such a way that Malta would be saving and protecting by law an important slice of its unique vernacular heritage.

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ԱԼԹԱՅԱԿԱՆ ՈՒՋԵԹԸ. ԷԹՆԻԿ ԳՅՈՒՂԱՏՆՏԵՍԱԿԱՆ ՏԱՆ ՄԱՐԴԱԲԱՆԱԿԱՆ ՎԵՐԼՈՒԾՈՒԹՅՈՒՆ ՄԻՋԵՐԿԱԾՈՎՅԱՆ ՄՇԱԿՈՒՅԹՆԵՐԻ ՀԱՄԱՏԵՔՍՈՒՄ

Ջորջ Ա. Սաիդ-Համիթ

Ամփոփում

Մալթական *ռազեթը* ոչ միայն ժողովրդական մշակութային ժառանգությունը ներկայացնող հուշարձան է, այլև բնակավայր, որտեղ մարդիկ ապրում և իրականացնում էին իրենց ամենօրյա գործունեությունը: Որպես տուն՝ այն ապաստան էր և ապահովում էր մարդկանց անվտանգությունը, միաժամանակ պահեստ էր, աշխատանքի, ժամանցի և հանդիպման վայր: Այն նաև մի տարածք էր, որտեղ ընտանիքի անդամները պատրաստում էին իրենց ուտեստը, ճաշում էին, աղոթում և շփվում իրենց մտերիմների հետ: Տան գլխավոր դուռը բացվում էր դեպի հարակից բակը, որը հաճախ ծառայում էր որպես ընտանիքի հանդիպման վայր այցելուների հետ:

Վերլուծությունը ցույց է տալիս, որ *ռազեթը*-ը ճարտարապետական տեսանկյունից դուրս է գալիս Մալթայի կղզիների սահմաններից: Դրա գլխավոր հատակագիծը հիշեցնում է միջերկրածովյան ժողովրդական ճարտարապետության մեջ հայտնի նախատիպերը: Ուշ միջնադարից սկսած՝ բնիկներն այդ ձևերը փոփոխել են՝ հարմարեցնելով իրենց կարիքներին, ձգտումներին և ապրելակերպին՝ ելնելով տեղի կլիմայական ու բնապահպանական պայմանների առանձնահատկություններից:

Ռազեթ անվանյալ մալթայական-միջերկրածովյան երևույթը վկայում է մշակութային, լեզվական, ճարտարապետական և ազգագրական բնույթի լայն փոխառնչությունների մասին: Այն նաև ցույց է տալիս, որ մալթայական ժողովրդական մշակույթի ժառանգությունը պետք է գնահատվի և ուսումնասիրվի շատ ավելի լայն համատեքստում:

Բանալի բառեր՝ *ռազեթ*, մարդաբանական վերլուծություն, էթնիկ գյուղատնտեսական տուն, միջերկրածովյան մշակույթ, մալթայական մշակույթ, միջերկրածովյան նախատիպ, մշակութային ժառանգություն:

МАЛЬТИЙСКАЯ РАЗЕТА: АНТРОПОЛОГИЧЕСКИЙ АНАЛИЗ ЭТНИЧЕСКОГО ФЕРМЕРСКОГО ДОМА В КОНТЕКСТЕ СРЕДИЗЕМНОМОРСКИХ КУЛЬТУР

Джордж А. Саид-Замит

Резюме

Мальтийская *разета* является не только памятником культурного наследия народа, но и поселением, где жили люди, которые разводили домашний скот и занимались фермерской деятельностью. *Разета*, в качестве дома, являлась пристанищем, обеспечивающим безопасность, своеобразным складом, местом работы, встреч и проведения досуга. *Разета* служила также территорией, где члены семьи готовили еду, обедали, молились и общались со своими близкими. Главный вход дома и двор часто являлся местом встреч семьи с посетителями.

Исследование явствует о том, что *разету*, с архитектурной точки зрения, можно рассматривать в более широком контексте, а именно – в контексте средиземноморских культур, а не только мальтийской культуры. Ее проект напоминает прототип, известный в средиземноморской народной архитектуре. Начиная с позднего средневековья аборигены несколько модифицировали рассматриваемую *разету*, приспособив ее к своим нуждам и образу жизни, исходя из особенностей местных климатических условий.

Мальтийско-средиземноморский феномен *разеты* свидетельствует о широких, культурных, языковых, архитектурных и этнографических взаимосвязях, в то же время явствуя о том, что *разету* как наследие мальтийской народной культуры следует исследовать в более широком контексте.

Ключевые слова – *разета*, антропологический анализ, этнический фермерский дом, средиземноморская культура, мальтийская культура, средиземноморский прототип разеты, культурное наследие.

THE MALTESE RAZZETT: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ETHNIC FARMHOUSE WITHIN A MEDITERRANEAN CONTEXT

George A. Said-Zammit

Abstract

The *razzett* is not only a part of the Maltese vernacular heritage, but also an abode where people and animals lived and conducted their daily activities. As a home it offered shelter, safety, security, privacy, storage, work, leisure and encounter. It was also a place where family members prepared and cooked their food, dined, prayed and shared their intimate life. The main door of the house and the contiguous courtyard were often the family's point of encounter with the outside world and visitors.

The foregoing analysis has likewise revealed that as an architectural expression the *razzett* goes beyond the frontiers of the Maltese Islands. Its general plan is reminiscent of Mediterranean vernacular architecture, but through the centuries since the late Medieval Period the natives modified it to their specific needs, aspirations, and way of life. They adapted its plan to suit the local climatic and environmental conditions.

This Maltese-Mediterranean identity of the ethnic *razzett* is evidenced through this milieu of cultural, linguistic, architectural, and ethnographic crosscurrents. It further demonstrates that the Maltese vernacular heritage has to be appreciated and studied in a much wider context.

Key words – *razzett*, anthropological analysis, ethnic agricultural house, Mediterranean culture, Maltese culture, Mediterranean prototype, cultural heritage.

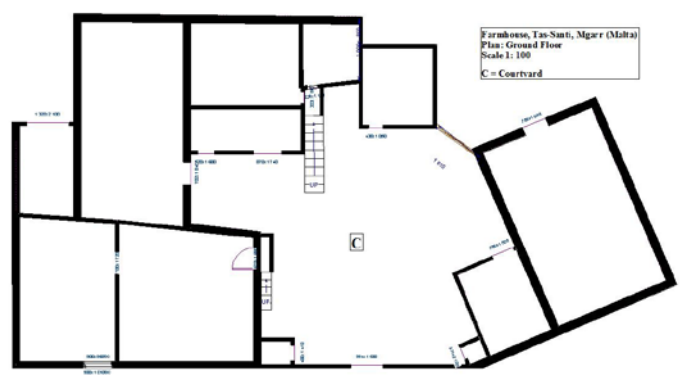


fig. 1. Plan of a central courtyard *razzett* in the limits of Tas-Santi, Mgarr



fig. 2. A *giren* cluster in the parish of Baħrija



fig. 3. A two-storey farmhouse in the outskirts of Sannat, Gozo



fig. 4. A central courtyard farmhouse in the limits of L-Iskurvit, Mġarr. The rooms all have their independent access



fig. 5. An example of an uncovered staircase in the central courtyard of an ethnic *razzett*



fig. 6. A simple and austere façade of a farmhouse in the hamlet of Għammar, Gozo



fig. 7. Sun drying of pumpkins



fig. 8. The wellhead of a rock-hewn underground *bir* in the courtyard of a vernacular house in Gozo



fig. 9. A *remissaof* of a *razzett* in the outskirts of Qala, Gozo



fig. 10. A closet underneath an open staircase enclosed by a timber gate



fig. 11. A rock-hewn *armarju* intended for storage purpose



fig. 12. An example of an iron latch