

## Malta bejn is-sekli 9 u 10

Is-sekli 9 u 10 jstgħu jiġu deskritti bħala ż-żminijiet Mudlama ta' Malta. Is-sorsi bil-miktub li jirreferu għal Malta f'dan il-perjodu huma ftit, fil-qosor u diffiċli biex jiġu interpretati. Huma jhallu wkoll hafna informazzjoni barra.

X'jgħidulna s-sorsi?

Huma jikkonfermaw li lsqof u uffiċjali militari Bizantini kienu attivi f'Malta mill-inqas minn tmiem is-seklu 6 sal-invażjoni Għarbija tat-870.

- Fis-637 kmandant militari Bizantin jew **Dux** kien ibbażat f'Malta.
- Fis-732 il-knejjes tal-Italja t'Isfel u Sqallija, inkluż il-gżejjer Maltin, ġew ittrasferuti minn Ruma għall-Patrijarkat ta' Kostantinopli. Dan seta' wassal ukoll għal bidla fil-lingwa u r-rit Grieg Ortodoss.
- Fit-840 Malta waqgħet taht il-ġurisdizzjoni tal-Knisja ta' Sirakuza flimkien ma' 12-il veskovat Sqalli ieħor.
- Sigilli tač-čomb iddatati fis-sekli 8/9 jiddokumentaw il-preżenza ta' **Arkon** u **Droungarios** (kap ta' skwadra navali) f'Malta.
- Fit-870 sorsi Għarab jirreferu għall-kap Bizantin lokali bit-terminu '**malik**' (re). L-istess terminu kien użat għall-Gżejjer Balearici fis-seklu 8. Il-kapjiet militari Griegi fuq gżejjer imbiegħda kienu jidhru bħala rejiet sovrani għall-Għarab - tali kienet is-setgħa u l-pożizzjoni lokali tagħhom.
- Sorsi Għarab jiddeskrivu wkoll l-invażjoni militari tal-Aghlabidi tat-870. Jingħad li l-gżira ta' Malta thalliet fi stat ta' herba u mingħajr nies. Xi studjużi interpretaw dan fis-sens li Malta kienet diżabitata għall-175 sena ta' wara.



Is-sigill tal-Arkon mič-Cittadella

The Arkon seal from the Citadel

## Malta between the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries

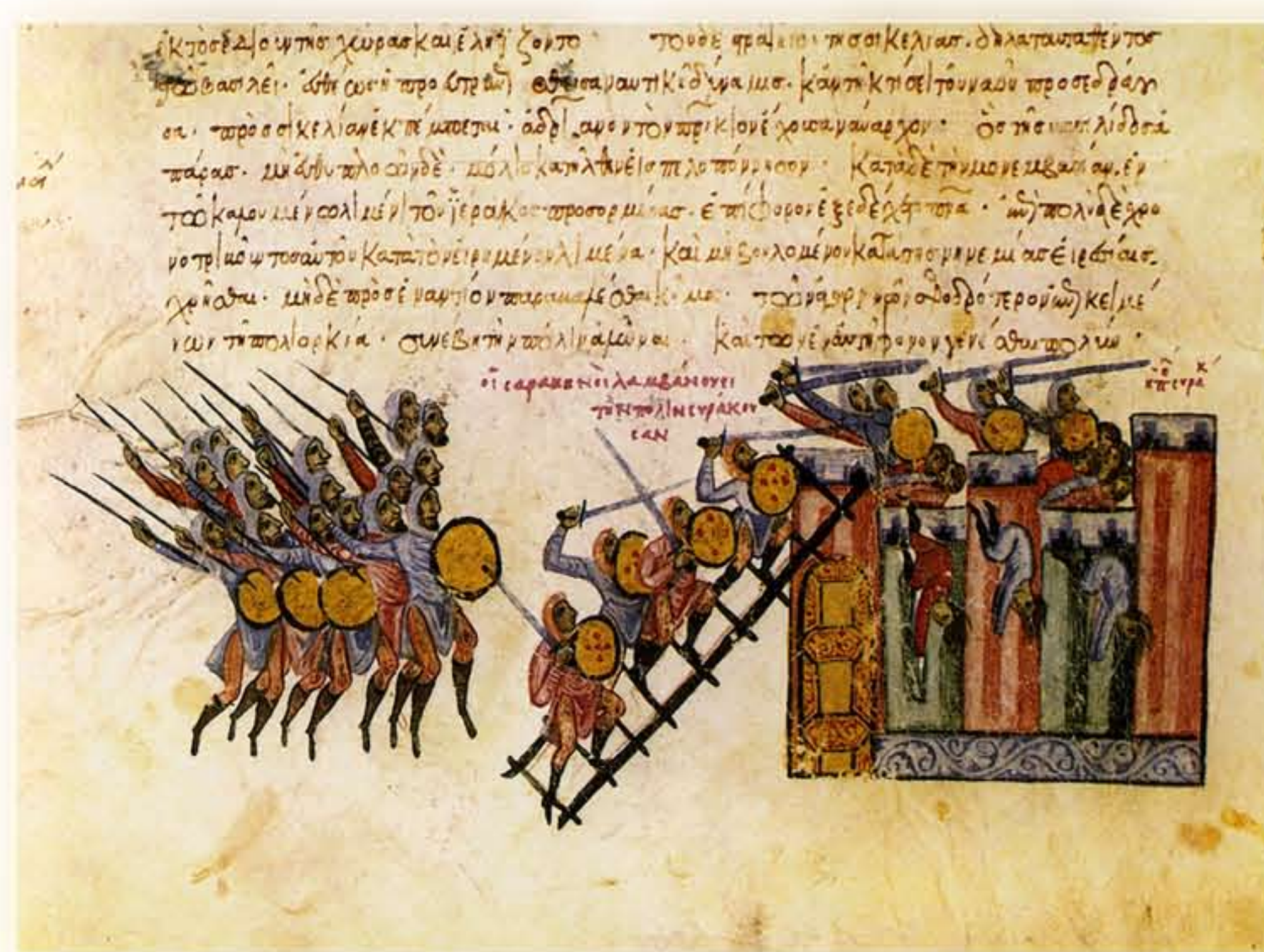
The 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> centuries may be described as Malta's Dark Ages. Written sources referring to Malta in this period are few, brief and difficult to interpret. They also leave much unsaid.

What do the sources tell us?

They confirm that a Bishop and Byzantine military officers were active in Malta at least from the late 6<sup>th</sup> century till the Arab invasion of 870.

- In 637 a Byzantine military commander or **Dux** was based in Malta.
- In 732 the churches of southern Italy and Sicily, including the Maltese islands, were transferred from Rome to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. This may have been accompanied by a shift to the Greek Orthodox rite and language.
- In 840 Malta fell under the jurisdiction of the Church of Syracuse along with 12 other Sicilian bishoprics.
- Lead seals dated to the 8<sup>th</sup>/9<sup>th</sup> century document the presence of an **Arkon** and a **Droungarios** (leader of a naval squadron) in Malta.
- In 870 Arab sources refer to the local Byzantine leader by the term '**malik**' (king). The same term was used for the Balearic Islands in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Greek military leaders on distant islands appeared to the Arabs as sovereign kings - such was their local power and standing.
- Arab sources also describe the Aghlabid military invasion of 870. 'The island of Malta' is described as being left depopulated and a ruin without people'. Some scholars have interpreted this as meaning that Malta remained depopulated for the next 175 years.

L-attak fuq Sirakuza mill-Għarab fl-878. Manuskritt Bizantin illuminat mill-Arkivji Skylitzes ta' Madrid. Detall minn fol. 100v



The fall of Syracuse in 878 to the Arabs, Byzantine illuminated manuscript from the Madrid Skylitzes - Fol 100v detail

Imma s-sorsi għandhom jittieħdu b'mod litterali? Ir-realtà storika kienet aktar kumplessa minn dik li hi ssuġġerita minn dawn il-ftit linji tal-kittieb Għarbi al-Himyari fl-aħħar tal-medjuevu?

Barra minn hekk, skont is-sorsi eżistenti tingħata l-impressjoni daqsikieku l-Knisja u l-Militar eżistew ġewwa vakwu. X'tip ta' soċjetà eżistiet dak iż-żmien?

Dan huwa fejn l-arkeoloġija tista' titfa' dawl ġdid fuq iż-żminijiet Mudlama Maltin.

But should the sources be taken at face value? Was historical reality more complex than what is suggested by this odd remark by the late medieval compiler al-Himyari?

Furthermore, going by the existing sources it is almost as if the Church and the Military existed in a vacuum. What sort of society existed at the time?

This is where archaeology can cast new light on the Maltese Dark Ages.