

LINO BIANCO – IL-MONUMENT TAL-ĦELSIEN: MINTOFF U L-ABBOZZI TAD-DISINJI TA' AGIUS, KITE GROUP, ĦAMRUN, MALTA, 2024

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Abstract. The present article is a review of the book: Bianco L. (2024), *Il-Monument tal-Ħelsien: Mintoff u l-abbozzi tad-disinji ta' Agius*, Kite Group, Ħamrun, Malta, 74 pp., with ISBN 978-9918-23-136-2.

Key words: Freedom Monument, Mintoff, Agius, Malta, book review.

1. Book review

"*Il-Monument tal-Ħelsien: Mintoff u l-abbozzi tad-disinji ta' Agius*", which translates as 'The Freedom Monument: Mintoff and the design sketches of Agius', is a bilingual monograph in Maltese and English by Lino Bianco (Bianco, 2024). It is based on an earlier publication issued in English in Transilvania (Bianco 2023). The translation into Maltese is by René Monseigneur. The year 2023 was the 55th anniversary since Malta and Romania established their diplomatic relations, and the year 2024 is the 45th anniversary of Freedom Day.

Interesting is the fact two persons whom Bianco acknowledged for their support in the production of this publication are Godfrey Pirotta and Kevin Aquilina. Pirotta is the Chairperson of the Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta. Bianco wrote reviews about publications written on Pirotta's work (Bianco 2021; Bianco 2022). Aquilina is the former dean of the Faculty of Laws at the

University of Malta and with whom Bianco wrote a publication (Aquilina and Bianco, 2010).

The monograph opens with a note of the translator who also wrote a short biography of Prime Minister Dom Mintoff and sculptor Anton Aguis. This book includes a preface, introduction, a description of the socio-political context, a discussing on a number of design sketches and on the design as executed. It concludes by final comments followed by the endnotes. This publication reproduces at high resolution the design sketches and other illustrations, and concludes by a bibliographical list of sources followed by a name index.

The monograph was endorsed by Nuno da Silva Gonçalves SJ (Professor of Church History, Faculty of History and Cultural Heritage of the Church, Pontifical Gregorian University, Rome), John Chircop (Professor of Social and Economic History, Faculty of Arts, University on Malta, Malta), Margarita

Gluzberg (Senior Lecturer of Fine Arts, Royal Academy of Arts, London, United Kingdom), Kenneth Wain (Professor Emeritus of Education Studies, Faculty of Education, University on Malta, Malta), and Nikki Petroni (Visiting Lecturer in Modern and Contemporary Art, Faculty of Education, University on Malta, Malta). Chircop and Wain have different political ideologies and each support the political parties close to their belief.

Chircop stated that this work is “an original contribution to the knowledge of the artistic, political and social aspects of the Freedom Monument at Birgu, and the part it plays in commemorating an all-important event in the long process of nation-building. Lino Bianco deftly examines the artistic and political symbolism, as well as the actual decision-making process for the physical layout, of the Freedom Monument, which as from March 1979 has served as the most visible mnemonic device at the service of national collective memory.” Wain stated that this “monograph is a comprehensive account and detailed analysis of the preparatory conceptual design sketches made for the Freedom Monument in Birgu by sculptor Anton Agius. Its rich and many faceted account of the monument’s creation takes him into its history, political context, and ideological significance. And into the mind of Prime Minister Mintoff, who commissioned and conceived it. Besides analysing the sketches, Bianco extensively discusses the monument’s artistic style and chosen location. He also describes Agius’ fraught relationship with Mintoff, whose restrictive brief and continuous, heavy-handed interference

with everything led the artist to declare that it was ‘Mintoff’s monument’.”

Petroni acknowledged that Bianco succeeded in “weaving together a divisive and multi layered narrative with ease.” He took up a national monument and in a well-written and solidly-researched work, he analysed it within the socio-political contexts surrounding it. Freedom Monument is not only an object which reminds one of the events that it commemorates but this monograph reconstructs its history as a statement of Malta’s identity as a military neutral and nonaligned country. This publication is important to all those interested in Maltese history, art and politics, whether students, general readers or specialists.

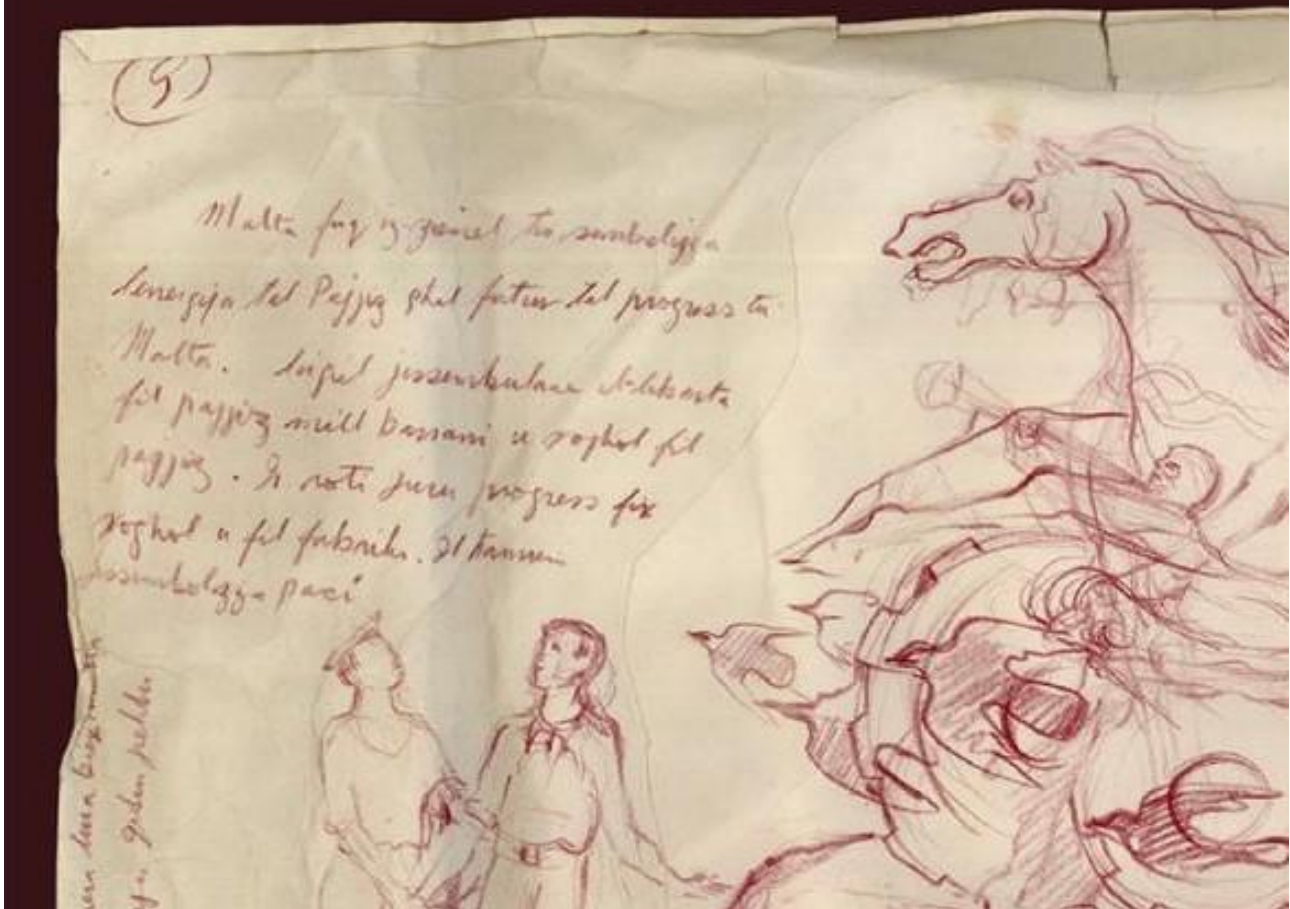
[2. About the author](#)

Lino Bianco is an architect, an engineer and an academic at the Department of Architecture and Urban Design, Faculty for the Built Environment, University of Malta (2024), visiting professor in urban planning at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy (UACEG) (2024), Sofia, and invited professor at the Faculty of Social Sciences, Pontifical Gregorian University (2024), Rome. Bianco has a PhD in architecture and politics from UACEG. He was invited professor of International Diploma Projects Committees at a number of state universities including the Technical University of Moldova, Chisinau, and ‘Ion Mincu’ University of Architecture and Urban Planning, Bucharest. He is the Ambassador Emeritus of the Republic of Malta to the Republic of Moldova, Romania, and the Republic of Bulgaria.

IL-MONUMENT TAL-ĦELSIEN

Mintoff u l-abbozzi tad-disinji ta' Agius

Lino Bianco



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