

The Motto “Ordo Condidit” and the Earliest Coat of Arms of Paola



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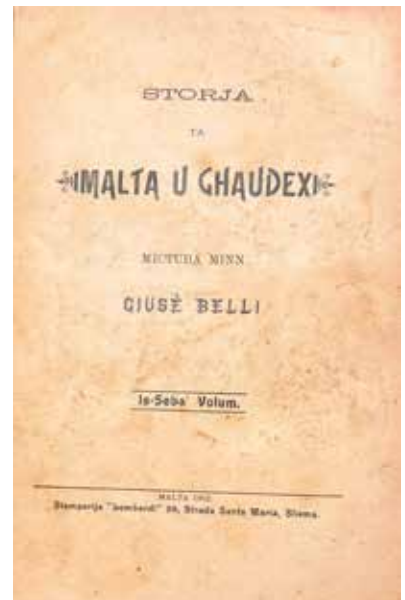
The motto of Paola is “Ordo Condidit.” This Latin motto was created in the nineteenth century. Today, it is translated into Maltese as “L-Ordni Bnieni”, meaning “the Order Built Me.” In the past, it was also translated in Maltese as “Is-Slaten Bnewni”, meaning “The Rulers Built Me.”

However, before speaking about the motto itself and how it came into being, let us first examine exactly why and how it was formed. A motto is a slogan or a short phrase in which an entire history is encapsulated, in such a way that whoever reads it can immediately understand what that place represents. Indeed, the motto used to be placed beneath the coat of arms that had been created as the emblem symbolising that place. Thus, the motto and the coat of arms were created together.

There is no doubt that this motto, “Ordo Condidit,” which was chosen in the nineteenth century to represent Paola, was intended to link the locality to the enduring memory of the Order of St John. In other words, the memory of the Order’s presence in Malta in general, and in this locality in particular, remained alive among its inhabitants, after the Order had lost Malta. Thus, the motto was created to show that this community continued to cherish the fact that the Knights of St John had founded the locality and had built palaces in its environs.

Thus, this motto clearly shows that the bond felt by the people of Paola was more closely tied to the Order than to any particular Grand Master. Today, Paola’s identity is associated far more with Grand Master Antoine de Paule than with the Order of the Knights, because it was this Grand Master who founded the locality. Yet for our forefathers, especially those who lived in this village in the nineteenth century, that identification was not limited solely to this Grand Master. This is because other Grand Masters also came to reside in Paola, and all of them contributed to the development of this locality.

Therefore, in the past, people preferred to speak of the fact that it was the Order of St



The front cover of Gużè Belli’s 1932 book, which contains details about Paola’s motto and coat of arms.

John that built this locality rather than associating themselves with any one particular Grand Master. And they were right to do so. For if de Paule founded this place, built a palace in the area, and initiated construction of the church of Santa Ubaldesca, other Grand Masters and Knights established additional palaces and houses in these surroundings. This led the inhabitants, rather than linking the locality solely to its foundation, or more precisely to 1626, to prefer to focus on the Order's continued presence in Malta and the contributions of various Grand Masters and Knights to this locality.

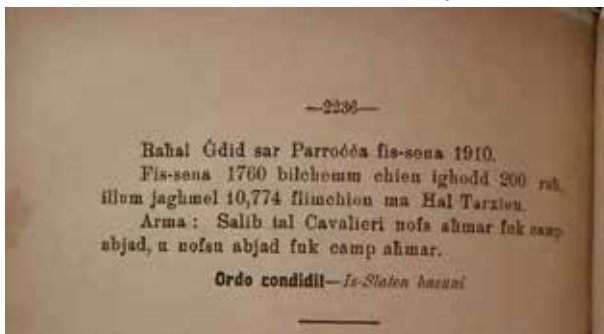
Yet this does not mean that they were ungrateful towards Grand Master de Paule or that they did not recognise the contribution he made to the founding of this locality. This gratitude emerges precisely from the way in which this motto was balanced. It is a motto of only two words. The first Latin word is “ordo.” This is a word in the nominative singular. In Maltese, this word can mean both a religious Order, such as that of the Knights, and also “order” in the sense of good order. In this context, it means the religious Order of the Knights of St John. Therefore, as I have explained, the choice favoured the institution rather than the individual, such as the name of a Grand Master, including de Paule, or even his title of Grand Master. It did not become “The Grand Master built me” or “De Paule built me,” but rather “the Order built me.”

Let us now turn to the word “bnieni.” In Maltese, this is a form made up of two elements. There is the verb *bena* (“built”), and there is the attached pronoun in the first person singular, which in Maltese becomes a suffix attached to the verb. In Latin, by contrast, the form used in the motto is a single one: there is the verb without an explicit pronoun. The word “*bena*” in Latin can be represented by two different verbs. First, there is the verb “*condere*,” and second, there is “*aedificare*.” Both can refer to the idea of building, but with different nuances. When the creators of the motto came to choose the verb, they chose “*condere*.” Therefore, instead of “*Ordo me aedificavit*,” they chose to write “*Ordo Condidit*.” Nor did they choose “*Ordo me condidit*.” In other words, the pronoun “me” does not appear in the Latin motto. What they wrote in Latin was “the Order founded” or “the Order built.”

What, then, is the difference between “*condere*” and “*aedificare*”? And why is “me,” that is, the pronoun, absent from the Latin motto while it enters into the Maltese translation?

“*Aedificare*” means to build, in the material sense of the word. “*Condere*,” on the other hand, more properly means to found, to establish, or to form as a new entity. Thus, what they wrote was that the Order was founded, with the name of Paola concealed, yet still understood.

Thus, because Paola (Casal Paola / Casal Nuovo) was founded by Grand Master Antoine de Paule in the year 1626, the Latin verb “*condidit*” refers precisely to this origin. Therefore, this motto is tied to the historical identity of the locality. The word “*Ordo*” links this locality to the Order — as I have already explained — while the verb “*condidit*,” that is, the third-person singular perfect of “*condere*,” links this history to the person of Grand Master de Paule himself. Thus, without



Detail from a page in Gużè Belli's *Storja ta' Malta u Ghaudex*, in which he discusses the motto and the coat of arms of Paola.

naming him, to understand this motto, one must know Paola's history well.

For those who know Latin, "Ordo Condidit" would have sounded more elegant, especially in heraldic terms, than a motto such as "Ordo me aedificavit" or "Ordo me condidit."

The motto literally says "The Order founded [this place]," and it is precisely for this reason that the pronoun entered the Maltese translation, in reference to the object that is understood but not written in the Latin motto.

Nevertheless, they could also have used as a motto "Ab Ordine Condita." Those who study Latin know that this type of formula would have been too close to the famous classical expression associated with the Latin historian Titus Livius. Between approximately 27 BC and 9 BC, that is, during the Augustan period, he wrote the work that is today known as *Ab Urbe Condita*, that is, "from the foundation of the City." This is a monumental historical work on Rome from its origins to the age of Augustus.

Therefore, the use of the verb "condere" would have reminded those who knew Latin of this classical tradition, which they would have studied. Thus, the use of this verb would have been very clear in their minds: they knew exactly what it meant, and why it was preferred over the other verb, "aedificare." This was a verb that spoke about the foundation of a new city, that is, the same verb that Titus Livius used when speaking about the foundation of the city of Rome.

At the same time, even though the motto was speaking about the Order, to recall this locality's connection with the various Grand Masters who ruled Malta and built palaces for themselves in Paola, the verb "condere" remained linked, in a subtle yet precise way, to what Grand Master de Paule had wished to initiate through his project for this locality; namely, to build a new town in this place.

Thus, through this eclectic Latin form, "Ordo Condidit," those who created it were able to give it several meanings and, as I have said, to link it both to the Order and to the Grand Master. Therefore, when one translates this motto from Latin into Maltese, one finds variations. One finds it translated as "Is-Slaten Bnewni" or "The Rulers built me" — in reference to the fact that from the eighteenth century onwards the Grand Masters also began to be referred to as Sultans — and at other times, more specifically, as a reference to the Order of St John itself, in which case it was rendered as "The Order built me."

Thus, the motto "Ordo Condidit" works very well. It is short and solemn.



The coat of arms of Paola, digitally reconstructed in colour using AI.

The Coat of Arms of Paola

The choice of a coat of arms for Paola accompanied this motto. Contrary to what many believe, the earliest coat of arms of Paola did not include the peacock; that is, it was not the coat of arms of de Paule. Instead, it was an emblem that encapsulated the sentiment that, after the founding of this locality, there stood behind it the effort of an institution, namely the Order of St John.

Thus, the coat of arms chosen was a shield divided vertically per pale argent and gules, that is, in white and red, the traditional colours of Malta. Upon it was placed the eight-pointed cross of the Order. Interestingly, on the white half, the four arms of the cross were

red, while on the red half, the other four arms were white. In other words, the cross was counterchanged, that is, its colours were reversed according to the background colour.

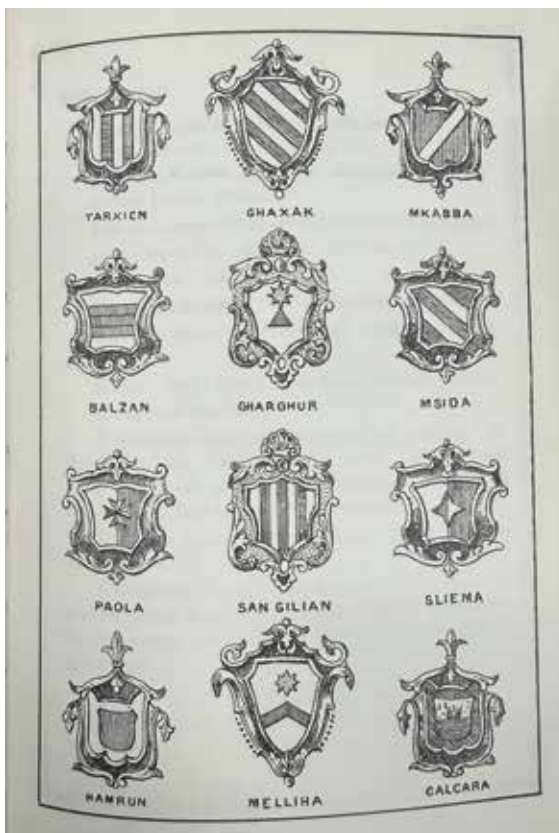
I personally remember this type of coat of arms appearing on the external festa decorations, on small shields that were mounted on poles or pilasters.

We know for certain that this coat of arms was still in use until shortly after the parish was established in 1910. In fact, in a book published in 1932, written by Ġużè Belli on the history of Malta and entitled *Storja ta Malta u Ghaudex*, there is a clear reference stating that the motto was the Latin “Ordo Condidit,” while the coat of arms was a shield divided in white and red, in the colours of Malta, bearing upon it the eight-pointed cross of the Order. The part of the cross placed over the white field was painted red, while the part of the cross placed over the red field was painted white.

This dispels the rumour that Grand Master de Paule granted the coat of arms of Paola. No Grand Master ever granted a coat of arms to any locality for it to represent a city or village. These civic coats of arms of Maltese towns and villages were created during the period of British colonial administration, within a context of civic and symbolic representation that developed in the nineteenth century. In this regard, it is significant that Pietru Pawl Castagna, in the second edition of his book *Lis Storia ta Malta bil Gzejer Tahha*, published between 1888 and 1890, reproduces these coats of arms in the first volume. Thus, even though Paola had not yet become a parish, the colonial authorities had already recognised it as a locality that could bear a distinct coat of arms.

The use of this coat of arms began to lose its importance within the local context after the establishment of the Banda de Paule. The Banda De Paule adopted as its own coat of arms that of the Grand Master after whom it was named. It was at this stage, and after 1932, that the coat of arms of Paola ceased to be the one showing the eight-pointed cross upon the background of Malta’s colours, and instead began to be replaced by that of the peacock. The difference is that the peacock coat of arms never enjoyed official recognition. The white and red shield bearing the cross of the Order was the official one, created by the colonial government.

Eventually, with the establishment of the local council, a new coat of arms featuring spirals was introduced in place of the older one. This new emblem broke with the locality’s



The full page from the first volume of the second edition of Pietru Pawl Castagna's *Lis Storia ta Malta bil Gzejer Tahha*, in which the coat of arms of Paola appears together with the coats of arms of other Maltese villages.

earlier heraldic tradition and discarded the historical references that had linked Paola to the broader history of Maltese heraldry. It was poorly received, so much so that it was later altered. Yet even the version in use today has never truly gained the affection of the people of Paola.

Thus, this locality possesses an old coat of arms, created alongside those of other Maltese villages by the British Administration in Malta. Alongside it, the motto was also created. These coats of arms became important and were embraced by the people because they represented the social aspirations and historical heritage of the towns and villages' inhabitants. Ġużè Belli reminds us of both the coat of arms and the motto, and it is above all through this motto that the memory of Paola's earlier heraldic tradition has survived to the present day.



The coat of arms of Paola as it appears in the first volume of the second edition of Pietru Pawl Castagna's *Lis Storia ta Malta bil Gzejer Tahha* (1890). It is located between pages 144 and 145.

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Touch*



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