

La Galite Island

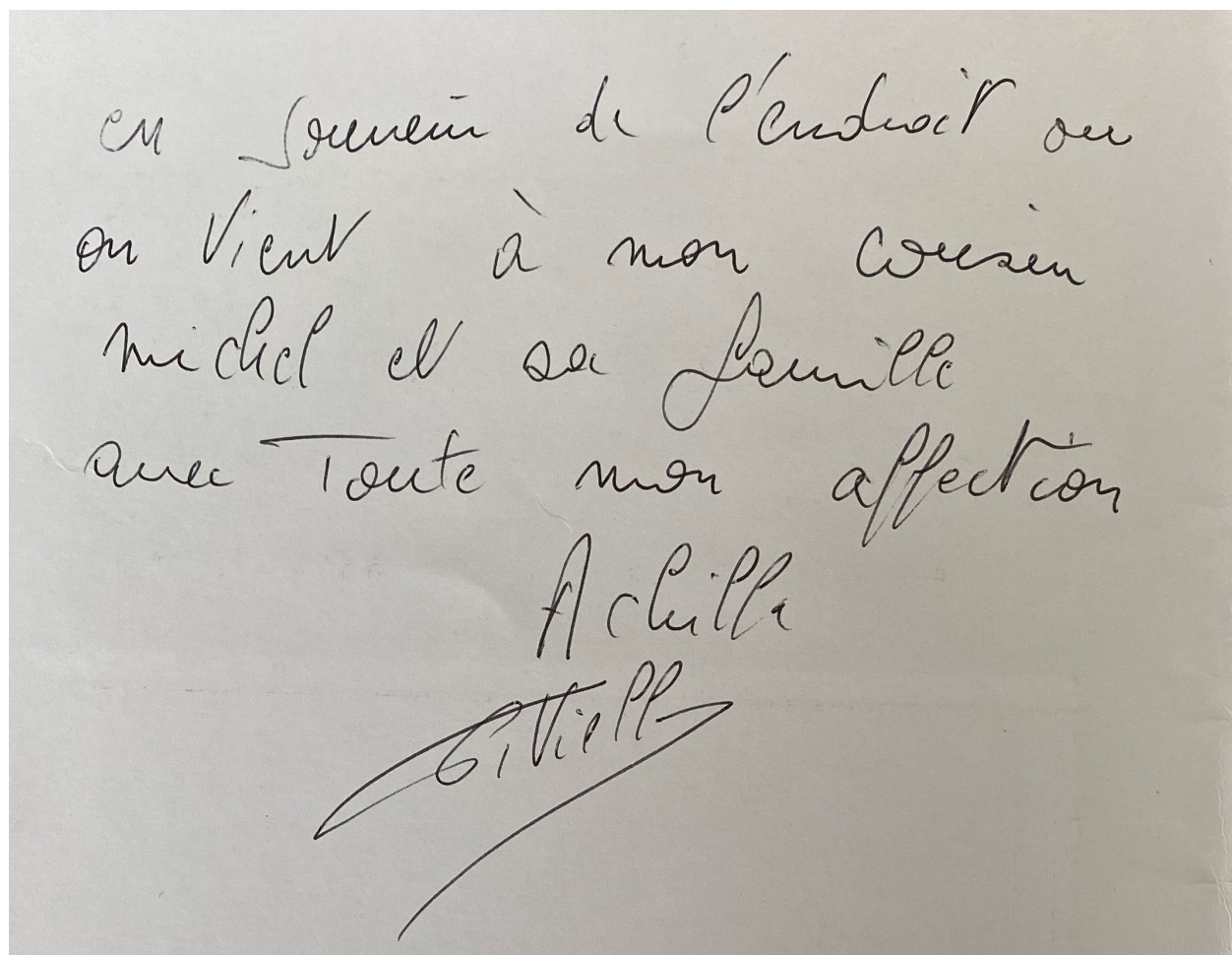
From 1840 to the end of the French Protectorate in Tunisia (1958)

Achille Vitiello

Owner/fisherman Sanary-sur-Mer (France)



My name is Achille Vitiello. I live with my family in Six-fours-les Plages, in the Var. Previously, we lived in Sanary-sur-Mer, where we arrived with my parents, on March 20, 1958. We come from Tunisia. I was born in Bizerte, on July 24, 1942; my mother, Marie Lopicolo, was born in Bizerte on July 23, 1922, and my father Antoine Vitiello, called "Jean", was born on the island of La Galite on September 27, 1918. It is the story of this island about which I would like to talk to you about, from my memories and from stories told by my father and grandfather, both of whom were fishermen...



In memory of where we come from. To my cousin, Michel, and his family, with all my affection.

Achille Vitiello

I have known Achille, sparingly, and that in my late years. We are second cousins and, as he likes to explain to me, "my father and your father, they were first cousins." On the few occasions when we have been together I found him to be a genuinely loveable gentleman, fond of his family and passionate about life. I could sit for hours listening to stories that take on a new life when heard through his unique combination of "Provencal, Corsican, Ponzese, Galitese, Italian and Tunisian" accents. After our families met on the island of Ponza, in 2014, Achille provided me with this manuscript. I made a copy for a relative of ours, Dr. Biagio Vitiello, a doctor on the island. He proceeded to translate the work in Italian and posted it on a local web page, in 12 chapter increments.

<http://www.ponzaracconta.it/?s=la+Galite&submit.x=18&submit.y=7&submit=Search>

Biagio asked if I would not mind providing the English translation, that now follows. In this process, I have tried to maintain Achille's voice throughout, sometime to the detriment of proper grammatical structure. I know he will forgive me.

Michel Vitiello

La Galite is an island located north of the border between Tunisia and Algeria, but is Tunisian territory. It is located 35 nautical miles from Tabarka, 24 miles from Cap Serrat, 55 miles from Bizerte and 90 miles in south of Sardinia.



The topography of the island is very steep and mountainous, but not very high: its highest point is 350 meters (1,150 feet). The island is in the shape of a crescent, about seven kilometers long and two and a half kilometers wide. The crescent faces

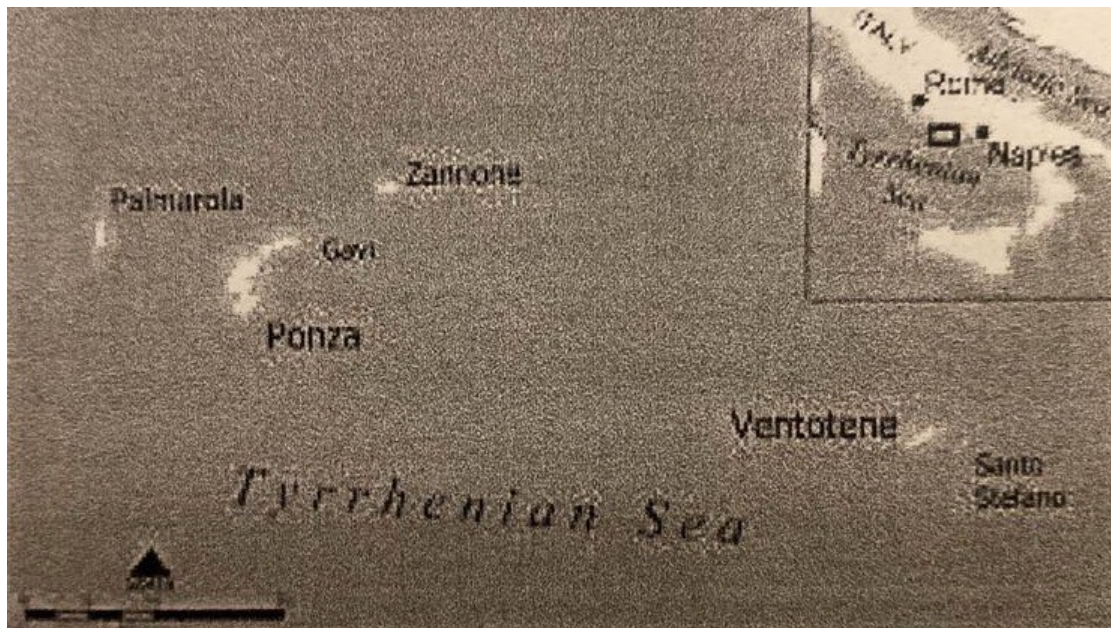
south to a port which is fairly well sheltered to the west by The Peak of the Madonna, and to the east by The Peak of the Mountain of the Guard.



Looking south, to the left, there is the Mountain of the Guard (A *Vouardia* in “Galitese”.) It rises so rapidly that it seems the highest point on the island, but the highest point is in the western part, the Watchtower, so named because the French National Navy built a guardhouse there around 1910. In Galitese, this peak was called *U pezzone*, the Great Peak. The least steep part of the island is from the center of the harbor, going east from the sea side to the north of the island (Levant ¹) It is there that the first inhabitants tilled the land for cultivation and that, halfway up on the southern side, they built the village. But let's go back to 1840, when the island was still deserted ...



In the beginning, there was Ponza.



The inhabitants of La Galite are originally from Ponza, an island to the north-west of Naples, continuing from the islands of Capri, Ventotene and Ischia. It is about seven to eight kilometers long (four to five miles) and three kilometers wide (two miles.) It is very steep and overpopulated and the smallest piece of open land is cultivated. The inhabitants live of fishing from May to September and, in winter,

¹ As in “sunrise, meaning to the East. Historically, the countries along the Eastern Mediterranean shores.

they have to cultivate the land because, without these two activities, it is impossible to live there.

In 1840, there are two friends who are around 12 years old. The first is Nicolas Vitiello, an only child. His father has enough land to support a family. He has a few domestic animals, fruit trees and a small vineyard. He hunts and sells his game, but does not fish. Nicolas starts working with his father and, later, will assume succession. The drama in these islands is inheritance. When a father, with many children, dies, the inheritance share of all is so small that the youngest is forced to live elsewhere. This was the case of Nicolas' friend, Silver Mazzella. At the age of twelve, he embarked for the fishing season, along the Cost of Barbary², as a coral fishing sailor. Coral fishing armament³ was based in Torre del Greco, a small port near Naples. Their composition was the same as that of the “Terre-Neuvas⁴” of Saint-Malo: sailboats with two masts, about thirty meters long (100 feet), each accompanied by six smaller boats of six to seven meters in length (about 20 feet), manned by five sailors. These fishermen were rowing and sailing, along the coast, under the supervision of the sailing boats.

At the border, on the Algerian side, there was a French enclave called - the Bastion of France (*A cal y Francia* to the Neapolitan corallers.) This would later on become “La Calle”. Fishermen often return there to get supplies or to take shelter when the weather is bad. And offshore, far offshore, there is a deserted island: La Galite. Fishermen like to go fishing there, because they are safe there, there is no risk of being attacked and fleeced by barbarians, as often happens along the Barbary Coast. In La Galite, therefore, they became accustomed to arriving in May and disembarking with supplies. On the island there is a plenty of spring water, they can stay in natural caves along the beach, and, occasionally, sailing boats refuel in La Calle. When the bad weather arrives, in September or October, everyone returns to Torre del Greco, and La Galite becomes deserted again.

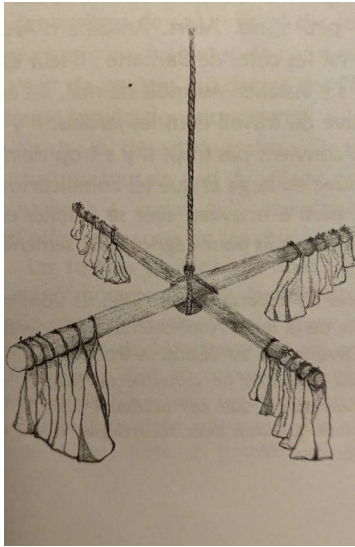
2 The term **Barbary Coast** (also **Barbary**, Berbery or Berber **Coast**) was used by Europeans from the 16th century to the early 19th to refer to the **coastal** regions of North Africa, which were inhabited by Berber people. Today, this land is part of the modern nations of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

3 All apparatus necessary for a process; in this case coral fishing.

4 Sailboats, from the 16th to 20th century, that sailed from the coast of Normandy to fish for cod in Newfoundland.

The cross of Saint-Andrew

Coral fishing is practiced with the “cross of Saint Andrew.” It is a cross with four arms of equal length: two crossed tree trunks weighted with a large ballast stone do the trick. Tufts of old nets (*I redzeniel*) hang from the arms.



This cross is sent to the rocky bottom, and, thanks to the dexterity of the lead fisherman, the arms (of the heavy cross) break the coral, which is caught on the old nets.

Antoine d’Arco et Silver Mazzella, the pioneers.

Silver Mazzella (initially, the name had two z’s, but, following an error from the Public Record Office of La Calle⁵ it was transcribed with a single z; since then all the Mazzellas of La Galite write their name with a single z.) Around 1855, Silver Mazella passionately practices coral fishing. He really likes *Cal y Francia* (La Calle). Upon his return to Ponza he marries Marianne Conte, known as *Marianne a Ross* (probably because she was a redhead [rousse in French, rossa in Italian].) In May, they settle in La Calle. Silver becomes an independent fisherman and becomes a French citizen. In fact, he will never return to Ponza. He and “Marianne a Ross” will have eight children, all born in La Calle or in the surrounding communities: four boys and four girls named: Vincent, Jacques, Emile, Jean, Marie, Celeste, Carmen and Liberine. Silver and his childhood friend, Nicolas Vitiello, will meet later ...

Also, in 1855, in Ponza, there is a Antoine D’Arco, married to an Emilie whose surname escapes me. He is a very simple and very believing man. He believes that everything that happens to him is due to God or the devil. This Antoine has a sister who is engaged. She falls seriously ill with a strong fever. When the boyfriend comes to see her, the girl makes great efforts to smile, speak and stand

⁵ A port in Algeria

up. When her boyfriend leaves, she goes to bed and gets worse. Antoine gets it into his head that his future brother-in-law has cast a spell on his fiancée (“a fattour”) and he must vanish for his sister to heal. I will never say that he killed him, but in fact the boyfriend disappeared and Antoine’s sister, unfortunately, died shortly after. Antoine D'Arco, then, proceeds to meet with coral captains in order to leave for the Barbary Coast. He asks them if they know of a deserted place to settle down. In May he embarks with his family for La Calle, where he finds work as a gardener. He remains in La Calle for a few years, but life, there, does not suit him much. There are too many people and he suffers from malaria. He becomes fascinated by the not too distant island, off the coast, where coral reefs fishermen gather every summer. So here he goes, again, with his family and everything needed for a long stay: tools for agriculture, seeds, plants ...

When they arrive on the island, they head towards the less steep part, on the right side of the bay. Halfway up the slope there is a canal *U Cavone* with flowing water and, above, there is a good water source and a pond with rushes, surrounded by ducks, chickens, goats, oxen... all wild! (Certainly, these animals have been there since the days when Sanson Napollon lived in La Galite with his troops, before taking the Bastion from the hands of the Turks.

A bit of history ...

In 1522 France created, in Algeria, a warehouse for fishing and trade, called the Bastion of France. This enclave was located a few kilometers from the Tunisian border. It is a small refuge protected by a peninsula. On this peninsula France built a fort that housed a garrison. Marseille fishermen and traders, Italian and Spanish fishermen traded there. Around 1620, the Bastion of France was destroyed by the Turks coming to the aid of the Dey of Algiers. The Bastion Governor, Thomas Lencis, was killed. Around 1630, a corsair, Sanson Napollon (a Corsican established in Marseille and whose real name was Guidicelli) was commissioned by Richelieu to retake the Bastion of France. He succeeded after a few years, having taken La Galite as a base camp for his troops and ships. He was killed, later on, at the foot of the Genoese fort of Tabarka. Future governors of the Bastion of France had the main task of repopulating it. So, all the Christian families who wanted to settle there, regardless of their nationality, were financially supported to acquire a boat, a house, land and tools for fishing and agriculture.

Antoine goes around the island. Above the spring, on the left, he digs a cave where he settles with his family. Just below, he finds remains of very ancient sheepfolds. This is located to the right of the bay when facing the sea (*U Scogl'y*

Pasqua or the Easter Rock). It is the most sheltered place in the bay. It is there that the French and then the Tunisians, at the end of the protectorate, tried to build a harbor. Every time - as soon as winter came at the end of their work - great storms from the south west destroyed everything. So, at this location, Antoine D'Arco finds the remains of columns and foundations of an important building site. He still discovers remains of construction to the right of the current village. These are remains dating back to the Phoenicians and then to the Romans. There are also the remains of a fortification in the upper part of Mountain of the Guard and the remains of a lime kiln on the left of the plateau. Near the present village, however, especially east of the village, there are only Phoenician and Roman tombs. One could believe that in a very distant past, the inhabited part of the island collapsed following an earthquake and there is nothing left, other than the cemetery. The Phoenician tombs are hollowed out of the rock horizontally. Each tomb contains only one corpse. The skeleton is in the middle. On both sides there is a large amphora and, at the foot, an oil lamp, shells of limpets or periwinkles, and one or two small urns. The few jewels he finds are of copper or glass. The grave is closed with a flat stone, sealed with lime. With regard to Roman tombs, they are cubic wells about two meters (six feet) wide and two meters deep. At the bottom, on each side, are the tombs proper, with skeletons and amphorae, arranged in the same way. Romans amphorae are similar, while the Phoenicians' are different.

Between 1860 and 1865, then, Antoine and Emilie settled with their children above this source, which has always kept the name of Emilie (*a fontana 'i Meliozza*). Their children were born in Ponza, except the last one born in La Galite. I don't know who the oldest is, but they are: Vincent, Carmel, Joseph, Paolo, Marguerite, Carmen and the last Antoine (*dzepite*)⁶. To locate the cave, you literally have to fall in it! Once inside, Antoine and his family are invisible. All around, Antoine planted prickly pears for protection against the wind. The daughters sleep with their parents and, since there are a lot of barrels around the island, the boys settle over the cave, each in a barrel with some straw. As a result, they have their own "studio" which they can turn at will, to shelter themselves from the wind.

Antoine and the boys begin to clear the land; he is an earth man and knows how to choose the best places for cultivation. Regular sailings of ships bring him what

⁶ Not in the original document, there were two more children: Dominique and Vincent (who was adopted.) Dominique is further referred to on page 18. Vincent on page 38.

he needs. With some vintage rifles in his possession, he can kill enough animals to feed his family, while waiting for the first harvests: goats, cows, chickens ... he has choices. He finally found his paradise!

Shortly after his landing, however, he sees some feluccas⁷ led by the Barbary people arriving from Cap Serrat, the closest place to La Galite from Tunisia. They hunt and bring the game to the beach at the foot of La Garde (*a chia y morte* or the beach of the dead.) They kill the animals, skin and smoke them. Eventually they load the meat on their ships and, finally, leave the island a few days later. Antoine D'Arco is frightened by what happened, especially since a few months later the events repeat themselves. When corallers return in May, he leaves for Naples to ask the Italian authorities for help. They tell him to "take a hike." He then invokes the help of the Bey⁸ of Tunis who, annoyed to see a Tunisian island occupied by an Italian, sends troops to La Galite. The solution does not suit Antoine d'Arco, but he will adjust, especially since the Tunisian guards are respected by the buccaneers. Moreover, the guards are not bad people. He must have gotten along well with them because his children learned to speak and sing in Arabic from them. The guards had to settle above the "beach of the Navy," where later the Galitesi will dry their boats. There is a channel there which will be called "The channel of Mansour" and, to the right, a source called *gopp'y Turcs*, the place of the Turks. The guards will probably stay there for about ten years.

Two or three years after his arrival, Antoine D'Arco makes exceptional harvests of fruit, vegetables and wheat. He also appropriated all the animals on the island. At the beginning of the season, when the corallers arrive from the Bastion of France and from Torre del Greco, Antoine D'Arco sells them vegetables, fruit and meat, for which he earns some money. Some Sicilian fishermen are beginning to come to salt their fish. They settle on a beach, a little out of the way (*Avan a rotti*, near the grotto). Then lobster fishermen arrive from Carloforte, Sardinia. Following the same principle as the corallers sailing ships, with the fishponds incorporated in their hull, they sail with five or six small boats crewed with fishermen, whom they drop at La Galite. In the evening, these fishermen bring in the lobsters caught in the traps made of reeds and rushes. When the sailing ships are sufficiently loaded, they leave to sell the beautiful catch in Naples, Marseille or in Spain. In September-October everyone leaves and Antoine D'Arco remains alone. But he is

⁷ Traditional wooden sailing boat used in Eastern Mediterranean:

⁸ Bey or Dey; governor of a district in the Ottoman Empire; a native ruler of Tunisia.

far from unhappy. For five or six years, he and his family will remain the only inhabitants on the island!

The baptism of the salient places - The choice of the king

When the first corallers and Antoine D'Arco arrived in La Galite, they assigned to the salient places the same names as in Ponza: *A guardi* (the guard), *U ciglio* (the crest), *Punta Madonna* (point of the Madonna), *U Cavaliere* (the knight), *Punta y Puniente* (western point), *Maïstrale* (mistral⁹), *Cala Abrile* (sheltered harbor), *Levante* (east), *Punta y Cane* (point of the dogs), *Punta y chirocco*¹⁰ (south-east point), *U Chcarubat* (scree) . These names were subsequently Arabicized: *U Ciglio* became *Oudjll*... Tunisians used to call La Galite: *Djebel Mas* (Goat Mountain); the Italians: *Isola di La Galita* and *Galitesi*: *Lalta*; which the Tunisians renamed *Jalta*, after the independence.

Long before Antoine D'Arco settled in La Galite, when the corallers came for the fishing season, there was an inlet on the east side of the bay, under the Mountain of the Guard. The boat anchored in that inlet that had plenty of fresh water. This is where corallers built some shacks. During a winter, probably following an earthquake, part of the Guard collapsed filling that inlet. The place has become known as *U chcarubat*, a rock and earth scree with springs ...

Let's go back to Silver Mazzella in La Calle. He practices coral fishing; his children grow up, some work with him, while others have embarked on Neapolitan boats. The elder, Vincent Mazzella, is a hard worker and a very skilled and astute fisherman, for which he was given the nickname *A vorpe* (The fox). As a child he embarked as a trainee seaman on a ship from Resina, a small fishing port near Naples. The inhabitants of Resina (*y Resinar*), have the reputation of being wizards and the people of the time really believed it! On those boats, as in all the boats in the world, seamen are assigned the worst duties: they have to help the cooks, wash the dishes, serve the whole crew and participate in the fishing. Corallers drop fish traps to find nourishing food. The seaman must clean the fish and is the last to help himself with what is left in the pot. One day, in a trap, they catch a cuttlefish and, Vincent Mazzella, my great-grandfather, eats it raw because he knows that, once cooked, there will be nothing left for him. At lunchtime, the owner starts rummaging in the pot to find the cuttlefish, but it is gone. He, then, he leans along the edge of the boat, fills a bucket with water and says to the crew: "Look, who ate the cuttlefish."

⁹ The mistral is a strong, cold, northwesterly wind that blows from southern France into the Gulf of Lion in the northern Mediterranean.

¹⁰ Sirocco: a hot dust-laden wind from the Libyan deserts that blows on the northern Mediterranean coast; a warm moist oppressive southeast wind in the same regions.

My great-grandfather will tell that he saw himself in the bucket of water, with the cuttlefish's tentacles coming out of his mouth. He will say that this image so scared him that he swore he would never do a bad deed again. In fact, that man will always be straight, respectful and respected.

One of his brothers, however, Emile, was the king of the slackers. He always ran away so as not work. This allowed him to know the whole Algerian and Tunisian hinterland. He went as far as sawing his oar so as not to row. When fishing, with his brother Vincent, he never rowed forcefully. One day Vincent told him:

“Emile, row!

Then you want me to break the oar!

Sure, break it, once and for all!”

Emile puts a little weight on the oar and it breaks. To punish him, Vincent leaves him on a rock off the coast, for twenty-four hours, without food or drink.



Antoine D'Arco, known as *Germanese*, with a cuttlefish

When Silver Mazzella, or one of his children, goes fishing to La Galite, Antoine D'Arco would give them fruit, vegetables and meat, since they originate from the same island. At the sight of such abundance, and in memory of their birthplace, Silver Mazzella, Marianna a Ross and their children, would move to La Galite. They settle above the Mansour canal, to the left of where Antoine D'Arco resides.

There, as well, is a water source, although not as abundant as the *Funtan y meliozz*.

Silver Mazzella had a fishing boat with which he went coral-fishing and, once a year, he left for La Calle or Tabarka to sell his coral. Every evening he pulled the boat ashore on the beach, because at night the boats at anchor are not so secure. There are often thermal winds raging from all directions. These routines will continue until 1958, the year when we [Achille's family] left. Silver Mazzella hurriedly plowed the land because, as I said, without the fruit of the land it is not possible to live all year round on the island.

The Gross family or abduction of the young girls.

We are around 1870-75, while Silver Mazzella is still living in La Calle. A Spaniard, Juan Cross and his wife Carmen, originating from the Seville, arrive in town. They had four children: Maria Antonia (who will later become my great grandmother,) Carmen, Bastiani and Giamino. They would have left Spain for a story of honor. Juan Cross becomes very close friends with Silver Mazzella and, when the latter settles permanently in La Galite, he followed him there with his family.

To continue the story, I will try to explain a wedding custom then in vogue in all southern Mediterranean countries, and in particular in La Galite. When two young people like each other very much and families agree, there is no problem. The wedding ceremony is a party that lasts several days, during one eats, drinks, dances and sings. But when the family disagrees, it's another story. If it is the boy's family that opposes it, it is not too serious. If the boy feels "manly", he marries the girl without the agreement of the parents and, generally, with the birth of the first child, everything falls into place.

If it is the girl's family that does not agree, the matter is more serious. To end up married, the boy must kidnap the girl, let's say by force, to save the honor of the girl, since, for the most part, she agrees. Sometime, the girl's mother "helps out" as, often, this custom is used to reduce the cost of what could be an expensive wedding. The boy goes into hiding with the girl; the day after the mother creates a pandemonium; she throws all her daughter's stuff out of the house and, for the honor of the two families, everything ends up going through the public records office, without a party.

In the event that the boy changes his mind, after spending the night with the girl, the matter ends with gun shots or aggression with a knife. In La Galite, everything always resulted in a wedding. This preamble was to explain the kidnap of Liberina (one of Silver Mazella's daughter) by Giamino's (son of Juan Cross. To wash this affront, Vincent Mazzella, brother of Liberina, kidnaps Maria Antonia, a sister of Giamino Cross. These two will become my great-grandparents and will give birth to my grandmother Angèle Mazella.

Juan Cross and his family won't stay in La Galite for long. Around 1900, they leave to settle in Bizerte¹¹. My grandmother will not remember much of her Spanish grandparents; only of a man and woman who wore Spanish costumes on holidays: he, who played the guitar and sang, while she, in long dress, danced playing the castanets.

The last wedding in La Galite: Michel Vitiello and his wife.



Nicolas Vitiello, another cock and bull story ...

Let's go back to Ponza, at about the same period. Nicolas Vitiello had already been married, for several years, to Filomena Scotti, they have eight children: Francois, Philippe, Louis, André, Joseph, Michel, Antoine and Achille, as well as a

¹¹ City in the north of Tunisia.

daughter who will die very young, drowned in a cistern. Nicolas' father had died and Nicolas' aging mother stayed with him. As I said earlier, he is a wealthy man, he has never been a fisherman, he lives only from the fruit of the earth and of hunting.

Among other things, he is an excellent hunter and a loaded rifle is always hanging on one of the house's walls. One day, a turtle dove came to rest on an almond tree, right outside the front door. One of his children¹², about twelve years old, takes the rifle without his father's knowledge, to shoot the turtle dove. A small boy of his age, a neighbor, stands in front of the rifle and asks him to fire. He wanted to see the lead coming out of the rifle ... Nicolas' son¹³ shoots and the little neighbor is killed.

Nicolas Vitiello has unending problems with the law. The island authorities, the mayor who is his cousin, advise him to leave Ponza. Nicolas remembers his childhood buddy, Silver Mazella who is in La Galite. In September, he embarks on a sailing ship leaving for La Calle. There he finds a farm to manage, but before returning to Ponza to fetch his family, he leaves for La Galite to find his friend. Due to bad weather, he is stuck on the island all winter. His wife and children think he is missing. One more story cock and bull story!

Filomena Vitiello is desperate, so she turns to a sorceress from Ponza (*Na ianare*) to find the whereabouts of her husband. During the night, the sorceress would go to La Galite and the next day she would tell Filomena not to be worry as she found Nicolas playing cards with Silver Mazzella.

In May, Nicolas returns to Ponza, donates the house and land to his closest cousin, provided that he takes care of his mother and he leaves with his family for La Calle. There, he settles in his farm, but his wife does not like this life at all. Around 1880, he leaves to join his buddy in La Galite. He settles in a cave below the one where Silver Mazzella has already settled, at the beginning of the Mansour canal. At that time, my grandfather Achille Vitiello was two years old. Nicolas Vitiello and his grandchildren start clearing the land right away. He is not a fisherman and in fact, he will never fish in La Galite.

The principal founding families.

¹² Name unknown

¹³ His brother, Silver Vitiello called *U Squarccione*, will later come to settle in La Galite

Between 1880 and 1900, when the French took possession of La Galite, Silver Vitiello, who only had a very distant relationship to Nicolas Vitiello arrives on the island. He was given the nickname of *U Squarccione*, probably because he was so boastful. Being single, he marries Carmen, a daughter of Antonio D'Arco. Also settling on the island were: a brother of Marianne a Ross, Domenico Conte, and his wife Vincente, and another Antoine D'Arco, a very distant cousin of the first Antoine D'Arco who was no plans to come to La Galite. Having left for America, he stayed there for five years. During all this time, he never sent a penny to his wife left in Ponza who, in order to survive, had to mortgage all the assets they had. She thought he would return with some money, with which she could repay creditors. Unfortunately, he returned without a penny; he squandered it all. He, then, separated from his wife and, with four children, François, André, Lucie and Judith, went to live in La Galite.

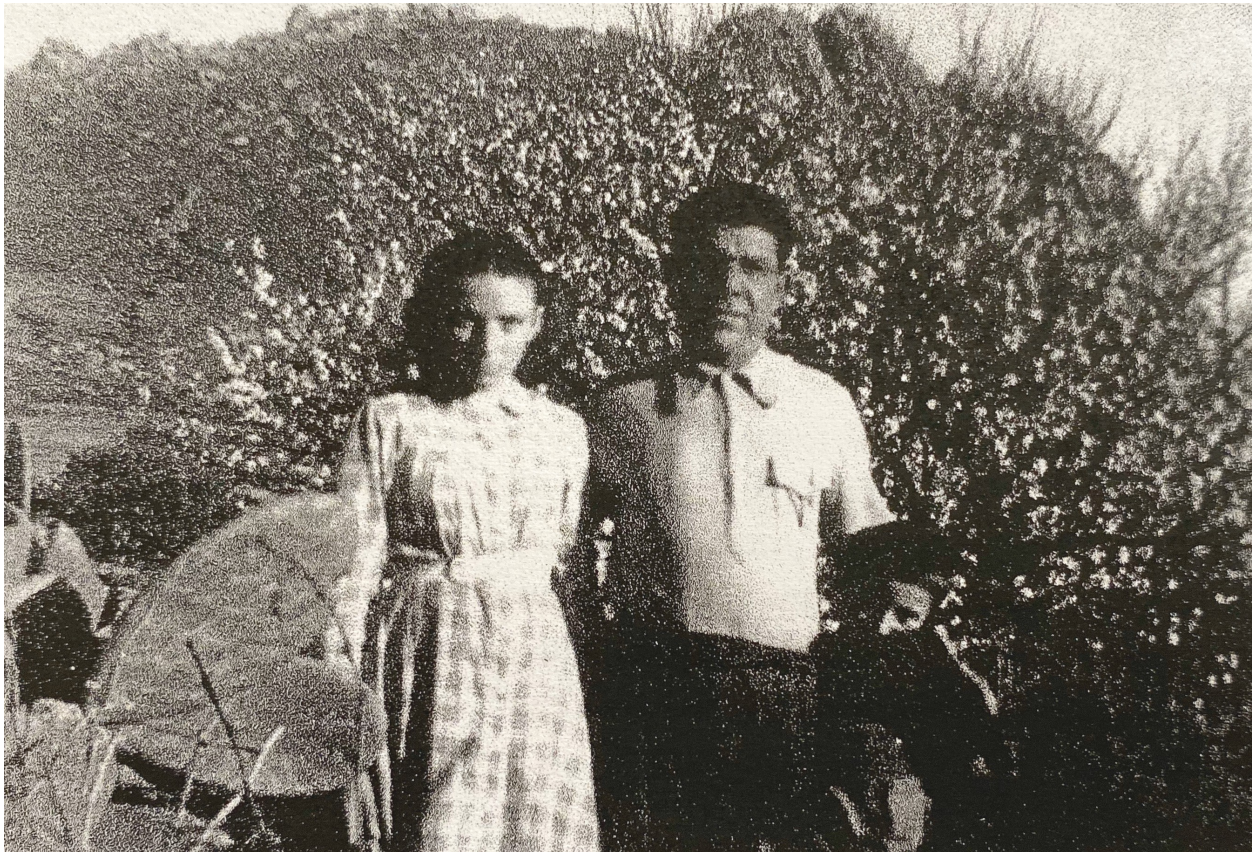
Carmelo Vitiello, who came from Sardinia, also settled on the island with his wife and two children. I only know the name of his daughter, Vincente, who will marry Nicolas Vitiello's son, Joseph, called *Giacchettone* (big jacket). Carmelo, his wife and children did not stay on the island for long, they left to live in Ferryville¹⁴.

These are the main families who founded La Galite at the time. Their children married each other. In 1903, when France arrived on the island, there were 150 inhabitants. In 1958 there were about 200 of us.

Daily life on the island without legal authority.

Until 1903 there is no legal authority in La Galite, but people at that time did not need it at all. They respect the rules of the given word and everything runs smoothly. An example of these rules: when someone begins to till the soil at the foot of a hill, he starts on a given width of land and, up to the top, this width is accepted as belonging to him. Nobody ever allows himself to stand in front of him, without asking permission. He starts to till to the top. Therefore, the people of La Galite do not have any ownership documents, and this was the case until two years before the end of the protectorate. But among the Galitesi, not even the slightest dispute regarding land ownership took place. There, a given word is as valid as all notarial deeds and, if, unfortunately, somebody does not honor his word, it would be shunned for the rest of his life.

¹⁴ Town in northern Tunisia, south of Bizerte. Site of a significant French naval base. Renamed Menzel-Bourguiba at the end of the French protectorate in 1956.



My sister Jeannette with my uncle Silver Vitiello and my little brother Toussaint.
Behind them, a fruit tree in bloom and, on her side, a prickly pear leaf.

With these people settling, there is an intense life on the island. The end of April sees the arrival of corallers from the Bastion of France, sailing ships from Torre del Greco, with five or six boats on board and the sailing-ships/fishponds with lobster fishermen. The Galitesi begin to have their own small boats. They dedicate themselves, more and more, to the fishing of lobsters that they sell to the Italians. Seasonal fishermen settle along the beach and often bring their families with them.

Notably, there is a family from Ponza, the Scarpato (*Chamergue*) who has been coming every summer for a long time. The woman, Lucie, often replaces her husband at the helm and, on holidays, organizes prayers and processions through the Galite, especially for the celebration of "Saint Silver".

The people of La Galite only trade with Italian shipowners; they sell them their lobsters and coral and the sailing ships bring them fishing equipment, food and

clothing. In October, everyone leaves and the Galitesi remain alone until spring. The Italians came to fish freely until the beginning of the Second World War. Many Sicilians come for the fishing season. They also salt their pickerels, sardines and mackerels. They stay away from the location of other fishermen (*Avan a rott*) and none of them has ever tried to settle permanently.



The small boat: "Marie-Annonciade"

Among the sailing ships/fishponds, there is one from the island of Ponza. Its owner is called Miguel Conte and the Galitesi trade mainly with him. Every summer he takes lobsters and brings back the goods ordered. He does the reconciliation only at the end of summer and the Galitesi do not see much of the money. It seems that Antonio D'Arco, when he arrived in La Galite, found a significant quantity of gold coins while tilling the soil. Every year he gives some coins to this Miguel Conte who brings him some goods and some money. One year, one of Antoine's children¹⁵ falls ill. A Sicilian fisherman, from Trapani, proposes to Antoine that he entrusts his son to him, at the end of the season, to have him treated and he would bring him back the following spring. Antoine D'Arco accepts and gives some coins to his son Dominique. Domenico D'Arco stays in Sicily all winter, gets treatment and returns to La Galite with goods and with much more money than Miguel Conte usually brings him. The latter will no longer receive a single coin from Antonio D'Arco! Antonio D'Arco uses that gold

¹⁵ See footnote on page 8.

only to live and does not consider himself a rich man at all. At the end of his days he said: "The earth gave the gold to me and, if I still have some I will return it to the earth."

Before he died, he buried the coins that remained. There were rumors that the youngest of the children would see him bury the coins and, some time after his father's death, he would recover them and thoroughly enjoyed the wealth they provided.





With a pulley they pull the boats dry. The keel slides on soaked wood.
In the morning, the boats would fly like arrows.

Births and comings and goings.

The first families who arrive in La Galite all had between eight and twelve children, who would marry each other. Often, mothers would give birth at the same time as their elder daughters. So, for example, the children of my grandmother Angèle Vitiello: Silver, Antoinette and Jean, were born at the same time as her brothers and sisters: Augustin, Marie and Sauveur. My grandfather Achille Vitiello married Angèle, daughter of Vincent Mazella. His two older brothers, Louis and André, marry Carmen and Celeste, Vincent's sisters. On the other hand, no one divorces in La Galite. There is only one single story of an unpleasant case of adultery. It is of a bricklayer, married with two children. A Galician was buzzing around his wife. The bricklayer noticed it and the two fought. The bricklayer was seriously injured and died later on.

Towards 1900, another family arrives, that of Antoine Mazella, called *Bambino*. He has many children and builds a beautiful house, right above the Marina, the beach where the Galitesi dry their boats. In that place, there are caves, which they use to store their fishing gear and barrels with salted fish, for lobster fishing. This Antoine Mazella remains on the island only for short periods at a time during

the year. The rest of the time, every winter he leaves for Ponza or Bizerte. Between the two wars, he settles permanently in Bizerte. Only one of his children remains, Silver Mazella (called *Bambino*, like his father.) He marries Anna, a daughter of Louis Vitiello (*U Rallone*, the Heron.) During this period two other men arrive and settle on the hills, like hermits. One is named Joseph Tavel, the other Palazzolo (*U Palazzuol*). They live only from the heavy labor they provide when hired, in exchange for a meal or some money.



My father and a cousin fishing for limpets and sea snails on the Isle of Dogs.

As soon as they wake up, they think about the food for the day.

On the island there is plenty of wine and water. Springs are everywhere. it is not at all like in Ponza where water by is brought by tankers and in bottles. All paths are rounded and painted with lime for the recovery of rainwater.

Crops, plantations, breeding and fishing.

When, over a period of ten years, the three main families arrived on the island, the heads of the families were around fifty years old. Seen today, the work they accomplished and the courage they had seems incredible! Okay, these are large families, but in La Galite you have to start from scratch. Obvious that there is plenty of land and water but, in a very short time, they clear the land, they make terraces on very steep land, they plant, they build houses ... When they arrive, they do not find a single tree. The island is covered with a rather low, dense scrub, vegetation, consisting of lentisk, rosemary, broom and myrtle (not unlike the Corsican scrub) and, also, of tall grass in large tufts with very long, thin and sharp leaves. The beautiful tufts have leaves about two meters long (six feet). These leaves, cut, dried and beaten, were used to make ropes for lobster fishing until the end of the Second World War. As for trees, the first inhabitants planted figs trees, carob trees, mulberry trees, apricot trees, apple trees, peach trees ... The Vitiello family had plum trees and quinces in their parcel (*bosco grande*). And, above all, in La Galite there are vineyards everywhere.



The making of a trap

The ground is protected from the wind and the saltiness of the southwestern great storms, by rows of prickly pear trees. Near each spring there are reeds used to make fishing traps. Almost half of the island would be cleared, with the exception of the western part which will not be inhabited or cultivated. Less than ten years after the arrival of the three pioneering families: the D'Arco, Mazella and Vitiello, there are no more wild animals, except some rabbits

The D'Arco family owns much land and a herd of goats, that it kept for a long time. Subsequently, the free movement of the herds on the hills will be forbidden as they caused too much damage to the plantings. The Mazellas grow just what is necessary to survive during the winter, they are mostly fishermen. The Vitiello family also has a lot of land. Nicolas Vitiello is well-organized. The eldest daughter helps the mother, while the other children plow the land with the father, especially in the *Bosco Grande*. They build a sheepfold at *Maïstral (U Barracone)* for their herd of goats and sheep. They even make some cheese.

Twenty years go by with the ebb and flow of the great seasonal liveliness: from May to October, fishermen from Italy and from the Bastion of France arrive for coral and lobster fishing, as well as for the salting of their catch. In 1900, there are already a dozen Galitesi boats that trade with the Italians. In autumn and winter, land must be cared for rigorously. There are no traders on the island and, in September, the caves must be well-stocked with wheat, dried legumes, wine, oil and petroleum until the following spring. During the entire winter, no boats are to be seen. In any case, there will never be regular connecting lines to the continent. Each family keeps around the house two or three goats, two pigs, chickens, rabbits and a donkey ...



My grandfather Achille Vitiello

In 1898, my grandfather Achille Vitiello is 12 years old. He is the youngest of the family and his brothers are very harsh on him. As he is very enterprising, in September, he hides in the last sailing ship, and stays unseen for twenty-four hours, when it is too late for the vessel to be able to go back. Until the age of twenty-four, he crossed the Mediterranean aboard sailing ships with the status of apprentice, seaman and, finally, sailor. In the meantime, he learns to read and write and is the only one of his generation, in La Galite, to be able to do it. He returned around 1910, after having served in the Italian Navy.



The fishing leader and his crew unloading material.
The myrtle baskets are used to weigh lobsters, [from 25 to 30kgs – (55-65 lbs)]

1903, the administration takes hold; buildings are erected ...

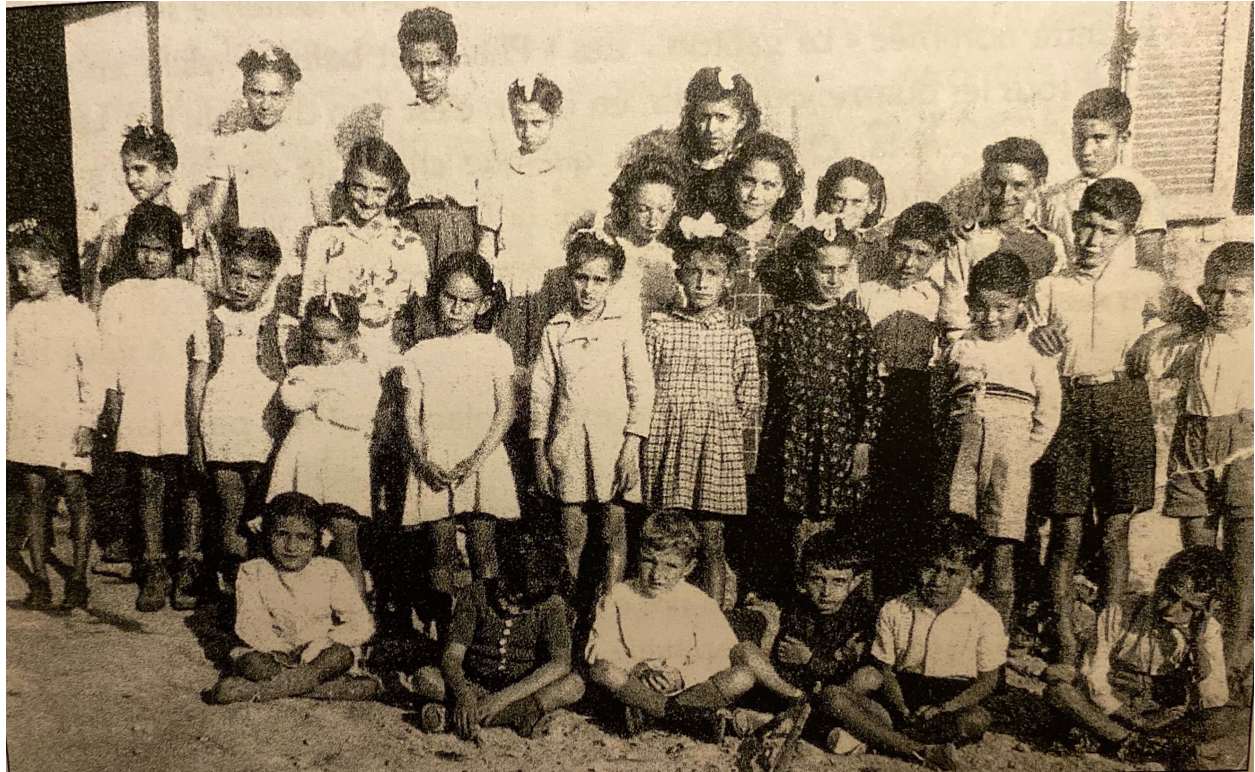
Around 1885, France placed Tunisia under its protectorate, but no one settled in La Galite till 1903. Until that date, the Galitesi live autonomous and independent, free of any legal constraints and taxes; regardless, they will never pay taxes directly. In 1903, France takes an interest in La Galite. A representative is appointed to the island. He is in charge of Customs and of the Port Authority Office; young and unmarried, his name is "Monsieur Clement".

Looking at the island from the harbor, on the right, under the Mountain of the Guard, and a hundred meters from the sea, the authorities begin to erect some buildings: a house for the customs' officer and a post office. A few years later, adjoining the first building, a second one will be added that will be the house of a gendarme and the police station. The gendarme, in addition to his duties, performs the function of a registrar: he records weddings, births and deaths. Adjacent to the gendarmerie, after the First World War, a small dispensary and an infirmary will be built, and a male nurse was put in charge permanently.

In 1910 the first school started, at the beginning of the Cavone canal on the right. It has only a single room, attached to the mountain. Next to it there is a house for the elementary school teacher. Near the spring, where Antoine D'Arco settled, a fountain is built. The water is channeled to the school and, further down, to the administrative offices. These are the only houses that have running water. Until our departure, we had to go and get water to drink at the fountain with buckets or clay jugs.

During these years it is not at all uncommon for sailing ship captains to bring families with them and to spend the summer in La Galite. The daughter of one of the captains becomes "Madame Clément", the wife of the harbor captain. At the opening of the first school in 1910, a nephew of Madame Clément, Henri Clément, becomes the first elementary school teacher on the island. He was drafted in 1913 and unfortunately died during the war in 1915. Subsequently, a commemorative plaque, in his memory, will be erected near the three succeeding schools. Now, the marble is shattered in the courtyard of the last school, transformed into a barrack for the few soldiers in the island. When this school was built, in 1950, it gave rise to a magnificent building in the center of the village, next to the church. It consists of a large classroom overlooking a lawn and

a tower-shaped apartment for the teacher. After Henri Clément's death, during the war, Mr. and Mrs. Clement sold the tobacco store and opened a café on the beach.



The pupils of the school in 1948, from 5 to 18 years old. Two or three of them went to boarding school in Bizerte, but it was just by chance!

Around 1910, the church of La Galite was built. It has a chaplain from the navy, Abbot Bourbonnaud, who took care of the church until his death, before the Second World War. He loves La Galite and the Galitesi. Originally from the Burgundy region, he brings to the island the buckthorn (*Myoporum*) (an evergreen tree, that would replace some of the prickly pear trees used as windbreakers around the cultivated land. With the help of the French Navy, he brings valuable help to the islanders. After the First World War, he convinced them to become French citizens, which they did in 1927. Only one family remained Italian, that of one of my grandfather's brother. At that time, older women in La Galite would wear dresses similar to the abbot's cassocks! He is a dowser and, with his wand, he can surface many springs. Upon his death, he wanted to be buried in the cemetery, in the company of those with whom he had lived for a long time.

Still around 1910, construction of the Galiton's lighthouse began. The Galiton is an islet southwest of La Galite. To the east of the Galiton, there is another islet, La Fauchelle, that has a particular shape, due to its huge granite rocks formation. It's from this island that the stones for the construction of the lighthouse originate. Three houses are added to the lighthouse for the family members of the lighthouse keepers. On the Galiton there are no springs; rainwater is collected in a huge cistern under the houses. The lighthouse light runs on oil and the lantern reflectors are gold plated. A speedboat, called "the Galiton of the lighthouses and beacons", should - theoretically – bring supplies every two weeks. In winter, however, this is far from being the case.

Life is very hard for these people. When something very serious happens at the lighthouse, they light a large bonfire and a boat from La Galite goes to see what is happening. In the beginning, the lightkeepers were from Corsica; later on, Galitesi took over.

In 1913, Monsieur Henri Clément, the schoolteacher, was replaced by Madame Fagard. Children from La Galite, however, can't learn anything from either of them. The kids speak a Neapolitan dialect, while the teachers speak in French. With the arrival of Mademoiselle Garantini, a Corsican who took over from Madame Fagard, the children begin to speak, read and write in French, because there is an affinity between Corsicans and Neapolitans; they understand each other. Even the customs officer and harbor-captain, Monsieur Dessanti, is from Corsica. He remains on the island for some fifteen years. His replacement is Monsieur Masson, a great hunter, from central France, who marries a sister of the teacher, Mademoiselle Angèle Garantini.

Monsieur Barban ...

My grandmother, Angela Vitiello, born Mazella in 1888, in La Galite, had told me that at the beginning of the century, a French couple arrived: Monsieur and Madame Barban. They remained on the island for a long period of time. This gentleman loved hunting and befriended a Galitese; they hunted together. Unfortunately, Monsieur Barban was found dead, in the mountain, probably the victim of an accident; the authorities accused the Galitese of murder, but his wife firmly fought his arrest. She left La Galite, repeating incessantly: "Only God knows who killed Monsieur Barban."

My grandparents never told me that these people had claims on the island, but, in a book written by a journalist from Ponza, Silviero Corvisier, he talks about La Galite and we learn that those people had obtained a concession, from the French government, to raise animals on the island. When they saw that La Galite was inhabited, they took it out on the state, but not the Galitesi.

World War I and the stories of the fighters.

After the declaration of war, all the young people leave, mainly in the Italian army. In 1914 only the Mazella family is French. All the children of Silver Mazella and of Mariane Conte were born in Algeria and, by law, have the French citizenship. My great-grandfather, Vincent Mazella will boast of having served in Toulon on board the "big-asses" (the battleships). At that time, conscripts in the navy must serve for five years. He will tell that once, with a crew from Toulon, they went to Barcelona, Spain, where they met an Italian naval team. In a bar a general fight broke out and my grandfather found himself, face to face, with François Vitiello, another Galitese and my grandfather's brother. In order not to fight each other, they locked themselves in the toilet until the end of the brawl!

Towards the end of the war, in June 1918, Jean Mazella, a brother of my grandmother, died in Verdun, at the "Chemin des Dames¹⁶." Another Galitese, Antoine Mazella, returns poisoned by the gas; the illness will continue throughout his life and he will die fairly young. All the others return without injuries. Another Galitese, Joseph D'Arco (*trepìel*) who fought in the trenches, tells of the fighting deeds where courage was paramount. During the bayonet assaults, you had to have the strength to jump over the shoulder of enemy soldiers; otherwise, you would be skewered by their bayonets. At night, Joseph would serve as a courier from one trench to another, in exchange for the dinner of those who did not want to do it.

From mines to cutting stones.

After the war, mines open on the western side of the island. Minerals are extracted for various metals. Since there is so much water in the tunnels, miners spend more time pumping out water than extracting minerals. Many men from La Galite work there and, outsiders, Sardinians and Sicilians are as numerous as the inhabitants of the island. The management of the mine opens an emporium in the

¹⁶ Sight of great battles between the French and the Germans during WWI.

village, where everything is sold: food, clothing, alcohol, oil ... and everyone can use it. The director is called Monsieur Pérousasse. The workers work all week long and, on Saturday nights they come to the village to celebrate. Some miners can play varied musical instruments, creating a really nice atmosphere!

Despite their numbers, miners never lay down the law in La Galite, as the following story shows. One day, the twelve-year old Daniel D'Arco brings the flock of rams to graze near the mine. A group of miners approaches him asking to purchase a lamb. Daniel, out of habit, knows that their weight is about ten kilos (22 lbs.) Miners, however claim that the lamb's weight is only seven kilos (15lbs.) The young Daniel goes to complain to my grandfather, Achille Vitiello, who works in the mine. He had the lamb weighted, and, indeed, the weight was ten kilos. The miners accept the weight, but behind my grandfather's back and in front of Daniel, they vow they will pay the lamb with stabs. The following Saturday, Achille Vitiello goes to meet them at the entrance of the village, with a revolver and a dagger on his belt. He demands the full price of the lamb and obliges them all to return to the mine. There is no follow-up to this story.

Don Miguel.

After the First World War, a picturesque character, who calls himself Don Miguel, arrives on the island. He is the husband of an Austrian nurse, who married him so as not to get expelled out of Tunisia. When he arrives, he must have had some money, as he has a beautiful house built, right above that of Madame Clément's Café¹⁷. He pays some young islanders to clear the land. It is likely that he plans to make these guys work for little. During the evening, the young islanders go to his house to listen to records on his phonograph. But the Galitesi need their children for their lands and various chores. After about ten years, Don Miguel leaves the island, ruined and sick, leaving behind him the memory of a man who, for days at a time, would tell far-fetched stories. If you tabulated all the jobs he held and the number of years spent doing those jobs, that man would be, as Noah, over nine hundred years old!

After the mine was closed, stone cutters came to settle on this island that was rich in granite. There is a great need for large cut stones for the construction of the docks of the French Navy's arsenal in Ferryville (renamed Menzel Bourghiba at the end of the protectorate) and for the borders of the sidewalks of Tunisian

¹⁷ Later on, this house will be bought by Alexandre Vitiello, a carpenter in La Galite and son of André Vitiello, nephew of my grand-father.

cities. These stone cutters settled in the north east (in the Levant) where they build their homes. As in the case of mines, many Galitesi become stone cutters or are hired to load the stones on board special vessels (*Maones*) used for their transport to Bizerte. Leftover smaller stones are recovered for railway ballasts. This activity ended around 1935, when the demand for cut stones diminished. The stone cutters leave and the Galitesi return to fishing. Just before the Second World War, around 1938, there are about twenty Galitese fishing boats, all motorized, with reworked engines from old cars.

The Holidays

For Easter the families prepare “*u casatiel and a pastiere*” two typical cakes of the Neapolitan islands. On Easter Monday we go eat bouillabaisse¹⁸ on the cliffs north of the island; the fish is caught on the spot!



On June 20th, the day of San Silvēre, patron saint of the island of Ponza, a big party takes place. This is also the day when money is first distributed among the crews. On July 16th, the feast of the Virgin of Carmel, fishermen do not go out to sea. On August 15th¹⁹, everyone goes to Ernest on the beach.

But none of these holidays is comparable to the big Christmas party. On Christmas eve, families gather to play lotto, seven and a half and other card games, when they wager a few cents and especially hazelnuts!

The [French] National Navy

When the French took up residence in La Galite [around 1910], they very quickly understood that this was a strategic location, and that its navy should have a presence there. On the left of the bay, above the current port, they erect buildings to house a transceiver station and a generator both manned by a garrison of about fifty men. In front of these structures, two large reinforced

¹⁸ Fish soup

¹⁹ Feast of the Assumption of Mary

concrete pillars support the radio antenna. On the highest part of the island, the Navy installs a lookout (optical post), from where the sailors constantly scan the horizon. To the east, *a Sirocco*, there is an underwater listening post. The first in command is named Pélissier and remains on the island for a long time. Many Galitesi girls would marry French sailors with whom they will leave at the end of their stay.

The Navy remained there until 1947. Even after the departure of the small garrison, the Navy watches over the island and its inhabitants. In fact, during summers, it is not uncommon for a seaplane with a doctor on board to come and anchor and at least once a week, a patrol boat or a tugboat comes to a dry dock.



French sailors exercising

Often, the National Navy buys lobsters and, in most cases, barter takes place: lobsters in exchange for meat or marine material (ropes, pulleys, tarpaulins, varnishes). As I have already said, there are no regular connecting lines between the island. Employees of the National Navy (customs, fishing warden, boats of the Lighthouses and Beacons, etc.) take the Galitese on board their ships to assume transport between Bizerte and the island. The lookout and the listening post have been decommissioned, but the radio has been taken over by the harbor captain, who is in contact with Tabarka twice a day. In the event of serious illness or an accident, a message is sent and, within half a day, a Navy unit arrives with a doctor. If the weather is nice, a seaplane is sent. The patient is either treated on the spot or sent to the Ferryville military hospital. Once healed, he is brought back to the island by the National Navy.

Shipwrecks, stories, hallucinations ...

In May of 1931, (I specify that year because my father, while telling me this story, told me that he was thirteen years old - having been born in 1918 -) Italian sailing ships were at anchor. There were about ten of them, including a few big pontoon boats from Carloforte²⁰ and two lobster ships from Camaret²¹. During the night, a storm comes from the Southwest. In general, storms do not last more than a few hours, then the wind turns to the west and the north-west. This time, however, the storm is aiming straight to the the bay facing south-west. The Bretons immediately hoist their sails and leave for Bizerte. The Italians remain at anchor hoping that the wind will turn. The storm lasts all night and the following day. The sailing ships are wrecked and an elderly sailor dies, he does not have the strength to swim to the shore. Only one sailing ship, belonging to two Ponza fishermen, nicknamed *Mezza Pach* and *Utre Chiazza* ("half and half" and "three closures") manages to clear the Point of the Guard (by about a meter.) The large ships of Carloforte sink where they were anchored. The beach is a sight of a real disaster.

On another occasion, a brand-new sailing ship, belonging to a young captain of about twenty years of age, crashes against the rocks, under the Mountain of the Guard, after a wrong maneuver. In desperation, the young captain is said to have jumped on the rocks, hoping to keep his boat away, but did not succeed and was crushed by the hull. The Galitesi tell that, for many nights, a light shined back and forth from these rocks to the top of the Guard. This lasted a long time, until the parents recovered the young captain's body.

Stories like these are told, in winter, by the Galitesi themselves during times of vigils; stories that give you goosebumps, make the hair stand on end, stories of goblins, ghosts, supernatural animals and stories of places to avoid as night falls ...



When a military ship arrived on the island,
everybody came to greet the sailors and drink local wine

20 Island in the southwestern shores of Sardinia.

21 Coastal town in Brittany (Northwestern France).

Before our departure, these facts had not happened for some years; when I went back to work, from 1970 to 1982, I went everywhere, both day and night, and I never saw anything of the sort. A few years ago, following a television program on the Mediterranean, I think I found an explanation for these visions and hallucinations. It seems that the same events occurred in the Aeolian islands, in Sicily. The Italian authorities have studied these phenomena and have discovered that cereals, that did not sufficiently dry, created mold and produced LSD. To convince these islanders, they made half the population eat the local flour produced and the other half industrial flour. Only those who had eaten local flour continued to hallucinate. In La Galite, hallucinations ceased after the Second World War, when flour was purchased in Bizerte, rather than produced locally. That said, during beautiful nights, one can hear harrowing throbbing cries of children. They are, however, only the screams of ashy puffins, the sea birds that nest in the holes of the mountain of the Guard.

Lobster fishing

Around 1930, coral fishing was practically abandoned and only lobster fishing remained. The coral quantities may have decreased, but it is mainly the sailors who no longer want to embark on the coral-boats. The sale [of coral] takes place once a year and, in the meantime, corallers are compelled to ask the owner for advance payments in order to subsist... and that is if the owners have sufficient funds in reserves. Lobsters, however, sell very well and the fishermen are paid every month. Fishmongers from Bizerte begin to show interest in these crustaceans from La Galite. While the bulk of the fishing is always taken by Italian sailing ships, these fishmongers commute between Bizerte and Galite, during the whole fishing season. They buy a few hundred kilos per trip, using their vessels of about ten-meters in length. This trade grew more and more, especially with the Sandolo family, originating from the island of Ponza, and who remained customers until 1958. There are, also, the Gallias, the Cross, and, towards the end, a Tunisian: Haj Bonmaïs. A lady of Corsican origin, Madame Grisoni, is in partnership with the fishmongers. She provides a lot of financial aid for the construction of fishing boats, but not for philanthropic purposes.



The crew of the Marie-Annonciade:

Antoine Vitiello, Augustin Mazella, Sylvère Vitiello, Daniel Vitiello, Jean Mazella

The lobster trap technique

Lobster fishing in La Galite is done with traps in reeds woven into triangles, with sides of four to five centimeters (1.5 to 2 inches) each and circles of cane strips, one centimeter wide (less than .5 inch). The lobster pots are made by fishermen. In order for them to last as long as possible, they need to be made with full rushes, but there are none on the island. In the beginning sailing ships brought full rushes from Italy. From 1935, they are bought in Tunisia. Also, once a year, fishermen leave on expeditions for Cap Serrat, 24 miles southeast of the island, or for La Calle, in Algeria. During these trips they pluck their own rushes. The boats return loaded with green rushes and squares of cork used for the making of floats. Once dry, the rushes acquire a beautiful yellow color. As for the reeds, the island is full of them; they must be collected during the waning phase of the moon, so that they don't rot.

Until 1945, fishermen made the ropes themselves. These serve to hold the lobster traps together, as well as the rope that connects them to the float. The diss²², a very common plant in La Galite, is cut in winter, dried, then beaten to soften it and finally woven to a length of fifty meters (150 feet.) This rope is called "*u reste*", because this technique comes from a fishing port in Sardinia, of the same name.

Galitesi pots are very effective as fishing gear, much more than Bretons' pots, which are much more fragile and last a month at most. So, at the beginning of the season a boat

²² robust, perennial, bush that can reach 2 to 3 m in height.

must have at least three times the number of pots [needed] to be lowered into the water. Even during the [fishing] season, the fishermen continue to manufacture them and, since the armament belongs to the entire crew, everyone participates in making the equipment. Consequently, sailors receive a bigger portion of the profits.

Behind the traps: Mr. and Mrs. Tcherniak, the last teachers.



With my mother and my sister.

Until after the Second World War, the traps are pulled by hand. Depending on the size of the boat, the crew drops from 100 to 200 traps into the sea, in groups or "steps" of three or four traps. These "steps" are spread-out every ten meters [30 feet], weighted by a fifteen-kilos stone (33 lbs.) and tied to a surface float by a buoy rope about fifty meters long [165 ft.) The float is composed of several porous cork plates, shaped in the form of a small barrel (*y panioune*). The floats must often be left to dry because, when they are soaked in water, they sink.

The lobster "steps" are dropped two by two to gain time. Two men pull a "step" at the front of the boat and, two other men, another "step" off the rear. The traps are baited and pulled daily. Since it takes about 30 kilos of fish to provide bait for 100 traps, the fishermen have special nets and traps to catch fish. So, from May to September, all fish caught is cut and salted to make baits. This problem eased after the Second World War, with the arrival of numerous boats from Sicily. They "light" fished with boats equipped with special lanterns (lamparos). (in La Galite, there will be over one hundred Sicilian lamparo boats). Sicilians trade fish that are difficult to sell: boops, mackerels, sardinelles etc... for grapes, figs and prickly pears.

Around 1948, rudimentary winches began to be installed on boats; (the hood of a car with a spoked wheel as the arm of the winch.) At that point, instead of three to four

traps per “step”, there now could be 25. The quantity of traps in each boat doubled to a maximum of 400. In the 1950’s, the seasonal share due to a sailor was between 300,000 and 400,000 francs of the time (500 Euros.)²³



It should be noted that the forkbeard is not used as bait. Split in half, gutted, salted and left to dry, it is prepared like cod, to which it resembles. At the end of the fishing season, all members of the crew share the fish to consume during the winter when, due to bad weather, fishing from the rocks is impossible.

The Second World War.

In 1939, following the declaration of war, all enlisted men left and fishing practically stopped until 1945. The island is occupied by Italian soldiers. It was a very hard period for the Galitesi. Supplies no longer arrive from Bizerte. The Italians, also, do not have much to eat and do not hesitate to invite themselves to the locals. They install anti-aircraft batteries just about on every point. The officers are staying in the French administrative offices. The Italians think that the Galitesi favor them, but Galitesi remain fiercely French, except for a few collaborators.

An Italian warship moored in the harbor with divers on board, as well as with fast patrol boats. Every night [the Italians] leave with these boats to carry out acts of sabotage and attacks in Algerian ports. One day, two planes fly over not too far from the bay. Believing that they are German or Italian planes, the Italians ignore them. A very short time afterward, many planes reappeared from the north flying

²³ At 2% compounded a year this would be about 2,000 Euros today. At 5%, that would jump to 15,000 Euros.

low and over the village houses. They were British planes that came to bomb the Italian warship. This ship, called *Ceffaro* (or "mullet", a type of fish), sinks on the spot. The Italians try to save all that they can: ammunition, weapons, torpedo boats and all sorts of material that they pile up on the beach. Later, the *Ceffaro* is bailed out and towed to Italy.

Meanwhile, the Italians make the Galitesi believe that they and the Germans are winning on all fronts and that, soon, a large part of the world will be fascist. A Galitese, Jacques D'Arco, called "Churchill" befriends an Italian officer in charge of communications. In exchange for a snack, D'Arco confides to the officer the real news about the war. This is how, one evening, Jacques D'Arco comes to my grandfather's house and triumphantly announces that the allies have landed in North Africa and that the Germans and the Italians are retreating everywhere. In fact, shortly thereafter, the Italians are ordered to evacuate La Galite.

Since they have no means of transport, they requisition all the fishing boats on the island. A man from La Galite who helps the Italians, takes care of repairing all the engines. The Italians want to force the Galitesi to bring them back to the continent. Everyone refuses and goes into hiding in the mountains. A young Tunisian shepherd, Jelloul Boukrani, brings them food and gives them news of the village and the Italians. The Italians arrest him, tie him to a post and interrogate him brutally, but he doesn't speak. At the end of the war he becomes a French citizen and changes his name to Charles, probably in honor of De Gaulle.

The Italians do not dare to look for the Galitesi in the mountains, as they feared they would be armed; but this was not the case. After a few days of preparation, the Italians are ready to exit with the fishing boats that are awaiting in the bay. An Italian warship arrives, however, and embarks them with only their personal belongings. Only one Galitese leaves with them. He would return a few years later and, thanks to my grandfather Achille Vitiello, the French authorities will look the other way for what he did and for all the other things that happened during the Italian occupation. The Galitesi recover their weapons, blankets and tents. The fishing boats, left adrift, are recovered by men who went after them swimming. With the exception of a couple of boats that ended up shattered on the rocks, all were recovered.

When the war resumes, all men leave. Two Galitesi are taken prisoner in Germany: Antoine D'Arco²⁴, later called "*u Giamanese*" (the German) and Antoine Vitiello²⁵, known as *Ninì*. They will all return safely. With the armistice, fishing does not resume right away as there is no fuel. Some fishermen who still have boats, tamper with the engines to start with gasoline, then switch to alcohol. Sailing ships and rowboats resume service and life goes on. 1945 is the best year for lobster fishing!

Teachers

In 1945 the island welcomes a new teacher, Monsieur Colombier and family, who will remain until 1953. Thanks to him, many children obtain the certificate of primary studies; André Vitiello and I managed to go to the Stephen Pichon High School in Bizerte [in 1954.] Monsieur Colombier will be succeeded by Monsieur Beitout, then Monsieur Tchemiak and his wife, who will become good friends with my parents. After them came two very young teachers, who will remain only for one school year, the year before independence. A Tunisian master will come later.



End of school year party, we are disguised as dwarves

The post-war period

24 Not in original manuscript. This Antoine was the son of Vincent (the adopted son of the first Antoine D'Arco.) See footnote page 8.

25 Son of André Vitiello, who was a son of Nicolas Vitiello

After the war, Italians no longer have the right to come and work in La Galite. Lobsters are sold in small lots in Bizerte and Tunis and for the most part to fishmongers in Marseille. There, the Scotto Company charts a large sailing vessel, when they know of a large quantity of lobsters awaiting in the fishponds (*ynassune*). The ship can transport four to five tons of lobsters. A large sailing ship with a fishtank from Brittany, the "Michel Nobletz" makes the trip very often, but other sailing ships, from Ponza²⁶, assume the transaction on behalf of the Marseillais. Shortly before the Second World War, a Breton soldier, serving in La Galite, married a daughter of Joseph D'Arco, Clorinta. This soldier, Monsieur Briand, remains on the island as port captain. In the 1950's, he tries to get lobsters illegally loaded onto his brother's lobster boat. This attempt cost him the post of port captain, that will now be assumed by a Corsican, Monsieur Pieraggi, until the independence [of Tunisia].

Numerous girls from La Galite leave the island while marrying French soldiers. On the other hand, young men arrive in La Galite with young ladies from the continent, my mother being one of them. Several Galitesi families leave for Bizerte, or Ferryville, because men can easily find jobs in the military arsenal.

In 1948, the first school was abandoned. The offices of the National Navy, above "*u Scogl'y Pasque*" (the Easter rock) are transformed into school, for three years, with Monsieur Colombieur as a teacher. He also runs a radio-holiday program in Tabarka. In 1949, Monsieur Andoloro arrives. He builds a lobster canning factory, next to Ernest's restaurant. It operates for two or three seasons, during which many women from La Galite go to work there. Unfortunately, the venture is not successful. Later he would run a small grocery store until the independence [of Tunisia]. Since the end of the war, there are already two grocery stores on the island. One is run by a Tunisian, Monsieur Hassen, a former lighthouse keeper from Tabarka who had married a girl from La Galite, Angela Mazella, daughter of Camille Mazella, (*u zu Mamile*.) The other store belonged to Daniel D'Arco (*Bazar*) and Conchette who, also, have cows and a flock of sheep. With the milk of their animals, they produce a kind of Sardinian cheese, highly appreciated. Occasionally they slaughter an animal, when they are sure they can sell it.

In 1950, a shipping company from Bone, Algeria, came to the island with the mission of building a new school, right in the center of the village. The Company

²⁶ Sailing ships belonging to the Feola family, fishmongers in Ponza.

also rebuilds the church and was preparing to build a port and a tower on the rocks of the Reefs of the Sisters, twelve miles southwest of La Galita. It is a very dangerous area for navigation, despite [the operation of] the Galiton lighthouse. To achieve this, the Company must also build a new pier to replace the remains of an old boat that had been used for that purpose. In fact, a large landing craft, about one hundred meters long (300 feet), torpedoed during the war near the coast of Tunisia, had been towed and stranded on the western sector of the harbor. This boat, with its front on the ground and [arranged] in a North - South direction, acted as a pier for the port. Many men from La Galite put aside their fishing boats to work on this site until 1956. At the end of the protectorate, the Company returns to Algeria, leaving the port and the Tower of the Sisters unfinished. A round platform of about four meters (12 feet) in diameter remains on the rocks, one meter above the water.



Galitese during their military service

The organization of time and tasks

During the fishing season, all men go to sea to earn something from which to buy what is not produced on the island: oil for lighting and cooking on the stove (Primus), clothing, flour and pasta that are no longer produced in sufficient quantities after the Second World War, and olive oil. They spend the time left working the earth to survive.

The soil is turned with a spade and seeded. Trees and vineyards are pruned. All wood is precious preserved for cooking and for the heating of bread ovens. The wood from the maquis (scrub) is cut and stored around the houses for the fishing season. Hunting is for for leisure, of course, but also to procure the needed meat. Everyone owns a gun. Wild game is hunted when the opportunity arises. There is no opening or closing of the hunting season. In practice, the gendarmes on duty understand this and adapt to our lives. It is also for their own benefit as those who would like to enforce the law will only eat pasta every day! In fact, the inhabitants of La Galite never resorted to the gendarmes to resolve their small problems.



Grape harvest with my grandfather's family

The harvest is done entirely by women, the elderly and children. The wheat is cut with a scythe, the bundles of wheat and the vegetables continue to dry on the roofs of the houses and, during the very hot days of July, they are struck with a whip. We await the days when, with a little wind from the South-East, we can meticulously sift through the various products, put them in bags and store them in the caves. During the summer, women prepare the indispensable tomato preserves and put the figs to dry.

The harvest is, at the same time, a period of great work and celebration. A large amount of water is needed to clean the barrels and the vat where the grapes are stored before being crushed by feet, fermented, squeezed and placed in the barrels. I remember that my grandfather and my mother carried buckets of water, especially in the middle of the night, when the spring gave more water ... As it is for the wheat harvest, it is always the women, the elderly and the children who do most of the work during the grapes harvest. Men lend a hand, in the afternoon, upon returning from fishing. The grapes are cut and placed in large baskets with handles. The boys transport these baskets, on the back of a donkey, from the field to the cellar. They are prohibited to ride the donkey on

the way back! The kids do the harvest with various families, in exchange for a good meal in the end; generally, gnocchi with a rooster.

Habib Bourguiba

In 1950, towards the end of the protectorate, I believe that the Bey was ready to renew the protectorate, but an independence movement was born with a lawyer as its leader: Monsieur Habib Bourguiba. In 1952, he was placed under house arrest in La Galite. He arrived on the island in an escort ship from the National Navy, accompanied by five gendarmes and a doctor. He is located in one of the two rooms of the infirmary, the one intended for the sick who must be under a nurse's supervision - incidentally, no such case has ever occurred for the Galitesi. The room is simply furnished: a bed, a wardrobe, a table and a chair. The other room, the one on the left, is the infirmary, with a treatment table and medications. Until his departure in 1954, Habib Bourguiba was free to move around and does so at will! Followed by a gendarme at a distance of about fifty meters (150 feet), he walks the island in all directions and at all hours of the day, with a quick step, and always using a walking stick. He wears a white gandoura²⁷ and a fez²⁸ on his head. For lunch and dinner, he eats at Ernest's, the only bar restaurant with a tobacco shop. Ernest D'Arco inherited it from his aunt, Madame Clement; Ernest is the also the island's nurse.

Monsieur Bourguiba becomes very close to the Galitesi; one of them does his housekeeping and washes his laundry. When the boats come back from fishing, he often gives a hand to bring them to a dry dock. In late afternoon, he often plays pétanque²⁹ with the fishermen. Every evening, at sunset, he goes to pray on the pier under construction. The National Navy regularly comes to anchor with a dentist on board and with the supplies sent by the Tunisian government. Often his wife and son come to visit him. It is the only time when there is a permanent doctor on the island. On New Year's Day, Bourguiba asks the teacher to see the school children; when we get there, we each receive a bag containing an orange, a mandarin and dates.

As for the "boulder" of Bourguiba³⁰, it is a legend ...

27 Traditional long robe

28 Felt cap, usually of a red color

29 French bocce game

30 Presumed location where Bourguiba used to pray

In 1954, Mendès-France becomes Council President (the equivalent of the Prime Minister in the IV Republic). When the radio announces it, Monsieur Bourguiba, leaning on the counter at Ernest's bar counter jumps up and shouts:

“- I won! I am free! We have independence!”

Indeed, the following week, a ship arrives to collect Monsieur Bourguiba and his escort.

The end of the protectorate

In 1955, France sends a surveyor. The French government already knew that Tunisia will become independent and that we will have to leave, but nobody came to tell us. We, Galitesi, always believed that La Galite was our home.

Let's go back to the surveyor: everything is measured and stones are placed at all corners of the land. The Galitesi acquire the deeds of ownership of all that is in their possession. Only then do the Galitesi understand that they will have to leave. At that moment, the idea of a referendum was born so that the island would remain French. Monsieur Dargent, general-resident³¹ of Bizerte, comes to explain that there would be no problems as we would be under the Algerian ministry. Sooner or later, however, Algeria would become independent and all will be for naught.

1956 marks the end of the French protectorate. The [French] gendarme is replaced by two young Tunisian gendarmes; the port captain, Monsieur Pieraggi, is replaced by Monsieur Tijene; the roadmender and the nurse are replaced by the Tunisians, as well. This is when our problems begin. When the Tunisian administration arrives on the island, the first thing it undertakes is to bring down the immense cross that Abbot Bourbonneau had erected on the top of the Mountain of the Guard. Immediately the Galitesi recover it to place it in the church. Very often the gendarmes fire machine gun bursts over the village. Everything the Galitesi do - including pruning vineyards and trees - are considered acts of sabotage.

Lobster fishing is nationalized; all lobsters are purchased directly by the Tunisian government, which handles their sale. This is a welcomed news for the fishermen, as the lobsters are bought day by day and the Tunisians are responsible for

³¹ One serving as the principal administrative officer in a French North African territory

keeping them alive in large floating tanks. Fishermen no longer have to worry about dead lobsters. A canning factory, for dead lobsters, is created but it did not last long as the cans are of poor quality.

On August 15, 1957, President Bourguiba came on a pilgrimage to La Galite. He is preceded by hundreds of Tunisians who want to attend the event. In the process, they sack the vineyards and the fruit trees. A Galician delegation, headed by my father Jean Vitiello, representing the fishermen, asks to speak to the President. The delegation expounded its grievances, to which the President replied verbatim: "You are my friends and I will answer as a friend. Everything that has happened so far will never be repeated, but you must understand that the island is now Tunisian and that it must be inhabited by Tunisians. So, either you become Tunisian or you leave. France needs workers. Nobody will send you away overnight, but think about this seriously. "

Indeed, after Bourguiba's departure, the gendarmes settled down a bit. At the end of September, at the end of the lobster season, a dozen men, including my father, leave the island looking for places to settle in Southern France: Marseille, Sète, Montpellier, Toulon, not knowing where to settle permanently. Anyway, fishing is what they do. A small group settles in Marseille and another in Toulon, where two daughters of Jacques D'Arco (*Churchill*), married to two French sailors reside. The families of those who settled in Marseille arrive in France on March 20, 1958. But things don't go so well in Marseille. My father finds a boarding place in Sanary, and is followed by all the families that were in Marseille. We have been in Sanary since.

The Galitesi who remain on the island in 1958 complete the fishing season, then from September to December of that year they expatriate. Only one French boat remains in La Galite, the Saint Joseph belonging to Jacques and Joseph D'Arco; they manage to bring it back, in France, in October 1958. Just under half settles in Sanary, the others follow Jacques and Joseph D'Arco first to Toulon and then to the Lavandou. In the beginning of 1959, the islands, in this area, attract the fishermen. Only two or three families will return to France as late as the 1980s. In Sanary, the Galitesi have to manage by themselves to find accommodations and work. Galitesi receive a little more help from the Lavandou municipality. On the other hand, no one is registered as a seafarer and it is very difficult to outfit their

boats. Fortunately, the Minister of the Navy, Gilbert Grandval, will help resolve the issue.

Upon their departure, the Galitesi left the island in perfect condition. They even completed the grapes harvest and left barrels full of wine. As a family leaves the island, the Tunisian government replaces it with a Tunisian family, who is given a monthly allowance of 20³² dinars for two years. At the end of the subsidy, everyone slowly returns to Tunisia. The island will be militarized and is still free of civilians.

Here, roughly, is what happened in La Galite in one hundred and twenty years. Now, each of us has made his own life. Those who were in their forties in 1958 have probably died. Children of the time are now around sixty. We have all these memories in our mind. Would this be the burden of childhood? As for me, the memories of my fifteen years in La Galite are much stronger than those that occurred in the following fifty years.

32 Between 20 and 100 Euros, today.



My grand-parents, my sister and me.





In 1977, I came back to La Galite, with my family, to live off fishing.
We stayed one year.

L'Encre de Mer

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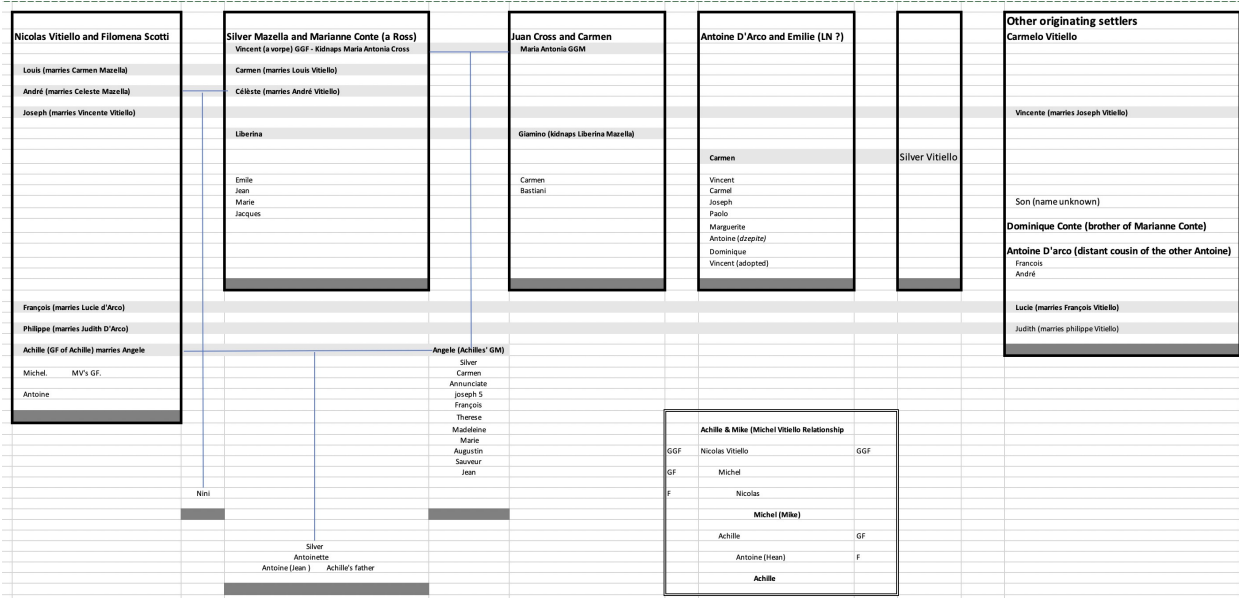
 **SANARY**
SUR MER

 Région
Provence
Alpes
Côte d'Azur

Appendix 1. Chronological Events.

	Vitiello	D'Arco	Mazella	Cross	Others
1828	Nicolas (born)		Silver (Born)		
1840			Leaves to fish along the Coast of Barbary		
1855			Marries Marianne Conte in Ponza		
1855		Antoine and wife (named Emilie (LN ?))			
		Settles in La Calle, Algeria			
1856			Settles in La Calle		
1860		Settles in La Galite			
1861 (circa)		Trades with corallers			
		Trades with Mazellas during their visits			
					Sicilian fishermen salt their fish
					Sardinian fishermen fish for Lobster
					Raids from Barbaresques
1870 (circa)					
1871 (circa)		Asks for help in Naples			
1871 (circa)		Asks for help from Bey in Tunis			
1872 (circa)				Juan befriends Siver Mazella	Tunisian guards move to La Galite
1875			Settles in La Galite with family		
1876 (?)	Son (?) has shooting accident			Settles in La Galite	
1877 (?)	Nicolas goes to La Calle				
	Stuck in La Galite on way to Ponza				
1878 (?)	Return to La Calle with family				
1880	Settles in La Galite				
1880 - 1900					Other principal settlers
					Silver Vitiello
					Dominique Conte
					Antoine d'Arco
					Carmelo Vitiello
1900				Moves to Bizerte (Tunisia)	
1903					Arrival of Mr. Clement
					Arrival of French contingent
1910					Guardhouse built
					First school built
					Church is built
1913					Clement replaced by Madame Fagard
1915 (?)					Ms Garantini replaces Mrs Fagard
1918	Achille's father is born in La Galite				Mines open
	Antoine (Jean) Vitiello				
1922	Achille's mother is born in Bizerte				
	Marie Lopicolo				
1927					First French citizenship
1930					Coral fishing ends; Lobster fishing picks up
1939-1945					La Galite is occupied by Italians
1942	Achille is born in Bizerte				
1945 - 1953					New Teacher: Monsieur Colombier
1947					French Navy leaves the island
1948					School abandoned, replaced by Offices of Navy
1950					Last school is built
					Church is rebuilt
					Attempt to build a pier
					End of French Protectorate
1952 - 1954					Bourguiba in exile at La Galite
1956					End of French Protectorate
1957					Bourguiba on pilgrimage in La Galite
1958	Achille leaves La Galite				
1958	Achille arrives in Sanary				
1972 - 1982	Achille returns to work in La Galite				

Appendix 2. Principal Families.



Genealogy of the principal families of La Galite.

Other than the children of Vincent Mazella and Marianne Ross, names are not in natural order of births.
Note that Angela was married to Achille; their children were contemporaneous to her own brothers and sisters.
A subset of the chart indicates the relationship between Achille and me (Mike (Michel) Vitiello).

Our fathers were first cousins.

Their fathers (our grand-fathers) were brothers.

We share a great-grand-father.



La Galite

[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Galite_island_\(MCPA_of_La_Galite_Archipelago\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:La_Galite_island_(MCPA_of_La_Galite_Archipelago).jpg)

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Le Phare du Galiton

<https://www.facebook.com/414979555760850/photos/a.414980632427409/414980602427412/?type=1&theater>



Habib Bourguiba on exile in La Galite

https://eltaher.org/docs_photos/1952-Bourguiba-prisoner-on-the-island-of-La-Galite-image1008_en.html



La Galite

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/129760032999334523/>

