



Technical Product Specifications and
Production Process for the
Arlogg tal-Lira

Introduction

As part of the implementation of the European framework for Crafts Geographical Indications (GIs), the Malta Crafts Foundation has initiated a process to explore the registration of the *Arloġġ tal-Lira* as a protected craft product.

This document sets out the proposed technical specifications that define the characteristics, materials, production methods, and other essential elements considered to be representative of an authentic *Arloġġ tal-Lira*. It has been prepared following discussions with traditional clock makers and other stakeholders, drawing on their knowledge and expertise.

Through this public consultation, the Malta Crafts Foundation is inviting interested parties to review the proposed specifications and submit any comments or recommendations prior to the document being finalised. The resulting specification will serve as the basis for any future application for a Crafts Geographical Indication under the relevant European Union legislation.

Interested parties are invited to submit their feedback to the Malta Crafts Foundation by not later than Monday, 31 August 2026, by email to karl.parnis@maltacrafts.org.

1. Product Description

The *Arloġġ tal-Lira* is a decorative wall clock traditionally displayed in prominent interior locations, such as corridors or above fireplaces. It is not mass-produced but is individually made and decorated according to the customer's requirements and preferences.

2. Construction of the Wooden Case

The *Arloġġ tal-Lira* production starts from the joiner. The case architecture of the *Arloġġ tal-Lira* consists of a rectangular case often featuring a carved top crown (cresting) and a bottom decorative support bracket (*mensola*) made of solid wood, generally manufactured from white deal, red deal, or high-quality seasoned wood according to the joiner's availability, crafted and carved by a master carpenter to achieve the Baroque design.

The carcass has two doors, the inner door carries the clock face, the dial and has a small aperture showing the oscillating pendulum. The outer door is fitted with a glass pane which encloses the clock-face to protect the inner mechanism from unnecessary handling and dust. The mechanism is firmly attached to the back of the clock-face on the inner door.

The wooden carcass may also come without a *mensola* and/or a cresting. Clocks might be more nearly square and simpler in design or with a more pronounced baroque look with more intricate designs and styles.

When featured, the upper part of the *Arloġġ tal-Lira* (the cresting) includes decorative elements that terminate in a sphere, an oval, the eight-pointed cross, or other ornamental decorations. At times, three-dimensional sculptural elements, including decoration in high relief (*alto rilievo*), are incorporated into the wooden case to enrich its artistic expression. The wooden carcass has a hole on each side so that the sound emitted by the clock can escape and resonate.

There are various sizes for the *Arloġġ tal-Lira* which is generally vertically elongated in shape. Its height ranges from around 70cm to around 120cm. The average height-to-width ratio is approximately 1.8:1. Depth ranges approximately from 12cm to 20cm. There may be slight variations, depending on the template used by the carpenter to construct the wooden case, as each craftsman typically works with their own template.

3. Surface Preparation, Relief Decoration, Gilding and Painting

The gilder takes over from the joiner and now gives the wooden box a coat of rabbit skin glue to seal the porous surface. Fine gauze is applied over joints, knots, and other vulnerable areas to help reduce the risk of movement or cracking becoming visible through the finished surface. Iron nails are also covered to prevent rusting.

This is then given several coats of *gesso di Bologna* or other type of gesso which is mixed with rabbit skin glue as per the individual gilder's preference and preferred methods, always leaving each layer to dry slightly before applying the next one. There is no defined number of coats. What determines the thickness of this application is whether any bas-relief techniques (slightly raised designs) are to be used. If this technique is to be used, the thickness of the gesso must be more than that of a clock where this technique is not used. The gypsum surface is finely sanded and any dust is cleaned off properly. Where bas-relief techniques are used, the clock's decorative motifs, such as floral designs, are first drawn onto the prepared gesso surface. Using small carving or engraving tools, such as burins, the artisan carefully cuts back the background surrounding the motifs and refines their contours, leaving the designs standing slightly proud of the surrounding surface.

Where bas-relief techniques are not used, the floral and ornamental designs are instead incised or engraved directly into the prepared gesso surface using fine engraving tools.

All surfaces intended for water gilding are then coated with bole, which is a special type of clay mixture, namely a smooth, refined clay mixed with an animal glue (such as rabbit-skin glue) that serves as the immediate foundation beneath the leaf of precious material. It provides the necessary cushion and adhesion to allow the metal leaf to be highly polished. The bole mixture plays an important role in this process since it enables burnishing to achieve a brilliant, mirror-like shine. Bole also enhances colour since the colour of the bole shines through the microscopic pores of the thin metal leaf, altering its final tone.

Bole is applied in several thin coats (with the number of coats varying according to the artisan's established method) over a perfectly smooth, gessoed surface. Once dried, the bole is lightly sanded to an ultra-smooth finish. The prepared bole is moistened with gilding water or gilding liquor, formulated according to the artisan's established method, before the metal leaf is applied. The bole creates an absorbent base that holds the leaf securely in place.

Gilding is the next step, where in most cases authentic 23.5-carat gold leaf is applied on the clock. Palladium, white gold, and silver are also used to decorate these clocks. Once gilding has been completed, the precious-metal leaf is hand-burnished using agate stones for a mirrored finish. The parts which are unburnished retain a matte finish.

The remaining areas are hand-painted in one base colour (using tempera paint/oil/water-based paint), traditionally dark red, green, blue, or black. Another technique used on the Maltese clock is sgraffito decoration. This is achieved by applying a coloured paint layer over a gilded surface and subsequently incising decorative motifs through the paint to expose the gold leaf beneath, thereby producing contrasting ornamental designs.

The centre of the cresting is also decorated and often bears the customer's family coat of arms, or other motifs such as the Knights of Malta's eight-pointed cross, a grandmaster's coat of arms, the sun, or flowers.

4. The Clock Movement

The clock mechanism is then installed. It can have two types of movements: a traditional mechanical movement which is either wound from the inside or else wound through the front part of the dial, or a quartz battery movement. The clock mechanism is attached to the wooden door on the other side of the dial. The clock usually has two hands – the hour hand which is short and broad, and the minute hand which is longer and narrower. These hands are connected to the mechanism by means of an axle which passes through a hole in the centre of the dial.

5. The Dial and Pendulum

The quadrant (dial background) is hand-painted either in oil, watercolour, or acrylic showing floral designs and scenic views and is then positioned such that it serves as a backdrop to the clock's minute and hour hands. The numerals around the dial are hand-painted too. The hour indicators are hand-painted using Western Arabic numerals or, more commonly, Roman numerals (with the number 4 often painted as IIII rather than IV). The circular ring on which the hours and/or minutes are painted is called the chapter ring. The chapter ring can have both a ring marking the quarters and another ring marking the minutes. Usually small Western Arabic numbers are marked to denote the minutes. The centre of the chapter ring is painted with a scene that typically includes depictions of Maltese landscapes, seascapes, or floral designs. Between the bottom spandrels, a small aperture - shaped like a crescent - shows the swinging pendulum at work. The pendulum may also be decorated, typically having concentric circles.