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# CLEMENTE TABONE: THE MAN, HIS FAMILY AND THE EARLY YEARS OF ST CLEMENT'S CHAPEL

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## ABSTRACT

Clemente Tabone is known for his connections with Żejtun, particularly for his role in the 1614 *razzia* on the village and for the construction of St Clement's chapel. After reviewing the available literature on Clemente, a search for primary documentary sources follows, focusing on his family, the main events in his life and his belongings. Much of our knowledge on Tabone has been confirmed and is now supported by new evidence. Some details, however, have been challenged while others present problems in interpretation necessitating further research.

## INTRODUCTION

Two reasons have prevented Clemente Tabone<sup>1</sup> from being forgotten from the books of Maltese history. His role in the 1614 *razzia* on Żejtun has transformed him into a village hero, at least to local historians, and has earned him a mention in the accounts written on the Order of St John. Secondly, the chapel he founded dedicated to St Clement is a landmark in the northern part of Żejtun, and has always remained a tangible reminder of this man's bequest, attracting research from historians.

## PAST RESEARCH ON CLEMENTE TABONE

An early reference to the deeds of Clemente Tabone may be found in Bartolomeo del Pozzo's detailed account of the 1614 *razzia* on the Maltese Islands. Del Pozzo (1703: p.590) mentions the courage shown by Clemente when he refers to the difficulty encountered by the Cavalry of the Order in attacking the Turks who

were taking cover behind rubble walls. In contrast in his *Malta Illustrata*, Giovanni Antonio Ciantar (1780: p.193-194) mentions Clemente when he succinctly refers to St Clement's chapel at Żejtun, claiming that the chapel was finished in 1658 and was under the charge of the parish priest through a papal bull issued in October 1622. The building of the chapel by Clemente in 1658 is also referred to by Achille Ferris (1866: p.380) who also claimed that this chapel with a single altar was a *jus patronatus*. Reproducing Ciantar's account, in the early twentieth century Emanuel Benjamin Vella (1927: p.66) also refers to the image of the 'manjifiku Clemente Tabone' in the lower left corner of the main altar painting of this chapel and notes the date of 1662 and Tabone's coat of arms on the opposite side of the painting. A later book on Żejtun was written by Walter Zahra (1978: pp.99, 101, 110) who refers twice to Clemente Tabone in connection with the 1614 *razzia*. Zahra claimed that Clemente formed part of the village *dejma* that responded to the canon fire coming from St Lucian's tower as the enemy approached

the shores of Marsaxlokk. Later Clemente is singled out from the force, consisting of the Cavalry of the Order and Maltese soldiers, that managed to drive the Turks attacking Żejtun back to their ships.

Recently, additional information has been given by Michael Spiteri (also known as Kilin) in one of his books on wayside chapels in Malta. In his work, Spiteri (2000: pp.238-239) claims that St Clement's chapel was built in 1658 as a vow by Clemente Tabone who was attacked by the Turks when he was riding past the place. He describes the chapel as having an altar, a paved floor with a grave at its centre and mentions two paintings in the chapel. A painting by Stefano Erardi is claimed to depict the face of Clemente Tabone while a smaller painting is attributed to [Francesco] Zahra. He also mentions that Clemente Tabone made arrangements for the provision of all that was necessary for the divine service in the chapel and for celebration of Masses on St Clement's day. The latter details leave no doubt that Spiteri consulted, either directly or indirectly, Clemente's 1661 will, particularly as there is a reference to the acts of Notary Salvatore Ciantar without a date as occurs in the will. Unfortunately Spiteri's work has some errors. The claim that Dorothea Cumbo was Clemente's wife is one of them - actually she was his mother - but the erroneous dating of Clemente's will to 1667 was more serious as it misled later historians.

Canon Joe Abela was one such author as is evident from the difficulties encountered by this researcher to reconstruct Clemente's later years. Nonetheless, Abela's (2000: pp.20-31) article on St Clement's chapel remains the most authoritative article on Clemente Tabone. Amongst other things, Abela attempts to establish the date of birth, mentions slaves held by Clemente and explores the evidence for Tabone's social status. He also describes at length the events related to the 1614 *razzia* on

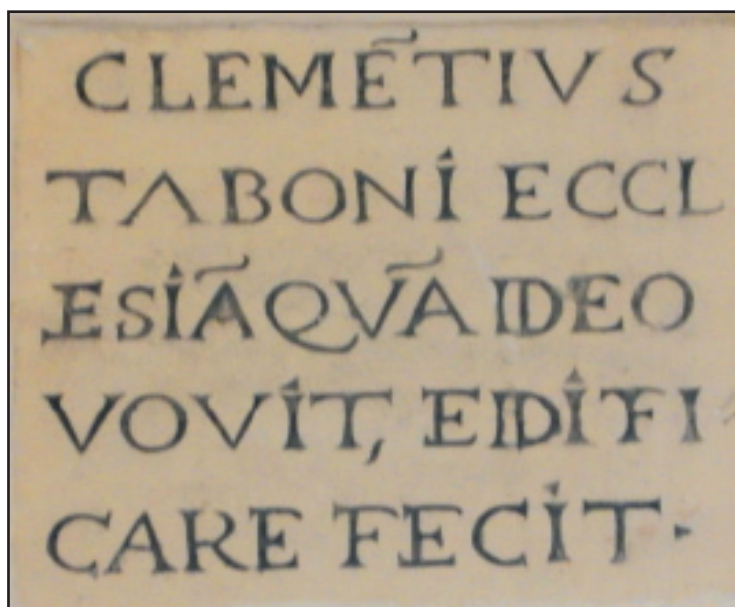


Figure 1: Inscription inside St Clement's Chapel, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2014.

Żejtun and includes a summary of the storm damage done to St Clement's chapel along the years. Equally important is the article by the same author on prominent members of the Tabone family and their role in the social and ecclesiastical life of Żejtun (Abela, 2003: pp.63-67).

More recently St Clement's chapel was featured as the first chapel described by Dr Joseph Grima (2010: 1) in what promises to be one of a series of lavishly illustrated volumes on Maltese chapels. It is clear, however, that Grima relied on published sources for this work.

Two inscriptions are an additional source of known information on Clemente Tabone. Well known is the inscription above the main door within St Clement's chapel (Fig. 1). It reads "*Clementiv Taboni ecclesia[m] qua[m] ideo vovit, edificare fecit*" (Clemente Tabone promised a church as a vow, and because of this he built it). Another inscription existed on a tower raised by Tabone in 1603 in the vicinity of Hal Tmin. It read "*Clementis clementia non par dicto gigantum – Taboniae stirpis Gloria honorve domus*"

(Clemente's clemency is said not to match that of giants - not even the glory of the Tabone's pedigree or the honour of the family) (Mifsud, 1920: p.75).

### THE TABONE FAMILY TREE

A number of sources allow us to attempt an outline of the relevant family tree of Clemente Tabone. An internet source lists the genealogy of the Tabone family (Said-Vassallo, 2013) but only some parts have been confirmed through notarial contracts (NLM, Giuliana Adami 58). Published material on the lives of members of the Tabone family (Abela, 2003) helps us to conclude that Clemente Tabone came from a wealthy family with strong connections with Żejtun. One source traces his family back to his great grandfather Pietro (Said-Vassallo, 2013). More secure is the fact that his grandfather was named Tomeo (NAV, Not. Giuliano Muscat R376/14: ff.332v-334v), who could be the person who together with his brother Agostino, both from Casal Pasqualino, bought several lands in 1504 from Manfridus la Habica.<sup>2</sup> Tomeo's name is listed in various contracts of sales, with his good financial position allowing him to lend money to other persons (Wettinger, 2002: pp.19-21). More important for us is that Tomeo married Helagia Bonici (NAV, Not. Giuliano Muscat R376/11: ff.529r-530v; Gauci, 1992: table 65), the sister of Ugolino Bonici, the latter being the great grandfather of the well-known Girgor Bonici who bequeathed land for the construction of the Żejtun parish church (Abela, 1992: pp.8-9, 18-30).

Tomeo made his will in 1544 in which he formed an ecclesiastical benefice consisting of two arable fields known as Habel Bixeni in the area of Longobardi. He also arranged for weekly Mass for the repose of his soul in the church of Our Lady of the Assumption in Casal Pasqualino (NAV, Not. Giuliano Muscat R376/10: ff.472v-480r). Through this

deed and that of his wife Helagia we come to know that he had a number of children; his five girls were Leonara, Eularia, Agnes, Pina (?), and Antonella while the three boys were Impugiades, Torres and Pietro (NAV, Not. Giuliano Muscat R376/10: f.478r; R376/11: ff.529r-530v). Two years later in 1546, Tomeo's son Pietro married Dorothea Cumbo, the latter being daughter of Dr Pietro Cumbo J.U.D. and then the late Margherita (NAV, Not. Giuliano Muscat R376/14: ff.332v-335v; Not. Giacomo Sillato, R441/12: f.536r).

### A PROFILE OF CLEMENTE TABONE

Clemente was born from the marriage between Pietro and Dorothea. From this marriage Pietro and Dorothea had six daughters (NAV, Not. Salvatore Ciantar R184/16: f.552r). These were Agatha Zimegh, Iacobella Agius, Antonella Busuttil, Scolastica Vassallo, Margherita Zimegh and Imperia Cumbo. All were married by the end of the sixteenth century except for Scolastica and Margherita, who eventually got married by 1615.

Clemente Tabone was born around 1575, a detail deduced from the fact that he is known to have been 88 years old in 1663 (Abela, 2000: p.20; ŻPA, Lib. Def. 2: f.16v). He is probably the Clemens Tabuni of Casal Pasqualino who received a clerical tonsure on the 18 March 1589 but did not continue to study for the priesthood (Borg, 2009: p.467). Common among the noble and rich families in Malta, clerical tonsure brought a person under the authority and jurisdiction of the church, protecting him from the powers of the Order of St John. In return for the ecclesiastical privileges and immunity received, the person was expected to be of greater service to the church (Abela, 1992: p.18).

Another privilege enjoyed by Clemente was probably consequential to the fact

that he was the only son in the family. In September 1596, Clemente acted as an attorney to his father in a deal with Joannes Calamia J.U.D. over a house in Valletta owed by the latter's father Raymundi Calamia, a medical doctor (Not. Giacomo Sillato, R441/12: ff.463v-465v). A month later, on the 11 October 1596, Clemente was beneficiary of two notarial deeds signed by his father. In the first deed Pietro donated several pieces of land to Clemente through a *donatio inter vivos*, with Pietro reserving for himself usufruct rights. The lands included the fields known as tal-Mogħoż at Longobordi, Ta' Sardinja at Delimara, Mitamar at Tal-Kasar and two fields with reservoirs called Mnadar ta' Latmet Fangju. The donation included several fields at Raħal Harrat, such as two small adjoining fields known as Tad-Djar and what appear to have been four adjoining fields known as il-Waten, il-Wied, 'Mamtatachbile', and il-Ġnejjen, described as touching to the east the lands Tal-Mogħoż mentioned above. Clemente also received six fields with two cisterns, two small fields, two buildings and two kitchens at Raħal Tmin. These included tal-Ħawli, tal-Bir, il-Ġnejjen, Andar Kejzu, Rokon, and l-Aħgar, with the last three fields subject to canon law. Three fields which would later be closely tied with the history of St Clement's chapel were also part of this donation. These included the field known as Il-Ħabel in Casal Pasqualino and two fields, touching the coastline at Delimara and separated by an intervening road, known as Il-Ħofra and Il-Bur ta' Wileġ il-Lhud. Finally there was mention of a property at Casal Pasqualino which will be explored later on (NAV, Not. Giacomo Sillato R441/12: ff.531v-535v).

Pietro's will was registered immediately after this contract. Of interest for the history of Żejtun is his donation of 12 tari to the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament of this village and his wish to be buried in a tomb that already held his

father's remains within the parish church of St Catherine's in Casal Pasqualino. Furthermore for the repose of his soul, Pietro hypothecated lands known as il-Hereb ta' Harrat at Ħal Tmin to Clemente for the celebration of a Mass in the church of Our Saviour at Żejtun (NAV, Not. Giacomo Sillato R441/12: ff.536r-544r).

Clemente married his first wife Helena Testaferrata in Vittoriosa on 11 January 1597 (VPA, Lib. Mat. 1: f.338r; NAV, Not. Giacomo Sillato R441/12: ff.704v-710r) but Helena died just over a year later on the 2 August 1598 at the age of 23 (VPA, Lib. Bap. 1: f.54v; NLM, Giuliana Adami, 58: f.35). On the 3 February 1602, Clemente remarried, this time to Margherita Pace (daughter of Baron Pietro Pace and Laura) of Siġġiewi (NAV, Not. Andrea Allegritto R16/7: ff.134v-142r; SPA, Lib. Mat. 1: f.36r).

In 1603, Clemente raised a tower near Ħal Tmin although some sources place this building closer to Misraħ Strejnu (Abela, 2003: p.67; Vella, 1927: p.60).<sup>3</sup> Known as Torri Ingraw it carried the inscription "*Clementis clementia non par dicto gigantum – Taboniae stirpis Gloria honorve domus.*" Not much further can be said on the tower. The eighteenth-century manuscript which originally recorded the inscription is lost (Mifsud, 1920: p.75) and the tower was described as dismantled in 1927. Its stone was used to build a room within the same field (Vella, 1927: p.60), still evident in the recycled stone with the date "1603" inscribed on the door lintel and the Tabone family coat-of-arms used in the facade of this rural room (Figs. 2a - c). By 1609, Clemente was already living in Vittoriosa. On the 14th September of that year he was granted a building in the same locality on perpetual emphyteusis from Caterina widow of the Magnifico Bartolomeo Abela for the annual sum of six unciae. Clemente would not enjoy it for long. A year later Elizabetta Cassar brought Clemente in front of the *Magna*





Figure 2a: Rural structure possibly built from the recycled stone of Torri Ingraw, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2014.



Figure 2b: Recycled stone with 1603 date over door lintel, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2014.



Figure 2c: Tabone Family coat of arms fitted to the facade of the rural structure, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2014.

*Curia Castellania* to revert the contract (NAM, MCC, AO 80: ff.425r-452r).

Much has been said, particularly in the relevant available literature of the twentieth century on the role played by Clemente in the 1614 Turkish *razzia* on the Maltese Islands. One source identifies him as a member of the *dejma* (Zahra, 1978: p.99). Another claims that he vowed to raise St Clement's chapel after he was attacked by Turks in the area where the chapel was later built (Spiteri, 2000: p.238). A further source claims that he lost his sword during this fight (Abela, 2000: p.27). To assess for the authenticity of such claims, reference was made to sources contemporary with the 1614 *razzia*. Three were consulted by the present author. One source is the account written in the second baptismal register preserved at the Żejtun parish archives and transcribed on the walls of the Old Church of St Catherine (Abela, 2000: p.21). The other documents include a description of the attack featuring in the contemporary *Liber conciliorum* and contemporary letters issued by Grandmaster Wignacourt (NLM, AOM 105: ff.67r-72r; AOM 1393: ff.11v-23v, 278r-298r). Unfortunately Clemente's name is not mentioned in these sources. Nonetheless it appears in later writings. When referring to the events under study, the historian of the Order, Bartolomeo del Pozzo (1703: p.590) writes that in "qual occasione mostrarono molto coraggio Clementio Tabone Maltese, & Andrea Marconual Spagnuolo" (on that occasion much courage was shown by the Maltese Clemente Tabone and the Spaniard Andrea Marconual). A later manuscript, preserved at the National Library (Malta), reveals how 'Si porto molto valoroso Clementio Tabone gentiluomo maltese il quale poi mori, e fu sepolito in San Lorenzo' (The Maltese gentleman Clemente Tabone showed much bravery and when he died was buried at St Lawrence [church in Vittoriosa]) (NLM, Library Manuscript 1146/1: f.524). From the above accounts

one confirms the courage showed by Clemente during the attack, but research is still necessary to uncover the primary sources from which Del Pozzo and the author of the library manuscript derived their information.

A few months after the attack, Clemente's mother, Dorothea, made her last will. The deed, was made at a residence in Vittoriosa and has been preserved in the acts of Notary Salvatore Ciantar under the date of 31 December 1615. Described as sick in bed, Dorothea made provisions for alms to be given to the poor and for Masses to be said for the repose of her soul immediately after her death. Clemente was given the right to decide his mother's place of burial and was given a sum of money according to a deed preserved in the acts of notary Gio Domenico Spiteri. Furthermore, a weekly Mass in a chapel chosen by Clemente was to be said for the repose of her soul. Finally, Dorothea, constituted all her children as universal heirs (NAV, Not. Salvatore Ciantar R184/16: ff.551r-552v).

In the early 1620s Clemente's idea of building a chapel was already taking shape (see below). In 1628, Clemente was procurator for the parish church of Casal Pasqualino (AAM, Acta Civilia 6: ff.317r-317v, 320v-321r). More information on Clemente is available through a will made in 1646. In this will he gave instructions for Masses to be said at St Catherine's Church in Valletta, while donations were contemplated for the confraternities that accompanied his burial procession. The obligations set out by his mother's will are also addressed. From this deed we learn that he instituted his daughter Dorothea, wife of Giovanni Manicaro, as particular heir. Clemente also instituted his son Angelo (also referred to Archangelo in other documents) as universal heir, specifically mentioning in his will the donation of lands at tal-Mogħoż and Ta' Hibila l-Kbira. It is interesting that Dorothea

is described as the child of Clemente and Aloisetta while Angelo is described as legitimised through a Pontifical Brief issued from Rome on 10 February 1641 (NAV, Not. Matteo Bonnici R77/22: ff.213v-217v). From another will dated 1659 we come to know that Angelo was the son of Clemente and Aloisetta (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/30: f.152r). As Angelo and Dorothea are documented in 1646, one concludes that they were both born out of wedlock as Clemente's third marriage to Aloisetta 'tal-Verun' is recorded at Żejtun on 14 January 1657 (ŻPA, Lib. Mat. 2: f.78r). Daughter of the late Jacobo Veron, this was also the third marriage for Aloisetta, having been previously married to Nicolai and later to Francesco Gaione (NAV, Not. Giacinto De Avolio R205/6: ff.293v-297v).

An insight into Clemente's business activities may be glimpsed through contemporary contracts. In 1649 Don Palmerio Cap J.U.D., parish priest of Cospicua, gave the field Ta' Hibela at Ħal Farrad (sic) to Clemente for four years on rent (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/20: ff.336v-337v). On the 16 January 1652, in preparation for marriage with Margherita Caruana, Latius Cassar borrowed 100 scudi from Clemente. Two months later Stefanus Schembri sold to Clemente the field at Tal-Bur. From a contract dated to May of the same year, we learn that Clemente was renting the fields at Mitamar, Ta' Sardinja, il-Bur and il-Ħofra ta' Delimara to Giovanni Pietro Ellul for the sum of 200 scudi (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/23: ff.276v-277r, 290v-292r, 457v-458v). Through another contract we learn that Clemente owed the sum of 2200 scudi to Don Joannes Zimegh (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/27: f.549r).

On the 13 August 1661 Clemente made his last will (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/31: ff.300r-306r). With Żejtun so much at heart, Clemente left legacies to the confraternities of the Blessed

Sacrament and of Our Lady of the Rosary that existed within this parish. He wanted also that every fortnight, a Mass was to be celebrated in the church of Our Saviour in Casal Pasqualino for the repose of his father's soul, to honour his father's will (see also AAM, VP 17 Miguel Juan Balaguer de Camarasa: f.200v). Finally, if his descendents were to die out, Clemente provided that all his lands were to be bequeathed to St Clement's chapel and its procurator. In case this was not possible, Clemente left the money for the poor and slaves of Casal Pasqualino and Vittoriosa.

Clemente was probably living in Vittoriosa during these years. His 1646 will confirms that he was living in Vittoriosa and in his 1661 will Clemente is described as from Casal Pasqualino but living in Vittoriosa (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/31: f.300r). Nonetheless Clemente's name is listed in the status animarum of Żejtun for 1663, with that of his wife and two slaves. Here he probably lived close or shared a house with the family of his daughter Dorothea. Indeed, the entry for Clemente's household in the status animarum is followed by that of Dorothea's family, namely Giovanni Manicaro and their five children (ŻPA, Lib. Def. 2: f.16v); Dorothea is not listed because she was already dead at the time (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/31: f.300r-303r).

Clemente's death is registered in the archives of St Lawrence Parish Church, Vittoriosa under the date of 11 March 1665. The death of his son Angelo is listed in the same page under the date of 12 March 1665 (VPA, Lib. Def. 2: f.91v). It transpires that the will of Clemente was not favourably received within his family, and Angelo was killed the day after Clemente's death. (NLM, Adami Collection, 58: f.39). His widowed wife, who had already given birth to three children, was at the time pregnant with the fourth child, later named Archangela (VPA, Lib. Bap. 2:



f.126v,133v, 149v, 180r). Consequent to these events, Angelo's wife Primitiva intervened on behalf of her children Giovanni Pietro and Maria Egittiaca to acquire the properties left by Clemente and Angelo. The document relating to this case is indispensable to learn about Clemente's later life. Reference is made of a black slave by the name of Guglielmo and of Madalena another slave, both claiming to have been set free by Clemente (NAM, MCC, RIH 2: f.910r).<sup>4</sup> There is no reference to Gregorio the Ethiopian servant to Clemente documented in 1646 (NAV, Not. Matteo Bonnici R77/22: f.217r). Lands previously owned by Clemente are also listed. These included the fields at Raħal Ħarrat namely il-Bur, il-Ħibla, il-Ħbula tal-Waten and others. There were also fields at Ħal Tmin such as il-Wiesa (divided in two), il-Ħabel miedi Saflieni and l-Ħabel miedi Fuqqani, Il-Bur ta' Latmet Fangju, Tal-Aħġar, Tal-Bir, Tal-Ħereb and Tal-Andar. Interesting is the mention of a 'torre cum suo ricetto, e giardino diviso in tre' at Ħal Tmin probably a reference to Torri Ingraw built by Clemente in 1603. Also mentioned are lands known as 'il mellicha la grande' and 'il mellicha la piccola' at Bengħisa that can be taken as reference to salt-pans in that area (NAM, MCC, RIH 2: ff.904v-914r). From other sources we learn that Clemente had a field in the archaeological site at Tas-Silġ. A contemporary owner of another field in this area, then known as Tal-Qasar or Tal-Kasar, was Mattheolo Delia (Bugeja, in press). It is likely that Mattheolo and Clemente, both inhabitants at Vittoriosa, knew each other as on the 6 November 1622, Clemente was godfather to one of the slaves of Delia (Abela, 2000: p.20).

Finally, the document lists a small group of persons who owed money to Clemente. Gio Maria Xuereb owed 350 scudi while Luca Borg owed 40 scudi. Likewise Mariano Agius of Ghaxaq owed 100 scudi at Christmas and Easter, while Pietro



Figure 3: St Clement's chapel, Żejtun. Photograph by the author, 2014.

Rizzo and his wife Gratia owed 2 onze (NAM, MCC, RIH 2: f.910r).

### ST CLEMENT'S CHAPEL

Documents related to the building of St Clement's chapel (Fig. 3) go back to at least the early 1620s.<sup>5</sup> The historian Giovanni Antonio Ciantar (1780: p.94) declares that this chapel was subject to the parish priest according to a papal bull issued on the 1 October 1622. A separate source declares that the chapel was independent from the parish in view of an apostolic bull issued on 8 October 1622 from Santa Maria Maggiore (Rome).



This bull was implemented locally by Don Filippo Borg, vicar general to the diocese, on the 7 April 1623.<sup>6</sup> Through this decision Clemente was obliged to raise at his own cost a chapel within his lands known as il-Habel tar-Raħal. This was to be 40 palmi long, 20 palmi wide and 20 palmi high and have 24 courses of stone on the exterior. When the building was completed, Clemente had to provide for the necessary repairs and rebuilding as well as provide it with all the necessary liturgical vestments, chalice, and everything needed for the celebration of Mass. He also had to arrange for the celebration of the feast of St Clement on the 23 November every year with prime vespers and Mass. A lamp had to be lit on feast days and Saturdays while Mass was to be said twice weekly (VPA, *Memorie Lanzon* 3: ff.245r-245v).

By 1646, Clemente expressed his wish to be buried in the chapel which was then described as still to be constructed (*noviter erigenda*). He made a provision that in case he died before the chapel was finished, his body was to be buried in a larger church and then transferred to the said chapel.

The date '1658' inscribed on the façade of the chapel (Fig. 4) has always been taken to represent the date when the building of the chapel was finished (Ciantar, 1780: pp.193-94). The repeated reference to the chapel in a will drawn by Clemente on 9 January 1659 (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/30: ff.149v-153v) supports this date and by 1661 the chapel is described as built (NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/31: ff.301r). Much of the details mentioned above related to the instructions by Don Filippo Borg are reproduced in Clemente's last will. Beyond confirming his obligations towards the church and for the celebrations of Mass on St Clement's day and for the repose of his mother's soul, Clemente made good for this through all his goods, but especially through the rents from the two fields Tal-Bur and Tal-Hofra in Delimara. In 1664, Clemente appointed Don Pasquale Zahra as the rector of St Clement's chapel and specified that the weekly Friday Mass was to be said for the repose of the soul of his mother. Arrangements were also made for Masses at the altar of Our Saviour in St Mary's Church for his father (NAV, Not. Michele Attard R29/21A: ff.293v-295v).

Through a document from the *Magna Curia Castellania* dated 1665 we come to know that a road existed to the north and east of the fields at Tal-Bur. The field at tal-Hofra had a public road to the west while the shoreline was found on the eastern side. The main interest of this document, however, comes from an inventory of the articles left by Tabone for St Clement's chapel. This suggests that the church was not only built but also capable of securely holding various objects. The objects listed



Figure 4: Tabone's coat of arms and the date '1658' embedded beneath it, St Clement's chapel, Żejtun. Photograph: Ruben Abela, 2014.

in the inventory included:-

A chalice and a paten,

A missal,

Two pairs of gilded candlesticks,

Another pair of gilded candlesticks  
decorated with angel's faces,

Another two pairs of non-gilded  
candlesticks,

Six vases for artificial altar decorative  
flowers,

A suspended bronze sanctuary lamp,

A crucifix and a *cartagloria* with a gilded  
frame,

An altar frontal of leather with the image  
of the Blessed Sacrament,

Another altar frontal with a green moquette  
background with threads in gold,

Another altar frontal of turquoise  
*terzanello*,

A woolen chasuble (?) with a white  
background,

Another chasuble (?) with a turquoise ...,

With their albs and accessories, stoles and  
maniples (NAM, MCC, RIH 2: ff.909r,  
913r).

Other details on the chapel can be gleaned through the pastoral visitation reports. As expected no mention was made of the chapel in the visitation reports prior to 1658 (particularly AAM, VP 16 Miguel Juan Balaguer de Camarasa: ff.253r-260r; VP 17 Miguel Juan Balaguer de Camarasa: ff.200r-207v). The chapel is not described by bishop Miguel Juan Balaguer de Camarasa in the subsequent visitation report of the early 1660s because it appears that he did not visit Żejtun (AAM, VP 18 Miguel Juan Balaguer de Camarasa). The first time the chapel is mentioned is in the pastoral visit made by Canon Domenico Attard in 1666. Here the chapel is described as newly built (*noviter edificatam*) by Clemente Tabone in his own lands at the edge and towards the north of Casal Pasqualino. The chapel had a main altar in stone with two stone steps. On the altar were a *carta gloriæ*, two golden candlesticks and four other candlesticks painted white. Certainly important is the

description of the painting above the altar described as fixed to the wall in a frame of wood and stone. Our Lady holding the child Jesus on her lap was painted in the upper part. At a lower level was Saint Clement, Pope and martyr, holding a censer in his hands (sic) and honouring the Blessed Virgin Mary. The pastoral visit confirms the long established tradition that the person represented in the lowest part of the painting is Clemente Tabone (Fig. 5) (AAM, VP 19 Domenico Attard: f.173r.) who is dressed as a respectable upper class civilian Maltese gentleman of the early seventeenth century (personal communication Giovanni Bonello). The chapel was paved with stone slabs and had a tomb in the middle. Reference is made to the west-facing main wooden door surmounted by a spherical oculus and having a window with bars on each side. Mention is also made of the sacristy, a hanging bronze altar lamp in front of the altar, a small bell fixed to the inside wall of

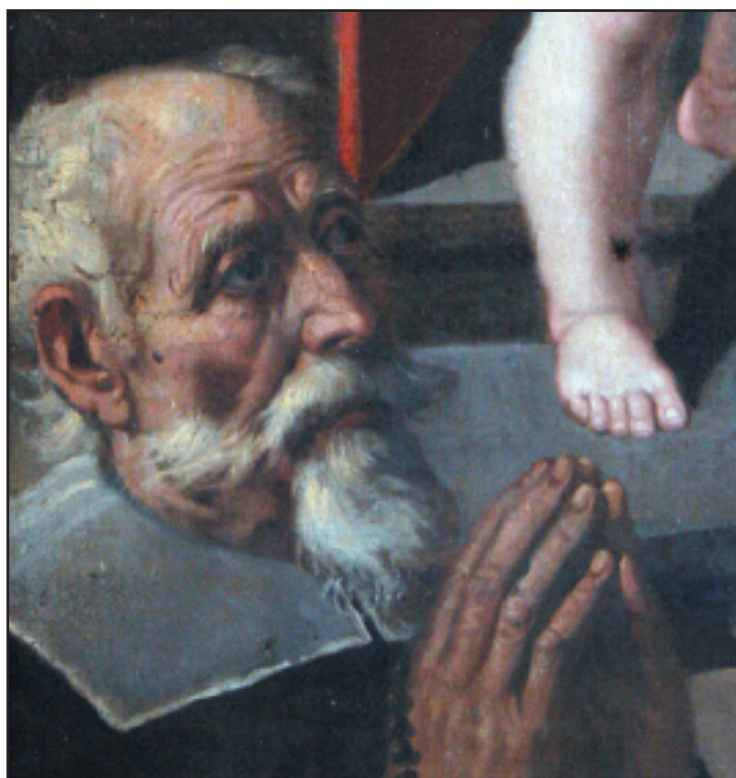


Figure 5: Detail of portrait of Clement Tabone from the altar titular painting of St Clement at St Clement's chapel, Żejtun. Photograph: Saviour Delia, 2014.

the chapel and a bell-cot with a bronze bell above the chapel. At the time the chapel was taken care of by Don Pasquale Zahra who showed Canon Domenico Attard an inventory of the items preserved in the chapel (AAM, VP 19 Domenico Attard: f.173r).

Another inventory of the chapel is found in the pastoral visit of bishop Lorenzo Astiria made in 1671. Its interest lies in providing details of other items as well as indicating the function of the objects included in the list of 1665. Thus, among other things, we find that the candlesticks decorated with angels were used for solemn feasts, whilst the plain ones were reserved for weekdays. Similarly the three altar frontals served for different periods of the liturgical year with the turquoise for advent and lent and the green for the feast days. The wall-affixed bell was used for the *sanctus*. Curiously, mention is made of a painting of the Blessed Virgin Mary on the altar of the sacristy. All this leads us to conclude that Clemente fulfilled his obligations by providing the chapel with everything required for it to be fully functional throughout the year (AAM, VP 21 Lorenzo Astiria: f.107r).

Later reports confirm most of the details described above but are also witness to additions made to the chapel in the following years. Thus in the pastoral visit of bishop Michael Molina mention is made of a reliquary containing a bone from St Clement's body, donated by Dr Simone Formosa J.U.D. (husband of Maria Egittiaca), accompanied by a testimonial sent from Rome on 9 March 1677 (AAM, Acta Civilia 39: ff.323v-324v; VP 22 Michael G Molina: ff.155r-155v). Later, bishop Davide Cocco Palmeri gave instructions for the reliquary to be gold-gilded for greater veneration. He also mentions a house to the left of the chapel with a courtyard, trees and a rainwater cistern reserved for the chapel's attendant (AAM, VP 24 Fra. David Cocco Palmeri: ff.375v-376r). Towards the end

of the century, Cocco Palmeri noted that the wooden reliquary had since been gold-gilded but Cocco Palmeri ordered further gold-gilding. The celebration of the first vespers and sung Mass of the 23 November and the lighting of the lamps were then being honoured by Petro Tabone and his sister Maria Egittiaca, heirs of Clemente. The priests taking care of the church at the time were Don Fabritio Mifsud and Don Aloisio Cachia (AAM, VP 27 Fra. David Cocco Palmeri: ff.159r-159v).

### THE 'HOUSE OF CLEMENTE TABONE'

There is a strong tradition that a building, namely what is today 40 St Clement's Street Żejtun (Fig. 6), was formerly the residence of Clemente Tabone (Abela, 1997: p.77). The confirmation of such claim would require the identification of an uninterrupted transfer of ownership from the sixteenth century to the present. This has not as yet been possible.

A less secure approach is to compare features of this house with buildings known to have belonged to Clemente. A convenient starting point is the mention of Pietro Tabone's only built property in Żejtun, which was donated to his son Clemente in 1596. It is described as a house in Casal Pasqualino consisting of several interconnecting rooms, a courtyard with a cistern and an adjoining small field as well as half of a tower. The other half of the tower belonged to the heirs of the late Antorres Tabone, probably Pietro's brother Torres referred to above. This property donated to Clemente was described as having to its east a house belonging to Leonardo Tabone, to the south buildings of Thome Carreana (?Caruana), to the west owned by Antonius Abela and others, and to the north was a public road. Pietro held together with his wife usufruct rights over the said property but after their death, the property was to pass to Clemente and





Figure 6: The house thought to have belonged to Clemente Tabone, Żejtun. Photograph: Saviour Delia, 2014.

his heirs. In his will signed immediately after, Pietro confirmed that Dorothea had usufruct rights to live and make use of the rooms, half the tower and adjoining field. In this contract, however, the property to the east is declared to belong to Leonardo Tabone, that to the south to Thomas Bezzina (?) while to the west and north by Angelo Abela and others (NAV, Not. Giacomo Sillato R441/12: f.539r).

Reference to the property in question is made in the will of Leonardo Tabone dated 1615. Leonardo's property is described as a house with a tower and an adjoining small field together with an animal yard. This property had a public road towards the east, a public road and property of Ludovigo Cassar toward the south, property of Clemente Tabone to the west and a public road and property of Antonius Abela to the north (NAV, Not. Andrea Albano R12/22: f.53v).

Part of the property under study was intended to go to Angelo in Clemente's will of 27 March 1646. It is described as having to the east property of Dorothea and heirs of Leonardo Tabone, to the south a public road, to the west property of Paolina Dalli and to the north property of Valerio Abela and others (NAV, Not. Matteo Bonnici R77/22: f.216r).

The property in question is easily identifiable in the list of possessions belonging to Clemente Tabone at the time of his death because it was the only built property listed at Żejtun. It is described as a house with rooms, courtyard and two adjoining enclosures. Property belonging to the heirs of Leonardo Tabone lay to the east, a public road was to the south, to the west was property of the heirs of Valerio Habela whilst to the north was an alley and other properties or more precisely touching a centimolo in one of

the two households (NAM, MCC, RIH 2: f.909v).

Unfortunately, access to the property under study in St Clement's street has not been possible, and the only information received is that '1624' is inscribed on the inside of this house (personal communication Mr Joseph Desira). Consequently the only thing that can be done is to compare details in the contracts to an aerial view of the house and surrounding neighbourhood. Some details in these contracts support an identification of the building owned by Clemente with the property mentioned above at St Clement's street. Like the building mentioned in the contracts, the house in this street has several rooms, a courtyard, and at least an adjoining small field and a cistern. The repeatedly documented street to the south of the property after 1615 may well be what is today St Clement's street while the public road towards the east of Leonardo Tabone's property may be identified with Sciortino's street.

Nonetheless a definite identification cannot be proposed in view of some dissimilarities. Contrary to what is mentioned in the contracts, in Sheet 109 of the Ordnance Survey Sheets of 1912

(War Office 1912) which is the earliest available of the area to the author (Fig. 7), there is no evidence of the public road or alley to the north of the property under study. When this survey sheet is studied the property to the west of the house emerges as identical to the one lying east of the field containing St Clement's chapel. In the 1665 list the property to the west of the house under study belonged to Valerio Abela in contrast to that to the east of il-Ħabel tar-Raħal containing St Clement's chapel which belonged to Alessandro Abela.

## CONCLUSION

The present paper has outlined the main events in the life of Clemente Tabone as revealed by a reassessment of previously little known documents. It has also highlighted the early history of St Clement's chapel in Żejtun and investigated whether a house in a nearby street could have belonged to Clemente. Nonetheless, a definite position on Clemente's role in the *razzia* of 1614 and whether this event is linked to the construction of St Clement's chapel requires further research and the discovery of relevant primary documentation.

*I would like to thank Rev. Can. Dun Gwann Azzopardi, Judge Giovanni Bonello, Mr Joseph Amodeo, Mr Joseph Desira and the staff at the Curia Archives, National Archives (Mdina), National Library of Malta, and Notarial Archives (Valletta) for their help. Any errors in the text are the author's responsibility.*



Figure 7: Ordnance Survey Sheet 1912, Office of the Public Works.



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 VP 18 Miguel Juan Balaguer de Camarasa (1662-1663).  
 VP 19 Domenico Attard (1665-1666)  
 VP 21 Lorenzo Astiria (1671-1674)  
 VP 22 Michael G Molina (1678-1680)  
 VP 24 Fra. David Cocco Palmeri (1685-1687)  
 VP 27 Fra. David Cocco Palmeri (1699-1700)

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## Endnotes

- 1 Referred to as Clemens, Clementio, and Clementis and with the surname reproduced mostly as Tabuni but also as Tabone, the name has been referred to as Clemente Tabone in the present text.
- 2 While Clemente's grandfather was named Tomeo, caution should be exercised in identifying him with Tomeo, brother of Agostino. This is because the lands owned by the latter two brothers are not reflected in the lands owned by Pietro and his son Clemente. See text and relevant references for details.
- 3 When Vella claimed that the tower was built by the person who built Santa Marija ta' Hal Tmin he undoubtedly intended Saint Clement chapel. Indeed, on page 60 he explicitly says that the tower was built by Clemente Tabone and on page 65 he declares that Santa Marija ta' Hal Tmin was built by Leonardo Tabone.
- 4 The names are given as Madalena and Giuliano in Abela, 2000: p.20; ŻPA, Lib. Def. 2: f.16v.
- 5 Unfortunately the original documents related to the events of the 1620s have not been retraced and this reconstruction has been made through secondary sources.
- 6 The date is given as 7 April 1627 in NAV, Not. Giuliano Felici R260/31: f.300r.