

Filigrana



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INTERVISTA MA' DR GIADA PIZZONI

TUL TA' HIN: ERBATAK MINUTA U SEBGHA U GHOXRIN
SEKONDA

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Today, the 29th of October 2024, I, Danica Abela am with Dr Giada Pizzoni at the Mdina Cathedral Archives for the Project Filigrana

Danica Abela: Firstly, thank you for agreeing to participate for this project. Firstly, how was your upbringing and how did it influence your academic career?

Giada Pizzoni: Well, first of all thank you for having me. This archive is truly a goldmine, and I am excited to be here for my new project. So back to the question, that is a very good question, I believe, sometimes I think I don't know when I was a child, I loved the Spice Girls that is why I got interested in British history and everything British but you know, jokes aside, I believe, I was very interested in the language, in English, and language is about culture. So growing up, I was a very good student, I liked both English as a second language as well history. I don't know, it became nature to combine both subjects and I was fascinated by British history, about their greatness, about also what was behind the greatness of the Empire. And, their culture, very pragmatic focused on commerce. Perhaps, it was my household well. My parents loved history, my father loved the subject, so perhaps there was a bit of, you know, context I guess and just being a good student so. It was a very organic as a process.

DA: And was it difficult since you are Italian, and you had to study a very different school?

GP: Very different, yes. I mean it took a lot of hard work. First of all, I had to learn the language, and then I also had to learn how to write as well because in Italy, almost all the subjects they have would have an oral examination, so we are not really used to write. Getting to the British system it wasn't easy because I had to teach myself how to write an essay for example. I was very good at public speaking, so I knew how to formulate an argument, how to articulate an essay but not how to write it down which is different than speaking. So, I guess, it took a lot of hard work but at the end it paid off.

DA: Your PhD research is about the British Catholic community in the Age of Mercantilism. How did you come up with this topic, considering your Italian roots? Did you find any difficulties in researching this subject?

GP: The subject initially was in general about the Catholic Church in Britain. So, I didn't really have a clear picture what the final thesis will be actually. That took you know, three, four years of research. So I think it was actually the documents, that led me to then write a book about British merchants. But it often happens when you do research, documents guiding you other than the other way round. I thought it was, when I found these documents, I was doing my research in Sussex, in a beautiful castle, the Castel of Arundel which is owned by the Duke of Norfolk. So I found these fascinating letters about these merchant family, Catholic, in England and it was just interesting to see how despite being Catholics, they negotiated with everyone. When it is about business, when it is about commerce, it doesn't really matter your faith even if it was the 17th century. I then realised how Catholic merchants contributed to build in a way, to lay the foundation of what it

would be the British Empire. Through work in a way, they ensure their emancipation as well. So trade in business as a way to gain in society and to be part, become part of society so it was just by chance I would say and in the end it became a very interested subject.

DA: What is the relationship this community and Malta? And how did it influence the trading industry during the period of the Order of St John?

GP: So, Malta was again by chance. I feel like all of my research projects had just happened. Perhaps they were meant to be. So I was actually part of a wider project in the University of Exeter, they were looking at the Mediterranean economy. And so I was sent to Malta to actually look at how the British Imperial system effected the legal system, the legislation here. So, again the project wasn't necessarily linked with my previous one. But then what happened, so I had the chance to look at the legal system and realised how the British didn't really have a vision for their colony like perhaps in all the empire, there was never a vision. From a legal point of view, they had always picked and choose what they needed for commerce. But being based here, I came to see the culture as well. Perhaps being Italian, being interested in a culture which is very familiar yet different because of the British influence. I wanted to investigate British merchants and heresy here in the 17th century. But then I realised, again the archives led me down to a different path, I realised how there was so much more potential for a different project which is my new project right now.

DA: Can you tell us how your relationship with Malta started and what sparked your interest to research at the Cathedral Archives?

GP: Initially my research was part of this other project, so I previously said. I was sent here, but I wasn't sent in this archive. So when I realised what I could actually look at, being here, I thought why I don't go to the Inquisition Archives. And here I found this amazing place, which is a treasure. It's honestly a gold mine for anyone who is interested in social and cultural history in early modern centuries. I believe this archive is just fascinating, it's almost unique and I've been to many many archives. What you hold here is fantastic.

DA: You are also researching and working a new project, about the cases of clerical sexual abuse including a particular trial of Don Palermino Capi from Bormla. Who was Capi and what does his trial involve?

GP: Again, thanks to this archive, I was able to think about a new project which now has become my main project, work. Looking at sexual violence in the 17th century and that trial about Palmerino Capi is actually one of the many that I'm looking at and will look at. Actually, my intention is not on the man, on the clergy but is actually on the women because I think, you know when it is about sexual violence especially in history there has been work especially on the clergy, there has been work on the man, obviously not

following the rules, not behaving according to their role. But sometimes you know, often actually I would say the victims are almost forgotten. And that's what I wanted to look at. I want to look at how they felt because these women for what I've been gathering for now, they were vocal and stood up. They demanded justice which for the time even nowadays it seems exceptional because there is shame involved, there is guilt. So I really want to understand what led them to demand justice and to demand this man being held accountable. And I think that is extremely important at the emotional impact of sexual violence. And I believe that it is extremely relevant topic and, in this archive, there are many trials which is again, its very rare to have these well preserved cases and I wonder if perhaps the nature of the community, that led women. Because gossip run more easily and then you know, women talk to each other or the community supported them, so I think, Malta is for me, it's probably the most important place to look at. And the project will be wider, I will be looking at other Italian cities as well. But, again, it was this archive that made this project possible.

DA: And do you have a particular trial that is still fresh?

GP: Well, this one of Palmerino Capi is definitely the longest. It seems that at some point everyone in the village of Bormla, sorry if I mispronounced it, stood up against him. So it is actually fascinating how the community wanted justice for these women. It's just relevant and important to look at and understand how these people, very often peasants, stood up to power. These women were extremely brave to challenge these powerful men. So that's for me probably the one I remember the most, the one that touched me the most

DA: What was the reaction of the Inquisitor when a fellow clergy man is accused of such a crime?

GP: What is interesting is that the inquisition supported the women. What I am asking myself is, is this about politics you know because obviously we have a religious order because often inquisitors often belong to the regular clergy, a religious order wanted revenge on the secular clergy, or perhaps they believed the women and wanted to support them? I am still asking this question and I don't have an answer and I don't know if I will ever have but I will think it matters is that no matter why they did so they allow the women to report this crime so they were supported which was extremely important when we discuss sexual violence, the justice system needs to believe the victim in order to support them and prosecutes the crime.

DA: Can you tell us any other prospective project you intend to conduct especially in our Archives?

GP: So far, I just started this project so for the next couple of years it will be my focus. But there is so much potential in this archive in terms of understanding early modern culture, early modern mentality as well. There is so much that anyone can be creative and envision another project and thanks to your archive will definitely be possible.

DA: Well, that's it for our interview, thank you very much.

GP: Thanks to you for having me.

DA: Thank you for telling us about your project and hope to see you again.