

NATIONAL

# Old map a highlight of an important Melitensia auction

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“Ownership is the most intimate relationship one can have to objects. Not that they come alive in him; it is he who comes alive in them” – Walter Benjamin.

There is an inherent magic in collecting, an addiction that generally borders on obsession, essentially becoming a way of life. It can also be regarded as an ongoing learning experience that enriches the collector in more ways than one, besides contributing to the cultural legacy of one’s own country.

Albert Ganado, one of Malta’s pre-eminent collectors of Melitensia, is widely acknowledged as a doyen in this specialised field of collecting, his knowledge that accumulated through over 60 years of intense scholarly research and through an overwhelming passion for cartography. He possesses an enviable eye, deciphering what stands out as unique and exceptional in the milieu of auctions, specialist bookshops and antique shops.

Joseph Schirò, one of Malta’s foremost experts in this very specialised field and who considers Ganado as a great friend and a mentor, has been asked by Obelisk Auction House to be the guest consultant for an auction of 146 artefacts from the Ganado collection.

“Ganado needs no introduction,” Schirò remarks.

“He is an expert in Melitensia, an authority in old maps.”

“I got acquainted with Ganado back in 1994 when I was tasked to compile a *Festschrift* (a collection of writings published in honour of a scholar) to celebrate him. This was quite an extraor-

dinary undertaking as it is an endeavour which is more popular in Nordic countries, not much so in Malta,” Schirò continues.

The two scholars’ friendship flourished and they shared knowledge and exciting discoveries; Schirò once accompanied the older scholar on a trip to London for a meeting of the International Map Collectors’ Society. Ganado was previously unaware that he was to be the unsuspecting recipient of the prestigious Helen Wallis Award, which is awarded to individuals who have contributed conspicuously to international cartography. The younger scholar was astounded by the reverence and esteem in which this international community of scholars held Ganado.

“Ganado’s persistence as a collector is legendary”

“Ganado is a pioneer who has managed to integrate two specialised disciplines, that of cartography with that of philigranology. The latter speciality studies watermarks, thereby providing an inestimable aid in dating documents and interpreting other variables,” Schirò points out.

“The man is very modest and doesn’t like to talk about this but he spearheaded an international trend and, for this, he is universally admired.”

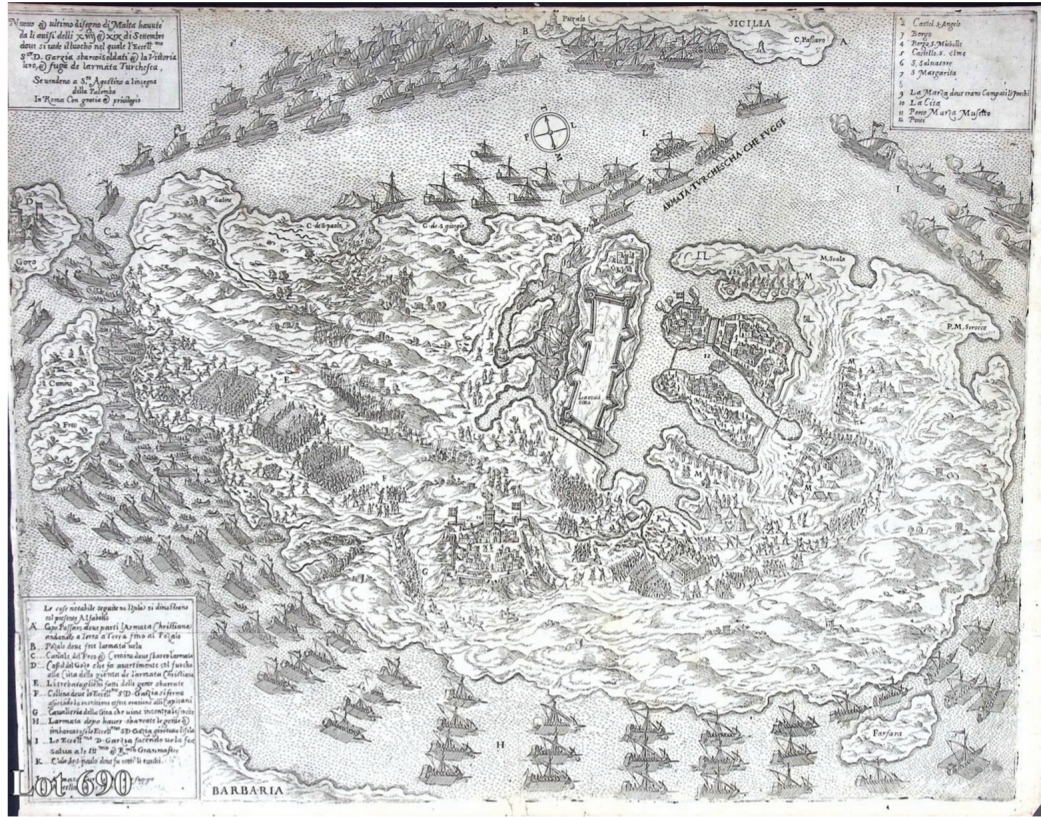
He says that Ganado is a completist, always on the lookout for editions of artefacts even if examples of them already belonged to his collection. For example, in



The Antonio Sciortino clay bozzetto



A general view of one of the rooms at Obelisk Auctions.



be-A misshaped map of Malta based on three Lafreri siege maps by Pietro Paolo Palumbo.

the past, he purchased various editions of the same book; he used to buy all available variants of publications and maps that interested him, even though these had been already represented in his collection.

In 2008, Ganado bartered part of his collection of maps, 450 of them, most of which were single exemplars, and which dated between 1507 and 1899, with the Maltese government. This was done in order to gain ownership of his family home, which actually belonged to the state. Schirò oversaw this transaction, on behalf of Heritage Malta.

“People sometimes comment that Ganado got the right side of the bargain in that exchange,” Schirò enthuses.

“I beg to differ. It was the government that got the better side of the deal because most of the maps simply can’t be purchased for any sum as they are so rare. Besides, he donated to the country the fathomless knowledge and experience accumulated through 60 years of collecting as well as a database that is a fountain of information.”

The public might ask how come that these pieces that are to be auctioned were not part of the deal. In some cases, Ganado had two copies of the same document, so the most prized and best copy was included in the deal while he kept the multiple copies for his collection. He had particular documents in various ‘states’ which he all gave to HM.

Ganado started his collecting career back in the 1950s at a time when interest in these fields was lukewarm. Thus, he enjoyed the luxury of a great market choice at reasonable prices. For a long period of time, he was the only local collector dedicated to cartography. His collection grew organically and was periodically augmented by the choicest of pieces. Ganado wasn’t just a collector; he was also a consummate researcher who was happy to share his knowledge and expertise with colleagues, fellow researchers and students.

## THE HIGHLIGHTS OF THE AUCTION

The six-day auction dedicates just one day, Wednesday, June 15, to the

sale of these artefacts from the Albert Ganado Collection. However, auctioneer Pierre Grech Pillow points out that, besides this prestigious collection, there are more than 1,300 items for auction, ranging from furniture and paintings going back to the 17th century, to 20th century works of art by Carmelo Borg Pisani, Giuseppe Cali and Gabriel Caruana, among others.

The highlight among these is an Antonio Sciortino clay bozzetto of a monument that will certainly intrigue the collectors of Maltese 20th-century art.

“The items on auction on June 15 are only the tip of the iceberg of the Ganado collection,” Schirò maintains. More pieces will be auctioned through Obelisk Auctions in the forthcoming months.

“I would say that the most desirable item for Melitensia collectors of cartography is the Antonio Saliba map, which is a single exemplar, the only one of its type existing in the world today. It is a broadsheet map, therefore, not originating from books, that should undoubtedly whet the appetite of all collectors in the field,” Schirò claims.

“There are other maps of the Great Siege that, although not single exemplars, are extremely desirable and very rare, nonetheless. There are also books in this auction that feature maps that are also part of this collection.”

This adds another layer to a purchase of both book and map to complement each other; this

sides the inherent prestige of actually owning artefacts that originated from such a distinguished source.

“Whoever buys any of these much-valued pieces would have the honour of owning something from the Albert Ganado Melitensia Collection. For collectors, the axiom that provenance is key is bible truth, so collectors should not miss out on this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity,” Schirò emphasises.

According to him, there is an amazing variety of rare books bearing a diverse thematic range. Items of such quality rarely come up for sale as, usually, owners are averse to parting with such treasures.

Ganado’s persistence as a collector is legendary. He would chase all leads that would secure him a rare and unique piece available on the market.

“His memory is impressive, even at the venerable age of 98,” Schirò continues.

“The books themselves have the added bonus of his personal notes in them, that document the biography of the book itself, the availability of copies of it in auctions as well as an exhaustive general knowledge pertaining to it.

“Ganado wrote a lot, he did a lot, he is a world authority on 16th-century Italian cartography.”

Ganado also founded the Malta Map Society of which he was the first president.



Table des Meteore. This edition of the world map by the Gozitan Antonio Saliba is the only known copy in the world.

“I have succeeded him as president and I’m proud to carry on his legacy. He always claims that collecting is open-ended; his enthusiasm brims when he discovers something that is in a class of its own. Research should be ongoing, a lesson that Ganado impressed on me, as, otherwise, the whole endeavour would stagnate and become stale,” Schirò concludes.

Obelisk Auctions have been entrusted with the sale of these documents from the Albert Ganado Collection. Viewing is on Friday, Saturday and Sunday from 10am to 6pm as well as on the mornings of the auction which starts on June 13. Wednesday, June 15 is dedicated to the auction of the Ganado Collection. Consult the Obelisk Auctions Facebook page for more information.



Lot 646 Della Descrittioine di Malta isola nel Mare Siciliano, Gio Francesco Abela, 1747



Lot 641 Malta Vetus et Nova.... by Burchardo Niderstedt, 1660



Lot 654 Statva Hospitalis Hiervsalem, 1788