

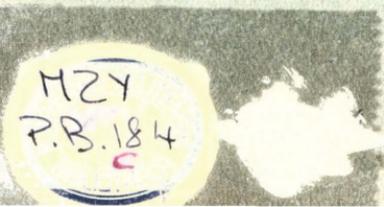
JOSEPH CASSAR PULLICINO

THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN
IN MALTESE FOLK-MEMORY

(Reprinted from "Scientia", Vol. XV, pp. 149-175)

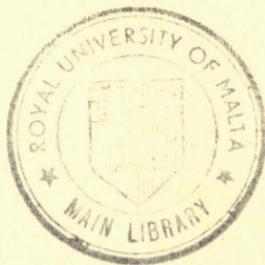
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THE ORDER OF ST. JOHN IN MALTESE FOLK-MEMORY

By JOSEPH CASSAR PULLICINO

The Order of St. John of Jerusalem is associated mainly with the two hundred and sixty eight years of its political sovereignty in the Maltese Islands. This Holy Order, which had its origin in the far-off days of the First Crusade, was destined to play an important part in Maltese History in an epoch which saw the final phase of the long struggle between the Cross and the Crescent. This centuries-old battle for supremacy came to a head with the eclipse of the powerful Turkey of Soliman the Magnificent, whose armies were crippled at the Siege of Malta and whose fleet was completely shattered by Don John of Austria at the Battle of Lepanto.

For another two centuries after this the Knights continued to lord it over these islands, leaving an indelible mark on Maltese life and thought. Records of their administration are preserved in the various *bandi* issued by the Grand Masters, and we have evidence also of their warlike temper and their munificence in the formidable bastions and stately auberges of our cities. Their religious sentiment is reflected in the numerous churches built at their expense, while their character as 'Hospitallers' is nowhere more apparent than in the Holy Infirmary building, with the longest ward in Europe. The later decades of their rule in Malta saw the increasing part which our island played as a pawn on the international chess-board. In the course of time the Grand Masters, especially Pinto, acquired greater prestige abroad through their diplomatic relations with European nations and with monarchs such as Catherine the Great of Russia and George II of England. Then came the Revolution in France and the successful rising of the Paris mob which, together with the increasing power of the

Commune, shook the ancient Order off its feet. Not only were the Order's possessions in France suppressed, but Jacobinism, fomenting anti-Order feeling, secured a foothold in these islands and paved the way for the final decision of the Directory which led to Napoleon's capture of the island in 1798.

Historians of this period have already dealt with this field of enquiry in a fairly extensive way, and it is not my intention here to recount the well-known deeds of the Knights. My aim is rather to present as true a picture as possible of the effects of the Order's rule on the mind of the people; in other words, to give the popular rendering of the history of the age, reflected in local legends, traditions and folk-memory. A complete picture is evidently impossible. The common people do not care about details normally and will, at the most, react only to such measures or events as concern their daily life and affect their material aspirations. Small wonder, therefore, that in this brief analysis of Maltese folk-memory we shall find that sulky Grand Master Lascaris, good-natured Zondadari and magnanimous De Redin are preserved in folk-memory much more than De Rohan, whose code of laws forms a landmark in the history of Maltese legislation.

Within this broad framework we shall now classify the traditions and record the folk-memories relating to the days of the Knights as they have come down to us. And here I must warn the reader that it is quite possible to trace a historic cause for some of these traditions. For the period under review has been extensively studied and written records, either directly or indirectly, invariably affect public opinion. Nor must we lose sight of the fact that for a very long time a common danger united the Maltese with the Order in their defence against the forces of Islam, and this undoubtedly softened the first adverse reactions to the rule of the Knights. That is why Maltese folk-memory does not, on the whole, show the Order in an unfriendly light.

For the sake of simplicity this vast material of traditional lore may be classified under two main headings:—

(1) local legends, including stories about churches, place-names, memories of the Inquisition and popular derivation of surnames;

(2) other memories, including village coats of arms, names of bandclubs, popular ballads and everyday expressions.

The following are examples of local legends:

IL-PALAZZINA (lit. small palace). This is the name given to a large house adjoining St. Theresa's Convent at Bormla. There is a legend about this building which says that the owner was a knight who, in his younger days, frequented a house of ill repute where he always left some of his ill-spent money. Once, returning to the sinful house after a long absence, he found it empty and uninhabited. On the table he saw to his surprise all the money which he had left years before. The knight interpreted this as a divine warning to change his way of life. When he returned to Malta he bought the *Palazzina* which he later bequeathed to the Convent (1).

IL-QASAM TA' SELMUN (Selmun Estate). Students of local history are aware of the origin of the "Monte di Redenzione" (1607), which was later incorporated by De Rohan (1787) with the "Monte di Pietà" founded in 1597. The first great benefactress of the "Monte di Redenzione" was Caterina Vitale, a charitable lady of noble birth, who bequeathed most of her property, including the Selmun estate, to this institution. Caterina Vitale died at Syracuse in 1619 but her remains were brought here and buried in the Carmelite church, Valletta. A suitable inscription on the wall of one of its side chapels recalls her liberality (2).

1. P.P. CASTAGNA, *Lis Storia ta Malta bil Gzejer tahha*, Malta, 1888, p. 110.

2. SIR RICHARD MICALLEF, *Origin and Progress of the Government Charitable Institutions in Malta and Gozo*, Malta, 1901, pp. 12-13; also A.M. GALEA's translation in Maltese, *Il Carita' f'Malta u Ghaudex*, Malta, 1912, pp. 18-19.

Apart from this, however, Catarina Vitale figures in folk-memory as *Is-Sinjura ta' Vital*. Among the peasants in the neighbourhood of Selmun Palace there is a popular story recalling how the Selmun estate came into her possession. The story runs that when Caterina came to be married her father offered the bridegroom a choice between two estates, Ghajn Rihana and Selmun — hardly a reasonable choice as from what followed the father seems to have wanted him to choose one estate and not the other. He praised the advantages of the respective estates in the following terms:

Ghajn Rihana warda mohtara,
u Selmun qasam majjur.

(Ghajn Rihana is the pick of my estates (lit. finest flower), while Selmun is an excellent (i.e. very fertile) estate). The bridegroom's choice fell on Selmun and the father, who in reality prized this estate above everything else, took it so much to heart that he shot the bridegroom. Whether he killed him or not, however, the legend does not tell (3).

ID-DAR TA' PULTU. This large country house is situated in Wied Zembaq, within the limits of St. George's Bay, Birżebbuġa. It takes its name from the knight who built it — Ippolito. Mgr. A. Mifsud refers to the building as "la casa formatasi dal Bne. Ippolito Novanteri nel 1626 nella contrada di S. Giorgio di Birzebbugia sul vallone di Wied Zembu (sic)" (4). According to tradition the knight Pultu had tried more than once to entice to his house a certain peasant girl, Katarina, who lived in the farmhouse called "Ta' Ġellieda", in the locality known as "Ta' l-Imsiefer" near Kirkop. Her father, resenting the knight's impertinence, took the law into his own hands, shot Ippolito out of sight

3. I heard this legend from a 50-year old woman who is the owner of the only shop at Selmun.

4. A. MIFSUD, *La Milizia e le Torri Antiche di Malta*, in *Archivum Melitense*, Vol. IV, No. 2, p. 76.

and buried him beneath a small mound known as "Il-Qlajja", half way between "Ta' Ġellieda" farmhouse and "Il-Palazz ta' Pultu". The building is now used as a farmhouse and part of it has been turned into a store for animal fodder, while cobwebs galore encumber the arches of its spacious rooms. (5).

"TAL-ĦLAS" CHURCH, overlooking Wied is-Sewda, between Qormi and Zebbuġ, forms part of the parish of Qormi. Tradition has it that a knight of dissipated habits once lived in the large house in front of the church. But one day he was taken ill and, feeling that death was nigh, sent two servants to call a priest. They went off in opposite directions, one to Qormi and the other to Żebbuġ. The priest from Qormi, who was the first to arrive, confessed the dying knight and gave him Extreme Unction. When he died, the knight was taken to Qormi and ever since this village has claimed "Tal-Ħlas" church as its own (6).

IL-WARDA TAL-KAVALIERI. This is the name given to the seed of a creeper commonly believed to grow within Fort St. Angelo between May and September, and nowhere else. In pre-war days people were allowed to enter Fort St. Angelo for the Divine Service which was held in the church of the Nativity on the 7th and 8th September, the occasion being the Feast of the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin and the anniversary of the Maltese victory over the Turks in 1565. People from the Three Cities and from other places used to look for this special plant which, according to tradition, sprang out of the blood shed by the Knights in defence of that Fort. The seed or "flower" has the form of the eight-pointed Cross of the Order, but two of its points on one side are slightly tilted at an angle with their opposite points.

5. For this legend and for the Bettina stories I am indebted to one Mikiel, known as "Ta' Psiepsu", whose farmhouse lies at a short distance from Ta' Loreto Church, Gudja.

6. G. GALEA, *Il-Knisja ta' Ħal Qormi*, Malta, 1928, p. 24.

An interesting parallel with the *motif* of this tradition occurs in the Polydorus episode in Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book III (Lines 22-68). Lately I have come across the following extract on "The Pasque Flower" by Ida M. Whitworth in "The Country Life" of June 14th, 1946. The writer says: "In 1937 I found *Anemone Pulsatella* growing not very far from Cambridge. It is said to grow wherever the Danes fought on English soil. Hence its local name "Danes' Blood".

THE CHAPEL OF BONES. This small chapel was demolished by enemy action during the war. It contained a great number of human skulls which, according to tradition, belonged to the soldiers who fell fighting in the Great Siege. Bradley (7) refers to the belief in these terms: "I visited the famous chapel of bones in Valletta, the decorations of which are given out to be the remains of Maltese soldiers who fell in the Turkish wars, but, according to the best expert evidence, are more probably the result of a general exhumation from a neighbouring Maltese cemetery, the site having been required for building purposes". In this respect one might mention similar beliefs that those who fell during the Siege lie buried within Fort St Angelo or, according to others, in the cemetery attached to St John's Co-Cathedral.

DUELLING IN STRAIT STREET. Ancient writers record the belief that this narrow street in Valletta was the scene of many duels and affairs of honour in which the knights were often involved. Lately, however, it has been contended, and not without good reason, that it was not Strait Street but Strada Frederico, a narrow street flanking the Palace, where duelling took place (8). P. Brydone thus upholds the tradition in his "Tour through Sicily and Malta": "The duellists are obliged to decide their quarrels in one particular street of the city; and if they presume to fight anywhere else, they are liable to the rigour of the law. But

7. R.N. BRADLEY, *Malta and the Mediterranean Race*, London, 1912, p. 164.

8. G. GATT, *Id-Dwell f'Malta fi zmien l-Ordni*, in *Il-Malti*, 1925-26.

what is not less singular and much more in their favour, they are obliged under the most severe penalties to put up their sword when ordered to do so by a woman, a priest or a knight. Under these limitations, in the midst of a great city, one would imagine it almost impossible that a duel could ever end in blood; however, this is not the case. A cross is always painted on the wall opposite to the spot where a knight has been killed, in commemoration of his fall. We counted about twenty of these crosses" (9).

ST. JOHN'S CO-CATHEDRAL. The task of planning this conventual church was entrusted to Girolamo Cassar, who is well known as an architect. It is commonly believed that before undertaking his work Cassar proceeded to Rhodes, the ancient seat of the Knights, to make a plan of the Church of St John which the Knights had possessed there and which had been converted into a Mosque by the Moslems.

In the *Cappella delle Reliquie* there is a Cross which, as the guide will tell you, was made out of the metal basin in which Our Lord washed the Apostles' feet at the Last Supper and which the Knights, who acquired it, converted into a Cross to prevent its being stolen. Among other relics in the same chapel there is a thorn which is believed to have formed part of the crown of thorns put on our Lord's head during His passion. The Maltese historian Ferris says of this thorn . . . *era venerata dall'Ordine Gerosolomitano da tempo immemorabile, e dichiarata reliquia insigne e degna di culto speciale, per decreto della Sacra Congregazione dei Riti del 21 Gennai 1632. Fu da Rodi portata in quest'isola, ed era gelosamente custodita. Il suo prodigio si è che quando l'Ordine era a Rodi, la Sacra Spina ogni anno nel giorno di Venerdì Santo e precisamente a mezzo giorno fioriva e si mostrava al popolo. . .*" (10).

9. P. BRYDONE, *Tour through Sicily and Malta*, — New Edition — London, 1806, p. 194.

10. A. FERREIS, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiesa di Malta e Gozo*, Malta, 1866, p. 141.

IL-ĠNIEN TA' BETTINA. The tower within this garden, wrongly pronounced and written *Shilejli Tower*, instead of *Xulliela Tower*, by Englishmen in Malta, lies half way between Gudja and Ghaxaq. It dates from the latter half of the 18th century and it belonged to the Marquise Bettina Muscat-Dorell, who figures in popular stories both as a woman of loose morals and as a benefactress.

According to tradition, the villa originally belonged to a Knight who was an intimate friend of Bettina. Later on she managed to exchange her house in Valletta for this country place where she began to lead a life of gaiety and merry-making. She kept no female servants and only men were allowed to enter her house. Knights of all nationalities went to visit her and, Circe-like, she had them all killed and robbed as soon as she grew tired of them. They were then buried in the garden where some graves are still shown as their burial place. Later on in life Bettina went to Italy whence, as if to atone to her past misconduct, she brought back with her the statue of St. Sinfoljano, whom Gudja villagers still hold in great veneration. While in Italy she was saved from a horse accident by an Italian peasant, and in return for his timely help she promised him her daughter's hand. Eventually the foreigner came to Malta as her son-in-law, undertook the administration of the estate and raised the field-rent (*M. il-qbiela*), to the great annoyance of the farmers, who so resented his interference that they called upon Bettina and told her that she should never have allowed an Italian to suppress them. Whereupon she promised to compel her son-in-law to leave her house and she did so. In her later years the grateful farmers working on her estate used to ask her to stand god-mother at their christenings, which she always accepted on condition that she would be allowed to give the child the name she liked. And she called them all Sinfoljanu, after that saint she had brought from Italy, and at each christen-

ing she gave a sum of one hundred skudi to the parents of the new-born babe (11).

Thus much tradition says. Undoubtedly popular fancy has been at work here in elaborating the Bettina stories. But one can trace some historical connection with reality, which must have helped to give rise or add details to the legends. Thus house No 13, Merchants' Street, Valletta, known as "Casa Dorell" may well be the house belonging to Bettina which is mentioned in the folk-story. The graves in the garden of the villa at Gudja are in reality the graves of some officers serving on General Graham's staff during the French Blockade, when *Il-Gnien ta' Bettina* served as General Graham's headquarters. Mgr. Mifsud writes on these graves: "*L'alta torre alla Gudja, di figura circolare sulle moderne mappe topografiche chiamato Torre Xulliela, fu fatto costruire un cento cinquanta anni addietro dalla marchesa Bettina Muscat Dorell a mo' di tardivo e postumo mausoleo di quella trascorsa architettura, destinata solo a dare un estesa visuale agli abitanti del bel villino che lo comprende, oggidi proprietà dei Signori Trapani di S. Marciano e dei Signori Galea Testaferrata. Il Generale Graham venuto ad assistere i Maltesi, insorti contro i Francesi nel 1798, colle truppe da lui levate, risiedette in questo villino. Qui morivano e venivano sepolti nel giardino due degli aiutanti del Graham, e nel più lontano angolo della villa si vede al muro una lapide portante uno stemma,*

11. For the cult of St. Sinfioriano at Gudja vide FERRIS, *Op. cit.*, p. 350, where we read the following:— "In essa (chiesa parrocchiale) venerasi il sacro deposito di san Sinfioriano, martire. Conservavasi al tempo dell'Ordine nella Chiesa conventuale di san Giovanni Battista. Il 9 settembre 1789 fu dalla medesima rimosso dal gran-priore dell'Ordine mons. Menville, e donato (previo il permesso del gran maestro De Rohan) al cav. fra Ugolino Tommaso Cumbi, della ven. lingua d'Italia. Il cav. Cumbi lo ridonò ad un suo amico, il quale nel 1815 ne fece presente a questa chiesa matrice. Fu indi coperto di ricco vestimento a spese dell'illustra marchesa Elisabetta Muscat Cassia Dorell, e dalla di lei figlia. La sua solenne traslazione fu fatta nel 1825 dalla villa di detta marchesa a questa matrice coll'intervento del clero di altre sei parrocchie".

forse d'uno di essi con iscrizione a caratteri di difficile decifrazione" (12).

THE PALACE WELL. Writing on Maltese palaces and churches in his book "Malta" (p. 148), Sir Harry Luke says: "Tradition has it that the then head of the Sciberras family now represented by the Barons Inguanez, generously gave the land on which the Magistral Palace was built, to be held by the Grand Masters on a perpetual leasehold against the annual payment of five grains of wheat and the offering of a glass of water from the Palace well. The glass of water was to be offered to the head of the Sciberras family by the Grand Master himself in the Chapter Hall of the Palace; and it is legitimate to suppose that the special opening of the mouth of the well in the great corridor outside the Throne Room on the first floor of the Palace, protected by an ornamental iron grille, was made to enable that right to be exercised".

IL-PALAZZ TA' STAGNO. This large country house at Qormi takes its name from the Knight Stagno who built it. Tradition asserts that when the parish church of Qormi was being erected on the site now occupied by St. Francis Church, the Knight Stagno, who was a wizard, caused the foundation stones to be transported by supernatural agency to the place where the parish church now stands. People add that he did this because the church would have shut out the view which he enjoyed from his terrace. When the building stones were thus transported three times the people of Qormi decided to abandon their original plan and they erected their parish church on its present site (13).

NAMES OF TOWERS, STREETS AND OTHER PLACES. The popular names which we will now mention form together a "folk" designation quite distinct from the "official" one given by the Knights and still used by the more learned section of the people. Their importance lies mainly in the fact that

12. A. MIFSUD, *Op. cit.* p. 67.

13. G. GALEA, *Op. cit.* p. 23.

they show very clearly that the people of the land never accepted a place-name unless it first suited their taste and conformed to their pattern.

TOWERS. I give here a few examples of traditional Maltese tower-names taken from Mgr. Mifsud's article on Maltese towers (14). In Malta we have: (a) *It-Torri tal-Kaptan* (The Captain's Tower) at San Pawl tat-Targa; (b) *It-Torri tal-Kavalier* (The Knight's Tower) at Qrendi; (c) *Torri Teftef* or *Torri tal-Ors*, nowadays Fort Ricasoli, so called after the Knight Alessandro Orsi at whose expense the tower was built in 1629; (d) *Torri tal-Vandomu* (Vendôme's Tower), so called after the Grand Prior of France, Vendôme, who in 1716 constructed batteries and other fortifications at Marsaxlokk and at St. Paul's Bay. In Gozo we meet with (e) *Torri ta' San Martin* (St. Martin's Tower) or *Torri Garzes*, erected on the promontory of Ras it-Tafal by Grand Master Martino Garzes.

OTHER BUILDINGS. Among names of other buildings and bastions which correspond more closely to the designation given to them by the Knights may be mentioned: (a) *Torri tal-Arlogg* at Birgu, now totally demolished; (b) *il-Macina*, which recalls the crane constructed at the Old Arsenal about 1629, which designation is now substituted by the word *biga*, although a street in Senglea is still called Strada Macina (15); (c) *Ta' Frankuni*, originally derived from Villa Franconi at Floriana, which was used as a Lunatic Asylum — a designation persisting today to indicate the Hospital for Mental Diseases at Attard; (d) *il-Kamrata* at Valletta, first built in 1593; (e) *L-Iskola tal-Habs*, used as a slave prison in the days of the Knights, then in the 19th century as a naval hospital and as an elementary school and later, up to the start of hostilities in 1940, as an examination hall; (f) *L-Abatija tas-Sultan*, originally built by Manoel de Vilhena in 1725 for housing poor girls and teaching them

14. A. MIFSUD, *Op. cit.* pp. 55-100.

15. G. DARMANIN DEMAJO, *The Naval Establishments of the Order*, in *The Daily Malta Chronicle* of the 3rd February, 1927.

sewing and reading, then converted into a House of Industry by Lord Hastings in 1825 and since 1850 used as a Central Civil Hospital; (g) *Bartala*, near Zabbar — a corruption of Verdala — used to designate the military barracks in that locality; (h) *Il-Barriera*, literally meaning “quarry” but here used in connection with quarantine measures (*It. barriera*, Eng. *Barrier*) near the present day fish-market at the Marina; (i) *Laskri*, meaning Lascaris Ditch; (j) *Ta’ Pwetu* alias Pinto Stores, at the Marina; (k) *Il-Pixkerija*, or fish-market, a name originally denoting the place known as *Is-Suq il-Qadim* but nowadays given also to the new fish market; (l) *Il-Furmarija*, a corruption of *Infirmeria*, being the Holy Infirmary of the Knights, still preserved in the expression *it-tabib tal-Furmarija*; (m) *Il-Kistlanija*, a corruption of the word *Castellania*, the ancient Law Courts now used as the Medical and Health Office, Valletta; (n) *Il-Gardjola* and *Is-Sirena* at Senglea; (o) *Il-Palazz l-Aħmar* at Lija; (p) *Dar il-Ljuni*, the residence of the Lieutenant-Governor of Malta, so called from the four stone lions on the terrace; (q) *Il-Mandraġġ*, a word originally meaning “mooring place” but eventually applied to slummy parts of Valletta, Birgu, Ghaxaq and Victoria, Gozo; (r) the various buildings known as *l-Armerija*, such as those at Valletta, Żurrieq, Siggiewi and Qormi; (s) *Tignè*, so called after the famous engineer who built Fort Tignè, — a designation which has supplanted the older one of *Ponta ta’ Dragut*; (t) *is-sur tad-Deredin* at Imdina, so called after one of the Grand Masters; (u) *Tal-Fama*, being that corner of the Palace Square where Kingsway meets Bishop Street, so called, according to Sir Temi Zammit, because a pillar surmounted by a stone wolf was erected there in 1588 to commemorate the grant of a Cardinal’s hat to Verdala, the expense of replacing the pillar in 1672 being borne by the Grand Master’s nephew who lived in the Hotel de Verdalin, now used as the Civil Service Sports Club (16); (v) *Il-Prezza*

16. T. ZAMMIT, *Il-Belt Valletta*, in *Ward ta’ Qari Malti — L-ewwel Ktieb*, Malta, 1936, p. 9.

(It. *Breccia*, Eng. *Breach*) at Birgu, being the post entrusted to the Castilian Knights during the Siege, where the Turks almost succeeded in effecting a breach; (w) *Fuq l-Ixprun* in Valletta, (lower St. Elmo) the name being derived from the Italian "sperone"; (x) *L-Għar tal-Paggi*, near St. Angelo, where the Grand Master's page-boys used to bathe in summer (17).

The following names of streets or of industrial quarters still remind us of everyday city-life in the days of the Knights and the early years of British Rule:— (a) *Is-Sur tal-Haddedin*, in Valetta, (near the lower Barracca) being the area where blacksmiths generally carried on their trade; (b) *It-Triq tas-Siġġijiet* that part of Christopher Street near the Jesuits' College where chairs were made or repaired; (c) *It-Triq tal-Masri*, being the upper half of St. Paul's Street, in Valletta, where Egyptian cotton was sold — *Masri*, which still survives as a family nickname in Malta and Gozo, being the Maltese word for Egyptian; (d) *Id-Duwi Balli*, a slummy part of Valletta, probably so called because two Balis (due Bali) lived there, or, according to others, from two stone balls (Sic. *dui palli*) at the street corner; (e) *L-Arcipielgu*, another slummy part of Valletta, derived from the word *archipelago*; (f) *Balzunetta*, a thickly populated quarter at Floriana, so called after some merchants who lived in this quarter and exported cotton to Barcelona — whence *Barcelonetta*, M. *Balzunetta* (18). (g) *Il-Mina s-Sewda* and *Iż-Żigużajg*, both tunnels used as a shelter during the last war; (h) *Fuq l-Iġgant*, near the old fishmarket at the Customs, the *ġgant* being the bronze statue of the sea god Neptune which is now in the Palace Courtyard; (i) *It-Triq tal-Gran Viskonti* (upper St. Ursola Street) where the Gran Visconte, in charge of the Police under the Knights, resided; (j) *In-Niżla tal-Kalzrati* or *It-Triq tal-Ganċ*, being that part of St. John's

17. CANON G.M. FARRUGIA, *Dawra Arkeologika ma' dwar il-Birgu*, in *Il-Malti*, 1926, p. 69.

18. G.A. VASSALLO, *Antichità dell'Industria e della Civiltà in Malta*, in *L'Arte*, No. 37, p. 1

Street flanking the Castellania. Here slaves were bound to the large nail (M. ganċ), which still exists, pilloried and left there after being flogged; (k) *Taht il-Qanpiena*, marking the street corner where the bell of the slave prison was hung; (l) *Bieb il-Lhud*, the city gate opening on Jews' Sally Port, marking the boundary of the Jewish quarter; (m) *Gnien is-Sultan* (The Grand Master's Garden) outside Victoria Gate; (n) *L-Ifran tas-Sinjuriġa*, where the bakery of the Order stood, whence the street name *Strada Forni* (Bakery Street). (o) *Il-Lampier tas-Sultan* (the Sultan's Lamp), offered by Grand Master Perellos to Our Lady of Mellieha on recovering from an illness in 1708.

It is not out of place to recall here the various attempts on the part of the Order to impose a village or a city name on the people. These attempts were invariably foiled by the tenacity of folk-memory and of the traditional place-names. As far back as 1420, before the Order came to Malta, Imdina had been honoured by the appellation of *Notabile*, for which name Le Sengle in 1554 substituted *Città Vecchia*, or Old City, to distinguish it from Birgu, "La Città Nuova". Both *Notabile* and *Città Vecchia*, however, could never oust the popular name *Imdina*, which has outlived the two other official designations. The same thing happened when the names *Cospicua*, *Senglea* and *Vittoriosa* were given by the Knights to *Bormla*, *l-Isla* and *il-Birgu* respectively. These Maltese names have survived in general everyday conversation, though the former ones are still used in private correspondence and in the English section of the local Press. During Pinto's Grandmastership the village of Qormi was raised in status, being re-named *Città Pinto*, and this, in a way, substituted the *Casal Fornaro* which had previously designated this village. But the popular name *Qormi* survived every attempt to suppress it. Pinto's association with the village, however, has been perpetuated by the adoption of his coat-of-arms as the village devise and, in comparatively recent years, a village band-club has been named after the Grand Master. *Żebbuġ, Żejtun, Siġġiewi*

and *Zabbar* were likewise changed to *Città Rohan* (1777), *Città Beland* (1797), *Città Ferdinand* (1797) and *Città Hompesch*, but here again the official designation was short-lived, for it ended with the inglorious exit of the Knights. Yet another example is *Pawla*, named after De Paule, the Grand Master who encouraged people to settle there by offering indemnity to those persons in debt who resided in the new town. But here as at *Qormi* the people, while appreciating the Grand Master's liberality and cherishing his memory, have stuck to the old name *Raħal Ġdid*. The above also explains the popular nickname *Il-Midjunin* given to the inhabitants of *Raħal Ġdid*. *Subborgo Vilhena* likewise has not been able to oust the more popular *Furjana*, named after the engineer P.P. Floriani (1634).

Parallel examples from the period of British rule in Malta may be cited. The capital of Gozo was declared a City in 1887 (19) on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Silver Jubilee, but the Gozitans still refer to their capital as *Ir-Rabat*. Similarly Albert Town, Marsa, named after Albert, the Prince Consort, has never taken ground among the Maltese, who still refer to the place as *Il-Belt il-Ġdida*.

THE INQUISITION. This institution, which flourished in Malta under the Knights, figures also in Maltese tradition. Besides the two palaces *Tal-Inkisitur*, one at Birgu and the other on the outskirts of *Siggiewi*, the name of the Holy Office is a popular synonym for repression, cruelty and torture. People still refer to a harsh law as inquisitorial, *Din Ingisizzjoni!* Of the tools of torture employed *l-Imqass*, *il-Kavallett* and *Il-Bir tas-Skieken* are the ones which are best remembered.

Popular imagination has created the following legend about Don Matteo Falzon, *is-Saħħar Falzun*, who was accused and condemned by the Inquisition in 1575. The story runs that while the Inquisitor was at table with his friends, they called Falzon from his dungeon to amuse the

19. Vide Government Notice, No. 75, of the 10th June, 1887.

guests. Falzon asked for a cask of water and for a piece of string. Taking the end of the string in his hand and giving the clew to a Knight, the wizard jumped head foremost into the cask and disappeared. And nothing was heard of him till the Inquisitor received a letter from Sicily in Falzon's handwriting with the words "Remember me". Later, Falzon ordered his Sicilian servant to cut him up into pieces and bury him in the cellar, whence he would arise and become the Anti-Christ. Every week the servant was to send a letter to the Inquisitor at Malta. But it so happened that the servant by mistake sent a letter which he was supposed to send at a much later date, with the result that the Inquisitor grew suspicious and asked the Viceroy to investigate the whole thing. Thus they were able to extract the whole truth from the unfortunate servant, how Falzon had left him a number of letters, carefully dated at weekly intervals, of which he was to send one every week. They took out of the cellar the dead man's bones, which were already beginning to reunite, and burned the remains. And that was the end of *Saħħar Falzun!*

Another legend dealing with the Inquisition tells the story of a Knight who fell in love with a Maltese girl. The latter, acting on her confessor's advice, rejected his amorous advances. The disappointed knight, however, managed to bribe a woman whom he persuaded to accost the same confessor under pretence of confessing and then accuse him of misconduct to the Inquisitor. As a result the innocent priest found his way into prison, where he remained for a good number of years. On her death-bed, the wicked woman confessed how she had maligned the good priest in order to obtain the reward promised to her by the Knight. Thus vindicated, the priest was freed and carried home in triumph. But his triumph was short-lived for he died soon after (20).

SURNAMES. According to a very common belief Maltese surnames beginning with the prefix *de* indicate direct descent from a knight. It is possible to find interesting parallels in English, Scottish and other surnames, examples being Fitz James, Fitz William, Fitz Roy, Fitz Gerald, Mac Donald, Mac Alpine, Mihailovitch, Mitrovitch. Historically the Maltese belief is unfounded, there being Demanueles, for example, as early as 1419. One Maltese surname is especially singled out as indicating illegitimacy, i.e. *Spiteri* which, according to tradition, was given to foundlings and children deposited in the *Ruota* at the Infirmary and later reared up in the country at the Convent's expense. *Spiteri* would thus appear to be a corruption of *Ospitalieri*.

SPORTS AND PASTIMES. The period of the Knights in Malta saw the emergence of our island from a state of fear and of monotonous existence to one of comparative safety and of spectacular entertainment. It is true that the Maltese of pre-Order days may have had their days of feasting and rejoicing connected with the seasonal festivals which, clothed in a Christian garb, have come down to us from a pagan past. Horseracing on the day of the traditional folk-festival *l-Imnarja* and on other feast-days (21) constituted a welcome break in their dull everyday existence. Archery, too, was practised in the Middle Ages, as well as running

21. Races were not, as is commonly believed, introduced in Malta by Grand Master Verdala in 1592. The races on *Imnarja Day* are referred to as a yearly event by Commendatore Fra Carlo Micallef in 1584 (Vide R.M.L. Ms 226 "Continuazione dell' Istoria Gerosolomitana" — 1611, Tomo Primo, p. 101). The Order, however, encouraged and extended this popular pastime. In 1592 by a vow of the *Università* during the great plague epidemic of that year, Verdala sanctioned the holding of races on St. Roque's Day (16th August), — (Vide Pozzi: *Historia della Religione Gerosolomitana*, Vol. I, Lib. VI, p. 340). The races on St. John's Day, which are no longer held, were instituted by Grand Master Lascaris's decree of the 29th May, 1638 (Vide R.M.L. Ms 19, p. 216). According to tradition, in olden times flat races took place in the street skirting the church of the Annunciation, in the outskirts of Rabat, on the feast of Our Lady of Carmel. This church belongs to the Carmelite Friars of Imdina. Races in which men take part are still held at Imdina on the occasion of this feast.

for a prize, hunting and hawking, and country dancing, traces of which survive in the well-known Maltese *kontra-danza*. There were also bonfires on Midsummer Eve. But more often than not the sounding of the tocsin or the firing of a signal from our watch-towers announced an approaching Turkish attack. Our farmers, thus warned, left their crops and retreated with their womenfolk and their children behind the fortified towns, there to lead a miserable existence behind the festering ditches of the citadels. But even when there was no Turkish attack one had to do one's share in building the fortifications when one's turn, called *newba* or *angara*, came. Or else one had to stand guard away from hearth and home in some coastal watch tower, expecting one's hours of furlough to return to the dear ones at home. Occasionally our forefathers had the good fortune of being visited by the Viceroy, or by the King himself, and then there would be the usual enthusiastic reception, the tournament at the Marsa and the distribution of money by way of royal largesse.

Bearing all this in mind we can realise the great change and the tremendous impulse given by the Knights to popular entertainment in these islands. With the gradual decline of Turkish power and the menace of Islam the sons of St. John ostensibly discarded their religious garb and added new life to already existing sports, introducing new customs and pastimes, primarily for their own enjoyment, and secondarily to provide amenities to the dwellers of the cities and to the tillers of the soil. And when the Order left these islands, there remained a rich legacy of entertainment. There were the Carnival celebrations, held for the first time in 1535, when the Christian armada was assembling in Malta Harbour; the horseraces, sanctioned by the official presence of high officials of the Order, including the Grand Master himself; the bonfires on the Palace Square lighted by the Grand Master and his Balis on St. John's Eve. There was also the Maypole merrymaking in the same square on the first of May of

each year, the blessing of animals on the feast of St. Anthony Abbot, when the Grand Master went to Rabat for the usual ceremony outside St. Augustine Church, the *Imnarja* festival at Buskett, which was announced by a *Bandu*, originally read in the streets of Rabat and Imdina, a practice traces of which survive to this day. The memory of all this has come down to us, together with other popular spectacles and entertainment, such as the 8th September celebrations with the *dghajsa* regatta in the Grand Harbour, out of season Carnivals known as *Karnival Ibleh* and the pilgrimage to Mellieha which gave rise to great fun and merry-making, as may be seen from the following folk-songs:

Meta morna tal-Mellieha
 Konna wiehed u ghoxrin.
 Hadna l-kunjatu magħna
 U l-flixkun tar-rożolin.

Meta morna tal-Mellieha
 Sibna hofra wara hofra,
 Dak iz-zopp jigżani l-ommi,
 Jien niksirlu siequ l-ohra.

Il-Mellieha ġejja u sejra
 U l-Mellieha nerġa' mmur;
 Ghax-xemx għandi l-ombrella
 Għall-gharaq għandi l-maktur.

THE MALTESE CROSS. The 8-pointed cross of the Order has been so closely associated with Malta that more often than not the term Maltese Cross designates the White Cross of the Knights. The Collegiate Priests of St. Paul's Grotto at Rabat, as well as the Ursuline Nuns, still wear the 8-pointed cross on their habit. The former do so in virtue of a special concession from Pope Pius XI following the extinction of the *Preti d'Ubbidienza*, whose last survivor, Fra Francesco Cilia, died at Żebbuġ in 1865 at the venerable age of 92 (21).

VILLAGE COATS OF ARMS provide yet another memory of the Order. Maltese villages often take their arms from those of

22. A. FERRIS, *Memorie dell'Inclito Ordine Gerosolimitano*, Malta, 1881, p. 253.

one or other of the Grand Masters. The Qormi coat of arms, for example, bears the five crescents on a field, characteristic of Pinto's arms. Other examples are the armorial bearings taken by the people of Raħal Ġdid from De Pawla's coat of arms; and the devices of Żabbar, Senglea and Valetta taken from the arms of Hompesch, Le Sengle and La Valette respectively. A modern instance of the influence of the Knights is evident in the names of several band clubs, such as *La Valette Band* in Valetta, *Beland Band* in Żejtun, so called after Grand Master Hompesch whose mother's surname was Beland, and *L'Isle Adam Band* at Rabat.

BALLADS. Of the period of the Knights two ballads have survived. One of them relates the story of a Maltese lady who fell victim to the fair words and compliments of a Knight of St. John, how her husband, finding out that she had betrayed him, stabbed her and how she finally repented and made her last peace with God. I have already published some stanzas of this ballad in my study on Maltese Ballads in "The Sundial" 1943. I am now giving the full text as recited to me by a 60-year old lady from B'Kara:—

THE AUDITOR'S DAUGHTER

X'siegha sewda kienet dina
Meta morna il-Ġiżwita!

Morna niehdu l-ilma mbierrek
— Kavalier għemiżha f'idha.

Riġalalha il-katina —
Riġalatlu id-djamant:
Kelma ġġib il-ohra
Sa ma waslu il-palazz.

Ġie s-sinjur minn barra,
Saqsqa: "Is-sinjura fejnha?"

— Qalltu: "Is-sinjura l-Ġiżwita

How dark was the hour
When we went to the Jesuits'
Church!

We went to take holy water
— And a Knight pressed her by
the hand.

He gave her a pendant —
And she gave him a diamond:
And they joined in conversation
Till they reached the palace.

When the master came home
He asked: "Where is thy
mistress?"

She answered: "At the Jesuits'
Church

Qiegħda tisma' il-quddies"...
Is-sinjur mar ifittixha

U l-Giżwita ma sabhiex!

Reġa' ġie s-sinjur minn barra
— "Għidli s-sinjura fejnha

Għax noqtol lilek minn flokha!
— "Is-sinjura fuq... fis-sala..."

Titkellem mal-Kavaliier...
Nitolbok la toqtolhiex!!...

Huwa tela' l-ewwel sala
L-ewwel sala ma sabhiex —

Dahal fit-tieni sala...
Qabadha minn dfuriha...
L-aħħar targa li niżel
Tfixkel fil-pantufija...
Seba' stalletti taħ

Mal-aħħar laħqet il-vina.

"Tutto fatto" hekkha nġhidu:
Baġtet hija għat-tabib;
Qallha: "Aħfer, binti, aħfer

Għaliex duwa m'hemmx għalik"

"Tutto fatto" hekkha nġhidu,
Baġtet hija għall-kappillan;
Qallha: "Aħfer, binti, aħfer

Għaliex duwa ma baqgħax".

"Tutto fatto" hekkha nġhidu
Baġtet hija għall-barbier;

Qallha: "Aħfer, binti, aħfer

Għaliex duwa m'hawn imkien"

My mistress is hearing Mass"
The master went out to look for
her
And he did not find her in that
Church!

The master returned home
He insisted "Tell me where
your mistress is
Or I'll kill you in her stead!..
— "My mistress is upstairs, in
the drawing room
Conversing with the Knight...
I pray you, do not kill her!...

He went up to the first hall
But she was not to be found
there —

He passed on to the second hall
He caught her by her hair...
And at the last step
He stumbled over her train...
He hit her seven times with his
dagger
And the last stab reached the
vein.

All was over, as we say
She sent for the doctor:
He said: "Forgive, my
daughter, forgive
Because you are past human
help".

"All was over", as we say,
She sent for the parish priest;
He said: "Forgive, my
daughter, forgive,
Because you are past all cure".

"All was over", as we say,
She sent for the barber-
surgeon;
He said: "Forgive, my
daughter, forgive,
Because there is no remedy
anywhere".

Kumparsa kuddiem is-Sultan

Qallu: "Dina kif inhija?
'K ma spidejthiex mur u
spediha"

"Ommi, meta mmutek jiena

Ghaddini minn triq bla nies;

La rridek qniepen iddogqli
W anqas tqaddisli quddies.

Ommi, meta mmutek jiena

Ghaddini minn triq mistura,

Halli ġara tghid il ohra

"Din bint il-Balzan maqtula".

Ommi, meta mmutlew jiena

Ghaddini minn fuq is-sur,

Halli ġara tghid il ohra:

"Dina bint il-Lawdatur".

Ommi, meta mmutek jiena

Int idfinni taht il-ġhatba,
Halli ma' kull ħarġa u daħla

Tiftakar fija l-minhabba.

Ommi, meta mmutek jiena

Fit-tebut ghamilli tieqa,
Halli meta jerġa' jiżzewweg
Nisimghu jiena jitnieda.

A summons before the Grand
Master:

He said: "How is this?"
If she has'nt died yet go and
finish her off".

"O my mother, when I am
dead

Let them carry me through a
quiet street

Toll no sad bells for me
And do not celebrate any
masses.

"O my mother, when I am
dead

Carry me through an out-of-
the-way road

So that one neighbour may tell
another:

"This is Balzan's daughter who
has been murdered.

"O my mother, when I am
dead

Let my corpse pass by the
bastions,

So that one neighbour may tell
another:

"This is the Auditor's
daughter".

"O my mother, when I am
dead

Bury me under the threshold
So that whenever you go in or

out
Your love will remember me".

"O my mother, when I am
dead

Leave an opening in the coffin,
So that if he re-marries

I'll hear his banns proclaimed".

We now pass to the second ballad, which appeared in one of the first newspapers printed in Malta, i.e. "L'Amico della Patria" of the 15th March, 1840. It is a soldier's song and I am including it here because internal evidence such as references to the coinage of the Order (*kruċ il-ħabba*) to the Sultan and to the Turks fixes its time of action well within the period of the Knights. It tells the story of a lovesick Maltese soldier far from his native land who thinks of his beloved and comforts himself at the thought that one day, having triumphed over the Turks, he would return to his love. The song contains some beautiful ideas expressed in simple language with feeling. It runs into twelve stanzas of four lines each, but the ballad must have been much longer as it is described in the abovementioned paper as a "fragment" of an old Maltese song. I give the text of the ballad:

X'dawl ta qamar jiddi!	What a brilliant moonlight!
Jien fih nara kruċ il-ħabba;	I can even see the cross on the grain;
Ohorġu, xbejbiet. ohorġu	Come out, ye maidens, come,
Ia intom ward minn tal- imħabba.	For you are the flowers of love.
Ftit sigħat minn tat-tgawdija	A few fleeting hours of joy
Thalluhomx hekkja jaharbu;	Let them not pass away so soon;
Meta tistgħu, xbejbiet, gawdu	Enjoy yourselves whenever you can, maids
Qabel tibdu l-wegħha ggarbu.	Before you begin to experience pain.
Jien garrabtu dan l-uġigh	I have myself experienced this grief
Uġigh qawwi u wisq kiefer;	A pain most cruel and intense;
Meta l-qalb ta' qalbi qaltli	When my beloved told me
"Kemmi inhobbok" — kelli nsiefer.	"How I love you" — I had to go away.
Kelli nsiefer, immur il bogħod.	I had to go far, very far away
L-irsiera ngħib lis-Sultan tiegħi;	To bring slaves to my Grand Master;

Ah! jahasra, kif kont thobbni,
U kemm ridt li tigi mieghi!

X'kienet helwa dik id-demgha!
Jiena ilqajtha gol-maktur,

Haw', fuq qalbi jien inzommha
Tal-imhabba rahan żgur.

X'naf dal-hin intix tibkini
U 'l dal-qamar stess issaqsi

Jekk jiena ghadnix inhobbok —
X'naf jekk tafx inti thobb
daqsi?

Qieghed nara dik is-shaba
Li ghaddejja hemm fil-boghod
Bajda bajda bhal hamiera
Li mal-ilma qed tirtoghod.

W issa niezla — w issa diebet
X'inhu qatt dan li qed nara?

F'daqqa wahda hija ghabet —
Hekk il-hajja tghib mal-hrara.

Il-mahbuba tieghi mmela
Bit-tbatija s'issa mietet?

X'lehen hu li qed ighidli:
Mill-art l-ohra: "Mietet,
mietet!"

Inhoss qalbi qieghda thabbat,
Nara l-art qed iddur b'ija,
Ma nistax inzomm jien iżjed.
B'dawn il-pwieni, b'dit-tbatija.

Fejnha l-hila li kelli qabel?
Mela hsieb hekk ighakkisni?

Alack how you loved me then,
And how you longed to be with
me!

O how you cried then,
I caught the tear in my
handkerchief,
And I keep it right on my heart
As a sure pledge of love.

Who knows but now you may
be crying for me,
And perhaps you are asking the
moon

Whether I still love you —
I wonder if you can love me as
much as I love you.

I am seeing that cloud
Flitting in the distance
White as a white dove
That trembles on the water.

Now it descends, now it
disappears
What can this be that I am
seeing?
All of a sudden she disappears—
So life passes away with
enthusiasm.

Therefore my beloved by now
Must be dead, having suffered
so much?
Hark! What is that voice
From another land: "She is
dead! She is dead!"

I feel my heart beating
I feel my head turning,
I can no longer stand
All this grief and suffering.

Where is my former strength?
How could anxiety so weaken
me?

— Le! Narak jiena żgur nerga'.

Alla għad żgur iħallasni.

Jien narak: tara mixhuta
Għaxar Torok fejn rignlejk,

Jitolbu l-ħniena tiegħek
Hajthom jiehdu min idejk.

—No! I shall certainly see you
again

God will surely reward me.

I will see you: And there will be
Ten Turks prostrate at your
feet,

Imploring your pity
Expecting life at your hands.

EVERYDAY EXPRESSIONS. The following sayings and expressions, which are still heard in everyday conversation, are in some way or other connected with the period of the Order's rule: —

Il-Habba tas-Sultan, i.e. in the Grandmaster's pay;

Habba tad-dirwan, a coin struck by De Rohan, the word being a corruption of the Grand Master's name.

Il-Bejta tas-Sultan, which literally means the Grand Master's nest, is used when referring to Valetta, the capital, where the Sultan exercised his official functions.

Wiċċ Laskri, a far from complimentary reference to a sulky person, originally applied to Grand Master Lascaris who not only interfered with women's dress unduly but also forbade women to wear masks during Carnival.

Pesta ta' Pawlu Milju, a plague which was no plague at all, so called after one Paolo Emilio Ramurri, a sanitary official who took every precaution against plague in 1623 only to find that it was a false alarm, with which compare the disease known as *ta' Ghio* (Ghio's Disease) in the 19th century.

L-Għatba tal-Kistlanija, literally meaning "the Castellan's doorstep" an expression denoting a thing accessible or applicable to all, irrespective of age or sex or class, usually heard in connection with litigious persons;

It-Tin ta' San Sidor, a kind of fig which, according to tradition, was introduced in Zondadari's time, whence the corruption *San Sidor*. Zondadari's refusal to take the usual vows on assuming office is thus recorded in a local saying: "Zondadari mhux bhal ta' dari" i.e. Zondadari is not like previous Grand Masters;

Parsott, another kind of fig believed to have been introduced by Grand Master Parisot de la Valette, whence the popular designation (M. *Parsotta*) of the fruit;

Banavolja, from the Italian *buonavoglia*, a term applied in Maltese to ruffians of the worst type. In those days *buonavoglie* were employed by the Knights on the galleys and other ships.

Il-Karrakka, recalling the Order's ship *La Gran Carracca*, a word which nowadays denotes an unwieldy person, anything awkward and obsolete, an old ship, a car which easily breaks down etc.

Il-Midjunin, meaning the debtors, a nickname given to Pawla residents, originating from Grand Master De Paul's offer of a free pardon to debtors who were willing to reside in the new suburb named after him. As early as 1750 the new village had given rise to the following saying recorded by De Soldanis in his Ms. dictionary (23): *Kollu wiehed ir-Rahal gdid*, i.e. whether it is a village or not makes no difference, because it is not a parish.

De Redin, a Grand Master who was also Viceroy of Sicily and who facilitated the importation of corn into these islands to such an extent that it was possible to sell it at six tari per salma, has given rise to the following saying:

Il-Gran Mastru De Redin
U l-qamh bis-sei tarin.

L-Imtiehen tar-Rih (The Windmills), an uncomplimentary reference to the Knights, whose eight pointed cross bore some resemblance to the sails of a windmill.

In this study I have attempted to show the main lines which the student of folk-lore in Malta has to follow in dealing with the traditional, as opposed to the historical aspect of the Order's rule. There are many other memories and traditions which are still waiting for the patient research worker to be brought within the range of human knowledge. It is my sincere hope that others will join me in my task of exploring the hidden treasures of the popular mind in these islands before they are completely lost amidst the turmoil and complexities of modern life.