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BACKGROUND MATERIAL FOR THE STUDY OF FOLK ARTS AND CRAFTS

by

J. CASSAR PULLICINO

For many years the subject of Folk Arts and Crafts in Malta has aroused the interest of non-Maltese visitors and residents. Their impression is typified by the following extract from an article by Pamela Berry entitled *The Charm of the Maltese Village* which appeared in the "Times of Malta" of April 29, 1967: "... Wandering in and out of the narrow streets and looking in at the shops and work-rooms, the visitor will notice the number of crafts that are still practised here in Malta. He will see skilled carpenters making new, repairing old and copying antique furniture. He will note the tinsmiths, goldsmiths, silversmiths, and wrought iron experts. He may spot the master tailors tucked away in odd little corners . . .

"As for the womenfolk, when their housework is finished, they sit on their doorsteps and knit. In Gozo they prefer to make lace, handing down from mother to daughter the formula for those fine and age-old patterns Women in kerchiefs and full dresses are bent double amongst the young crops. Some carry loads on their heads. Occasionally their menfolk straighten themselves to test the sharpness of a knife

"The festa season (starting any time at all) is the highlight of the village year, attracting not only tourists and visitors, but neighbours from other villages. The altars and side tables of the Church are covered in the finest linen and lace, to set off beautiful collections of silver. Entwined round the candlestands are flowers made of gold thread and silk. The statue of the patron saint is taken from its niche and surrounded by live flowers in readiness for the triumphal procession through the streets"

The possible danger of extinction facing such arts and crafts as have survived justifies a review of recent work and studies in this field. In doing so we have to keep in mind that by the 18th Century some of the older crafts were already well established in particular localities in Malta. Indeed, the earliest craft forms go back to the prehistoric period. Archaeologists have given us fascinating descriptions of the range and variety of the pottery-sequence recovered from the temples and rock tombs, of impressed ware and examples of the 'cut out' and 'incised' techniques as well as of vases with chequer-board and other decorations. Many works of primitive sculpture and relief-carving on stone may also be seen in these temples.

From the Tarxien temples the late Professor Temi Zammit in 1915-17 obtained specimens of Maltese textiles, lumps of incinerated cloth in which the thread used was often very fine, though coarser tissue was also observed. We read that "the colour of the burnt fabrics varies in the several specimens collected, but their tint falls within the scale of the reds, varying from a dark dull red-brown to a soft pinkish-yellow. Iron salts formed an important ingredient in the dyeing of woven material for analysis showed that iron is always present..."

Specimens of these calcined textiles were submitted to Professor Alfred F. Barker, of Leeds University, who reported that "the material certainly is not wool and is most likely flax or a fibre of that type. The fabrics themselves are interesting as showing considerable knowledge of interlacing. The simplest is plain weave, but in some of the thicker fabrics there is a suggestion of a more complicated weaving."¹

Professor J.D. Evans expresses the opinion that textiles, or clothing of some sort, may well have been among the exports of the ancient Maltese in their prehistoric world. He goes on to say that "though no spindle wheels attest the existence of a textile industry, we have excellent evidence of their skill in the manufacture of clothing in the statuettes, which also give an insight into prehistoric Maltese fashions."²

It has also been suggested that the imports required by the Copper Age Maltese, who produced the temple complexes, were paid for by the skills of the inhabitants and that the relatively high quality textiles they produced might have been sufficiently in demand to be used in bartering for raw materials. In this connection Blouet very aptly states: "If the islanders were overcoming the deficiencies of the archipelago in this way they would be employing, at a very early stage, an adaptation to the local environment which has been used frequently throughout Maltese history; namely the development of high quality craft industries and the export of their products to pay for the many goods which the islands, with their scant resources, have always had to import."³

Fine mosaic pavements in Roman houses and villas have been preserved in these islands, which became famed for their fabrics in Roman times. In his philippic against Verres, a Governor of Malta, the Roman orator and Senator Cicero refers to quantities of Maltese cloth and fifty cushions for sofas and many candelabra which the rapacious Praetor had stolen. He also states that Malta "became a manufactory for weaving women's garments" (*In Verrem, II*). Diodorus Siculus (V. 12, 1-4) mentions artisans of every class who were to be found among the inhabitants. "The most expert are such as make textiles famous for their fineness and softness. Their houses are very beautiful and ambitiously adorned with cornices and stucco works".

From the early Christian period we have evidence of tools used by craftsmen belonging to various trades. Temi Zammit mentions shears, mallets, frames for holding yarn or thread, pincers, and loom weights, all instruments connected with the spinning and weaving industries, represented in low relief on one of the large blocks closing the entrance in one of the minor catacombs (No. 3) grouped around the main St. Paul's Catacomb at Rabat. In another catacomb (No. 23) tools used by masons are cut in the wall of the antechamber while a complete set of tinsmith's tools is carved with remarkable accuracy on a slab found in a rock-tomb at Hal Barka, near Rabat.⁴

From notes kindly favoured me by my friend Godfrey Wettinger and based on his researches on the medieval archives at the Mdina Cathedral Museum one

1. T. ZAMMIT, *Prehistoric Malta: The Tarxien Temples*, O.U.P., 1930, pp. 55-56.
2. J.D. EVANS, *Malta*, 1959, p. 161.
3. B. BLOUET, *The Story of Malta*, 1967, p. 32.
4. T. ZAMMIT, *The St. Paul's Catacombs and other Rock-cut Tombs in Malta*, 3rd ed. 1926, p. 26. These tools have recently been interpreted as being surgical instruments by Dr. P. Cassar ('Medical History' 1973).

can say that the local supply of candles for the *Università* was at least partly in Jewish hands in the middle 1470's. Weaving as a home craft is also attested in the case of Antonius Busalib against Hugolinus de Sillato and his wife Safra which dragged on before the Episcopal Court for many years in the 1450's and 60's. The case centred on the possession of two bed covers. Before her marriage Anthony's wife, Manna, had been staying with her aunt and she had herself woven a piece of linen cloth which was then turned into a quilt by a woman from Hal Tartarni, near Dingli, who seems to have been quite expert at this sort of work for she is referred to as *magistra*.⁵

The production of cotton, which was one of the crops almost certainly grown in Malta during the Arab domination, developed during the Middle Ages and after declining in the 15th and 16th centuries it became increasingly important under the Order, especially in the 18th century, by virtue of the number of people employed and the foreign exchange earned. Cotton was grown by small farmers and spun by their wives and other members of the family. A middleman then purchased the spun cotton and exported it, probably through other agents or placed it with a different family which specialized in weaving.⁷

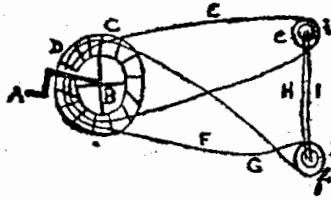
Blouet adds that apart from cotton there were other textiles, such as woollen yarns, which had been produced in these islands at least since the Middle Ages and which continued under the Order. There were, besides, a number of ancillary trades such as the manufacture of spinning and weaving machinery which involved a large number of craftsmen. Sail making was also a craft of some importance. Gold and silver smiths and a large number of tailors represented the more specialized crafts in the city while numerous other craftsmen, such as bootmakers, smiths, bakers and millers formed small — usually one-man — establishments in both town and village. From 1530 onwards, if not before, craft guilds were regulated by statutes, approved by the Grand Master, which provided for the yearly election of Consuls and other officers to control the various trades, such as goldsmiths, tailors, carpenters, bootmakers, saddlers, etc.

The Maltese historian G.F. Abela in his *Descrittione di Malta* (1647) left some useful information on a few 17th century folk crafts which have now disappeared. In the northern parts of Malta, such as Sta. Marija l-Għalja, Bahrija, Mtaħleb, Mellicha and Ghajn Hadid, the cliffs produced a gum in the form of tiny dots, called *vercella*. These were scraped off with an iron instrument and immersed in a liquid to which a certain ingredient was added. The resulting mixture was exposed for some time in the sun and was then used to dye the wool and give it an old rose colour, which was employed especially in the manufacture of a kind of carpet called *farda*. It was likewise applied to silk which was then being produced in small quantities (p. 132). At Zurrieq the principal calling of the villagers was the sale of linen and cotton wool, considered to be specialities of the locality, and of some cloaks, woollen carpets made in various colours, and large haversacks likewise woven in wool and used when travelling on horseback. They also produced some pottery ware, vases more

5. CATHEDRAL MUSEUM. Curia Episcopalis Melitae — Acta Orginalia, Vol. I, fols. 434-443; CATHEDRAL MUSEUM: Università — *Quaderni Diversi*, No. 1 (1475-76).
6. B. BLOUET, *op. cit.*, pp. 130-134.

'delicate', as Abela puts it, than those manufactured in any other part of Malta, and they did so without using the potter's wheel. This wheel, however, had already been introduced both in Malta and in Gozo when Abela wrote his Description (p. 102).

Sir Philip Skippon, who visited Malta in 1664, describes the manner of preparing cotton in *An Account of a Journey* published in vol. VI of Churchill's *A Collection of Voyages and Travels* (London 1732, pp. 361-736). "After it is gathered out of the cod, they separate it thus from the seed with this engine.



"A is the handle that turns a wheel B, which moving from C to D, brings the string E from E to C and makes another string F put cross at G, turn a little wheel or pulley *if*, and move from I to F contrary to the pulley *ie*, which moves from *i* to E. HI are two irons fixed in those pulleys that lie close enough to draw the cotton through to H, but the seed stays behind at I. They annoint the irons with oil. After this separation, they strike the cotton with a bow-string, as hatters do when they prepare their wool and hair for hats. They sell cotton here for about 50 *skudi* the *cantare*, which is equal to 116 English pounds. In hot weather they seldom work up their cotton, which is usually laid up in magazines under the walls of Città Valletta".

Under the Order of St. John sumptuary legislation was enacted by successive Grand Masters with the express purpose of curbing the extravagant fashions and inordinate show which had a serious economic impact on the spending power of the family. *Inter alia* the use of embroidery and such fine craft products was prohibited by La Valette in 1558 and there are references to hammer-beaten gold and silver in a *Prammatica* issued by De Redin on May 25, 1658, while on January 26, 1741 Pinto laid down severe penalties for such as dared to wear, or to sell, any garments woven or embroidered with gold or silver, and restricted the use of braids, lace or fringe and other gold or silver ornaments to church vestments.⁷

Useful information on textiles in the 18th century can be gleaned from Agius de Soldanis's Dictionary of the Maltese Language. Unlike the people of Italy, who lived mainly by the manufacture of silk goods, he says that the Maltese relied for their livelihood on the production of cotton which was spun into threads and then woven and made into fustian, stockings, caps, quilts or coverlets which were exported to France, Portugal and Spain, where the Maltese engaged in the trade had set up their own living quarters, and to most parts of Italy. Because of its quality, Maltese cotton then was more esteemed than that produced by other countries and the womenfolk held that local cotton had the

7. J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Notes For a History of Maltese Costume*. In "Maltese Folklore Review", Vol. I, No. 3, 1966, pp. 167, 172, 175.

advantage that it could be more easily drawn out and twisted by the spinning wheel.

Cotton weaving was exclusively a female occupation and it had given rise to the proverb *Ix-xoqqa wil-mara f'dawl il-musbieh qatt tara*, 'never look at a piece of cotton and a woman by the light of an oil lamp'. In the villages of Malta they produced carpets made of wool and cotton which were so soft that they looked like tapestry. In both islands the womenfolk manufactured various kinds of striped cloth in many colours, known as *bordi*. For indoor use in the villages, they wore the *geżwira*, a kind of petticoat reaching down from the waist and made of linen or cotton woven by peasant women and dyed blue, with white stripes.

Agius de Soldanis gives further details about the *farda* which we have already mentioned. It was an unsophisticated kind of cloth produced in Malta from wool dyed in many colours, and from linen likewise roughly woven. About 1750 the weavers developed their technique so as to imitate Persian carpets in respect of width and thickness. Thereafter the word *farda* was replaced by *farda kbira* if not altogether wiped out by the term *tapit*.

On the initiative and at the expense of Don Giuseppe Vella, parish priest of Qormi, a set of such carpets was made for his living rooms. The new carpets also began to be used to cover the altar steps in rural churches.

In Gozo they turned out a special kind of quilt or bed cover known as *kverta ta' Ghawdex*, made of linen, with cotton designs and figures hand-sewn on to the linen cloth and standing out in relief. These were sent to Malta and from here to various parts of Europe where they were in demand for use on the finest beds.⁸

In 1772 Count G.A. Ciantar in his edition of G.F. Abela's work under the title *Malta Illustrata* left a record of the main occupations of the inhabitants of the four villages of Żurrieq, Luqa, Żebbuġ and Qormi. This is what he wrote:—

§XXIV. *TERRA ZEBUGI* " . . . i cui abitanti sono spezialmente applicati al traffico di bambagio; e tra loro si trovano delle famiglie facoltose; perciò vi sono diversi artefici, e professori . . . " (Libro I, p. 280)

§XXXI. *CURMI* " . . . Essa è situata nella valle, che conduce alla Marsa: onde soggiaceva all'aria cattiva di questa contrada: talchè gli abitanti godevano poca salute, e ne mostravano gli effetti nello squallore dei loro volti: ma ora che vi sono introdotti i forni molto numerosi, che provvedono di pane gli alberghi de' Cavalieri, e molte case di persone particolari, ed in gran parte i venditori di pane, che si trovano nella piazza, o mercato della città Valletta, si è purificata l'aria di questa terra, e vi si gode buona sanità; con tal mestiere non solamente si sostentano molti fornai, ma pure alcuni di loro son diventati in poco tempo facoltosi . . . Vi è pure abbondanza di polli, e di pasta, che quivi si lavora da buona parte delle donne . . . " (p. 289)

§XLVII. *ZORRICO* " . . . Il mestiere loro principale è il traffico di tele, e di bambagio filato, che quivi si fanno eccellentemente; come anche si lavorano

8. R.M.L. Ms. 143A, *Damma ta' Kliem Kartaginis* . . . Fols. 63, 112, 156, 315, 318, 442, 470.

leggiadramente certi tabarri, e tappeti di lana di vari colori, ed alcune gualdrappe, e bisacce da portare a cavallo. Quivi pure si fanno de' vasi di creta, più delicati di quelli che si lavorano in altre parti dell'Isola, quantunque senza l'uso della ruota; ma oggi se n'è introdotta l'arte, come anticamente qui si usava: e non meno quivi, che nell'isola del Gozo si trova della buona creta, e di varie qualità . . ." (p. 307)

§LV. *LUCA* " . . . Racchiude dugento cinquantotto fuochi con mille ed ottantadue abitatori. Questi esercitano diversi mestieri, e specialmente quelli di murare, tagliar pietre, ed imbiancare con calce le fabbriche; e parecchi di loro attendono all'agricoltura". (p. 313)

During the last years of the Order's rule Canon F.X. Caruana, of Zebbug, who was later raised to the Bishopric, gave a great impulse to these home industries. In the words of R. Bonnici Cali: "Weaving, embroidery and lace-making are all manifestations of the art of design and colours in which the energetic priest excelled. With the help of many friends living on the Continent, chiefly Knights of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem residing in the various cities of Europe, he managed to open commercial relations with several merchants and to please the taste of their clients both as to the technical and the artistic qualities of the articles he used to send abroad. It is a well-known fact that the inhabitants of Zebbug and of Rabat, where Mgr. Caruana had his looms, had an old artistic tradition . . ." The same writer adds that in an exhibition of Mgr. Caruana's souvenirs held in November, 1947, there were some specimens of the products of Caruana's factory: ". . . The carpets were particularly admired, both for their usefulness and for their decorative display. One rug in Persian style was a surprise to all, its fine and fast colours are really marvellous. Another carpet shows a Western design made up of a border round a scene of a big bird fighting a viper, all having a pictorial effect obtained by toned colours and chiaroscuro . . ."⁹

In spite of considerable depression both during and after the Napoleonic wars, the cotton industry still provided a source of livelihood to many thousands of Maltese up to the late thirties of the 19th century. Thomas McGill, who issued *A Hand Book, or Guide, for Strangers visiting Malta* (Malta, Luigi Tonna, 1839, pp. 23-4), writes that "the spinning and weaving of the cotton has always been considered the most extensive branch of native industry; though it has ceased to be very profitable, yet many thousands continue to gain a livelihood by it, however miserable . . ."

"The table covers, bed mats and glass doilies made here (the manufactory of which was introduced some years ago by the present Bishop) are very pretty, cloth made from the nankeen cotton of the Island was much in vogue some years ago, and is still worn: it does not always wash well unless particular attention is paid: (after washing Malta nankeen, it ought to be thrown for a night into a lye of straw water, and hung up to dry in the shade, but must on no account be wrung out, otherwise the cloth will be cloudy and shaded). Embroidery on cotton and silk is done to perfection by the females of the Island, and sent out to adorn those less industrious in the neighbouring states;

9. R. BONNICI CALI, *Mgr. F.X. Caruana Maecenas of Fine Arts*. In "Scientia", Vol. XIV (1948), pp. 33-34.

they make also excellent lace; the lace mitts and gloves wrought by the Malta girls are bought by all ladies coming to the Island; orders from England are often sent for them, on account of their beauty and cheapness".

Malta lace was already a well-established local industry by the 18th century, and De Soldanis records that it achieved a high degree of perfection and compared favourably with that produced by the women of Holland. Its widespread use for adornment may be inferred from the fact that lace was included with other articles of luxury in a *bando* enacted by Grand Master Perellos in 1697 aimed at repressing the wearing of gold, silver, jewellery, cloth of gold, silks and other materials of value. The Maltese word for lace, i.e. *bizzilla*, suggests a comparatively recent origin and in fact its introduction into these islands cannot go further back than the 16th century, when the art of lace making, probably introduced into Venice from the East, began to spread in Europe. From Venice the new technique was soon taken up by Genoa where pillow lace, as distinct from Venetian point lace, developed. Modern Maltese lace is descended directly from Genoese lace. Quoting from Mincoff and Marriage (*Pillow Lace*, 1907, p. 21): "This heavier Genoese lace was made from 1625 onwards. Its lineal descendant is modern Maltese, which was introduced into the island by laceworkers brought from Genoa in 1833 by Lady Hamilton-Chichester Though Genoese by extraction the industry, flourishing exceedingly in Malta, has developed a character of its own, retaining as essential the Genoese leaf-work, but very little of its solid tapes, light twists taking their place. Characteristic is also the Maltese cross in the patterns and the cream or black silk in which the lace is usually worked".

From the above one may infer that lace-making, a flourishing industry in the 18th century, fell on evil days and was on the decline during the first years of British rule, and therefore, rather than 'introduce' it into Malta Lady Hamilton-Chichester helped to 'revive' the industry in 1833. It is a fact that this date coincides roughly with a period of considerable revival and expansion. About the same time lace-making spread to the whole of Gozo and became a thriving industry there through the efforts of Canon Salvatore Bondi (1790-1859). A. Ferres mentions this in a biographical article in *L'Arte* (No. 93 — 15 Nov. 1866) in which we read: "*E per assicurare egli un onesto procacciamento alle povere famiglie del Gozo si die' ogni cura possibile a propagare il lavoro dei merletti, che oggi forma una delle principali industrie di quell'isola. Questo lavoro utile e gentile era per primo esercitato da una sola classe di femmine del Rabato: per cooperazione poi del Can. Bondi fu esteso per tutto Gozo: egli ne aiutò ancora la diffusione di tali lavori coll'opera, preparandone una quantità di scelti disegni*".

In 1947 the present writer referred to the importance of traditional village crafts for the study of ancient and modern folk-life. He wrote: "The mention of occupations recalls the subject of folk arts and crafts. A study of these in Malta is invaluable to ascertain the ancient occupations of the Maltese and to note how these have in some cases given place to newer ones while in other cases their disappearance has created a force of floating unskilled labour employed outside the boundaries of the village. Of these village industries I will mention a few: the weaving loom, known as *newl*, at Zebbug in Malta;

the pottery ware and brooms at Birkirkara; goat rearing at Tarxien; cotton beating, before weaving, at Żurriq; the preparation of blood puddings at Luqa and lace manufacture and a special kind of small cheese in the sister island of Gozo. Ready-made articles imported from abroad have now reduced some of these industries to negligible proportions.

"The primitive conical stone-constructions, which are known as *giren* (sing. *girna*) in Malta and *Nuraghe* in Sardinia, the peculiar quarrying methods still obtaining in these islands, the weaving looms renowned since Roman days, and the Maltese lace industry, which are nowadays losing their importance, together with basket making and straw hat plaiting, provide virgin soil to the investigator. To these may be added the class of the extinet miller who used to blow a large shell, known as *bronja*, from the window of his mill and call his customers to bring their corn for grinding; the dying class of the *daqqâq* beating the cotton on a primitive bow-like instrument known as *watar*, and, not less, the fisherman and the sportsman with their numerous array of nets to catch fish or birds"¹⁰.

In 1956 the writer of these notes also dealt with traditional callings and occupations figuring as personal nicknames in Malta and Gozo¹¹.

Public awareness was aroused in July 1959, when the Department of Information organised an Exhibition in Gozo having as its theme *Gozo — The Life and the People*. This exhibition attracted island-wide interest and was favourably received by the Press — especially the Crafts and Industries Section. The organisers purposely focussed the attention of visitors on folk arts and crafts. This is what we read in the Introduction to the printed programme: ". . . In a special sense, Gozo may be said to be passing through a period of transition. Characteristic of Calypso's Isle is the existence of the old side by side with the new, the survival of various ancient folk arts and crafts that linger on in the quiet streets of the capital and the villages of Gozo, lending a peculiar charm and providing a touch of local colour that is an added attraction to the visitor. The Crafts and Industries Section of the Exhibition has been arranged so as to bring out the local colour not only in the form of a photographic record of what is unusual and little known, but more realistically as live demonstrations of some of the local arts and industries that are still part and parcel of Gozitan life".

The local crafts represented in the Section included lace manufacture, weaving, boat-building, varieties of local bread, farmers' straw hats, light baskets for shopping, fruit, etc; baskets for agricultural produce, carts and wheels, spinning wheel and spindle (*M. Raddiena u Magħżel*), cane blinds (*M. partieri tal-qasab*), cheese and rikotta baskets (*M. qwieleb*), pottery, cotton beating (*M. daqq tat-tajjâr*), embroidery, shoes and sandals and rope making.

This Exhibition was followed by a series of five informative essays in Maltese, by the well-known Gozitan author George Pisani, in the Department

10. J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Folklore Research in Malta*. In 'Folklore', Vol. LVIII, Sept. 1947, pp. 328-334.

11. J. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Social Aspects of Maltese Nicknames*. In 'Scientia' (Malta), Vol. XXII, 1956, pp. 66-94.

of Information's weekly "Ir-Review", i.e. *Xoghħijiet b'Metodi Tradizzjonali* (13.10.59), *Industrija tad-Dgħajjes fil-Gżira ta' Calypso* i.e. boat-building industry in Calypso's Isle (24.11.59), *Xoghħol tal-Hbula* i.e. rope-making (9.12.59), *Xoghħol tal-Qwieleb* i.e. cheese-basket making (7.1.60), *Industrija Qadima tal-Insig* i.e. old weaving industry (20.1.60).

Between October, 1964 and July, 1965 the Malta Broadcasting Authority produced a monthly programme on Malta Television devoted to the dying crafts of Malta under the title *L-Imghallem* (The Master-Craftsman). These documentaries included live interviews by Lawrence Mizzi with artisans and craftsmen belonging to the following callings: *Tal-Karrettuni* (The Wheelwright), *Tal-Bizzilla* (The Lace-Maker), *Tal-Qfief* (The Basket Maker), *Tal-Filugranu* (The Filigree Worker), *Tan-Nases* (The Fishing Net Maker), *Il-Buttar* (The Cooper), *L-Argentier* (The Silver-Smith), *Tal-Fuħħar* (The Potter) and *In-Nagħal* (The Farrier).

On the linguistic side, the terminology of a few traditional crafts and callings was incorporated by the late Professor Temi Zammit in some of his delightful sketches in *Il-Malti* between 1927 and 1931, i.e. *Għodod tal-Biedja* (Farm Implements) [1927] *Il-Mohriet* (The Plough) [1927], *Il-Mithna tar-Riħ* (The Windmill) [1929], *In-Nissieġa* (The Weaver) [1929] and *In-Nassaba* (The Bird Trappers) [1931]. A list of terms used by cobblers, originally published in a Maltese bilingual periodical *Il-Ħabbar tal-Maltin* in 1860, was reproduced, with some additional terms, by the writer of these notes in his *Voci e Termini Maltesi Usati dai Calzolari* in 1964 ("Journal of Maltese Studies", No. 2, p. 238-245). The terminology of sea-craft has been covered by A. Cremona in his study *La Marina Maltese dal Medio Evo all'Epoca Moderna: Storia e Terminologia Marittima* ("Journal of Maltese Studies", No. 2, 1964, pp. 177-194), while Professor J. Aquilina has carried out a linguistic survey of marine and fishing terminology based on the Questionnaire of the "Atlante Linguistico Mediterraneo". This material has been analysed in his communication *La Stratificazione del Vocabolario Marinaresco Maltese* (in "Bollettino dello Atlante Linguistico Mediterraneo" N. 8-9 — 1966-67) and in the introductory comparative study contained in his monograph *Maltese Names of Fishes, Molluscs and Crustaceans of the Mediterranean* (1969). Traditional callings and dying crafts are being covered by the Maltese Dialect Survey that is being carried out jointly by the Department of Maltese in the University of Malta and the Department of Semitic Languages and Literatures of the University of Leeds.

Professor J. Galea, who contributed two interesting articles "*Taglia*" and "*Tacca*": *The Marketing of Farm Produce in the Past* and *The Old Flour Mills of Malta*¹² in the first and second numbers of the "Maltese Folklore Review" (1962 and 1963) has for a number of years been collecting material about vanishing traditional callings which has been published in book form by

12. For historical aspects of windmill development vide B.W. Bloud, *Windmills in Malta* ("Times of Malta", June 3, 1962) and J. Galea *Il-Mithna tal-Qaret l-egdem mithna f'Malta* ("Iż-Zurriq", Lulju-Awwissu, 1962). It is well to record here that the Museum Authorities in 1965 restored the Xarolla Mill, in the limits of Zurriq, to working order. Since its restoration the place has been visited by many tourists.

the Department of Information under the title *Xogħol u Snajja' ta' l-Imghoddi* (1969).

Mr. Foster's article *Aspects of Maltese Folk-Art*, which appears elsewhere in this issue of our Review, prompts us to bring together for our readers' benefit other scattered material which has come to our notice over a number of years. Professor N. Zammit's compilation *Malta and its Industries* (1886) has been taken as the point of departure. To supplement this we are reproducing extracts from learned studies and modern publications, together with various articles appearing in local newspapers in recent years. Related data can also be found in the documentation appended to our study *Notes for a History of Maltese Costume* ("Maltese Folklore Review", No. 3, 1967).

The material here presented is by no means exhaustive, but it is hoped that the selected extracts provide sufficient coverage, as a start, to show how rewarding would be a comprehensive study of Folk Arts and Crafts in Malta.

Everywhere in Malta, by the roadside, by the seaside, in churchyards or burial grounds, in farmhouses and in village squares one finds examples of the unobtrusive native peasant or folk art which humbly flourished in the past. Some of them have some devotional significance, like the wayside shrines and street niches, the stone crosses and statues and the votive offerings that are to be seen in some country chapels and sanctuaries associated with a special popular cult of some saint or of the Virgin. Most of these works are by artists whose names have not been recorded and it would be impossible to trace the style of any one individual. The common characteristics are their simplicity and directness of purpose; fundamentally they follow the pattern of folk-art the world over and one can find striking affinities with the work of the primitive artist in near-by Sicily and elsewhere.

Most, if not all, of these folk arts and crafts have been almost entirely superseded by machine-made things. We cannot begrudge the onward march of progress, however late it has reached these shores. But practitioners of the old crafts are probably right when they claim that their articles lasted far longer than their machine-made rivals. The answer might be that the machine-made article is good enough to serve its turn. But there is another side to craftsmanship which concerns not the product but the producers. There can be no question but that the man who finds satisfaction and happiness in his job is able to live a fuller life than the man whose job is merely a means of support and who puts up with it in the hope of enjoying himself after it is done. Craftsmanship carries its own very great reward. Through all the stress and uncertainty of contemporary life we know that certain things remain constant.

This peasant culture which is gradually breaking up before us was once an important aspect of Maltese life. From a certain angle it reflects the traditions by which we ourselves live and in accepting its one-time importance we must safeguard its maintenance somehow and, if that is not practicable, at least preserve a living record of what has been. And here one cherishes the hope, or rather the expectation that the long-awaited Folklore Museum at Imdina will materialise in the not too distant future, when these folk arts and dying crafts of Malta would find an honourable place in it, together with other specimens of local primitive material culture.

APPENDIX

EXTRACTS FROM BOOKS, STUDIES AND ARTICLES
IN LOCAL NEWSPAPERS

MALTA AND ITS INDUSTRIES. Published by the Commission appointed to superintend in Malta the sending of objects to the Exhibition of Industries of Her Majesty's Colonial and Indian Possessions to be held in London, 1886. Compiled by the Special Relator to the Commission NICHOLAS ZAMMIT, M.D., Professor of Philosophy . . . Translated from the Italian by H. VELLA, Member and Secretary to the Exhibition Commission for Malta. London, 1886.

Precious Metals

"Work in precious metals, for which the country enjoys a well-established fame, is the most extensive of these industries.

Its most valued production is gold and silver filigree. The manufacture is neat and of a symmetrical exactness in its minutest details; it is transparent and light, so that it is really a delicacy of art. Its strong soldering gives a certain solidity to its delicacy, and on this account, probably, our filigree work compares favourably with the much prized productions of the kind made in Genoa and other places. What is wanting to set off to perfection the beauty of this industry is a more correct design, something more neat and showy in form, and also the insertion of small smooth plates to receive engravings and to serve as a frame-work and support for these metallic nets or spider webs, into which all kinds of objects of taste and elegance are ingeniously introduced.

Work is also done in gold and silver, in stamping, punching, and chiselling elegant vases, jewels and all sorts of fancy objects, which, however, are at times deficient in a fine finish, style and novelty. Since the local industrial exhibition of 1864, this art has notably improved...."

(p. 28)

Iron-Work

"Less advanced is the blacksmith's trade, with the exception of a few works made to order or executed as an exercise of personal skill. The work is almost exclusively anvil and file work, manufactured out of bars imported from England and Trieste. Although our founders are very ingenious and enterprising, not many of them find employment, with the exception of those employed at Government yards and workshops. All articles of cast iron come from abroad. In the manufacture of small objects made at the forge or by hammer, great perfection has been attained, due allowance being of course made for the want of means and suitable tools. For, besides ingeniously devised locks, safes, scales, carriage springs, iron bedsteads and other articles of various kinds produced more as samples of workmanship than as merchandise, hand-rails for protection along our staircases, for windows and galleries, may be considered as excellent specimens of native workmanship. By a skilful combination of bars of different thickness and of straight and round supports, and with the aid of neatly carved foliage, a handsome sort of lace-work with pretty designs is produced, combining elegance with solidity, and furnishing our windows and balconies with an attractive looking protection."

(pp. 28-29)

Gilding

"Gilding on wood and stone is in a fair state of perfection. In gilding with chalk the minutest parts of the decorations in relief are rendered conspicuous by means of a shining and brilliant burnishing, while gilding with mordant vies with the neatness of the metal itself.

A skilful combination of the dull with the shiny parts, the beauty of grained decorations, the composition of gilt plastering for great decorative works, the neat silvering on wood, and the perfect imitation of gold by means of varnish mixtures, prove that this art of luxury is with us far advanced, and that the demand for its production is daily increasing. Not more than forty persons are employed in these works".

Embroidery

"The elegant art of embroidery, almost entirely in the delicate hands of the fair sex, is rarely correct in its designs, but frequently excellent in the execution of the work presented. This manufacture is mostly applied to sacred vestments and church furniture. These works, wanting for the most part as they do in taste, are often admired for the splendour of the gold with which they are worked, and as they are left entirely to the blind discretion of the needle, they often fail to produce any effect; they, however, display great skill, which is only in need of better training. Over eighty women and not more than two or three men are employed in this occupation, which dates from ancient times in this country. More common and much more extended is the embroidery in cotton, silk and wool, and, above all, the lace, with which the dresses of the ladies are trimmed, according to the fashions of the day".

(pp. 29-30)

Coarse Cotton Cloth and Other Tissues

"The cotton industry is with us one of the most common, and it certainly dates back very far. A small portion only of this product is exported in wool; the remainder is manufactured in the Island. It is spun by hand or machinery for weaving into coarse and thick cloth, which is partly used for sails and partly exported to Barbary, where it is sold for clothing....."

".....Besides the coarse cotton cloths, several other tissues of finer qualities, in imitation of foreign draperies, are manufactured in the Island and worn by our country people. Another peculiar production of our manufactures is the nankin blanket, remarkable for its softness and beauty, which, however, is in its decline on account of the imitation of the colour on common cloth. Damask cloths, others of gaudy colours, striped with gold, and even all gold, and other interesting varieties are manufactured in the country. These manufactures, however, deprived as they are of a correct distribution of workmanship, woven without technical experience, unaided by the means which ordinarily lead to perfection, cannot be expected to compete with the similar foreign manufactures with which our markets are over-stocked."

(p. 32)

Rush and Straw Work

"Works in straw or fan-shaped palm (*Chamærops humilis*) afford another profitable local industry. In this manufacture, women of the lower classes are employed, though they are at the same time engaged in other work. The plaiting is either triple or single, and it is easy to learn and still easier to perform. The country lass, while following her flock or looking after the crops, works at this

even unconsciously, keeping watch, singing, and working her fingers at the same time. The varieties of works in this branch are numerous and plentiful. Out of the choice leaves of the shrub over 100,000 hats are manufactured yearly, according to the demands received for their supply from abroad. A large number of these hats (sennet) are expressly made for the British Navy and for shipment to the East. The inferior leaves are manufactured into cord, of which 20,000,000 yards are made annually. Some is used for chair bottoms, and the remainder exported to Greece and Turkey. Mats are also made from this material, the supply of which varies from ten to 15,000 dozen annually, according to the demand from the East. Besides fire fans, over 50,000 dozen brooms are made yearly from this material, and a large number of these exported to Greece. Baskets and hampers of all sizes and shapes are also made.

The primary material for these works, which is not produced in our soil, and which only grows where marshes are abundant, is necessarily very scanty in Malta, as the few marshes we have are barely sufficient for the cane-brakes which grow in our valleys. The material is, therefore, imported from abroad, and as it is cheap, a considerable margin is left for the manufacture".

(pp. 33-34)

Woodwork

"These works, with the exception of chairs and carts made for shipment to Africa and the East at a considerable profit to our carpenters, are mostly limited to articles required for local use. Vehicles and carriages in particular are built in the Island, which for their solidity and elegance are not inferior to those imported from abroad. But the woodwork most in vogue in house furniture is mahogany or walnut wood. Some very beautiful ebony chests of drawers inlaid with ivory, and even silver, have been worked here, as well as several fine specimens of fancy furniture. The workmanship of the ordinary household furniture is very solid, and as such, lacks that elegance and neatness which contribute so much to the beauty of these articles. We make no mention here of furniture of an antique type, which is to be met with exposed for sale. In this common sort of furniture you find always the same tables grotesquely carved, chairs made without any regard to style and design, console tables with dog-shaped legs, and cupboards with ornaments at the corners without any resemblance to the reality; and besides, as a peculiarity devoid of all purpose, those twisted bars according to the Gothic style in the square spaces.

The ordinary carpenter works in fir and larch wood, and is generally employed in making window frames and shutters; while others, with more or less accuracy, according to the price agreed upon, work at other articles, and especially household furniture. A large number of casks, barrels, and buckets, the handicraft of the cooper, are also made, as well as all kinds of agricultural tools. Over 1,900 workmen are employed in carpentry in its various branches".

Turnery

"The works turned on the lathe with which the carpenters' and the stone turners' shops are furnished are limited to round shapes only. The art of turning by machinery, by means of which all kinds of work can be performed, is better known by a few amateurs than by the artificers themselves".

(pp. 34-35)

Baskets and Hampers

"A large number of baskets and hampers made of osier twigs or cane, of all sizes and descriptions, are manufactured in the Island. Over 200 workmen are employed in this trade. A good portion of these baskets is used for agricultural purposes, the basket made of twigs is used for carrying goods, and also as a measure, and a large number too are used for carrying rubbish in the erection of buildings, and for carrying coals into the holds of steamers and in unloading colliers; the remainder is sold for various purposes".

(p. 35)

Rope

"This is an interesting manufacture, although it must be admitted that owing to the decline in the number of sailing ships it is not now in great demand. Although made by hand, very important kinds and qualities are sold, and from the twine to the hawser it is often turned out superior to that manufactured by machinery. This is owing to the choice of the hemp, the compactness of the strands, and a correct twisting which renders it more pliable without in the least diminishing its strength.

This industry does not employ more than 200 rope makers".

(p. 36)

Lace

"Lace, which, strictly speaking, is only an amplification of the edging of lace and of which entire dresses are now made, is indeed a providential means of livelihood for more than 4,500 women and girls of the lower classes, whose work yields to the Island an annual income of £45,000 to £50,000. Another kind of lace, worked in linen thread, and much more difficult for execution, has always been known in the Island, and is used particularly in church vestments. The black and white silk lace manufactured in Gozo, which has acquired world-wide renown, presents innumerable varieties, varying according to the thinness of the thread, the dimensions and the design of the work.

Our lace is a delicate and transparent network, not put together by any fixed rules, out of which a design invariably results from a system of lines enclosing circles and polygons of various sizes symmetrically arranged. A style half-Moorish and half-Chinese is the result, which has not very definite characteristics, and whose beauty consists only in the skill with which it is worked, and in a repeated and continued piece of network....."

(p. 40)

H. BOWEN-JONES, J.C. DEWDNEY and W.B. FISHER, *Malta: Background for Development*. Department of Geography, Durham Colleges. 1961.

Cultivation Equipment and Tillage

Of the implements observed in Malta, the traditional types of plough, hoe, sickle and harrow are of the same genera as those to be generally found in the Mediterranean region.

Ploughs are of the *Aratrum* or *Ard* type, steel tipped wooden wedges, devoid of cutting edges and having very restricted powers of furrow making or inversion — *mohriet*. None of those observed had lateral 'ears' or 'wings' but apparently ards thus equipped are occasionally used. There are various sub-types with differing arrangements of beam, body and handle but no constant rational relationship between these sub-types and local environments could be observed. Prices range upwards of £4. 10s. Iron or steel tips for the body cost about £1. One interesting modification of the plough is manufactured at Żurrieq. On top of the basic beam and body is fitted a movable double mouldboard of which either or both breasts can be brought into operation at any one time. Ridging and left and right furrow inversion are therefore made possible. For those areas where furrow inversion is practicable such a cheap, light multi-purpose implement would be very valuable, and the development of such improvements might well be encouraged by official approbation.

Hoes are manufactured in four main types. The heavy spade type, the *zappuna*, is generally used for soil trenching in preparation for manuring. The effort involved tends to restrict its use. The small, single-tined, wedge-shaped hoe, the *Mghazqa* or *Leaxuna*, is a general purpose implement that is replaced under damp and cohesive soil conditions by a forked, two-tined variety, the *Kroxun*. A three-tined hoe is often used, together with the ard, for potato lifting. In general, each cultivator possesses a selection of different types of hoe, necessitated by the variety of manual operations he usually has to perform and made possible by the reasonable prices of the implements (prices range from about 16s. for the single-tine, to 18s. to £1 for the spade hoe).

The sickle in general use is a small, smooth-edged type costing about 12s. 6d. The small number of sickle types observed may result from the widespread practice of pulling rather than cutting green fodder. Traditional harrows are almost invariably of the Mediterranean and Asiatic type, harrows cum levellers and seed coverers. Those observed were triangular and stone weighted. When manufactured for the purpose they were usually constructed of ash and had removable tines. Without metal tines, the cost is about 50s.

These implements have already to some extent been displaced by imported newer types.

The spade proper is hardly ever used, and its absence is associated with the reasons for the survival of the *ard* plough. . . . Other equipment includes a great range of fixed and movable adjuncts to farming, all but one class of which are constructed rurally, from local materials. The exceptional group is that connected with irrigation and includes windpumps and small diesel engines. Threshing and winnowing, traditional style, needs no more than a rock or *torba* (beaten earth) floor and asses or horses for trampling, baskets constructed of local cane, and simple winnowing forks. Of recent years, centralised threshing by contractors'

machines has almost entirely displaced the older method in all but the more remote western regions. Canes, grown in slightly marshy conditions in *wied* floors, provide the raw material for wind breaks, covered forcing beds, crop supports, etc. Livestock harness is simple in type consisting of harness and collar. Working bullocks, now rarely used, are also equipped with collars for traction but the guiding reins are attached to the horns. Country carts are unsprung, wooden frames resting directly on the metal axles. That the ruggedness of their construction is only equalled by the toughness of the draught animals is evinced by their presence on places such as Dingli Undercliff, or the cliff-sides of the Wied il-Luq (Buskett).

The solidly built stone huts or *ghorfa* that are to be found on most holdings may be regarded as part of the farmers' 'equipment' rather than his habitation. The simplest and most numerous are simple one-roomed cubes, some five yards square, strongly constructed, usually of worked stone blocks with wood and *torba* roofs. These 'blockhouses', for such they appear, serve as storehouses for implements and crops, for guns and birdcatching equipment, as well as for shelter during the 'siesta' hours and bad weather. Their cost in construction labour, and the pride that goes into the simple furnishing of what is the farmers' 'den', as well as the deceptive appearance of dispersed settlement that they give, suggests that further investigation into their origins might prove valuable. In general terms, they seem to be a natural response to the marked concentration of settlement in the casals. They are far less numerous in the western region of more recent and dispersed settlement. The larger, two-roomed and two-storied types are used mainly as summer working residences, when a whole family may move out of its casal to the main holding.

These implements and types of equipment are one facet of the complex of traditional cultivation techniques — techniques based on the intense and continuous application of uncosted hand labour. A brief examination of the working characteristics of some of the implements is a necessary introduction to a discussion of general cultivation techniques.

The *moħriet* is used as an animal-drawn hoe rather than as a plough proper. It is light and can be carried by the cultivator along narrow field paths and across rugged terrain. Its negotiability is limited only by the ease of access demanded by the draught animals

(pp. 321-322)

J. QUENTIN HUGHES, *The Building of Malta 1530-1795 during the period of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem*. London, Tiranti, 1956.

Flooring and Roofing Construction

".....Because of the shortage of timber the floors were normally constructed of stone, which has to be supported on stone-arched ribs thrown across from wall to wall and spaced about four feet centre to centre. The ribs are supported by double walls because of their outward thrust. The spandrils of the arches are filled with squared stones up to the level of the keystone, so as to form a horizontal bed for the ceiling slabs. Sometimes the upper courses are cut away to form a better bed, and this takes away the heavy appearance which the full depth of the arch stones would otherwise give to the room. By this method not more than five or six inches of keystone appear under the ceiling.

"The flooring itself consisted of ceiling slabs, three inches thick, laid onto the arched ribs. Two inches of stone chippings were laid onto these and finally three-

inch-thick floor stones were laid on top of the chippings. These flags were normally two *palmi* wide. The finished surface was then scraped and covered with a thin coat of warm oil. This hardened the stone, and allowed it to be well polished, as well as forming a surface which kept a beautiful appearance free from stains.

Roof construction was very similar, for all the roofs in Malta, with the exception of about two or three of the early buildings of the Knights, such as the Great Hospital and the Auberge de Provence in Valletta, were practically flat. The slabs of stone were laid onto arches in the same manner. The edges of the slabs were bevelled and the triangular shaped groove which was left between the edges was filled with small pebbles which had been soaked in water. The pebbles were set in one part of lime and a similar quantity of *xahx* i.e. very small chippings mixed into a mortar. Three or four inches of dry chippings were laid over the slabs to distribute the load and another layer of fine chippings mixed with lime mortar covered these. This top layer had a slight fall to allow the water to run off in the required direction and in this way it was led from terrace to terrace until it finally fell into a well in the courtyard and was preserved for the use of the household.

The second layer of chippings was well rammed down, and then a mixture of *deffun** with lime and water, was beaten up to a paste and laid uniformly over the whole surface to a thickness of about $\frac{3}{4}$ inch. This was thoroughly beaten up with wooden rammers, which are semi-circular lengths of wood about nine inches long, with a four-inch handle. The workmen hit the roof with the flat side of the hammer causing the excess water to run out. As it did so, fine *deffun* dust was sprinkled on to absorb this excess water. When no more water oozed out, women were employed to finish the construction of the roof. The surface of the roof was divided into strips, each two-and-a-half feet; and the women, seated on small stools and barefooted, each took one strip. With trowels, and all working together, they swept the surface of the roof, smoothing it and glazing; all slowly moving across the roof in a regular manner. This process was usually carried out in spring and autumn when the weather is neither too hot nor too cold, and when it was completed a layer of loose straw was placed over the whole roof and sprinkled with water from time to time to keep the roof cool and allow it to harden without cracking. The straw was removed after two or three weeks and the result was a hard roof capable of withstanding the torrential rain and wind of winter and the blistering sun of the long dry summer. This method of construction is still used, in exactly the same way, today.

The same form of roof was laid over timber ceilings when they were used instead of stone arched ribs. The scantlings were usually made of Sicilian olive or chestnut imported from Sicily, Southern Italy, or the islands belonging to Venice; and these timber ceilings are found on many of the top floors of the auberges and palaces of importance.

Certain farm houses, where the rooms are not more than nine feet wide, had their roofs constructed of single slabs of stone which were corbelled out from the walls. The stones were six inches thick and seven and a half feet long. They were covered with three inches of *torba* (i.e. small stones mixed with argillaceous earth excavated from fissures in the rock, which are generally found to be filled with it) and on top of that, half-an-inch of *deffun* and lime. The walls were double and filled with rubble stone.....

(pp. 196-197)

* *Deffun* is composed of small pieces of broken earthenware pots.

R. ENGLAND, *Converting a Farmhouse: A Change of Function and Scope.* In "Sunday Times of Malta" of March 13, 1966.

"The Maltese farmhouse, for long a neglected construction, is now suddenly very much in demand as a basis, or point of departure, for a residential unit...

"The homogenous sobriety of character of the local farmhouse comes from an almost infallible use of our natural stone, not only in the straight-forward wall construction, but also in intelligent applications to roofing problems, and finally, as a flooring material; the whole producing a grammar of the highest aesthetic property and intensity.....

"In the farmhouse, what one searches for is the personification of the local architectural character, the deep earth-rooted simplicity, the whole visual picture of a characteristic vernacular environment. In fact with the lapse of time this is exactly what one is left with in these particular cases.....

"However, one almost unsolvable problem is the fact that existent farmhouses are usually constructed without a damp-proof resistant course, and this gives rise unfortunately to recurrent damp-problems — obviously an unfortunate complaint. Another problem is that of size of windows and apertures. The farmhouse having been conceived with the local climatic conditions very much in mind, provides openings of the smallest possible nature; in fact one can state that the whole system of construction was geared to produce an ideal solution to the problem of living in our particular climate — thick walls kept the heat out in the summer months; small openings prevented the scorching summer sun from penetrating into the intimate private world of our ancestral farmer.....

"Farmhouse conversion is still at its infancy on our island but if it is conducted well and controlled it could well be the salvation of the few remaining examples of our ancestral forefathers' toils in building.....".

J.A. TONNA, *Malta Stone.* In "Sunday Times of Malta" of August 14, 1966.

"Though not advertised as loudly as its sea and sunshine, stone is one of Malta's few great natural resources, and, perhaps, we have been taking it too much for granted. Time and again, we have heard glowing references to our "honey-coloured" stone, but when our foreign guests are actually specifying it for their houses in the sun right at the moment that we are adulterating it with concrete block and submerging it under plaster, it is clearly time to sit up and evaluate its potentialities...

"Besides its durability, Malta stone has two great properties; its workability, and the possibility of using it as relatively large, block-like components. Our native architecture developed from a restrained balance between the expression of each of these properties. The block-like nature of carefully-squared stone, used in large units, explains the simple cubical volumes assumed by most of our buildings.

"Its workability accounts for the profusion of ornament usually concentrated around doorways and set off by the plain surfaces of the rest of the masonry. These tendencies run through most of our architecture from the auberges to the parish churches, down to the anonymous, yet delightfully designed doorways and balconies that often grace the humblest buildings. Laymen and technical people alike marvel at the uncanny precision with which the most complex of mouldings are worked with the most elementary — not to say primitive — of tools. It is hard to believe, in this age of mechanization, that every single stone in this great pile has been shaped and laid by hand — but so have the stones of Haġar Qim and the ramparts and the auberges.

"There have been some inroads into the onetime primacy of stone in local building. Stone arches supporting stone slab roofs long ago gave way, first to timber beams, then to steel joists. Not so long ago, slabs, beams and joists have all been discarded for reinforced concrete.....

"Traditionally, Maltese masons have been split into two interdependent trades, the *nagġara*, who dress the stone, and the *bennejja*, who lay it in courses. Machine-made concrete blocks enabled the latter to set up business without the former, indirectly contributing to a lowering of standards all round.....".

E.R. LEOPARDI, *The Decorative Maltese Wall-Clock*. In "Times of Malta", November 27, 1965.

Visitors to Malta often notice and are charmed by the decorative clocks which are entirely Maltese. The exact period when these clocks were first made is hard to ascertain, probably the decorative cases we know today developed with the years from a far plainer style.

What we can say for certain is that this particular style of clocks is essentially Maltese and, in a genuine example, the machinery is also locally made. Probably this type of clock was to be found in the homes of better class families in the latter part of the 17th century, for the abundant decoration, much gild flowers, landscapes, etc., are typical of the baroque style of that period. In a painting by Favray of a Maltese interior, the clock referred to is clearly seen in the room of Favray's picture.

This type of Malta clock consists of a wooden case measuring approximately 20 by 24 inches, usually oblong. Sometimes a smaller size square clock is found. Inside the case is the locally made machine, and originally this consisted of primitive mechanism. It was made of three wooden cog-wheels for the movement of the hands and a wooden pulley round which was wound the strong string — *lenza* — supporting the lead weights*. It was also fitted with a pendulum. The key for winding the old models leaves no doubt as to the hand workmanship of the machine.

The hands denoting the hours and minutes are likewise in metal, and, although a matching pair, they differ in shape as well as size — the hour hand being short and broad with more elaborate scroll than the long and narrow scroll of the minute hand.

The roman numbers around the dial are hand painted. It is on the dial that the artist gave vent to his imagination, for no two models were identical. In the four corners of the board on which the dial was painted are to be found flowers, birds, scenery, rustic landscape, scenes of the sea shore, just anything imaginable.

It is possible that the choice of the design was made by the would-be owner of the clock when ordering the model. I say "ordering" for the genuine old clocks were never made except to order. From the time of British rule in Malta until the withdrawal of the gold sovereign from circulation in the First World War, the clocks were commonly referred to as *arlogġ ta' lira* — i.e., a sovereign clock, for that was the amount this time-piece cost in those days. Today it is not so easy to come across genuine old models and the prices for this range high, rarely under eighty pounds.

As is obvious, more than one artisan worked to make this clock. These were: the cabinet maker, the clock maker and the gilder. The cabinet maker made the

* The lead weight usually weighed one *wiżna*.

wooden case with its frames and the foundation of the outer ornamentation. The clock maker made and fitted the mechanism and the gilder completed the clock with its decoration and gild ornaments. In modern times getting so many different artisans to work in unison would be extremely difficult, but our ancestors knew the secret.

When ordering an *arlogg ta' Malta* — a Maltese clock, the person contacted was the gilder who noted the dimensions and the design required. Every gilder knew the cabinet maker most suitable for undertaking the woodwork, likewise he knew the clock-maker. And thus in a short time with dial painted in the style designed and the case coloured and gilded as ordered, the clock was brought for the approval of the patron who rewarded the gilder with a gold sovereign.

The earliest models have a plain base, but as time went by we find models with a console, or *mensola*, attached. All clock cases have more or less gild ornamentation. On the outer case there is rarely more than one colour used with the gild, therefore we have red and gold, blue and gold, green and gold cases — these three colours varying in shade.

A device often seen in the decoration of many of the old clocks is the eight pointed cross. As time went by improvements were introduced in the mechanism of the clock, the wooden cog-wheels were substituted by metal ones. Later on chiming was introduced, but the shape of the case, the gilding and the style of decoration have remained the same as they were two centuries ago.

E.R. LEOPARDI *The Maltese Coffer*. In "Times of Malta", April 30, 1966.

The Maltese coffer — known as *senduq* — is a piece of Maltese furniture ever in demand; as a matter of fact the *senduq* is typical of a period rather than typically Maltese, for it was used all over the Continent of Europe from late mediaeval times until the chest of drawers came as a large box for storing clothes. However, the *senduq* has certain characteristics typically Maltese and, into comparatively modern times, it was in use as an essential piece of furniture of the bride's dowry.

The older *senduq* was a comparatively plain chest with a hinged lid and attached short legs to raise it from the ground. It was used as a coffer wherein were carried the bride's household linen and dowry from her paternal roof to her husband's home. In these *sniedaq* are a small inner chest also with a lid which is placed across the right side of the coffer. In this inner coffer were placed the bride's jewels and gold forming her dowry.

The right length for a Maltese *senduq* has been said to be just under two canes, i.e., the equivalent of approximately 75 inches, with width 24 inches, and height 30 inches.

Well into the last century the *senduq* was frequently used as a bed, in such a case a loose mattress of fibre was placed on the lid. Incidentally the *senduq* was also used as a family safe, especially by the inhabitants of the villages and the country farmers. When this was so the head of the house would sleep on the *senduq* as an extra means of guarding the family treasure.

The bridal chests or coffers on the Continent in the 18th century became elaborately decorated chests according to the bride's social position and means. Some were decorated on the panels by well-known artists of the day, and no pains were spared to embellish the chest with a rich inlay of mother of pearl and ivory. But in Malta this over-decoration was never reached. At the most we find mouldings and domestic scenes carved on the panels round the chest. Sometimes at the corners

there are figures in bas relief usually representing the bride and bridegroom, but sometimes a fully armed knight. The design on the front panel and the two sides is made to blend with the corner designs, usually representing galleys of the Order of Malta and harbour fortifications.

But to return to the older *senduq*, these are simple in design having no ornamentation except a moulding and are of the regulation size, sufficient in length to accommodate a mattress and pillows. That the *senduq* was used as a couch is beyond dispute, because in genuine wooden models the heavy wooden lid is slightly dented through supporting the weight of the sleeper.

The *senduq* was closed with a lock, in old models often of rude construction, made roughly by hand but in some cases these are works of art of the locksmith.

The wood of the *senduq* was usually chestnut, but any hard wood was used and examples of different woods are to be found. Whatever the quality of the wood or the condition of the bride whose dowry the *senduq* was to hold, all were solidly constructed and served as a kind of strong box or safe. There is an old Maltese proverb which runs: *aħjar habib is-suq milli mitt skud fis-senduq* — it is better to have a friend in the market-place than one hundred scudi in the coffer. A proverb showing the value of a friend as against money.

A miniature *senduq* is sometimes found. These were made for the infant daughter of a family — possibly their original use was for holding certain essentials of clothing, but as these have the inner chest to the right side as is found in the larger models, we suppose this miniature form may have been kept to put aside jewels and coins against the time when the child would need a dowry. A typical example of the miniature chest is a *senduq* measuring 22 by 8, and 10 inches in height, with a bas-relief on the front panel representing rural scenes with a church in the centre. At the ends of the side panels are infants in swaddling cloths carved in the wood; to the right and left of the front panel are two carved figures, a youth and a maiden. No matter how elaborate the carvings on the front side panels may be, the lid is always plain except for the mouldings.

In Victorian times the chest of drawers and the wardrobe caused the *senduq* to become a somewhat neglected "antiquated" object. In the second decade of this century there was a revival of the *senduq* which suddenly became fashionable as an article of furniture for the entrance hall. As a result many old genuine *sniedaq* were bought up by collectors and dealers, repaired and sold at prices far beyond their original cost.

There were many smaller models made to suit the modern house and these were elaborately carved — not with bridal scenes, but with the eight pointed cross, galleys of the Knights and coats-of-arms of grandmasters.

Such is the change of human tastes and customs. The *senduq* from the bedroom now adorns the sitting room, the dining room and the entrance hall.

E.R. LEOPARDI, *Maltese Bread*. In "Times of Malta", December 20, 1966.

The Maltese Islands have a type of bread peculiarly local; this is a loaf of slightly sweet, rich crumb in a delicious, dark-brown crust. Perhaps such a loaf was ubiquitous throughout Europe before machine-made bread, electric ovens and highly refined flour ousted it in favour of the delicate soft crusted, somewhat insipid bread of today.

In Malta, however, the home-made type of bread has survived. On account of its being the only kind of bread many Maltese will eat, and its pure and sustaining qualities, it forms a major part of the sustenance of many a manual worker. But Maltese bread is looked upon by many a visitor to Malta as a treat peculiar to their holiday on these Islands. I must say here that our large well run bakeries produce every kind of loaf known in Europe. But it is not to that we refer in the term "Maltese bread". Every town or village of Malta has its bakery and *il-Forn* is specially built for the purpose it serves. The doorway opens straight on to the large room where the oven is built into the structure.

When bread is made on the premises the necessary mixing machines can be seen in this room. Today most of the Maltese bread is kneaded by machine, but there are exceptions where this is done by hand. The Maltese family like their bread new, in fact, warm if possible, therefore the local bread is a daily item on the shopping list. For the early delivery of bread the village oven works during the early hours of the morning, then a second oven bakes bread for later delivery. Passing the village bakeries when the bread has just been withdrawn from the oven is an appetizing event for the delicious smell tempts the appetite. Some bakers sprinkle the loaf with sesame seeds and there is always a few loaves of *ftira*, a form of unleavened bread flat in shape with a crust of peculiar taste and a moist crumb. Many buy a piece of *ftira* besides their daily loaf and late comers find this form of bread has been sold out.

Although every village or town has its bakery, and often more than one, the town of Qormi has the reputation of making the largest supply and sending bread to many other parts of the Island. The bread of Qormi is said to be particularly well made — certainly Qormi has the tradition of making bread from time immemorial. Before the building of the bakery of the Knights of St. John in Valletta, it was the bakers of Qormi who supplied the Order with bread and we find it documented that the Auberges were furnished with this commodity from Qormi. An old wives' tale of former days relates that once Qormi was a place where malaria flourished on account of its low lying position. This was rectified, it was said, by the building of many ovens which warmed the air, dried out the damp and in consequence Qormi became one of the most healthy districts in Malta. Whatever we may think of the old wives' tale the fact is that Qormi has for long been known as *Casal Fornaro*.

Maltese bread is made of the best flour locally milled. Since it is not possible to grow sufficient wheat on the Island for the consumption of flour, grain is imported from abroad. This has been the case throughout the centuries and although today we have an up-to-date silo close to the New Quay for the storage of grain, there are still the old underground granaries to be seen in various places. Today wheat is imported principally from Canada, but there was a time when the wheat fields of Sicily filled our granaries.

There were times when scarcity of wheat forced the bakers to use a mixed flour called *mahlut*, made from a mixture of rye and wheat. Until comparatively recent times many a household — especially those of the farming population — made their own bread. It was a common sight to meet a country man or woman balancing on their head a large plank on which were freshly baked loaves of different sizes. This bread was baked in large supplies since it would serve the family for a week or more — a convenient arrangement since the bakeries were in the towns or villages and the farmer lived in the outskirts. The bread was kept fresh by storage in a

wooden chest or else in earthenware jars covered with wooden lids. Today the baker's van calls at the farmhouses and we often see a loaf or two of large proportions placed on the window ledges of farmhouses by the baker, thus every one in Malta can today have new bread daily.

A word rarely heard today is *kumpanacc*. This was used to express the food taken in small proportions with bread. It might have been cheese, tomato, meat, or any other tasty morsel — for morsel it was in comparison to the half loaf it flavoured. This word is a corruption of the later Latin *cumpanatico*. Another word having the same meaning and often used by the countryfolk was *bukkun*.

Bread was looked upon by the people of Malta as a blessing from God — in nearby Sicily it was called *grazia di Dio* — and in consequence the loaf was treated in a special manner. The person cutting the loaf would sign it with a cross before using the knife to slice it. Likewise, should a piece of bread be found by the roadside it would be lifted by a passerby, reverently kissed and placed on a wall or ledge so that it would not be trodden under foot.

E.R. LEOPARDI, *The Ex-Voto*. In "Times of Malta", November 12, 1966.

"... In Malta and Gozo there are abundant examples of this particular religious offering. Through the centuries there has been fervent devotion to the Virgin Mary and we find that the sanctuaries dedicated to Her are rich in votive offerings.

The sanctuary of Mellieha is one of the oldest in Malta and there *ex voto* can be found more than three hundred years old. The sanctuary of Żabbar dedicated to Our Lady of Graces is one of the larger shrines; the small church *tal-Herba* in Birkirkara is visited by many; *tal-Mensija* is yet another popular shrine; likewise *il-Madonna tal-Għar, tas-Saħħa*, and the shrine of Our Lady in the church of St. Agatha at Rabat. In Gozo there are various shrines to which many grateful suppliants have given *ex voto* in memory of a grace received. *Ta' Pinu* has become a national shrine for both islands and the small church at Qala seems to have been of special devotion to seafaring folk, for many graffiti of ships express the *ex voto* there. Another place where a few *ex voto* can be seen is *tal-Hniena* in Xewkija.

The *ex voto* are varied in kind: there are silver figures, infants in swaddling-clothes, kneeling figures, hands, eyes, limbs, in fact most parts of the body reproduced in miniature in metal. There are actual dresses of children and adults and embroidered tokens with *ex voto* in gold thread. There are crutches, chains, an occasional anchor, ropes and tattered sails.

One of the more interesting form of *ex voto* are the framed pictures, usually oil paintings which graphically tell the tale for which the vow was made. The artists of these paintings appear to have been more imaginative than artistic for perspective is usually poor, but it is easy to understand the purpose of the picture. In a rough sea the ship is at a giddy angle, up in a corner is a vision of Our Lady saving the donor from the terrors of shipwreck. It is not surprising that the majority of these pictures refer to danger on the sea, since Malta and Gozo have depended on the sea for communications through the ages. Some of the votive paintings depict somewhat graphically an accident, which according to natural laws, should have proved fatal. Here too we see a painting of the Virgin in an upper corner of the picture through whose intercession no harm befell. In Mellieha sanctuary is a large canvas bearing the coat-of-arms of Wolfgang Philip Gutemberg. The painting shows this Knight of

Malta kneeling in prayer before the figure of Our Lady. Also in this picture are ships of the Order tossed by heavy seas. At the shrines of Mellieħa and Żabbar are *ex voto* given by Grand Masters and Knights of Malta.

It is interesting to study the significance of *ex voto* which has come down through the ages and is still to be found in our islands. Principally the shrines are Marian, but saints also have *ex voto*. St. Paul has more than one shrine and the crowned statue of St. Joseph at Rabat, St. Anthony of Padua, Santa Rita, St. Theresa of Lisieux, are saints whose intercession is more sought by the pious people of these islands.

Until a few years ago it was a common sight to see shop-windows in Valletta showing silver *ex voto* offerings for sale. In conformity with the times *ex voto* are no longer accepted when representing parts of the body, with the exception of the form of a heart. Most common today are offerings of jewellery: rings, bracelets, gold chains, etc., and it is not uncommon to find sets of medals of the 1914-18 war as well as others, beribboned and encased in a frame at the feet of a statue.

The shrines where the *ex voto* are most to be found are invariably places of pilgrimage. Today when a group visits the shrines it is usually an easy matter, but in bygone years such pilgrimages were acts of penance and only the strong and healthy could undertake the distance on foot after fasting . . . "

E.R. LEOPARDI, *The Faldetta*. In "Times of Malta", December 24, 1966.

Whilst women's fashions in headwear were changing throughout Europe during the last three or four centuries the Maltese women appear to have been constant in the wearing of the black faldetta. The faldetta was worn by all classes though it seems that the material varied from heavy silk to black poplin or sateen. There was, further, blue head covering much on the same style as the former which was worn by the women of Żabbar.

This headwear is known as *ghonnella*, *ċurqana* and *stamina*. It is difficult to surmise how the *ghonnella* came to Malta, and either when or from where the fashion, or the idea was taken. Looking at the *ghonnella* today we find no resemblance in it to the headwear of any other neighbouring country. Perhaps the *ghonnella* evolved from a form of silk mantilla — though we have no authority for such evolution. What we do know is documented in engravings of the 16th century, also brief descriptions by travellers passing through Malta.

The *ghonnella* at its best was a voluminous hood falling gracefully from a hard headboard. This was a curious shape, wide at one end and tapering towards the other, made of cardboard with whale bone sides to allow it being bent at a graceful angle. This foundation acted as the head piece and was covered with the material of the faldetta in such a way that to the wide end it was gathered tightly — so tightly that the gathers formed a semi-circle from which flowed the folds of the hood. When the material was thick silk the effect was striking and it must have needed considerable skill to keep it in place, for there were no pins used, nor fasteners. The blue *ċurqana* of Żabbar in our time, at least, had no head board but was shaped the same as far as the material was concerned. Usually the gathered part was placed on the head and the rest fell around the wearer.

Żabbar has been for many years the village renowned for capers. These plants grow in the crevices of the rocks and the walls around Żabbar. For this reason Żabbar women sell the caper throughout the Island and there were few sights more

picturesque than these country folk, carrying their pails of capers, wearing their blue cotton headgear and having a beauty derived from health and goodness. The faldetta made a perfect setting for the Maltese beauty and artists such as Caruana Dingli have painted their model in faldetta.

Until the first world war the *ghonnella* was in general use — for church and morning wear. It is true that in early Victorian days smart little bonnets were worn by the privileged few, but even then such bonnets were reserved for drawing room, weddings, and such like society occasions. Gradually the makers of faldetta were replaced by milliners and the Maltese woman became fashion conscious in hats. Today it would be difficult to find a person adept in making the faldetta.

The very shape of the *ghonnella*, the head board of which jutted out at least a foot on either side, necessitated space for its wearing. Utility and modern travel could not afford space for the faldetta. For a while the wearers removed the faldetta on entering a motor bus and held them at an angle least likely to inconvenience the other passengers. The female members of the Society of Christian Doctrine wore the faldetta as part of their secular habit and looked truly impressive in procession of four abreast. However, even this Society has discarded the *ghonnella* and today it is rare to see a woman thus covered.

In souvenir shops visitors can buy dolls in various sizes dressed in black and wearing the faldetta.

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(Continued on p. 304)

ASPECTS OF MALTESE FOLK-ART

By THOMAS FOSTER*

What follows is concerned with the present, not the past: it is not an account of Tarxien temples nor of prehistoric potsherds. That is prehistoric art and is the province of the archaeologist, not the folklorist. It seems advisable, at this juncture, to make a further distinction, between primitive art and folk-art. The former has its bases in savagery and is the product of an incomplete body of technical skill. Folk-art is the product of an advanced civilization and of a high degree of technical skill that shows a mastery of the art-forms used.

In every culture there is a period in which the useful and the beautiful are combined; when everyday things please the eye as well as fulfil their essential utilitarian purposes. It is properly called folk-art because the craftsman designs as well as makes, as distinct from the modern practice of separating design and execution into watertight compartments. In Britain, this era ended over a century ago: in many spheres of English life it ended much earlier. Indeed, it is substantially true to say that the decay of folk-art began with the Industrial Revolution and that the seeds of this decay were planted at the Renaissance, when the designer as distinct from the craftsman first made his appearance. This holds good in large measure for the whole of Western Europe, although there the Industrial Revolution came later and had a less pronounced effect on the social structure of Continental European nations than it had in Britain.

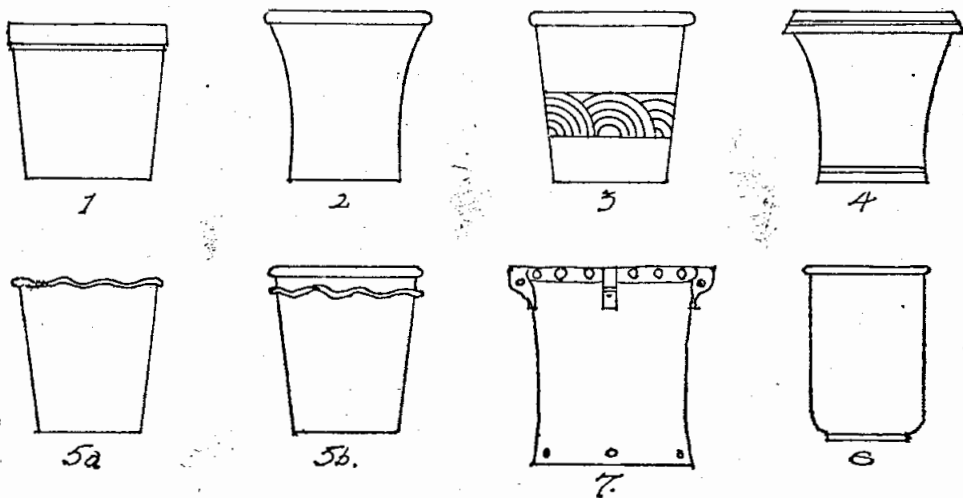
To-day, in Western Europe, the process of decline is complete. There is no living and unbroken tradition of folk-art, although there is much of a self-conscious revivalism. In consequence, the folklorist in these countries is without much of the evidence on which to base even a complete historical survey, much less theories of derivation and development. Behind the Iron and Bamboo curtains, folk-art has been deliberately suppressed as being anti-revolutionary, reactionary and running contra to the collectivist production techniques that all communist countries regard as the main evidence of their social rightness. In these places, folk costumes, folk dances, folk music and folk art have received a grudging tolerance for a few specific purposes such as the attraction of tourists and the provision of worthless articles for souvenir hunters. But, in the everyday life of modern nations, be they capitalist or communist, folk-art has no place.

Malta, however, occupies a unique position. Here, folk-art is an integral part of everyday life and evidences of this fact are all around for us to enjoy as well as study.

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Flowerpots

We may begin with one of the humblest of things, the flowerpot. Figure 1 shows the modern, machine-made Maltese flowerpot, available in a range of diameters from 10 to 3 inches. In the next illustration (figure 2) is an older, hand-thrown pot, which, in relation to its diameter, is considerably taller. The writer has recorded three diameters: 10, 6 and 4 inches. Pots, similarly hand-thrown, were often decorated with bands of



ornament, halfway up the pot. Sometimes this was no more than two parallel lines, but often elaborate incised patterns (figure 3) can be found. It will be noted that all these hand-made pots are slightly bell-shaped; sometimes this concavity was increased and the rim sloped inwards to give an attractive if unusual shape (figure 4). Rims are sometimes scalloped (figure 5) or the scalloped edge is an applied decoration forming a second rim beneath the normal rolled edge.

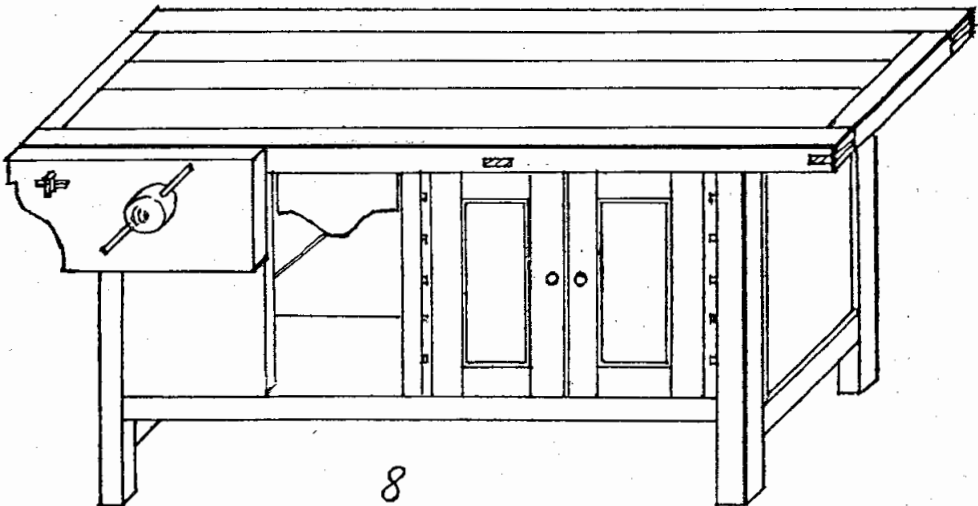
From flowerpots to flower vases is but a step: indeed, the simple shape shown in figure 6 is as much a flowerpot as a vase. Then, there are flower urns, some of which are of considerable size, with four small cleats through which a rope could be threaded for lifting. The example in figure 7 is two feet in diameter and two feet high. Some had moulded decoration applied to them, or were entirely moulded: in this class is an example in the Argotti Gardens, measuring about 2 ft. 6 ins. high by 3 ft. long by 2 ft. broad. Modern examples, made at Rabat, are smaller but are similarly ornamented. They are, of course, moulded.

Some research could profitably be undertaken into other articles of garden pottery. There is, for example, a type of pottery beehive that is, the writer believes, particular to Malta.

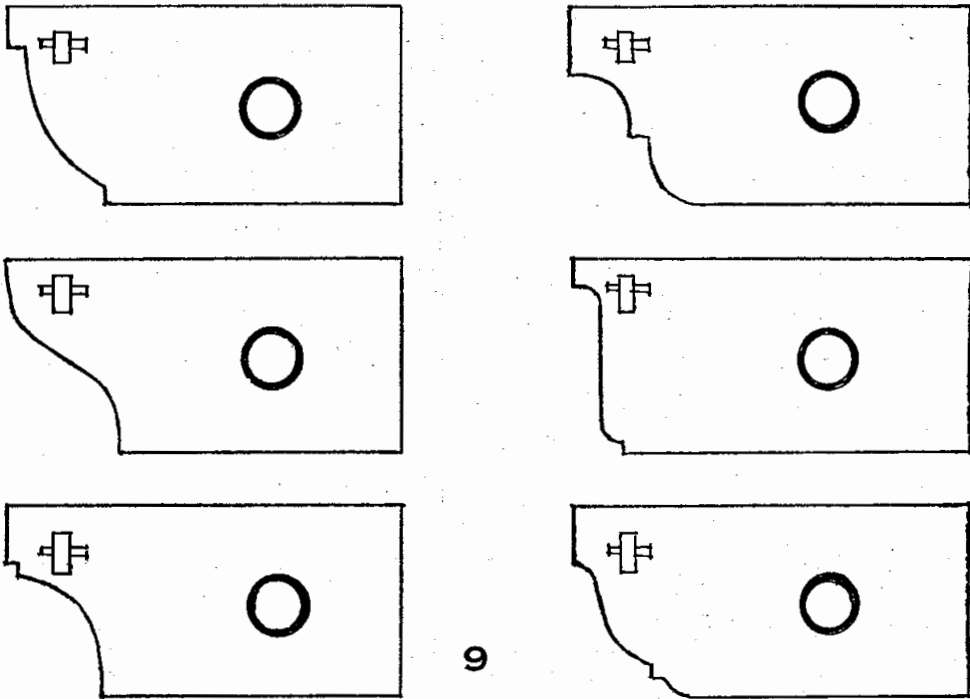
Casualties among flowerpots are high, perhaps exceeded by those among kitchen pottery. It can only be stated, due to limitations of space, that this is a more complex subject, but one whose study would be even more rewarding.

The Carpenter's Bench

There is no carpentry in Malta. The Maltese carpenter is really a joiner and cabinet maker. His bench, a unique structure, reflects this fact. In many European countries and in the U.S.A., the woodworker's bench is no more than an assemblage of planks, not jointed but nailed together. In England, the bench is often 15 feet long and anything up to 4 feet wide, so that a man can work at each end of it and very large pieces of work can be assembled on it. The Maltese bench is a more personal affair, being only 6 ft. 6 in. long and 1 ft. 6 in. wide. It consists of front and back frames, mortised and tenoned together; and the two are connected by rails



dovetailed at the top and mortised and tenoned at the bottom (figure 8). The top is of 1 in. board, resting on an intermediate bearer and housed in rebates at sides and ends, thus forming a level top. Beneath the top, the left half is usually a cupboard, with two doors, but sometimes a nest of drawers replaces one half of the cupboard. In older examples, a series of square holes in the front of the bench provides for the insertion of pegs to support long timbers when they are being worked in the vice. The right-hand compartment is sometimes left open, but is more usually closed in, with perhaps a drawer next the bench-vice. Some benches are "K-legged," to give greater stability and these have tool-troughs formed at bench level. All these benches are carefully made, often in red pine and are in reality as well made as are pieces of furniture. Their most distinctive feature is the bench-vice. In older examples, the screw is of olive-wood, very substantial and — one primitive feature — not connected to the front jaw of the vice. This latter is ornamented at one end and the ornament varies from bench to bench, as the illustration (figure 9) shows. They are profiles of classical mouldings; often Roman (sections of circles) and less frequently Grecian, which are sections of ellipses. The possible variations are almost infinite, and those shown here are the more usual patterns. There are other possibilities of ornament: such as the bench-screw seen by the pre-



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sent writer, which was carved to represent a lion's head. The Maltese carpenter's bench is, therefore, a personal thing: the Maltese carpenter makes it during his apprenticeship and uses it throughout his working life.

Maltese Woodworking Tools

As might be expected, the Maltese carpenter's tool kit is basically English, but with some interesting local variations. There is, for instance, a distinctive Maltese mortise-gauge and there are Maltese smoothing planes usually made from orange wood, that follow Continental rather than English shapes. The larger planes, particularly trying planes, are also locally made and here, the Maltese craftsman lets himself go. Three examples are cited below. The first is about 80 years old, made of African iron-wood, that follows the English exemplar except in one important point. The handles of all Maltese planes of this type admit three fingers only instead of four, as in all English planes. The Index finger is used to restrain lateral movement, which in fact it does not do to any extent. This plane is redeemed from mediocrity by the ornament at the base of the handle. The second plane, of medlar wood with a handle of beech, was made by Mr. Abraham Muscat some thirty years ago and is still in daily use in his workshop at Balzan. For the student of folk-art, the interest is, again, in the handle. The hand-guard is exceptionally long and the graceful curves of the top of the handle are worth noting. These, with a touch of ornament at each end, makes the whole a true work of art. The third plane is the most interesting of all. It is of oak — an unusual wood for a plane — and is elaborately carved. The Baroque moulding on the wedge

and the large upstanding projection or horn are noteworthy, as is the handle, carved to represent a dolphin's head. The plane is very narrow for its length and has a single iron, instead of the double iron common to planes of this type. This points to a very early origin. So does the curved top of the plane body: this is a feature common to planes of the 15th and 16th centuries. The position of the handle and the size of the horn show that the plane was intended to be pulled towards the operator, instead of being pushed from him. This is a significant feature. Such planes are very old: common in classical Roman times, they were even then being superseded by iron planes of the "push" type, such as that discovered in a Roman town near Reading in England. When, then, was this plane made, and where? The Maltese lady from whom it was recently bought is 60 years of age and it was made by her grandfather. It is therefore, about 100 years old. Why, then, these antique features?

Joinery

This slow rate of change in the shape and appearance of things (i.e., in their design) is typical of folk-art. Maltese carpenters are to-day making doors with raised and fielded panels and delicate ogival mouldings that differ but little from those at Versailles, made about 300 years ago. The traditional Maltese window, in which the glazing-bars interpenetrate the framing of the individual sashes instead of framing each individual pane of glass, is even older: it is pre-Renaissance, it is Gothic and derives from stone forms. The glazing-bars are direct modifications, in wood, of the iron bars used to fix stained glass in stone window-openings. This seeming old-fashionness is due to the fact that the Maltese carpenters do not work to an architects' drawing for every door or window that they make. It is doubtful if they would be able to understand the average architect's detail. Instead, they follow traditional exemplars that they modify according to their personal taste and the special requirements of each job. In short, the craftsman designs (in a narrow but very real sense) as well as makes, and he draws on the art-forms of all preceeding ages for his inspiration. It follows that, once a design has been incorporated in his repertoire, it is centuries before it is dropped. These are fundamental principles of folk-art and are nowhere better exemplified than in Malta.

Space prevents any further treatment of this fascinating form of folk-art, and also allows no more than a mention of Maltese ecclesiastical woodwork. This is a subject on which nothing significant has been written, in spite of the elaborate pulpits and choir stalls in every Maltese church and the enormous presses and cupboards in every sacristy that excite one, even after a casual glance, to investigate them fully.

Furniture

Maltese domestic woodwork — that is, furniture — is a field of folk-art that has, for the present writer, an immense attraction, perhaps, to be paradoxical, because of the un-English Englishness of it all. There are traces and often more than traces of Italian influence as well; but in spite of this, Maltese furniture, especially that made in the 19th century, is something particular to Malta alone. There are some structural features that stamp a piece of furniture as Maltese; but unhappily these are vices

rather than virtues. None the less, there is a succession of Maltese styles, or more correctly, Maltese versions of styles current in Europe. As might be expected with any form of folk-art, there are no great names associated with Maltese furniture, but there are some pieces that can stand comparison with the best in any other country. For instance, there is a form of circular table, with Regency-style pedistal. It has a veneered top, generally in walnut, consisting of eight segments of veneer. Each segment is made up of four pieces carefully matched to make a symmetrical whole in itself, that also has to match with the adjoining pieces of the adjacent segments, the whole forming one harmonious radial pattern. By itself, this were feat enough: but in addition the grain pattern of the segments is carried over the edge and to do this the craftsman has to make 64 shaped and matched pieces, forming the circumference of the table top.

The history of Maltese furniture has yet to be written: as a whole it is unknown to international collectors and would be a fascinating and fruitful study for any folklorist or art historian.

The Maltese Cart

Turning from Maltese homes to Maltese streets, there is the Maltese cart, a familiar sight there. It is an extremely simple affair, consisting basically of two poles that form the body of the cart and its shafts. There is no framed body: at one end a few slats are bolted across the poles and on these the load rests. The carts are without springs but the wheels are properly dished and are as well-made as any in Europe. What, once again, redeems this almost primitive structure is its ornament. The general colour pattern is blue on a red ground with, in more elaborate examples, the addition of further decoration in light green. Less frequent are blue on a green ground, pale blue on a red ground and light green on a blue ground. The patterns consist of concentric rings on the hub and felloes of the wheel, with patches of colour at the ends of each spoke and conventionalised flowers along each spoke. The poles-cum-shafts are often painted with a conventionalised leaf pattern in one or two colours. The whole is highly colourful and makes of a simple structure something that in its best examples can truly be called masterpieces of folk-art. There appear to be several cart-painters at work, each with his own version of this highly-conventionalised decoration. This art is in danger of dying out, but the writer would stress the urgency of at least recording the patterns and the names of those who employ them.

Maltese Boats

Malta is an island and the sea has played a great part in its history and development. Maltese boats are as gaily decorated as Maltese carts and it is interesting to note that the palette is the same as that employed in the decoration of the English canal barges. The ornament is, however, entirely different: whereas in England it is naturalistic, on the Maltese boats it is highly conventionalised, incorporating a band of colour that differs for each village or port, so forming a ready means of identification. The boats themselves are relatively simple, yet have some features that would repay further study. Their ornament requires full investigation and this would prove fascinating for any folklorist.

Textiles

Any review of folk-art in Malta, however brief, would be incomplete without a mention of the islands' weaving and lace industries and their traditional patterns. Fortunately, they have been perpetuated and materials embodying them can readily be obtained. Once again, space permits no more than an allusion to things that must be familiar to every reader. Nevertheless, something must be said about ecclesiastical draperies and vestments. The immense presses in every sacristy of every church most probably contain vestments that, together, would form a national collection of historic and artistic importance second only to the collections in Rome and some other capital cities of Europe.

Jewels and Plate

Once more, space permits the writer to do no more than state that there is a body of work by Maltese gold and silversmiths and jewellers that urgently needs study. No small part of this is the ecclesiastical gold and silver ware and jewellery, some of which can be seen displayed in parish churches at fiestas. Together these precious objects must form a collection of first-rate importance that still awaits its cataloguer and its historian.

Finale

In order to emphasise the ubiquity of folk-art in Malta, something very humble has been chosen as a final example. It is the floor of a little village shop, where wine is sold directly from the cask. The floor is not even of cheap tiles; it is cemented and marked out to imitate tiles. What redeems it from being, frankly, horrible is a picturesque corner design.

For the folklorist and even more for the social historian the most important feature of Maltese folk-art is the traditional folk-artist — the craftsman himself. Instead of trying to compose a picture of him from stray descriptions and passing references written 150 years ago, it is possible in Malta, and perhaps nowhere else in the world, to meet the tradition-based craftsman in the flesh; to talk with him, to observe his methods of work, to discover how much formal education he needs to follow his calling, what is his position in society, his political and other opinions — in short, a picture of the whole man.

There are many colourful and beautiful things in Malta; examples of folk-art designed as well as made by village craftsmen. Together, they form a body of folk-art, a sub-culture that is unique in Europe and that has the advantage of being a living thing, not just a collection of museum objects. It is something of which every Maltese should be proud: something he should do his best to make known to the world at large by recording and describing it in all its many facets.

* * *

Thanks are due to Mr. Abraham Muscat, of Balzan, for much interesting information and for the loan of tools, and to the members of the Malta Folklore Society for helpful comments when this paper was read before them. Above all, thanks are due to Mr. J. Cassar Pullicino, without whose encouragement this paper would not have been written.

MALTESE DEATH MOURNING AND FUNERAL CUSTOMS*

By A. CREMONA

Sir James Frazer's communication of a coroner's note about "Beliefs Regarding Death in Cumberland" has suggested to me that I might put on record Maltese funeral customs now extant, some of which are analogous to those noticed in Cumberland.

Amongst our middle and lower classes the practice still lingers of placing a dish of salt on the stomach of the corpse, whether male or female. The popular belief in Malta is that salt prevents early decomposition. Certeux and Carnoy give the following interpretation of a practice by Arabs in Algeria: "Il est de convenance religieuse. . . de lui poser sur le ventre (of a dead person) quelque chose de pesant afin de prévenir le gonflement." One of our Maltese sayings runs:

"Imut il-ghani u jmut il-fqir
It-tnejn jitmellhu ghal gewwa l-bir."

i.e. "Both the rich man and the poor man die, and both are salted for the pit" (a common rock tomb). This may, however, refer to the pickling or preservation of bodies in a saline solution.

The covering over of looking-glasses in the rooms where the body is lying is also practiced by several Maltese families. Some go so far as to remove the furniture, and turn round or take down pictures, in the death chamber and passages.

The following are the most characteristic features of existing Maltese practices, many of which are comparable to those of Sicily, while a few show some Eastern influence:—

(a) The washing of the dead body before shrouding. This is not a religious rite, and has no connection with that of Islam.

(b) The shutting of the eyelids, if open, and the raising of the chin by means of a band, usually a white kerchief, tied on the head.

(c) The removal of door knockers and knobs; house doors are kept closed for several days; neighbours half shut their own. In some districts doors or knockers are draped with black crape.

(d) The lowering of the window blinds for some months. Some people, who follow old customs, replace all window curtains by linen sheets.

(e) The hiring of poor women and beggars to pray over and watch the corpse for the whole night. This custom prevails mostly in Gozo. In old days official female mourners named *newwieha* (from *newwah*, "to cry") were employed. The practice was abolished in Malta during the plague of A.D. 1676. Sicilians employed mourners called *Praeficae* or *Reputatrices*, a custom of Greek and Roman origin and practised by the Irish until A.D. 1849. It still prevails among the Corsicans and the Sahara tribes of Algeria. The old ceremonial of the Maltese female mourners is described by Abela as follows:—

They wore trailing veils (*kurkâr*), and when they entered the premises of the deceased they cut down the bower vines in the yard and threw the

* Reprinted from *Folklore*, Vol. XXXIV, 1923, pp. 352-357.

flower pots from the balconies and windows into the street. They searched the house for the finest piece of china, dashed it on the floor, and mixed the fragments with ashes from the hearth. They boiled the whole together in a pot, and with the mixture washed the door posts and windows' shutters of the house. During these proceedings they sang couplets which ended in long-drawn sighs and lamentations. Then they gathered round the corpse and knelt down, extolling the virtues of the deceased, and the relations joining in their mourning.

(f) An oil lamp is often lit and left for forty days before the Crucifix or the image of the Madonna in the death chamber. This is supposed to please the soul of the departed, whose ghost is in this way prevented from haunting the house. In some of the Gozo villages the persons attending the corpse to the burial-ground return in procession after the funeral mass to the room of the deceased, where they kneel down and say the rosary before the Crucifix, placed on a chest covered with white cloth, and between two lighted candles which are afterwards replaced by the devotional oil lamps. The belief still exists that the lamp must remain lighted for forty days, during which the soul of the departed remains above the flame.

(g) Some families give the poor bread. The love-feasts of the primitive Christians were in mediæval times replaced in both Malta and Sicily by the distribution of meat and boiled wheat mixed with sesame. Distributions of meat and bread to the poor came also to be a custom at some *festas*, but were continued in Sicily mainly by the giving of beans and bread on All Souls' Day. In Malta on that day, however, the old custom has been replaced by the free kitchens or the "Potage for the Poor" (Borma tal-Fqar).

Mourning customs in Malta have during the last century passed through wide changes and, as in other European countries, have reverted to a more simple type. Some are purely mediæval, and are influenced by the prolonged intercourse with Sicily and Italy during the rule of the Grand Masters. The vernacular term for mourning is *vistu*, corresponding to the Sicilian *visitusu* ("to be in mourning").

The wearing of special mourning clothes was general in the fourteenth century, but became less marked by the year 1700. Women used to wear woollen trailing skirts and dark shawls over their heads. Some better-class people wore one black transparent veil over the head and another veil of black silk taffeta over the gown, reaching to the waist. A sort of Majorca woollen cloth is prescribed for mourning wear to the heirs under a will of A.D. 1543. The Grand Master's suite wore a special garment called *Scoto*, of thin light serge. Although it is nowadays customary with some families to put on as little mourning as possible and to shorten its period, a full mourning dress is worn by others for two full years after the death of parents. The simplest style of mourning, a black necktie and a crape arm band, is in general use after the death of a distant relative.

Family mourning is generally observed as follows:—

(1) Closure of business premises, a mourning notice being affixed to the door.

(2) Women keep indoors for a few weeks, only going out in the early morning to hear mass. In old times such seclusion was much more strictly

observed and the period was never less than forty days, and is now generally limited to three days. For men this sort of mourning did not exceed seven days, and is now generally limited to three days, after the funeral.

(3) Old custom prohibited cooking for three days, and the family of the deceased was provided with meals by friends or distant relatives. This rule was, and perhaps is still, followed in some districts of Sicily and amongst Arab tribes of Northern Africa. While meals were being served the bereaved family sat with folded legs on the floor, which was covered with a straw mat. The historian Ciantar relates in 1772 that these mourning dinners still took place in his early days. This custom has now been discontinued, and our village people merely abstain from having their pastry and other food prepared in a public oven for a period of some months after the death of a member of a family.

(4) Men often do not shave for a fortnight or even a month. This practice was more in favour in old times, Middle and lower class people keep away from *festas*, and the higher class from theatres, dancing, and merrymakings.

(5) People of rank wear a mourning dress for a few days following a death in their family, but country people are satisfied with wearing a black felt hat and a dark sash round the waist. Women, if wives or brides, follow the continental style of full mourning dress in crape. Some women do not wear a hat or bonnet during the first week of mourning, and go out in *faldettas*, a national head-covering which is more commonly used when attending religious services. Since the seventeenth century the Maltese *faldetta* has undergone some changes in shape and material. The old *faldetta*, as described by Ciantar, was a black veil or cowl covering the head and reaching to the heels, like the Arab and Sicilian women's trailing mantles. Apparently countrywomen wore a blue linen veil, which is still adopted, for economy's sake, in some of the eastern seaside hamlets of the island, but amongst the lower class in general the black hood, which matrons changed into silk with lace edges, was more common. Bombazine (without lace) or silk *faldettas* are now the popular style. The vernacular *culqâna* and *ghonnella* for the *faldetta* point to its probable origin; the word *ghonnella* is derived from the Italian *gonnella*. The term *falda*, with its diminutive *faldetta* (skirt), suggests that this hood or wimple represents the tail of the skirt put over the head inside out in wet weather. Black stone trinkets are worn in place of those of gold. Women in both villages and towns who cannot afford to buy special trinkets cover their ear-rings with black stuff.

The old funeral rites, described by Abela and Ciantar from extracts from wills of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, are only faint survivals of the gorgeous pseudo-pagan rites which prevailed in all parts of continental Europe up to the period of the Reformation, and in Malta when under Italian influence. Up to 1872 the burial of the dead generally took place in churches or in churchyards (Maltese *zuntier*, from French *cimetière*). This still continues in country places, where people have family vaults. A law providing for extra-mural interment was proposed by De Rohan (A.D.

1775-1797), but it was only enforced by the Police Law of 1869, when a public cemetery was provided in 1871.

Since the adoption of the new burial law, funeral customs have assumed a very simple character. Old custom required that the dead body was placed on a handbarrow or in a coffin with a cushion stuffed with laurel and orange leaves fixed under the head. The body was then conveyed to the church, with the relatives and friends following, and the wailing of the mourners accompanied by the sound of bagpipes, which in some villages are now replaced by violins and counterbases, to which lamentations are sung. Since the opening of the Addolorata Cemetery the dead are generally transported in hearses. The tolling of funeral bells was once so important that in many wills careful provision was made for it, and it even rivalled the usual charitable bequests. This corresponds to the Sicilian custom in the fifteenth century. After burial of the corpse, a black carpet of coverlet, or a velvet counterpane, was laid over the grave, and left there for some days. The offering of flowers to the dead is at present in great favour amongst the less educated, but some of the higher class object to it as a profanation. Wreaths are laid on the grave, and oil lamps are lit on it for some days. The construction and decoration of the graves in the public cemetery is much the same as on the continent. Marble slabs with inscriptions are very common. Pillars with crosses on the top and sacred statues are also erected on bases of marble, or bronze reliefs symbolising Time and Eternity. The higher class own vaults in the form of chapels, in which an altar is erected and Requiem Masses are said.

In the professional and educated classes cards expressing sympathy are sent by friends to the mourning family, but in some districts, especially in the country, people still follow the old etiquette of paying a mourning visit within nine days of the death. Photographs of the deceased, with an inscription, are sent to friends and acquaintances.

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ASPETTI DELLA VITA CRISTIANA NELL'ISOLA DI MALTA VERSO LA META' DEL SEICENTO

di

ALESSANDRO BONNICI, O.F.M.Conv.

Nel corso degli ultimi decenni, un certo numero di studiosi, stimolato da scopi patriottici o politici, si mise al lavoro per risolvere vari problemi della storia maltese. Nonostante ciò, la maggioranza stragrande delle pubblicazioni si restringe alle vicende storiche dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano, il quale per la durata di quasi tre secoli detenne nell'isola il potere civile. Sappiamo senza ombra di dubbio che allora il popolo per intero professava la Religione Cattolica, ma l'impronta indelebile impressa dalla Religione nella vita popolare ci è ancora quasi del tutto sconosciuta. Le nostre indagini non si prefiggono come scopo di narrare nè la storia civile, nè quella ecclesiastica; cerchiamo solo di colmare in qualche modo una lacuna nella storia delle forme intellettuali e della cultura del popolino specialmente in quel che riguarda la fede, le tradizioni, e le usanze. Osserviamo come il modo di vivere della gente rispecchiava gli intimi sentimenti della anima. Notiamo come l'attività pastorale del clero si ripercuoteva sulla vita religiosa della plebe. Investighiamo il senso cristiano della vita coniugale da dove sgorgavano e si alimentavano nel bimbo i primi affetti verso il Dio Supremo.

In ciascuna delle nostre accurate indagini, cercheremo di trarre un giudizio spassionato e imparziale basato su una vasta mole di documenti ufficiali e ufficiosi finora sconosciuti. Le fonti di maggior rilievo donde scaturiscono attendibili e autorevoli informazioni sono quelle che trattano delle attività degli Inquisitori di Malta. Per non dare uno sguardo troppo furtivo e fugace, ci restringeremo ad un solo periodo della storia dell'Inquisizione di Malta, con dei riferimenti qua e là a diversi altri documenti degni di nota. I manoscritti che risalgono al periodo dell'Inquisitore *Antonio Pignatelli* (il futuro Pontefice Innocenzo XII) sono alla base del nostro studio. Questo giovanissimo Prelato, appena trentenne, si avviò in una vita densa di uffici di somma importanza proprio nell'isola di Malta, dove per quasi tre anni (1646 - 1649) prestò i suoi servizi alla Sede Apostolica come Inquisitore Generale e Delegato Apostolico.

Tutte le lettere originali che Antonio Pignatelli ricevette dalla Suprema Congregazione del Sant'Uffizio si conservano presso l'Archivio dell'Inquisizione di Malta (1). La corrispondenza tenuta con le altre autorità romane si considerava ancora come proprietà personale; per cui, al termine dell'ufficio, ciascun inquisitore la portava via con se (2), e la riponeva nell'archivio di famiglia; per questo fatto, molti documenti di non trascurabile impor-

(1) A.I.M., *Lettere del Sant'Uffizio all'Inquisitore di Malta*, 8(1642-1648), 9(1649-1654).

(2) L'Inquisitore di Malta, *Romiero Pallavicini*, nell'anno 1676, scrisse le seguenti parole al suo Pro-Inquisitore *Ludovico Famucelli*: "Trattenghì per me quelli della Segreteria di Stato per rimettermeli a più pronta e sicura occasione, e gl'altri del S. Offitio restanno nei soliti registri": A.S.V., S.S.Malta, 27D, f.61r.

tanza sono andati perduti. L'Archivio dell'Inquisizione di Malta conserva anche la maggior parte dei processi e delle denunce ricevute nel periodo di quasi tutti gli Inquisitori: documenti che, appartenendo al Sant'Uffizio, l'Inquisitore non poteva portare con sé. Non si rintracciano tutti i singoli processi perchè, quando qualcuno appellava alla Suprema Congregazione contro la sentenza dell'Inquisitore, non di rado, si inviava a Roma lo stesso originale del processo tenuto a Malta (3).

Nell'isola di Malta, oltre ai documenti dell'Inquisizione sopra citati, abbiamo rintracciato numerose lettere dei Gran Maestri, Ambasciatori, Vescovi ed altri che trattano, integralmente o parzialmente, delle nostre questioni. Gli importantissimi archivi della città di Roma sono stati per noi una fonte di grande rilievo; ma gli archivi di maggiore importanza per gli argomenti da noi brevemente svolti sono quelli del Vaticano.

Il periodo da noi preso in considerazione vede il Gran Maestro *Jean Paul Lascaris Castellar* (1636-1657) alla guida dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano. Purtroppo, l'Ordine attraversava un periodo nel quale già si intravedeva una gravissima crisi spirituale in molti Cavalieri. Se non vi fosse la fermezza del Lascaris, l'Ordine avrebbe corso dei seri pericoli a causa dell'insubordinazione dei giovani. Verso gli ultimi anni del suo lungo magistero, il Gran Maestro, avendo raggiunto una vecchiaia decrepita, sperimentava che l'Ordine gli era diventato come un peso schiacciante. Monsignor *Giovanbattista Gori Pannellini*, uno degli Inquisitori di allora (1639-1646), in una lettera indirizzata alla Segreteria di Stato, riporta l'abbattimento che accasciava il Gran Maestro: "A chi governa fu mai sempre malagevole il poter sodisfar a tutti; ma impossibile assolutamente riesciva a lui, costituito da Dio al regimento d'una repubblica di tante nazioni composta e di cervelli cotanto vari" (4).

In tale periodo assai difficile, il peso della diocesi aggravava le spalle del Vescovo Aragonese *Fra Michele Giovanni Balaguer de Camarasa* (1635-1663), il quale ha tanto sofferto per le ingerenze dei Cavalieri durante la sua quasi trentennale attività pastorale. Tante erano le sue difficoltà che spesso minacciava di dimettersi una volta per sempre (5). Il Gran Maestro spesso denunciava alla Segreteria di Stato l'odio radicato nel cuore del Vescovo contro la Religione Gerosolimitana: "Questo Vescovo mostra in ogni cosa la sua animosità verso la persona nostra, ma più assai la testifica nell'anticipare a querelarsi di noi in quelle occasioni nelle quali sa e conosce molto bene d'haver il torto" (6). Dall'altra parte, il Vescovo non smetteva

(3) Per i processi del periodo del *Pignatelli* vedi: A.I.M., *Processi*, 61.

(4) La lettera è pubblicata in: P. PICCOLOMINI, *Corrispondenza tra la corte di Roma e l'Inquisitore di Malta durante la guerra di Candia in A.S.I.*, t.41(1908), p. 61.

(5) Spesso il Balaguer si esprimeva con simili parole: "Si degni prevederci di qualche opportuno rimedio . . . o sarò forzato lasciar ogni cosa, e ritirarmi in qualche remotissimo luogo": Bibl.Vat., *Barb.Lat.*, 6687, f.28r-v. Per le relazioni ostili che passavano tra il Gran Maestro e il Vescovo di Malta, Michele Balaguer, cf. Aless. BONNICI, O.F.M.Conv., *I Vescovi di Malta Baldassarre Cagliares (1615-1638) e Michele Balaguer (1635-1663)* in *Mel. Hist.*, v.5, n.2(1969), pp.114-157.

(6) A.O.M., *Registri di lettere spedite a vari Sovrani, Ambasciatori, e altri personaggi dal Gran Maestro*, 1427, all'Ambase. Euieu, 16 maggio 1649.

mai di lamentarsi per il fatto che i Cavalieri s'industriavano "per cacciarlo in ogni modo dalla sua diocesi" (7).

Comunque, i documenti sia editi che inediti tramandarono alla storia delle cose spiacevoli contro il Vescovo Balagner. Fra l'altro, "egli era molto facile a conferire la tonsura a chiunque gliela chiedesse" (8). Attraverso tanti scritti ancora inediti, si accumula un mucchio di denunce più o meno gravi contro questo Prelato. Ma noi, nello sviluppo dello studio presente, ci occupiamo soltanto di quelle che avevano una vera ripercussione sul modo di vivere del popolo nell'isola di Malta.

Problemi nell'Attività Pastorale del Clero

Dalla fine del secolo sedicesimo, nell'isola di Malta, a poco a poco, si addestrava una classe di gente veramente colta. Inoltre, il secolo decimosettimo si distingue per un relativo splendore prodotto dalla proficua attività di tanti Ordini Religiosi, i quali alleggerivano l'onere pastorale del clero secolare (9). Dato il fatto che una parte eletta del clero si impegnava anche in varie opere culturali, non esitiamo di affermare che i sacerdoti, anche con queste opere, contribuirono in modo non trascurabile per imprimere un profondo senso cristiano nel cuore della gente. Non tutti gli scritti appartengono ad una mano abile per maneggiar la penna. Del resto, il fatto che diversi fra di loro non emergevano per l'arte stilistica non dovrebbe suscitare meraviglia alcuna. I sacerdoti colti e zelanti, spesso incuranti di una gloria passeggera, cantavano nei loro scritti la legge di Cristo, lo splendore della virtù cristiana, la grandezza dei santi. Da altri non si poteva aspettare niente di meglio perchè solo pochi conoscevano le varie sfumature di una lingua per loro straniera; infatti, quando alcuni di loro cercavano di farsi un nome per mezzo degli scritti, qualche volta si rendevano troppo artificiosi e nello stesso tempo di scarso valore letterario. Naturalmente le loro opere, scritte quasi sempre in italiano, non potevano mai penetrare in mezzo al popolino, il quale allora non sapeva leggere. Gli scritti servivano piuttosto allo stesso clero, il quale poteva servirsene durante la sua attività pastorale. Rammentiamo che allora la semplicità dello stile era necessaria anche quando un'opera era diretta ai sacerdoti perchè la formazione letteraria di molti fra di loro era tutt'altro che alta.

Indichiamo qui solo qualcuna di queste opere. Il sacerdote *Giacomo Farrugia* (1641 c. - 1716) ci lasciò *L'ipocrisia castigata e Ismeria convertita*. *Carlo Magri* (? 1693) scrisse fra l'altro *Il valore maltese difeso contro le calunnie di Girolamo Brusoni*. Un certo *Carlo Micallef* tramandò di nuovo il racconto di *Ismeria* e una *Vita di S. Giovanni Battista* (10). Le devozioni popolari e alcuni racconti che esaltano la fede sono da questi sacerdoti descritti con parole di fuoco; ma, sfortunatamente, molte delle loro opere

(7) A.S.V., *Vescovi*, 26, I, f.302r.

(8) G.F. ABELA-G.A. CIANTAR, *Malta Illustrata*, Malta, I.3, par.57, p.66.

(9) Art. BONNICI, *History of the Church in Malta*, v.1, Malta, Empire press, 1967, pp. 100-105.

(10) ABELA-CIANTAR, o.c., I.4, not.4, pp.534-602.

V. LAURENZA, *Il contributo di Malta alla letteratura italiana in Il giornale di politica e di letteratura*, 1934, pp. 533-535.

giacciono praticamente sconosciute ad annuffire fra i manoscritti della Biblioteca Reale di Malta.

Da altre fonti, non molto posteriori al periodo che noi esaminiamo, conosciamo che anche la situazione generale del clero, durante il secolo XVII, è stata in qualche modo migliorata. Nel 1681, il Vescovo di Malta, *Michele Gerolamo Molina*, riferì alla Santa Sede circa lo stato della diocesi. I componenti del clero diocesano avevano almeno una scienza mediocre in quel che spettava ai loro doveri ministeriali. Essi regolarmente non mancavano alle riunioni periodiche che si tenevano dal clero; in queste riunioni tutti insieme studiavano la soluzione di qualche "caso morale" proposto. Oltre a questo, prima dell'Ordinazione Presbiterale e durante gli esercizi spirituali, essi venivano esaminati circa la loro competenza nelle rubriche liturgiche (11).

Nonostante questo aspetto positivo della vita sacerdotale durante questo periodo, per ragioni ben comprensibili, molti preti si vedevano impossibilitati a dedicarsi interamente per il bene delle anime. Esaminate le circostanze nelle quali vivevano, le colpe del clero si spiegano, anche se non si scusano.

Il fatto deplorabile che quasi tutti i Vescovi diocesani fossero di origine straniera gettava la maggioranza del clero isolano in una situazione molto penosa. Tali Vescovi non allacciavano mai nessun contatto diretto con il popolino; conseguentemente, essi non si addentravano quasi mai nei gravi problemi dell'Isola; tuttavia, da questo, essi si potrebbero scusare perchè la causa va cercata nel fatto che la lingua del popolo rimase per loro sempre sconosciuta. Ma i Vescovi stranieri preferivano di concedere i benefici della Chiesa di Malta ad altri sacerdoti altrettanto stranieri, e in preferenza a quelli della propria patria. Questa consuetudine produceva delle gravissime conseguenze sulla vita cristiana del popolo. I sacerdoti erano ridotti alla povertà; quasi non c'era da scegliere fra il clero secolare e quello regolare. Già nel secolo antecedente, quando un Cavaliere scrive di Mdina, la città vecchia, nell'anno 1568, egli parla in questo modo dei conventi dei frati: "Vi sono molte altre chiese et monasterii de frati religiosi di tutti gli Ordini Mendicanti, ma circonvicini a detta città, *devotissimi et molto poveri*" (12). Il clero maltese, trovandosi sprovvisto dei mezzi indispensabili per il suo mantenimento, doveva in qualche modo trafficare per guadagnarsi il suo pane quotidiano (13).

Da una Relazione scritta in forma di lettera e inviata al Pontefice *Gregorio XV* (1621-1623), apprendiamo il seguente: "ci sono alcune (chiese) che si sostentano solamente delle primizie et altre elemosine che sono loro date dal popolo, come sono particolarmente le otto capelle sudette

(11) Arth. BONNICI, *History of the Church in Malta*, v.II, Malta, Empire Press, 1968, p.34.

(12) Bibl.Vat., *Urb.Lat.*, 833, f.216v. Per un caso particolare, cioè la povertà dei Frati Minori Conventuali, i primi mendicanti a stabilirsi nell'Isola, vedi: B. FIORINI, O.F.M.Conv., *Il convento di S. Francesco in Mabat (Malta) dei Frati Minori Conventuali in Mel. Hist.*, v.3. n.3(1962), p.5.

(13) Vedi Art. BONNICI, *History of the Church in Malta*, v.I, pp.89-93. L'Autore tratta fino al periodo immediatamente antecedente al nostro, ma la situazione non era affatto cambiata. Per altri usi e abusi, vedi v.II, pp.48-63.

nelle quali in forma di parrocchie si ministrano i sacramenti a i loro casali" (14). Qui il relatore si riferisce alle otto parrocchie che allora erano situate in ambiente completamente rurale e dove il clero non poteva nutrirsi con altro se non con i prodotti agricoli.

Quando il sostegno da parte del popolo per qualche ragione veniva a mancare, si fomentavano degli abusi assai deplorabili. Il popolo era sempre venuto a pagar "le primizie" (cioè i primi frutti del campo) ai clero della propria parrocchia. Ma, in qualche stagione cattiva, i prodotti dei campi scarseggiarono tanto che gli agricoltori non si trovarono in condizione di poter fare questo dovere. Alcuni sacerdoti, lottando anch'essi disperatamente con la vita, insistettero troppo per esigere quello che spettava a loro. Da questo, qualche volta capitava che dei "poveri che non han la possibilità di pagar le primizie sono stati messi in carcere" (15).

Altri abusi scaturirono anche dall'amministrazione dei sacramenti (16). Non avendo altri mezzi per vivere, il clero giustamente aspettava di guadagnarsi il pane dal suo lavoro apostolico. Nello stesso tempo, quando si vivacchiava in mezzo a comuni strettezze, ciascun sacerdote comprendeva che c'era poco da aspettare dal popolo. In qualche caso particolare, qualcuno, incurante delle disposizioni emanate nel Sinodo Diocesano del Vescovo Cagliares, predecessore del Vescovo di allora, non ascoltava le confessioni senza qualche pagamento o compenso, "ma con metter mano alla scarsella" (17). Il caso era ancora molto più grave quando si trattava di un moribondo; infatti, leggiamo anche che "li sacramenti del Viatico et Unzione non s'amministrano senza pagamento contro l'ordine del Synodo di Cagliares" (18).

In tempi di tanta scarsezza, altre accuse rivolte al clero non reggono perchè, date le circostanze scusanti, la parsimonia usata nello spendere non recava un vero danno spirituale ai fedeli; ma delle persone mal'intenzionate e con sentimenti anticlericali, anche in quei tempi, a torto valutavano dalle apparenze e senza riflettere le azioni altrui. La seguente accusa non richiede alcuna spiegazione: "Molti sacerdoti, per sparmiar la miseria d'un baiocco che dariano ad un barbiero, vanno a radersi dentro le prigioni de schiavi per mano d'infideli; cosa che l'istessi infideli non fanno per mano di cristiani, e si burlano di noi e di nostra fede in vedere viltà simile de nostri sacerdoti" (19).

Altri fatti particolari dell'epoca confermano la povertà del clero secolare e degli Ordini Regolari che allora svolgevano il loro apostolato nell'isola. Ciascun Inquisitore che risiedeva nell'isola si considerava tenuto di attenersi ad una pia e lodevole consuetudine. Per dare qualche sollievo alle Religioni Mendicanti "suol farsi l'elemosina di dieci pagniotte la settimana per ciascheduna, et alli Cappuccini suole di vantaggio empirsi ogni

(14) B.l.Vat., Barb.Lat., 5335, f.46r.

(15) A.S.V., S.S.Malta, 7, ff.72v-73r.

(16) Per una spiegazione generica, vedi BONNICI, o.c., I, pp.95-99.

(17) A.S.V., S.S.Malta, 7, f.73r.

(18) Ib.

(19) Ib., f.72v.

mese una volta la loro fiasca grande di vino. E' però arbitrario "di fare o non fare tale elemosina, et il farla in maggiore o minore quantità" (20).

Lo stato delle monache di clausura era ancora peggiore perchè esse per ogni loro provizione dipendevano dagli altri. Una loro supplica rivolta al Papa spiega chiaramente come fossero ridotte ad una estrema povertà: "Le monache del monastero di Santa Scolastica della città Vittoriosa di Malta humilmente espongono alla Santità Vostra che sono in estrema necessità, non solo del vitto e vestito, ma anco dell'habitatione, poichè al numero di settantacinque sorelle in quel novo monastero stan così ristrette che i letti del dormitorio toccano l'un l'altro, e dormono a due a due, che di estate si muoiono del caldo, e, com'è noto a Vostra Santità, il luogo dove furon portate che non v'è cosa di buono, e per li terrenoti che corsero frequenti quest'anno, dubitando che ogni tetto et ogni fabrica li cadesse adosso, furono astrette a dormire nel cortile a ciel sereno, et infatti sono ancora senza l'officine necessarie poichè non hanno nè refettorio capace, nè infermeria, e quel ch'è peggio ne anche cucina, et essendo il luogo da per sè stesso molto angusto, non v'è anco dove fabricarli se non pigliano alcune casette vicino detto monastero ad effetto di isolarlo" (21).

Senza alcun dubbio, casi di debolezza umana si venivano a conoscere anche a Malta. Tale era la situazione per tutta l'Europa in quel periodo. Qualche Inquisitore, come il *Degli Oddi* (1654-1658) esigea dal Sommo Pontefice delle severissime misure per tali colpe. Infatti, il 9 settembre 1655, egli scrisse delle parole molto dure: "Supplico humilissimamente la paterna carità di Nostro Signore a compiacersi di dare benignamente la sua santa mano perchè la Sacra Congregazione del Santo Ufficio apprenda quanto sia necessario in questo paese l'applicare in simili casi i rimedii più rigorosi, e riserbare gl'atti della loro clemenza per altrove" (22). Ma come risulta da altre fonti, questo Inquisitore era troppo severo, esigente, e anche imprudente nel suo modo di agire. Dall'esame dei processi al periodo di *Antonio Pignatelli*, apprendiamo che simili colpe non mancavano; ma la loro frequenza non si dovrebbe esagerare. L'Inquisitore *Pignatelli* comprendeva molto bene che ciascun caso doveva essere considerato in se stesso con tutte le circostanze mitiganti. La Suprema Congregazione del Sant'Ufficio spesso puniva con pene tremende simili colpe, ma quando l'imputato si mostrava docile, penitente, e ubbidiente subito dopo il primo richiamo, le pene erano regolarmente soltanto medicinali. Spesso troviamo questa osservazione: "corripiendus et absolvendus ad cauthelan" (23); ciò significa che l'individuo non era stato immune da una colpa, ma il Sant'Ufficio lo assolse con un ammonimento di stare in seguito all'erta e vigile su sè stesso per poter dominarsi.

Quando un sacerdote abusava del sacramento della penitenza, l'Inquisitore sempre lo accoglieva benignamente se compariva nel tribunale di sua spontanea volontà. Dall'altra parte, un prete veramente consapevole

(20) Bibl.Naz.Roma, *Vitt.Eman.*, 838, Istruttione al Maestro di Casa del nuovo inquisitore di Malta (1664), (non numerato: f.6r del documento).

(21) Bibl.Casan.Roma, *Casanate*, 322, Copia di lettera inviata nel 1659 a Papa Alessandro VII (non numerato).

(22) A.S.V., *S.S.Malta*, 10, f.43r.

(23) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, n.46, 13 marzo 1647, f.250v.

della propria colpa, domandava umilmente, non solo il perdono, ma anche la penitenza dovuta: "Sono comparso con total pentimento e ne dimando perdono a Dio, et a Vostra Signoria Illustrissima con quelle penitenze salutari che merito per rimedio dell'anima mia acciò mi sia un specchio di qua avanti per la mia emenda" (24).

Se noi riflettiamo sul contenuto di alcuni documenti dell'epoca, possiamo addossare, almeno in parte, la responsabilità di queste mancanze a *Monsignor Balaguer*, il Vescovo di allora. Egli non sapeva reggere la diocesi con quella disciplina che è necessaria per tenere in freno tutti i suoi sudditi. La storia ci insegna che chi non regge con energia per reprimere e prevenire ogni abuso diventa in qualche modo come un complice nelle azioni biasimevoli dei suoi dipendenti. Quando si comanda a briglia sciolta, tutto l'ambiente incomincia a pullulare di errori di ogni genere. Infatti, troviamo scritto: "Si è notata per gran cosa che in tempo del Vescovo (Balaguer) non si sia mai veduto un chierico condannato in pena corporale per enormi e gravi delitti che avesse commessi" (25).

Data questa mancanza del debito castigo da parte del Vescovo, comprendiamo molto bene il motivo del Gran Maestro *Lascaris* quando, di propria iniziativa, puniva alcuni sudditi del Vescovo che trasgredivano le leggi dello stato. Naturalmente, il Vescovo protestava con disapprovazione perchè il fatto costituiva un reato contro le leggi ecclesiastiche e perchè sapeva bene che il Gran Maestro si approfittava di tutte queste occasioni per intromettersi sempre più in quel che riguardava le persone esenti dalla sua autorità (26).

Coscienza cristiana del popolo (27)

Prima di proseguire con le nostre indagini, una breve descrizione della indole naturale dei Maltesi ci è di grande aiuto per comprendere e valutare i loro intimi sentimenti del cuore e dell'anima. Quattro secoli fa', nel 1568, un membro dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano ci lasciò una interessante descrizione dei maltesi: "Gli huomini sono robusti, di carnagione bruna, di assai buona statura, atti alla fatica, religiosi, et dediti alla Religione Christiana; le donne sono medemamente brune, non belle, ma piacevoli et amorevoli, devotissime, vedono alla siciliana, si come con l'istesse leggi anco si governano. Il parlar loro è moresco; sono ingegniosi et astuti molto talchè fin li figlioli di mesi dieci caminano, di diecidotto parlano, et de sette anni travagliano et si procacciano il vivere da sua porta, et le donne ordinariamente de dodici anni generano figlioli" (28).

Un altro documento che risale ad un periodo molto vicino al nostro esalta in modo specifico la fede tradizionale del popolo: "Sono tutti questi popoli divotissimi, e piacesse Dio che così si potesse dire de i Cavalieri; frequen-

(24) *Ib.*, n.204, 23 dicembre 1634, f.1036v.

(25) A.S.V., S.S.Malta, 7, f.71v.

(26) A.S.V., Vescovi, 26,I, f.802r.

(27) Per una vasta raccolta di documenti che trattano principalmente della vita della plebe nell'isola di Malta, vedi: Aless. BONNICI, O.F.M.Conv., *Due secoli di storia politico-religiosa di Malta nel fondo Barberini-Latino della Biblioteca Vaticana in Mel. Hist.* v.4, n.4(1967), pp.229-256.

(28) B.bl.Vat., *Urb.Lat.*, 833, ff.140v-141r.

tano le chiese, honorano i sacerdoti, e per quanto possono fanno anche prontissimamente dell'elemosine conforme all'institutione de loro antichi, per la quale veggonsi, però, per tutta l'isola molte chiese, e ci sono diversi beneficii semplici" (29). Il mittente della relazione è un certo *Giovanbattista Leoni*, che non era di origine maltese; perciò la sua testimonianza è ancora più importante. Tale relazione rimonta all'anno 1582. Il *fondo Barberini Latino* qui citato non porta né il nome del mittente né l'anno; ma un'altra copia della stessa relazione conservata nella medesima *Biblioteca Vaticana* (30) precisa anche questi particolari. In essa, si conferma anche la fervida devozione verso l'apostolo San Paolo e le tradizioni popolari fin da allora saldamente credute dal popolino: "Poco discosto dal sudetto Rabbata(!) vi è una chiesa dedicata a S. Paolo in memoria della venuta sua in quest'isola, la quale è visitata con grandissima divotione, particolarmente per la grotta che è sotto ella chiesa dove dicesi che habitasse S. Paolo, della quale si cava quella pietra miracolosa contro ai morsi di serpenti" (31).

Oltre a queste pie credenze, che potrebbero apparire come semplice sentimentalismo e senza un reale fondamento, qualche altra notizia importante dimostra che la fede è stata veramente vissuta anche con le opere. Lo stesso relatore si riferisce alle varie confraternite che già fiorivano nella ancora nascente capitale dell'Isola; ricordando in modo particolare la confraternita del S. Rosario, egli scrive: "Nella quale sono inclusi alcuni Cavalieri, i quali vivono molto christianamente, havendosi fabricata una stanza particolare, et sono quelli a' quali la Santità Vostra ha concesso il P. Do' Paolo, dal quale si può sperar grandissimo frutto" (32).

Abbiamo creduto che sia molto opportuno trascrivere qui queste osservazioni fatte da un contemporaneo, anche se appartengono a qualche decennio prima del periodo da noi considerato. Infatti, mentre le strutture giuridiche con tutte le questioni loro annesse si cambiavano molto facilmente anche a Malta, quel che era radicato nel cuore degli uomini non poteva subire un cambiamento radicale nel giro di pochi anni.

Un'altra relazione inedita mandata da Malta in forma di lettera dall'Inquisitore *Angelo Ranuzzi* (1667-1668) al Cardinale Conti, il 12 aprile 1668, magnifica con apprezzamento e innalza alle stelle con grande ammirazione la fede dei maltesi: "Il popolo è pio e cattolico, divoto alla Santa Sede, e pieno di rispetti verso il Ministro Pontificio, e concetto di molto merito nella bontà le fa la memoria segnalata di S. Paolo Apostolo e suo Protettore, il quale, dopo haver predicato la fede e benedetto l'Isola, essendo morso da una velenosa vipera, non solo non ne sentì offesa, ma meritò appresso che l'isola tutta d'indi avanti rimanesse libera da simili animali mortiferi, et, in oltre, che il terreno e fango medesimo dell'Isola, dopo tal miracolo, diventasse ottimo antidoto e rimedio per i veleni e le morsicature di simili bestie" (33).

Per conoscere la vita religiosa del popolo e per penetrare nell'intimità

(29) B'l.Vat., *Barb.Lat.*, 5325, ff.45v-46r.

(30) *Chigi Lat.*, N.III,57, ff.226r-253r.

(31) *Ib.*, f.237v.

(32) *Ib.*, f.238r.

(33) *Bibl.Vat.*, *Barb.Lat.*, 5858, f.46r-v.

delle famiglie, la fonte più genuina scaturisce da una accurata ricerca nei processi dell'inquisizione. Oggi, grazie alla facoltà concessa agli studiosi di indagare in questi processi dell'Inquisizione di Malta, è stato tolto ogni ostacolo che ci impediva di metterci in contatto con questa ricchezza inesauribile per la storia della cultura e delle tradizioni, e usanze popolari. Questi processi ci servono come uno studio demopsicologico perchè leggiamo in essi le medesime parole della gente che appaiono come testimonianza di bontà interna, di semplicità, e, nello stesso tempo, di timore riverenziale davanti alla legge di Dio e della Chiesa.

Gli stessi Inquisitori riconobbero nella gente una sensibilità profonda davanti al male. Il perugino *Giulio Degli Oddi* comunicò le sue impressioni alla Segreteria di Stato: "Trovo che per grazia di Dio, il paese vive con molta regola" (34). Nella medesima lettera, questo Delegato del Sant'Uffizio attribuì lo spirito cristiano del popolo al faticoso impegno dei suoi predecessori nel governo del Sacro Tribunale: "Procurarò con tutto lo spirito di mantenere et accrescere queste buone inclinazioni alle quali hanno dato motivo le virtuose operationi di quelli che avanti a me sono stati i direttori di questo Sacro Tribunale" (35).

Gli Inquisitori, attenendosi ai gravi doveri del proprio ufficio, serbavano sempre il segreto per tutto quello chi si denunciava durante i processi (36). Quando si stimava opportuno, il Sant'Uffizio procedeva con vera saggezza e prudenza per evitare ogni scandalo e proteggere le stesse persone diffamate. In simili casi, l'Inquisitore riceveva degli ordini per non procedere nella causa, nonostante la colpevolezza dell'imputato. Citiamo un solo esempio che si riferisce alla fedeltà coniugale; il Sant'Uffizio così scrisse all'Inquisitore *Leonetto della Corbara* (1607-1608): "Circa l'adulterio da lui commesso con una donna che habitava vicino alle carceri, ove andava per un buco fatto nel muro del carcere, le dico che, per esser il delitto occulto, Ella non proceda a farne risentimento con darli il debito castigo, per evitare il grave pericolo che ne risulterebbe alla donna dal marito e parenti" (37).

In un'isola attaccatissima alle tradizioni cristiane, la fantasia del popolo diventava molto suscettibile a qualche scandalo pubblico contro il buon costume. L'Inquisitore, perciò, era tutt'altro che indifferente quando lo stesso popolo pretendeva una pena vendicativa per qualche colpa commessa. Dall'altra parte, mentre si chiedeva da tutti un silenzio assoluto per tutte le colpe sconosciute dalla gente, un delitto pubblico meritava una riparazione davanti a tutti. Un certo Antonio Demayo, mentre scrutava con passione sensuale una immagine raffigurante la nudità femminile, disse delle parole poco degne di un cristiano; un testimone denunciò le parole scandalose allo Inquisitore: "Havendolo io avvertito che queste non erano parole di christiano, per esser ciò contro li commandamenti di Dio, mi replicò che era peccato non consentire ad una bella donna" (38). L'Inquisitore, il quale allora era *Antonio Pignatelli*, accertatosi dello scandalo, inflisse all'imputato questa

(34) A.S.V., S.S.Malta, 10, f.15v.

(35) *Ib.*

(36) B'bl.Vat., *Borg.Lat.*, 558, f.89v.

(37) A.I.M., *Lettere*, 1(1588-1608), f.2r5r.

(38) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, n.181, 20 gennaio 1640, f.90r.

pena di riparazione: doveva restare inginocchiato, con una candela accesa in mano e uno strumento di legno (comunemente chiamato 'mardacchio') appeso alla lingua, per la durata di una messa, all'ingresso della chiesa dei Gesuiti alla città Valletta (39).

Gli Inquisitori erano sinceramente convinti della bontà di cuore della gente. Essi apprezzavano il vivo attaccamento del popolo alla Religione Cattolica. Ma si sapeva anche che molti fra i Maltesi parlavano apertamente e senza discrezione dei difetti di quelli che comandavano. Questa loro abitudine, che non era affatto lodevole, infastidiva l'Inquisitore; per questo, troviamo la sua eco anche nelle istruzioni che si consegnavano a ciascun Inquisitore alla sua partenza per l'isola. In quelle consegnate a *Monsignor Gori Pannellini* nell'anno 1639, leggiamo le seguenti parole: "Sogliono costì gli huomini essere assai liberi nel parlare, e facili a giudicare sinistramente le attioni altrui, e massime di chi essercita giurisdittione. Simili dicerie, quando arrivino a toccar lei, o qualche d'uno de suoi, debbono più tosto smaccar col disprezzo, che dar loro reputatione con mostra di premura. Nel corso di virtuose operationi, prevale appresso ad ogn'uno la potenza del vero" (40). Secondo queste parole, gli Inquisitori non avrebbero dovuto affliggersi troppo per le maldicenze del popolo. Quando qualche decisione del Tribunale si interpretava sinistramente dal popolo, l'Inquisitore avrebbe dovuto proseguire indisturbato nelle funzioni del proprio ufficio. Quando poi le imputazioni corrispondevano alla verità, un Inquisitore che era all'altezza della sua missione, non si sarebbe vergognato a fare un passo indietro per riprendere la via della giustizia. Naturalmente, queste parole mostrano soltanto il vivo desiderio della Suprema Congregazione del Saut'Ufficio. Non ostante questo, anche gli Inquisitori erano degli uomini come tutti gli altri; spesso ci accorgiamo che diverse persone, anche se convinti del proprio errore, purtroppo, non sempre si sentivano prouti di ammetterlo apertamente.

Incostanza nella fede davanti al pericolo

L'unica limpida sorgente da dove scaturisce la verità in quel che riguarda l'apostasia dalla fede cristiana s'incontra soltanto nei processi dell'Inquisizione. Quando si trattava di Maltesi, fin dove ci risulta da questi processi, ogni apostasia dalla fede si connetteva ad uno stato di schiavitù in mezzo ai musulmani.

Da anni e anni, la fantasia popolare creò spesso dei commoventi racconti basati sulle frequenti incursioni musulmane nell'isola di Malta. Qui non possiamo non ricordare la più antica ballata maltese "*L-Gharusa tal-Mosta*" (La Sposa della Mosta) che racconta in modo molto sentimentale come una ragazza maltese venne rapita dai Turchi proprio alla vigilia delle nozze (41). Altri racconti, come "*Inez Farrug*" e "*Ix-Xebba tal-Wied tal-Ispersanza*" (La giovane della valle della Speranza) danno una chiara testimonianza come in quei tempi per tutta l'isola si tremava continuamente per

(39) *Ib.*, 8 febbraio 1640, f.925r.

(40) *Bibl.Vat., Borg.Lat.*, 558, f.89r.

(41) G. CASSAR PULLICINO, *Il-bennejja tal-folklore malti*, Malta, Università, 1964, p.45.

la paura di quelle scorrerie di turchi armati a scopo di rapina. In ciascuno di questi racconti, gli scrittori e il popolo cercavano sempre di esaltare la fede tradizionale dei Maltesi e la loro forte resistenza di fronte al nemico della loro Religione. Esempi di rinnegamento pubblico della Religione Cristiana per abbracciare quella musulmana sono rarissimamente illustrati in queste pagine.

Uno studio approfondito di documenti ancora inediti presenta un aspetto nuovo in questo problema. Non si tratta qui di racconti creati dalla fantasia, ma di una cruda e atroce realtà. Non si descrivono semplicemente le sofferenze fisiche e morali di quei tempi crudeli, ma sentiamo le lagrime e i sospiri di quegli individui che soffrirono nelle angustie, gli affanni e le pene di una dura e lunga schiavitù. Dei fatti concreti mostrano una certa resistenza iniziale, ma poi molti soccombendo alle torture, crollarono e almeno in apparenza si sottomisero pienamente alla legge di Maometto.

Il primo dovere di ogni Inquisitore era "il mantenere cotesta Religione (42) et isola nella purità della fede catholica et nell'obbedienza dovuta a questa Santa Sede" (43). Nell'isola di Malta, i pericoli imminenti di apostasia dalla fede sempre incutevano una seria inquietudine nei nostri Inquisitori. L'isola era situata in una posizione troppo vicina all'Africa maomettana; di conseguenza, si temevano sempre le infiltrazioni di dottrine erronee (44). Data questa vicinanza, dei Musulmani ed Ebrei spesso si accostavano all'isola con lo scopo del commercio. Il Sant'Uffizio, prendendo le sue precauzioni, cercava di scansare questo pericolo: "Sogliono in detta isola habitar Turchi et Hebrei per occasione di mercanzia; se questi ultimi non portano alcun segno che gli distingua da christiani, procurerà con ogni ardore che gli sia fatto portare, mostrando a chi bisogna quanto importi al mantenimento della purità della fede cattolica che ognuno sappia con chi conversa" (45).

Un pericolo ancora più serio nasceva dal considerevole numero di schiavi infedeli ritenuti nell'isola (46). Per questa ragione, l'insistenza della Suprema Congregazione in questo particolare era ancora più incalzante: "Fa' però di mestieri di ben invigilare per custodirla dalle procelle che per lo più vengono colà eccitate dalla quantità degli schiavi infedeli che si ritengono, non meno dal Gran Maestro e dai Cavaglieri della Religione, che dalle persone private" (47).

Nel solo periodo di *Antonio Pignatelli* come Inquisitore di Malta, dalle 209 denunce del suo inquisitorato, ben più di una cinquantina sono in quel modo connesse con l'apostasia (48). Ma il caso si spiega facilmente. Lo

(42) In questo caso, il termine 'Religione', secondo la consuetudine di allora, si riferisce all'Ordine di Malta.

(43) *Bibl.Vat., Borg.Lat.*, 558, f.84v.

(44) *A.S.V., S.S.Malta*, 186, ff.88v-89r.

(45) *Ib.*, 151, f.27v.

(46) Da una relazione del 1630, apprendiamo il seguente: "Si trova in suo potere (cioè, del Gran Maestro dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano) più di 3.000 schiavi infedeli, de quali si serve per il servizio delle galere e per altri bisogni che gl'occorrono": *Bibl.Vat., Barb.Lat.*, 5036, f.15v.

(47) *A.S.V., S.S.Malta*, 186, f.89r.

(48) *A.I.M., Processi*, 61.

Inquisitore era obbligato a giudicare non solo i Maltesi, ma anche tutti quelli che per caso attraversavano il territorio sottomesso alla sua giurisdizione. L'imputato poteva sfuggire la corte dell'Inquisizione locale soltanto appellandosi a Roma; ma anche in questo caso, l'Inquisitore non si lasciava convincere facilmente. Il *Pignatelli* in questo non faceva eccezione. Un certo Inglese, di nome George Gorne, si lasciò persuadere di passare alla Religione Cattolica, ma non voleva in nessun modo fare la sua abiura a Malta perchè diceva: "Io ho fatto giuramento di non lasciar la mia setta se non anderò in Roma" (49). Il pover'uomo dovette arrendersi ma solo dopo lungi mesi di prigionia (50).

I casi di apostasia che abbiamo trovato nei processi non sono dei più gravi. Era molto difficile trovare un solo caso di persone che avessero rinnegato la fede cristiana volontariamente. Le circostanze dell'apostasia ci ricordano l'era dei martiri dei primi secoli della chiesa. Qui, sfortunatamente, non abbiamo nessun documento a favore di quelli che difesero la fede fino all'ultimo respiro. Fatti di una costante resistenza si possono conoscere solo per caso. In questo periodo leggiamo soltanto di un certo Francesco Fazoì il quale racconta di quando era "schiaivo appresso infedeli li quali haveano voluto che io mi facessi turco", ma egli aveva resistito con fermezza e perseveranza sino al riscatto dalla sua schiavitù (51).

Sarebbe troppo lungo citare tutte le parole di quelli che rinnegarono la fede in mezzo a dolori nel corpo e nell'anima, ma non possiamo tralasciare alcune delle deposizioni più significative, anche se non sempre si riferiscono ai Maltesi. L'abbandono pubblico della propria religione per passare alla confessione musulmana era spesso il risultato di lunghi e atroci patimenti. Le seguenti parole sono tratte dalle denunce deferite all'Inquisitore di Malta: Doppo un anno, per molti giorni, m'ha dati molti bastonati perchè voleva che m'havessi fatto turco, tanto che io mi contentai, per il timore, di farmi turco" (52); "volendo ch'io m'havessi fatto turco et io recusando per lo spatio di doi anni, finalmente, dandomi molte bastonate, ho proferito le parole solite d'abnegazione" (53); "dicendomi che se io havessi detto per l'avvenire d'essere christiano, che m'haverebbero abbrugiato" (54); "subito incominciò a minaccarmi e maltrattarmi col bastone, e volendo ch'io m'havesse fatto surco, e non havendo io voluto consentire, m'ha fatto, 20 giorni doppo, ligare per doi giorni in una scala con li piedi in su et il capo in giù, con farmi dare molte bastonate; finalmente, passati doi giorni, m'ha fatto tenere e tagliare (55) con imponermi il nome d'Hali

(49) *Ib.*, n.14, 17 genna'o 1647, f.69r.

(50) *Ib.*, 6 febbraio 1648, ff.72r-73r.

(51) *Ib.*, n.139, 10 luglio 1648, f.708r.

(52) *Ib.*, n.20, 24 gennaio 1647, f.99r.

(53) *Ib.*, n.21, 26 gennaio 1647, f.105r.

(54) *Ib.*, n.24, 28 gennaio 1647, f.117r-v.

(55) Delle parole che forse potrebbero sembrare non del tutto chiare si riferiscono al rito religioso con il quale una persona passava alla confessione musulmana; il rito che significava il passaggio di una persona alla religione maomettana consisteva in quattro azioni: a) un taglio con l'effusione di sangue alla somiglianza della circoncisione ebraica, b) alzare il dito, come segno di resa alla volontà di Dio, c) proferire le parole rituali, e d) assumere un nuovo nome.

e m'ha fatto alzar il deto e proferire certe parole quali loro mi somministravano, senza sapere che fossero" (56).

Si potrebbero riportare anche altri fatti, ma se consideriamo in modo speciale l'ultimo caso, ci accorgiamo che non ci sia neanche una vera apostasia dalla fede; tutto era compiuto contro la volontà dell'individuo. Non era questo l'unico caso di apostasia forzata perchè durante lo stesso periodo leggiamo anche quel che disse un altro: "Tanto dissero con parole e fecero con darmi da bere finchè m'ubriacavano; ne sapendo io quel che si faceva, mi fecero tenere da altri infedeli e mi tagliorno con havermi fatto alzar il deto e proferire le parole solite d'abnegatione, con havermi imposto il nome di Mustafà" (57).

Come severamente esigea il dovere del proprio ufficio, l'Inquisitore non poteva non istruire un processo contro simili persone denunciate di apostasia; ma, come ci risulta da manoscritti originali, quasi nessuno degli Inquisitori di allora trascurava un prudente uso del senno e della ponderazione prima di procedere in simili casi di apostasia. Infatti, a quelle persone che avevano tanto sofferto beneficiava molto di più la compassione che la pena e il castigo.

Molti allora venivano forzati alla servitù e messi al remo su qualche galeone o al servizio di un padrone, con privazione assoluta di ogni facoltà di disporre di sè e incapacità di possedere. In quei tempi, molti a Malta si procacciavano il pane dedicandosi alle legittime scorriere contro gli infedeli (58). Queste scorriere da corsari, che per la gente di allora non avevano niente di ingiusto o crudele, portavano con sè delle tremende conseguenze; parecchi Maltesi perdevano la libertà e passavano il resto della vita come schiavi dei Musulmani. In quel periodo, vi fu riferito all'Inquisitore che qualche Maltese, preso come schiavo dai Turchi, aveva liberamente abbandonato la propria fede per abbracciare quella maomettana. Il caso sembrava ancora più grave perchè si trattava di un chierico (59). La denuncia fu defe-

(56) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, n.25, 29 gennaio 1647, f.123r-v.

La Bibliografia di studi veramente oggettivi concernenti la schiavitù resta ancora molto rara. Conosciamo ben poco dai nostri storici. Ma uno scrittore illustre, G.A. VASSALLO, nel romanzetto *Alessandro Inguanez*, pubblicato in *Strenna per l'anno di grazia 1861* (Malta, pp. 3-28), in modo rigidamente storico, riporta tutte le circostanze da noi descritte. Citiamo soltanto un brano da questo racconto: "Quale ti prese per suo schiavo e cominciò persuaderti d'abnegar la Santa Fede Christiana, ma gli ne facesti resistenza; finalmente in capo di cinquanta giorni ti fece dare da trecento bastonate sopra le piante dei piedi per la detta resistenza, dicendogli che volevi stare nella Fede Christiana: E tuttavia si risolse di farti tagliar la testa, se non ti facevi turco; del che dubitando tu, per esser egli persona assoluta di detta città, per timore ti contentasti a rinegare solo con la bocca, ritenendoti intrinsecamente per cristiano" (*Ib.*, p.19).

(57) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, n.16, 21 gennaio 1647, f.81v.

(58) R.E. CAVALIERO, *The decline of the Maltese Corso in the eighteenth century* in *Mel.Hist.*, v.2, n.4(1959), p.224.

(59) Il termine *chierico* non significava sacerdote: Allora, nell'Isola di Malta, in modo abusivo, si conferiva ancora la tonsura clericale a molte persone che non avevano alcuna intenzione di proseguire negli studi fino al sacerdozio. Il Concilio di Trento aveva parlato senza ambiguità (*S.Trid.Syn.*, sess. 23, decr. de reform., cap. 8), ma i nostri Vescovi non ne volevano sapere. Essi persuasero la Santa Sede che,

rita all'Inquisitore da un'altra persona la quale aveva sentito del fatto ancora da una terza persona: "Mentre si trovava con questa squadra di Malta in Levante per soccorso della Candia, intese come il chierco Francesco Dorso, Maltese della Valletta, suo cognato, si era fatto turco e che serviva per bombardiero alli Turchi, dalli quali era tenuto in gran stima" (60).

Quando si trattava di giudicare gli apostati sopra nominati, l'Inquisitore vedeva ben chiaro che dei casi in se stessi gravissimi, considerati nelle loro circostanze particolari, non richiama vano ad alcuna vera preoccupazione. Quasi tutte le persone che mancavano contro la fede si presentavano spontaneamente per chiedere il perdono. Inoltre, le medesime Norme del Santo Ufficio non mancavano di umane riflessioni, come qualcuno potrebbe immaginare. "Circa la causa impulsiva, ch'è il timore, par si deve haver riguardo, perchè o questa sarà timor grave o velemente, come quello della morte et dei supplicii atroci, il quale sarebbe efficace a commover un huomo costante" (61).

Molti dei casi che abbiamo descritti sono di questo genere, e il Delegato del Sant'Ufficio, secondo questa procedura, osservava che "la suspitione dell'apostasia sarebbe leggera" (62). Nonostante questo, le colpe commesse, anche se parzialmente involontarie, non sempre consentivano una completa assoluzione, senza alcuna pena; ma, in ogni caso, la pena doveva essere medicinale e spirituale. Il gesuita *Sebastiano Salles*, un illustre consultore del Sant'Ufficio di Malta durante quel periodo, si riferisce molto chiaramente a questa maniera di assolvere: "In simili casi, quando la loro comparsa è spontanea, si possono assolvere o con la dovuta punizione o con la sola legittima abiura" (63).

a causa di alcune circostanze particolari, tale consuetudine non poteva essere rimossa. Citiamo qui un solo documento, come esempio, fra i tanti che esistono. Quando il Gran Maestro Lascaris nel 1639 insisteva per finirla una volta per sempre con questi chierici coniugati, la Santa Sede stava per prendere una decisione conforme ai decreti del Concilio Tridentino; ma così, fra l'altro risponde il Vescovo diocesano *Michele Balguer*, il 6 luglio 1639: "Mi addosserò l'odio di tutto il mio clero, e dirian: 'vedete che ha fatto il Vescovo; tutti li suoi antecessori difessero la giurisdittione della sua chiesa, e questo la destrugge'; e saria dar campo a tutto il clero di congregare Capitolo Generale e mandare tre o quattro in Roma contro di me . . . Il vero rimedio di tutte queste cose saria lasciar le cose come erano, e portar il Signore Gran Mastro alla lunga, che così Sua Eminenza, o per dir meglio li suoi Ministri, si straccariano": *Bibl.Vat., Barb.Lat., 6687, ff.55v-56r.*

Dall'altra parte, molti si sentivano vivamente interessati a ricevere la tonsura clericale. Da un documento inedito del 1646, rileviamo il seguente: "Dovria il Vescovo haver cura de suoi chierici; si portassero e si vestissero da tali; ma nel vescovato di Malta i chier'ci non servono mai a chiesa, vestono alla moda: chi alla francese, chi alla lombarda di co'ore, con armi di ogni sorte, cap'giatura da donna con gal'ane sui capelli, fanno i soldati su le galere e vascelli di corte, il falegname, il muratore, il tavernaro, il beccaro, et il pizz'carolo; ne si fanno chierici se non per non far la guardia, per non portar cavallo, non pagar datii, e per caso di qualche delitto": *A.S.V., S.S.Malta, 7, ff.71v-72r.* Vedi Ph. CALLUS, *The rising of the Priests*, Malta, Univ. Press, 1961, pp.2-7.

(60) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, n.177, 24 novembre 1648, f.914r.

(61) A.I.M., *Teorica di procedere, tanto in generale quanto in particolare nei casi appartenenti alla S. Fede*, f.191.

(62) *Ib.*

(63) S. SALLES, S.J., *De materiis Tribunalium S. Inquisitionis*, Roma, Gollini, 1651, prol.13, n.1.

Quasi tutte le persone chiamate in tribunale furono giudicati come *soltanto sospetti* di apostasia, e perciò assolti sempre con qualche pena medicinale. Tuttavia, la sentenza più dura inflitta durante il periodo del *Pignatelli* si riferisce ad un caso di apostasia. Si trattava di un turco convertito che tentò di evadere dall'isola per raggiungere un paese maomettano con l'aiuto di alcune donne cristiane; ma la sorte non fu loro propizia perchè vennero presi, incarcerati, e chiamati in tribunale del Sant'Uffizio. L'imputazione di aver cercato di scappare in una terra non cristiana costituiva contro di loro una supposizione che fuggissero con il proposito di abbandonare la propria religione (64). L'accusa più seria gravava sullo schiavo convertito perchè fu incolpato d'aver istigato alla fuga le due donne. L'Inquisitore, riconoscendo il pentimento dell'individuo, lo assolse dalla scomunica nella quale era incorso, ma doveva ugualmente assoggettarsi umilmente a una sentenza molto rigida: "Acciò che questi tuoi errori non restino impuniti del tutto e sii più cauto per l'avenire et esempio a gl'altri . . . ti condanniamo a tutte le pene delli apostati contenute et espresse nelli sudetti Sacri Canonici et Constitutioni Pontificie et a vogar il remo sopra una delle galere della Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana con la catena di ferro in piedi legata, e senza stipendio alcuno per anni dieci Per penitenze salutari, t'imponiamo che per quattro anni prossimi ti debbi confessare sacramentalmente quattro volte l'anno et di consiglio di tuo confessore comunicarti nelle quattro solennità di Santa Chiesa . . . et per detto tempo, debbi ogni sabbato recitare la corona" (65).

Maria Rotella, una delle donne implicate in questo caso, non smise mai di gridare che non aveva alcuna intenzione di apostatare, ma le sue parole non avevano alcun credito presso l'Inquisitore. Anch'essa fu condannata come "lievemente sospetta d'apostasia" (66). Se osserviamo la sentenza definitiva pronunziata contro di lei, ci accorgiamo che non si trovi una simile condanna per tutto il periodo del *Pignatelli*. "Ti condanniamo a dover per doi anni continoi tener la città Valletta per carcere" (67).

Le colpe popolari di eresia

In questa questione, come nella precedente, tutto si vedrà alla luce dei processi dell'Inquisizione. L'eresia, nel suo significato teologico, consiste nella coscienza e libera negazione, da parte di un battezzato, di una verità della fede insegnata dalla Chiesa. L'eresia dev'essere un errore palesemente sostenuto contrario ai dommi. Ma questo concetto di eresia non corrisponde pienamente a quel che si trova nei processi del periodo del *Pignatelli*. Anche in questo periodo, i processi che si istruivano contro l'eresia erano abbastanza frequenti; ma tutti riguardavano persone della confessione protestante, i quali, per una ragione o per un'altra, sbarcavano nell'isola di Malta (68). Quando tali persone si conducevano innanzi al Tribunale dell'Inquisizione, esse si convincevano che fino a quel momento fossero vissute nell'errore. Per

(64) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, n.150, f.769r.

(65) *Ib.*, f.779v.

(66) *Ib.*, f.781v.

(67) *Ib.*

(68) Le seguenti sono le denunce di eresia in tutto il periodo del *Pignatelli*: A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, nn.5, 6, 11, 18, 30, 32, 35, 36, 42, 87, 113, 115, 116, 130, 148, 156, 173.

questa ragione, quasi ciascun protestante, spesso con una certa violenza alla sua libertà, arrivava al punto di sentire che il passaggio alla fede cattolica fosse per lui un gravissimo dovere. Essendo il risultato della paura e della violenza, le loro conversioni non erano quasi mai sincere e tanto meno profonde.

Qualche volta, anche dei Maltesi erano implicati in quei processi, ma solo indirettamente: cioè per le loro connessioni con persone protestanti. Fra gli altri, un certo Thomas Gherot disse apertamente a P. Colombano di San Michele, Carmelitano Scalzo, l'interprete della lingua inglese per il Tribunale, "d'esser heretico e d'haver promesso matrimonio qui in Malta a certa donna; però che vol seguitare la sua setta, e non farsi Cattolico Romano" (69).

Se l'eresia formale poco o niente molestava la vita religiosa nell'isola, i casi che in quei tempi si consideravano come sospetti di eresia erano frequentissimi. Secondo la mentalità di allora, una persona che offendeva esternamente Dio con parole o azioni provava di non credere alla riverenza dovuta alle cose sacre, e conseguentemente si sospettava di eresia, perchè esitava in un articolo importante della fede cristiana.

Un certo Sebastiano Seychell, ingiustamente imputato di aver parlato contro il proprio parroco, venne sospetto di eresia perchè si sentì dire le seguenti parole davanti a tutti: "Madonna Santissima, se io ho detto tal cosa, fate miracolo di abbrugiarmi, e se non farete questo miracolo, non ti tengo per Madonna" (70); ma l'Inquisitore lo assolse con una semplice ammonizione (71).

Delle volte, qualcuno sporgeva spontaneamente una auto-denuncia oppure veniva denunciato da altri, ma non si poteva istruire alcun processo perchè l'Inquisitore e i suoi Consultori non vedevano niente che poteva essere attinente all'eresia. Leggiamo che un certo Pietro aveva detto: "Metto in culo le croci di denari e di tutte le chiese, e di S. Paolo" (72). Ad un altro nel ragionare uscì l'espressione "puttana di Dio" (73). Ma queste non erano altro che parole sconcie o volgari, e come tali non cadevano sotto la giurisdizione dell'Inquisitore. Altre volte, l'Inquisitore non vedeva alcuna ragione per procedere perchè la persona denunciata aveva solo espresso qualche verità in un modo irriverente; tale era il caso di un individuo che aveva mancato di rispetto parlando contro il Papa (74).

Le bestemmie ereticali potevano aver luogo non solo con le parole ma anche con le azioni. Davanti al Tribunale dell'Inquisizione, si portavano dei casi che oggi a noi apparirebbero ridicoli. Per esempio, Giovanni Leus, un Inglese, venne condotto in tribunale perchè, essendo ubriaco, aveva ridotto a pezzi "anco una immagine della Passione di Christo" (75). Un altro si denunciò spontaneamente per aver mancato involontariamente contro una immagine del Crocifisso: "Io, andando a cercare un pezzo d'armi, non havendo

(69) *Ib.*, n.35, 8 febbraio 1747, f.195r.

(70) *Ib.* n.146, 30 luglio 1643, f.727r.

(71) *Ib.*

(72) *Ib.*, n.137, 13 giugno 1648, f.694r.

(73) *Ib.*, n.191, 25 agosto 1648, f.787r.

(74) *Ib.*, n.17, 22 gennaio 1647, f.87r.

(75) *Ib.*, n.29, 1 febbraio 1647, f.153r.

trovato, afferrai un crocifisso ch'era ivi pendente, e lo ridussi in alcuni pezzi, non sapendo io quel che facevo" (76). Ma come è chiaro dai fatti stessi, l'Inquisitore non poteva ragionevolmente processare simili individui.

Forse per noi potrebbe apparire strano che anche quelli che non osservavano l'astinenza nei giorni stabiliti dalla Chiesa venivano sospetti di eresia. Tuttavia, anche in questo caso, la connessione con l'eresia non manca del tutto. La Chiesa con la sua autorità stabili che questo precetto sia osservato da tutti i Cristiani. Chi non crede che la Chiesa abbia la facoltà di imporre delle leggi ai fedeli si rende certamente colpevole di eresia. Dall'altra parte, chi non osserva simili precetti, fa poco conto dell'autorità ecclesiastica. Per questa ragione, si sospettava di eresia.

Durante il periodo del Pignatelli, alcuni individui erano visti mangiar carne in giorni di astinenza; ma al momento della denuncia, non si poteva procedere contro di loro perchè si trovavano lontani dall'isola (77). Qualche volta, si sporgeva una denuncia anche contro quelli che avevano mangiato solo in caso di necessità. La seguente è la confessione del capitano Marcello Efnech che si accusò di questa mancanza al Tribunale: "Mi mancò talmente la provisione di magnare che, per non morire la mia gente, fui necessitato alcuni giorni della settimana dar da magnare del cascio e dell'uova, et io stesso l'ho magnato ancora" (78).

Una donna prese la decisione di denunziarsi solo quaranta anni dopo la sua presunta colpa: "Quaranta anni sono in circa, i vicini diedero a mia madre un po' di macarrone con cascio et un pezzotto di carne porcina; et l'indimane, mia madre per sua povertà, ancorchè giorno di quadragesima, non potendo magnare a complimento il pane, magnò detto macarrone, et io, per esser stata inferma, ho magnato il pezzotto di carne porcina, e per quindici giorni in circa doppio, restai magnare il cascio et ova" (79). Ma in questi casi, l'Inquisitore non aveva niente da assolvere perchè, essendo in stato di necessità, non avevano in alcun modo trasgredito un precetto ecclesiastico. Infatti, tale precetto non obbliga mai con grave incommodo.

Fra i casi che riguardano l'astinenza, il più curioso è quello che si riferisce al Padre Francesco Schembri, il Superiore del Convento dei Carmelitani alla città Vittoriosa. Essendo denunciato dai suoi confratelli per aver mangiato carne quando era vietato, egli fu incarcerato nel Convento del proprio Ordine di Mdina (80). Questo frate si rifiutò di sottomettersi ai suoi superiori perchè, secondo lui, essi non erano competenti in simile materia. Per questa ragione, il religioso Carmelitano fece un ricorso all'Inquisitore Pignatelli e gli supplicò di esaminare il proprio caso. Presso il Tribunale del Sant'Uffizio, il frate fu dichiarato innocente perchè nelle sue circostanze particolari, il precetto ecclesiastico dell'astinenza non obbligava; ma, nello stesso tempo, l'Inquisitore lo dichiarò anche deposto dal proprio ufficio di superiore perchè, secondo le costituzioni dell'Ordine Carmelitano, chi in modo abituale non poteva osservare il precetto ecclesiastico dell'astinenza, non godeva del diritto di essere eletto superiore di una casa religiosa (81).

(76) *Ib.*, n.12, 9 gennaio 1647, f.57r.

(77) *Ib.*, n.92, 13 novembre 1647, f.431r.

(78) *Ib.*, n.82, 12 settembre 1647, f.392r.

(79) *Ib.*, n.190, 22 marzo 1649, f.946r.

(80) *Ib.*, n.199, 1 maggio 1649, ff.992v-996r.

(81) *Ib.*, f.1009r.

Altre persone, per alcune mancanze contro questo precetto, incorrevano veramente il sospetto di eresia. Ogni Inquisitore, secondo le Norme vigenti, si sentiva costretto di procedere severamente contro di loro. Infatti, nella *Prattica per procedere*, leggiamo il seguente: "Quando un sano, senza necessità, scientemente ne mangia, e molto più, se ciò fa con scandalo, il Santo Ufficio procede, e con tanto più, rigore, quanto si ha mala informazione della sua vita" (82). I seguenti casi si registrarono dall'Inquisitore *Pignatelli* con una certa preoccupazione, non tanto per la mancanza in se stessa, quanto per il disprezzo della legge e per lo scandalo dato alle persone circostanti. Quando una donna rimproverò una certa Catarinuzza per la di lei aperta violazione di questo precetto, questa rispose prendendo in giro la stessa legge ecclesiastica: "Non è carnevale?" (83). Un altro si schernì della legge incominciando "a recitare li comandamenti di Dio, con dire che in essi non era tal comandamento" (84). Altri servirono da scandalo per la loro indifferenza: "Ho visto Dergli marinaro maltese dell'isola, che era marinaro su detta fregata magnar del fegato e trippa di montone . . . et essendo da noi ammonito, niente di meno seguìto a magnare senza necessità alcuna" (85).

Le trasgressioni gravi richiedevano qualche volta delle severe misure da parte del Tribunale. Per dare semplicemente un esempio, riportiamo qui una pesante condanna dell'Inquisizione di Malta. Durante tutto il periodo del *Pignatelli*, il seguente caso era l'unico nel quale le norme processuali furono applicate nella loro severità.

Giovanbattista Chitchigno si rese formalmente colpevole di aver trasgredito questo precetto con grave scandalo delle persone che gli stavano attorno. Il Sacro Tribunale lo assolse da ogni scomunica e censura perchè egli si provò veramente pentito, ma la sua pena medicinale era relativamente severa anche per quei tempi; il seguente è il tratto principale desunto dalla sentenza definitiva: "T'imponiamo che per un mese, debbi digiunare ogni venerdì e sabato, et in un mercoledì di detto mese, debbi visitare la Madonna delle Gratie di casal Zabar e per doi anni prossimi debbi confessarti sacramentalmente quattro volte l'anno e di consiglio di tuo confessore comunicarti nelle quattro solennità di Santa Chiesa, cioè per la Pasqua di Ressurrezione, per la Pentecoste, per l'Assontione della Beatissima Vergine, e per il Natale del Signore, e per detto tempo debbi ogni sabato recitare la corona" (86). Prima di essere imposta a quest'individuo nella precedente forma definitiva, questa dura sentenza aveva subito una piccola modificazione per attenuare in qualche modo la sua rigidità. Infatti, in un primo momento si era deciso di indurre la persona colpevole a fare la visita penitenziale alla "*Madonna delle Grazie*" a piedi scalzi; ma dopo, qualche riflessione sulla molestia che gli avrebbe arrecato, l'Inquisitore cassò queste parole dal testo della sentenza.

Negli altri casi, quando le colpe non si potevano in alcun modo scusare, l'Inquisitore cercava sempre di istruire il processo secondo la prassi in vigo-

(82) A.I.M., *Prattica per procedere nelle cause del Sant'Officio*. f.47.

(83) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, n.185, 5 marzo 1649, f.952r.

(84) *Ib.*, n.98, 7 dicembre 1647, f.474r.

(85) *Ib.*, n.57, 19 aprile 1647, f.281r.

(86) *Ib.*, n.98, ff.483v-489r.

re. Quando non c'era alcuna colpa da parte dell'individuo, l'Inquisitore faceva trascrivere regolarmente la denuncia ricevuta, ma l'imputato non veniva neanche ammonito.

La poligamia alla luce dei processi dell'Inquisizione

La poligamia si ha quando un uomo ha più mogli contemporaneamente. Generalmente si chiama *poliandria* quando è la donna che ha contemporaneamente più mariti.

L'Inquisitore di Malta, *Federico Borromeo* (1653-1654), nipote dell'omonimo Cardinale Arcivescovo di Milano ricordato nei "Promessi Sposi" di Alessandro Manzoni, scrivendo da Malta nell'anno 1654, asserì che "la poligamia (era) frequentatissima in queste parti" (87). Con molta probabilità, questo illustre Prelato non si riferì alla poligamia in senso stretto; in altre parole, egli non accennò alla convivenza da un uomo con più donne, o viceversa. Questo Inquisitore volle semplicemente affermare che non si teneva un concetto molto alto dell'indissolubilità del matrimonio. Quando dei Maltesi si trovavano in alcune circostanze particolari che domandavano da loro una prova di fedeltà coniugale con un duro sacrificio, spesso, non sapevano vincersi e dominarsi.

Per evitare uno studio superficiale, anche in questa sezione, ci limitiamo ai processi inquisitoriali dell'Inquisitore Pignatelli. Da questi processi, non risulta, neanche per una sola volta, che un Maltese sia vissuto coniugato con più donne contemporaneamente. Il *Sallelles*, riferendosi alle denunce più frequenti che si ricevevano presso il Tribunale dell'Inquisizione di Malta, non scrive di poligamia, ma solo di Maltesi che contrattavano un secondo matrimonio illegittimo (88).

Uno studio molto minuzioso di tutti i processi di questo periodo ci condusse alle medesime conclusioni del *Sallelles*. Tutte le denunce di questo periodo si potrebbero raggruppare in tre specie:

1. Stranieri che, abusando degli inadeguati mezzi di informazione, nascondevano i loro legami coniugali e facevano la corte a qualche ragazza di Malta per trarla in inganno e indurla ad una unione illegittima.

2. Dei Maltesi, i quali viaggiando lontani dall'isola, si rendevano colpevoli dello stesso crimine.

3. Delle donne Maltesi, le quali, non sopportando con coraggio i disagi di una separazione involontaria, attentavano un secondo matrimonio, soltanto in apparenza legittimo.

In quei tempi antichi che noi ricordiamo, non era affatto facile ad un giovane per incominciare ad amareggiare nascostamente con una ragazza. Chi si sentiva attirato dal fascino di qualche fanciulla, non ardiva mai di volgerle lo sguardo in pubblico prima di spianare la strada con mezzi che allora erano consueti. Generalmente qualche amico o una persona anziana gli faceva da mediatore presso i genitori della donna desiderata. Avuto il consenso iniziale, i genitori delle due parti progettavano gli incontri dei due sposi promessi; le conversazioni amorose fra i fidanzati non sfuggivano mai lo sguardo attento di qualche persona adulta della propria famiglia. Certa-

(87) F. BORROMEO, *Relazione di Malta e suo inquisitorato in Malta Letteraria*, s.II, 1927, v.2, p.189

(88) S. SALLELLES, *De materiis tribunalium S. Inquisitionis*, prol.13, n.1.

mente, nessun padre di famiglia ha mai voluto dare la propria figlia ad una persona già legata da un vincolo matrimoniale. Con tutto ciò, qualche genitore, forse per non lasciar scappare un buon partito alla propria figlia, si lasciò trarre in inganno dall'apparente sincerità di un giovane poco conosciuto.

Dalle denunce portate davanti al *Pignatelli*, leggiamo che un Maltese aveva promesso la propria figlia ad un Italiano; ma poco dopo le nozze il marito sparì. Dopo alcune ricerche, il babbo, con grande delusione, venne a scoprire tutta la verità: "Ho maritato mia figlia con Lorenzo Granato de Isca, et essendosi absentato da quest'Isola di Malta, un anno fa in circa, con occasione di voler sapere dove fosse, mi fu detto . . . da un marinaio . . . che haveva veduto detto Lorenzo in Isca, dove haveva sua moglie" (89).

Come spesso capita anche ai giorni nostri, i genitori, non solo non permettevano che le figlie si legassero con un uomo già sposato, ma davano il consenso solo a malincuore per una unione con persone che già vivevano in stato vedovile. Fra l'altro, una mamma montò su tutte le furie quando venne a sapere che un tale l'aveva ingannata. Inoltre, ai primi giorni, lo scandalo della donna fu ancora molto più grande perchè, secondo quel che le avevano riferito, pensava di aver dato la mano della figlia ad un uomo che non era ancora libero: "Il detto Signor Honofrio haveva moglie in Terminè dalla quale haveva procreati duoi figli . . . io il tutto il dì 18 riferii al detto Signor Honofrio dicendogli che questo negozio spettava al S. Offitio, e lui mi rispose ch'era vero e che lui haveva moglie, però che fra tre mesi era morta; del che mi sono scandalizzata perchè, nel fare il matrimonio m'haveva detto che non haveva mai havuta moglie, e da che io l'ho avvertito del sunarrato non è comparso più da me" (90).

L'isola di Malta, essendo circondata tutta intorno dalle acque del mare, offriva scarse possibilità ai suoi abitanti di comunicare con gli altri popoli. Mentre le comunicazioni già si presentavano irte di difficoltà per quelli che avevano qualche posizione eminente nell'Isola, queste diventavano praticamente impossibili per la povera gente. Per il fatto che molti sostavano a Malta per ragioni di commercio, gli abusi potevano fomentarsi sempre più. Quelli che si soffermavano praticamente sapevano con certezza che pochi potessero riuscire ad avere delle notizie sicure in riferimento alla loro vita privata. Questo fatto ci spiega perchè non era molto difficile che un uomo tenesse una donna a Malta ed un'altra altrove. Naturalmente, questi uomini, i quali si lasciavano dominare dalla passione, si sposavano sempre in chiesa davanti al sacerdote. Delle volte, le povere donne rimanevano per molti anni in inganno e davanti all'autorità continuavano ad apparire come legittimamente sposate. Gli uomini, che generalmente nascondevano la loro doppia vita anche alla donna tenuta a Malta, spesso venivano scoperti da qualche compagno di viaggio. Un uomo siracusano venne denunziato al Tribunale dell'Inquisizione perchè si era sposato per ben tre volte. Il seguente è tratto dalla denuncia portata contro di lui: "Un buttarò siracusano, quale con sua moglie sta di casa nello mandraggio della Valletta . . . tiene anche

(89) A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, 29 aprile 1647, f.287r.

(90) *Ib.*, n.127, 21 aprile 1640, f.66r.

moglie viva in Xicli, e che l'havea sposato in Modica, e che n'haveva una altra moglie in Messina" (91).

Tale quale era la colpa di qualche Maltese vivente all'estero. Ma, in diverse occasioni, anche se all'inizio si lasciavano trascinare dalla passione, essi, ricordandosi del proprio dovere e della legge divina, ripararono in tempo per il male che stavano per commettere. Fra l'altro, un chirurgo Maltese s'allontanò per pochi giorni dall'Isola senza alcuna intenzione di mancare di fedeltà alla sua moglie legittima. Per caso, mentre viaggiava attraverso la città di Napoli, un nativo del posto gli offrì la mano della sorella di sua moglie per prenderla come sposa; il Maltese finse di acconsentire, non tanto per pigliar moglie quanto per poter assicurarsi di un alloggio gratuito almeno per quei pochi giorni; ma i parenti della donna, non sospettando l'inganno, già preparavano tutto per le nozze. Ecco le parole del chirurgo, il quale, pentitosi, deferì una dichiarazione spontanea del torto fatto a quella donna: "Lui mi offerse di darmi per moglie la sorella di sua moglie, si come in effetto fu fatto tra noi l'instrotione di detto matrimonio, il che io ho fatto solamente col pensiero d'accomodarmi in quel tempo sin ch'avessi trovato commodità sopra un vassello per chirurgo, e con fermo proposito di non sposare la detta giovane, si come con effetto, avendo io visto che loro trattavano già di fare li bandimenti ecclesiastici, io senza aspettare che fossero incominciati, e senza produrre testimoni che non ero accasato, poi che io ho moglie viva nella Valletta, mi partii da Napoli" (92).

Dal punto di vista della religione cattolica, le denunce fin qui riferite non suscitano delle serie obiezioni contro il senso religioso della gente. Nella maggior parte dei casi, le ragazze Maltesi non erano che delle vittime di altri che operavano con poco scrupolo di coscienza. Anche il fatto del chirurgo qui sopra riportato prova che quell'uomo si sentiva impegnato di non tradire la propria consorte.

Tuttavia, altri vincoli matrimoniali illegittimi, esaminati in se stessi sembrano molto più diffamanti per le persone iolane compromesse. Ma, se riflettiamo su i casi con tutte le circostanze mitiganti, necessariamente ci sentiamo mossi da una profonda compassione verso le stesse persone colpevoli. Trattiamo qui di persone del sesso debole, le quali, per colmo di sventura, si trovarono sole, abbandonate, senza mezzi per vivere, e senza alcun sostegno contro i pericoli sia fisici che morali.

Non di rado, lo sposo salpava per guadagnarsi il pane quotidiano su qualche galea dell'Ordine Gerosolimitano, ma non vi fece più ritorno. Dopo delle lotte crudeli e cruenti contro qualche nave musulmana, i Maltesi restarono sconfitti, imprigionati, e poi privati della libertà per il resto della vita. Da quel giorno funesto in poi, si perdeva ogni contatto con la propria famiglia; la povera moglie e i figli, senza disperarsi, ma tante volte vanamente aspettavano quella persona che per loro significava l'unico sostegno della vita, già in se stessa dura e faticosa. La donna abbandonata sopportava delle pene gravissime, sotto le quali tante volte sembrava che dovesse soccombere. Ciascuna di queste donne comprendeva molto bene che, come cristiana non poteva in nessun modo passare a seconde nozze prima di accertarsi della

(91) *Ib.*, n.117, 29 febbraio 1648, f.588r.

(92) *Ib.*, n.27, 31 gennaio 1647, f.100c.

morte del primo consorte legittimo. Mentre gli anni lentamente e angosciosamente sciupavano e logoravano la sua giovane vita, il sacrificio impostole dalla fedeltà coniugale pesava sempre più. In simili condizioni, la donna, sull'orlo della disperazione, vedendosi senza alcun barlume di speranza a causa della schiavitù perpetua, avrebbe preferito che il marito fosse morto. In quello stato di tanto sconforto, lei non viveva che di una sola speranza; lei cercava di prendere tutte le informazioni possibili per riuscire a constatare la morte del proprio marito. Nello stesso tempo, la donna temeva anche di andare troppo in fondo nelle sue indagini; in mezzo a quella vita tanto affannosa, non voleva in nessun modo sentire della sopravvivenza del marito e insieme dell'impossibilità di un suo prossimo ritorno. In questa insufficiente ricerca vada sempre considerata l'accusa di poligamia contro queste donne sventurate.

Confermiamo le nostre asserzioni con le parole di queste donne quando si recavano davanti all'Inquisitore per chiedergli il perdono e l'assoluzione. Innocenza Camilleri, alla distanza di soli due anni da un felice consorzio nuziale, vide col cuore straziato il marito strappato alle sue cure e forzato a vivere in schiavitù presso i Turchi. Possiamo dire che allora lei era ancora una ragazza perchè era appena quattordicenne. A poco a poco, i bisogni più pressanti della vita la trascinarono sempre più in basso. Essa vivacchiava disonorata di fronte a tutti i suoi conoscenti fin quando una mano amica apparentemente la sollevasse da quella condizione abietta. Infatti, trascorsi dodici anni da quando era andata a nozze, un Maltese testimoniò davanti alla corte ecclesiastica che il primo marito di quella donna fosse morto; ma non depose altro che il falso perchè quell'uomo non l'aveva mai conosciuto. L'uomo si era soltanto proposto di compiere una buona azione verso quella donna per sollevarla dalla corruzione e dalle altre sozzure mondane. In verità, la donna abbandonò la cattiva strada, sposandosi pubblicamente in chiesa "presente il Signor Don Mattheolo Zahra, quale haveva cura della detta parrocchia et multitudi di gente" (93). Il nuovo vincolo matrimoniale irregolare non ristabilì alla normalità la vita della donna perchè il nuovo consorte subito si stancò di lei e di nuovo la lasciò sola per affrontare i problemi della vita. Parecchi anni dopo, le arrivò la notizia della sopravvivenza del primo legittimo marito, e soltanto allora, dopo trent'anni, per evitare il peggio, la donna si decise di correre dall'Inquisitore e esporgli con tutta la sincerità la sua situazione: "Perchè io sono risoluta di mutar vita et servire Iddio come conviene, venni hoggi dall'Isola del Gozzo in questa isola di Malta a denuntiare il sudetto fatto per scarrico di mia conscientia senza passione alcuna" (94).

Altri casi dello stesso genere si potrebbero ancora citare. Simili casi sembrerebbero anche accusare una certa negligenza da parte dell'autorità ecclesiastica. Nonostante ciò, sia il Vescovo che l'Inquisitore non mancavano di allargare le loro ricerche anche in paesi lontani prima di dare il loro consenso per un secondo matrimonio. Senza andare troppo in fondo nei particolari, dalle lettere ufficiali esaminate, affermiamo che la Suprema Congregazione del Sant'Uffizio in Roma spesso ordinò all'Inquisitore di non terminare definitivamente le sue ricerche prima di chiedere informazioni

(93) *Ib.*, n.202, 20 maggio 1649, f.1027r.

(94) *Ib.*

dalla Francia ⁽⁹⁵⁾, da Ferrara ⁽⁹⁶⁾, da Francavilla ⁽⁹⁷⁾, e dalla Repubblica di Venezia ⁽⁹⁸⁾.

Qualche volta, da parte di queste donne, non si rintracciava colpa alcuna. Da indagini accurate, il coniuge poteva risultare, anche se erroneamente, come morto. Quando si provava la buona fede, le legge, sia civile che ecclesiastica, non poteva infliggere alcuna pena. Naturalmente quando la verità veniva a galla, delle delusioni e dei problemi forse ancora più gravi non mancavano. La donna, volendolo o no, poteva coabitare solo con il primo legittimo marito.

Dal punto di vista religioso, il comportamento di queste donne ci lascia alquanto perplessi. Quando si stipulava il contratto matrimoniale per la seconda o terza volta consecutiva, queste donne infedeli cercavano di non ricordarsi più del primo marito quando la sorte le aiutava a vivere tranquillamente e a formare una nuova famiglia. Ma i loro sforzi per dimenticare non erano altro che il rimorso della coscienza. Non c'era per loro un pensiero tanto assillante quanto quello di un improvviso ritorno del primo consorte. In tale caso, simili donne rischiavano non solo il carcere ma anche la loro reputazione davanti a tutti. Comunque, lo stato d'animo del nuovo illegittimo consorte era ancora peggiore perchè, in caso di tale svolta degli avvenimenti, lui sarebbe stato necessariamente respinto.

L'eventuale ritorno del marito dopo una affannosa schiavitù complicava ancora la situazione con altri problemi. Dopo tante sofferenze, redento dalla sua schiavitù, l'uomo giustamente sperava di poter passare felicemente il resto dei suoi giorni nella propria patria, in seno alla famiglia; ma con indescrivibile amarezza, egli subito si accorgeva che la sua presenza non fosse affatto gradita.

Le stesse deposizioni di queste donne al tribunale dell'Inquisizione non significavano un vero pentimento. Nella maggior parte dei casi, esse si affrettavano a recarsi dall'Inquisitore proprio all'ultimo istante, quando non c'era più niente da fare. Quando non si sentiva più niente del marito scomparso, esse non si preoccupavano troppo dell'incognito. Poi, quando per qualche informazione ricevuta, l'arrivo del marito si aspettava da un momento all'altro, esse preferivano di denunciarsi spontaneamente per non rischiare il pericolo di essere deferite all'autorità competente; in quest'ultimo caso, la loro sorte sarebbe stata peggiore.

Molti degli Inquisitori di Malta non imponevano altro che pene medicinali a queste donne perchè prendevano anche in considerazione i pericoli che travagliavano una donna abbandonata a se stessa. Uno dei gravissimi pericoli di allora era il fatto che restava indifesa in qualche irruente incursione dei pirati sull'isola di Malta.

Superstizioni popolari come testimonianza della fede

L'isola di Malta, nel periodo da noi considerato, pullulava di superstizioni popolari. Non desideriamo dedicare largo spazio a questo interessan-

(95) A.I.M., *Lettere*, 1, f.109r.

(96) *Ib.*, f.273r.

(97) *Ib.*, 3, f.25r.

(98) *Ib.*, 2, f.67r.

tissimo argomento ⁽⁹⁹⁾. Illustriamo soltanto come le superstizioni dell'isola in qualche modo esprimevano la religiosità della gente.

Molte pratiche magiche, introdotte specialmente da estranei, si tramandavano attraverso i secoli da una generazione all'altra. Inoltre, in un periodo quando nell'isola dimorava una grande quantità di schiavi musulmani che godevano una certa libertà, la fede nel potere occulto della magia cresceva di giorno in giorno. Nonostante questo, quando un Musulmano applicava a qualcuno una cura magica, generalmente, non si invocava nè il nome di Dio ne quello del demonio ⁽¹⁰⁰⁾.

Le persone del sesso debole cascavano assai facilmente nelle insidie di quelli che incoraggiavano e propagavano la magia. Con l'andar del tempo, parecchie donne di Malta praticavano la magia con iniziativa personale. Quando poi le cure magiche passavano fra le mani di qualche Maltese, incominciavano delle trasformazioni dello stesso atto, illecito. Un atto assolutamente pagano perdeva molto del suo significato originale con varie aggiunte di elementi religiosi. Molte donne semplici, immersi in una grave ignoranza religiosa, non immaginavano mai di agire contro la fede; specialmente quando l'intenzione era retta, esse non pensavano neanche lontanamente di poter essere accusate per aver voluto associarsi col demonio. Evocazioni e strane azioni, vietate dalla Religione Cristiana, frammischiate insieme a varie preghiere a Dio e ai Santi, divenivano assai frequenti nell'isola di Malta.

Una donna, come leggiamo da un processo, istruì un'altra come dovesse comportarsi per ottenere quel che desiderava: "La detta quondam Barbarica . . . m'accomodò il sale, e m'ha buttato le fave all'effetti da me sopra detti. Di più, la medesima Barbarica, nel detto tempo m'insegnò dire per 9 volte innante la figura di Santo Vito: "Beato Santo Vito, che fosti amico del nostro Signore, una gratia ti domandasti come fedele servitore' et altre parole delle quali non mi ricordo, inginocchione, perchè il mio amico fosse reconciliato meco" ⁽¹⁰¹⁾.

E' forse strano pensare che in quei tempi si usassero dei metodi superstitiosi anche contro il demonio medesimo: diverse persone, con la loro magia, pensavano di poterlo scacciare da qualche posto. Ci muove ancora a più grande meraviglia il fatto che le vittime di simili superstizioni non erano soltanto delle persone semplici, ma anche delle persone abbastanza istruite e che avrebbero dovuto conoscere molto bene gli insegnamenti della Fede. Fra l'altro, alcuni frati Carmelitani e un prete secolare furono denunciati per aver usato dei metodi illeciti con lo scopo di purificare una grotta dalle infestazioni del demonio. Queste persone avevano compiuto il rito con grande raccoglimento e assorti nella preghiera: "Entrassemo nella presuppota grotta del detto avvertimento, et accesa la candela delle tenebre da me portata solamente, io e li detti frati per devotione dissemo il Simbolo di S. Atanasio 'Quicumque', e poi, non havendo fatto altro se non scavato un poco in un

(99) Per uno sguardo sintetico ma completo delle superstizioni di Malta in quel periodo, vedi il nostro studio: A. BONNICI, O.F.M.Conv., *Superstitions in Malta towards the middle of the seventeenth century in the light of the Inquisition trials in Mel.Hist.*, v.4, n.3(1966), pp.145-183.

(100) Per simili casi, vedi: A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, nn.15, 44, 56, 64, 70, 71, 94, 108, 135, 194.

(101) *Ib.*, n.4, 19 dicembre 1646, f.16r.

lato della grotta, siamo usciti fuori" (102).

Considerato questo, non è da stupire se il popolo non distingueva chiaramente la Religione dalla Superstizione. Una certa Anna aveva l'usanza di dar da bere e consigliare anche agli altri dei filtri d'amore; ma lei aveva anche la ferma convinzione che in alcuni giorni la magia non poteva produrre alcun effetto. Le seguenti parole sono tratte da una denuncia contro questa persona: "Haveva acceso una candela innante la figura di S. Antonio per reconciliarsi l'amico, dicendomi che per essere quel giorno di sabbato, non servavano li sortilegii, e che bisognava dire l'*Ave Maria* et il *Pater Noster* in honore di S. Antonio" (103). Un'altra di queste povere donne, sentendosi angosciata e tormentata dal dubbio se l'amante le volesse bene, fece ricorso ai Santi e alle pratiche magiche per scoprire la verità: "Beata Santa Lena, che fosti madre di re Costantino, per la santa nave che montasti, per la santa tavola che trovasti, per la Santa Ecclesia che tu havisti, per la Santa Croce che trovasti, mostrami la verità in queste fave, se l'amico mio mi vuol bene" (104).

Nonostante ciò, non tutto si può attribuire all'ignoranza. Degli incantesimi e delle invocazioni di demoni qualche volta capitavano anche a Malta. Tuttavia, anche queste colpe dovrebbero essere attribuite alla debolezza umana. Si sapeva molto bene che le pratiche magiche fossero proibite; infatti, molte persone non si potevano difendere se non con queste parole sincere: "Io allora oppressa d'amore non ho pensato a questo ne ad altra cosa; però adesso io intendo che l'effetto doveva sperarsi dal demonio, e che Iddio non vuole le cose male" (105).

Possiamo aggiungere tanti e tanti altri casi presi da documenti autentici; ma ci bastano queste poche testimonianze per vedere il senso religioso del popolo anche in mezzo alla colpa.

Conclusione

Dopo queste brevi riflessioni sulla religione come si viveva da un popolo molto ristretto, non ci rimane altro che fare una considerazione riguardo alla fonte primaria di questo studio. Nel percorso della lettura, forse qualcuno avrebbe potuto chiedersi: 'Come mai si pretende di parlare del cristianesimo da una serie di processi?' Ammettiamo pienamente che i processi rispecchiano direttamente soltanto l'aspetto negativo della vita cristiana. In altre parole, noi dai processi riusciamo a conoscere quali fossero le imputazioni per le quali si citavano per apparire nel Sant'Uffizio, esporre il proprio caso, chiedere l'assoluzione, e sottomettersi alla pena imposta. Ma è anche vero che i processi dell'Inquisizione aprono la strada per poter scoprire tanti aspetti positivi della vita cristiana.

Fatta qualche eccezione, come abbiamo dimostrato nei casi di poligamia, resta certamente un elemento positivo che quasi tutti quelli che si resero colpevoli direttamente o indirettamente contro la fede si siano presentati spontaneamente per chiedere il perdono. In molti casi, essi erano completamente sconosciuti; nessuno li avrebbe cercati per farli condannare ma sentivano il rimorso della coscienza che poteva essere tranquillizzata

(102) *Ib.*, n.129, 22 aprile 1648, f.656r.

(103) *Ib.*, n.3, 19 dicembre 1646, f.9v.

(104) *Ib.*, n.4, 17 dicembre 1646, f.15v.

(105) *Ib.*, n.123, 24 marzo 1648, f.624v.

solo con la comparsa al Tribunale.

Anche se molti erano spesso accusati di apostasia o eresia, la colpa era quasi sempre da attribuirsi alla debolezza umana. Nella loro insufficiente istruzione, essi pensavano due bastasse conservare la religione nel proprio cuore. Citiamo un solo esempio: "Mi contentai di farmi turco estrinsecamente con pensiero di poter un giorno fuggire e tornare in christianità" (106). Altri non si sentirono mai convinti da quelli che violentemente l'avevano costretti all'apostasia; infatti, un altro dichiarò di essere "pronto di maledire la setta di Mahometto, quale sempre nel mio cuore ho tenuta 'per falsa" (107). Qualcuno, invece, non sentiva alcun odio verso la confessione maomettana; infatti, un tale viveva tranquillamente secondo la legge maomettana "havendo solamente in Algieri e non prima inteso da Christiani che i Turchi non potevano salvare l'anima loro nella loro setta, et io così ho creduto e sono pronto di maledirla con abbracciar la fede cattolica romana" (108).

A quelli che si denunziavano di eresia non passava per la mente neanche lontanamente che essi avevano errato contro la fede. Il sospetto di aver rinnegato in qualche modo la fede veniva soltanto dopo il fatto, quando delle persone le facevano constatare l'errore commesso. Per citare un fatto solo, un tale così confessò davanti all'Inquisitore: "Afferrai un crocifisso ch'era ivi pendente, e lo ridussi in pezzi, non sapendo io quel che facevo, e mia socera Catharinuzza Azzoppordo, mia socera (!), mi avverti ch'io allora dissi ch'il diavolo è più bello d'Iddio" (109).

Tutto questo è positivo e come tale lo giudicava anche lo stesso Inquisitore, il quale spesso, non vedeva alcuna ragione per istruire un processo. Nella loro semplicità, tante persone si presentavano per cose da niente, quando non c'era neanche la minima colpa. Tale era il caso di quelle persone che avevano mangiato la carne quando non c'era altro da prendere.

Le stesse pene definitive del Tribunale sono come una prova a favore della religiosità del popolo. L'Inquisitore considerava quasi tutti i casi come semplici problemi di coscienza. Abbiamo visto che quasi tutte le pene erano veramente salutari e medicinali; esse consistevano soltanto in digiuni, preghiere, e una certa frequenza ai sacramenti. Dall'altra parte, nessuno vigilava per vedere se i Maltesi adempissero o no le pene imposte. In qualche caso, essi si accusavano spontaneamente per aver trasgredito qualche particolare della sentenza.

Concludiamo dicendo che il popolo di Malta fu veramente cristiano, ma molti fra di loro erano ancora i figli della paura. Considerata la fragilità umana, essi generalmente camminavano sulla via del bene, ma piuttosto trepidavano davanti al loro Dio. Alcuni fatti considerati potrebbero farci pensare che la vita cristiana fosse soltanto in apparenza; nonostante ciò, tali conclusioni non si possono legittimamente tirare perchè non si può mai generalizzare da particolari errori gravi che si constatano. Abbiamo visto che gli stessi giudici del popolo, nelle mancanze contro la fede non avevano formato che un'ottima impressione riguardo alla sensibilità religiosa dei Maltesi.

(106) *Ib.*, n.31, 4 febbraio 1647, f.163v.

(107) *Ib.*, n.26, 31 gennaio 1647, f.136r.

(108) *Ib.*, n.39, 12 febbraio 1647, f.213v.

(109) *Ib.*, n.12, 9 gennaio 1647, f.57r.

APPENDICE

I

**Il maleficio, l'eresia e l'apostasia dalle Istruzioni date nell'anno 1663
all'Inquisitore di Malta, Mons. Galeazzo Marescotti**A.S.V., S.S. *Malta*, 186, ff. 93r-95v.

Nelle cause delle stregarie, e de' maleficii, altrettanto frequenti in Malta, quanto difficili a mettere in chiaro, non dovrà Vostra Signoria dipartirsi dalla particolare istruttione che se le dà qui aggiunta. E quantunque son sì habbia da negare che le streghe, per vigor del patto ch'elle fanno col demonio, non possano operare per mezzo de' maleficii quelle cose che naturalmente sono impossibili, contuttociò, perchè sotto i pretesi maleficii e stregarie si racchiudono illusioni et inganni rivolti a deludere le persone semplici et incaute, et a cacciar denari dalle mani de' proclivi a gli amori, a gl'odii, et all'interesse, sarà parte della prudenza di Vostra Signoria il non credere che tutto quello che si può far dal demonio sia fatto, el non discredere che in qualche parte non si sia posto in esecuzione. Dalle pruove dunque ha da dependere la vera cognitione del fatto, ma nel savio avvedimento di lei consisterà principalmente la cura di fare un diligente squitino di che peso elle siano, in qual verità o verisimilitudine restino fondate, e finalmente qual credito se gl'habbia da dare.

Sogliono nell'Isola habitar Turchi et Ebrei per occasione di mercantia. Se questi ultimi non portan alcun segno che gli distingua da Christiani, procurerà con ogni ardore che li sia fatto portare, mostrando a chi bisogna quanto importi al mantenimento della purità della fede Catholica che ogn'uno sappia con chi conversa.

Approdando pur'anco a' lidi et a porti dell'Isola navi inglesi, olandesi, del mare baltico, e d'altre parti del settentrione ripiene di marinari, di soldati, e di mercanti heretici, i quali soglion tal'ora condur seco predicanti delle lor sette, e, scesi in terra, usar' i lor'empii riti e le cene calvinistiche. Importa, perciò, molto che Vostra Signoria procuri che non si dia loro libertà di predicare, di far' adunanze, e molto meno di far l'empie cene, o di mangiar nell'isola carne e cibi vietati ne' giorni prohibiti da Santa Chiesa.

Molto maggiore avvedimento sarà necessario d'usare che da essi non si spargano libri d'heretici e perniciosi; perciochè, per istillare negl'animi de' popoli l'heresia, hanno quei perfidi costumato di andar seminando e spargendo alcune picciole operette in deriso degl'ecclesiastici, de' riti, e de' sacramenti di Santa Chiesa, e dell'auttorità pontificia.

Sarà pur anco Vostra Signoria avvertita che i Cavaglieri Francesi e Thedeschi non conducano seco servitori d'altra religione che della Catholica Romana, et havendone qualcheduno, procurerà con destrezza di reconciliarlo a Santa Chiesa, o di farlo uscire dall'Isola.

Sono frequenti le prede che si fanno in Levante et in Barbaria dalle galere della Religione, e da' vacelli che si armano nell'isola per corseggiare; onde, ben spesso accade che, fra gli schiavi che si fanno, alcuno ve n'è che si presenta spontaneamente nell'inquisitione e, narrando d'esser nato da parenti christiani, e da essi fatto battezzare in fanciullezza, o in gioventù, fatto cattivo da' Turchi, per timor della morte, o per fragilità, gl'è convenuto d'abiurare co' fatti la fede cattolica, ancorchè dentro il suo cuore

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l'habbia sempre ritenuta. Per mezzo di questa spontanea comparsa et assertione, alle volte sono stati liberati alcuni di loro dalla schiavitù. Ma, essendosi di ciò richiamata la Religione pochi anni fa dalla Sacra Congregatione, fu risoluto che somiglianti apostati, ancorchè sponte comparenti e reconciliati a Santa Chiesa, non potessero conseguire la libertà, havendola essi, per la sola apostasia, perduta.

Però è che se alcuno di essi esporrà d'esser rapito da Turchi, o venduto loro in tenera età, et allevato nella setta mahomettana, senz'esser capace di conoscere la verità della fede cattolica, in cui è nato, e con pruove riputate sufficienti verificherà la sua assertione, dovrà Vostra Signoria darne parte qua per attendere gli ordini opportuni.

Alla schiavitudine, però, non dovranno esser sottoposti i Greci Christiani, ancorchè predati sopra vascelli turcheschi, purchè eglino non habbiano combattuto contro i Christiani predatori, o apostatato della fede.

Molto meno dovranno ritenersi per forza alla catena al remo quei remigranti, che di buona voglia sono andati a servire nelle galere la Religione, perciocchè cotesto sarebbe un atto di manifesta ingiustitia ed empietà, e bastevole a provocare l'ira di Dio sopra l'isola e la Religione medesima, onde non si può nè tollerare, nè dissimulare da Nostro Signore. Dovrà dunque Vostra Signoria informarsi prima se ve ne sono, e trovandone, ancorchè fossero Christiani di Levante, Greci, Cofti, Armeni, Soriani, Caldei, o altri somiglianti, interporrà caldi ufficii per la loro liberatione, e con quelle vive ragioni che le saranno dettate dalla propria prudenza, farà in modo che si levi del tutto un così grave abuso, e non bastando i suoi ufficii, ne dia qua avviso.

II

La magia alla ricerca dell'amore, da una denunzia presso il Tribunale dell'Inquisizione di Malta

A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, f. 219r.

Die XI mensis martii 1647.

Coram Illustrissimo et Reverendissimo Domino Antonio Pignatello, Inquisitore, et assistente Domino Assessore.

Comparuit sponte personaliter Reverendus Don Philippus Bonnicus, sacerdos de civitate Victoriosa, etatis annorum 32, filius quondam Valerii, cui delato iuramento de veritate dicenda tacto pectore more sacerdotali pro exoneratione suae conscientiae denunciavit infrascripta:

Sedici anni sono in circa, a tempo ch'io dovevo havere altri 16 anni, ho trovato in terra un libretto scritto a mano, nel quale ho letto alcune ricette contro gl'armi e per esser amato, fra le quali ho letto che si prendevano le proprie ugna, e poi si mettevano a bullire nell'oglio, e che questo poi serveva per esser amato, e similmente si prendevano alcune foglie di noce, et in esse si scrivevano certe parole, delle quali non mi ricordo, col proprio sangue anche al sudetto effetto; si come, per sperimentare le dette ricette, io e Don Vincenzo Mangion, allora mio compagno nella scola, mesimo a bullire le nostre ugna nell'oglio et scrissemo col proprio sangue le parole nelle foglie di noce; però, essendosi abbrugiato l'oglio su il foco, e non havendo visto effetto alcuno delle foglie scritte, abbruggiammo il libro

e non ci siamo serviti, ne dell'una, ne dell'altra ricetta.

Interrogatus an credat vel crediderit liberam hominis voluntatem sortilegiis cogi posse:

Respondit: in quel tempo io non sapevo niente di questo; però adesso, come Cristiano, credo di no.

Interrogatus an in praescriptis sortilegiis fuerit intermixta aliqua invocatio Demonis:

Respondit: Signori, no.

Quibus habitis, fuit ei iniunctum iuramentum silentii et ut se subscribat.

FILIPPUS BONNICIUS

III

Problemi pratici di poligamia dai processi dell'Inquisizione di Malta

A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, f. 1027r.

Die XX mensis maii 1649.

Coram Reverendissimo Domino Don Pietro Francesco Pontremoli Vice-Inquisitore, assistente D. Bartholomeo Testaferrata V. J. D. pauperum Advocato.

Comparuit sponte personaliter, Innocentia, filia quondam Mariani Camilleri, Gaultitana, etatis annorum 44 circiter, cui delato iuramento le veritate dicenda prout tactis Sacrosanctis Scripturis iuravit, denuntiavit infrascripta:

Havendo io, 32 anni sono in circa, preso per marito Michaelae Sant da Casal Lia, et sposatolo nella Matrice Chiesa del Gozzo, presente il Cappellano et moltitudine di gente, detto mio marito, doppo doi anni incirca, andò in corso et fu preso schiavo, e io, trovandomi sola et abbandonata, ho preso la cattiva strada. Et, saranno dieciotto anni incirca, venne nel Gozzo un Maltese quale si chiamava Centola, già morto, e quello, o solo o in compagnia di altri, testificò nella corte ecclesiastica, però non so in quale, che detto mio marito era morto, et di la pochi giorni, detto Centuola mi disse che lui non haveva mai conosciuto detto mio marito, ma che haveva fatta quella depositione perchè io havessi potuto prender marito, et viver nel honor del mondo poichè egli era amico del quondam Antonio Vella, mio avo, si come con effetto di là a quattro anni incirca, io presi per marito Tomaso Cassar, et l'ho sposato nella chiesa parrocchiale del Rabato del Gozzo, presente il Signor Don Mattheolo Zahra, quale haveva cura della detta parrocchia, et moltitudine di gente, con il quale rimasi doi anni in circa e poi, essendosi disgustati ci siamo separati; et, fra sei mesi, vennero da schiavitù Geronimo Maltese, detto di Chimeischa, et Gioanne Cheticut, li quali dissero che detto Michele, mio primo marito, ancora sopravviveva in Scio, sopra le depositioni de' quali, io ho havuto precetto di non cohabitare ne praticare il detto Tomaso; però non so per ordine di qual tribunale, del Vescovo o della Inquisitione, si come fu eseguito: et dall'hora non l'ho mai praticato. Et perchè io son risoluta di mutar vita et servir Iddio come conviene, venni hoggi dal Isola del Gozzo in questa Isola di Malta a denuntiare il sudetto fatto per scarrico di mia conscientia senza passione alcuna.

IV

L'abiura di un Maltese, pentitosi della sua apostasia

A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, ff. 411v-412r.

Io, Andrea Muscat, figlio d'Angelo dell'Isola del Gozzo, dell'età mia d'anni 25 in circa, costituito personalmente in giudizio, et inginocchiato avanti di Vostra Signoria Illustrissima et Reverendissima Monsignor Antonio Pignatello, Inquisitore Generale di Malta et Apostolico Delegato, havendo avanti a gl'occhi miei i Sacrosanti Evangeli, quali tocco con le proprie mani, giurò che sempre ho creduto, adesso credo, e con l'aiuto di Dio crederò sempre per l'avvenire tutto quello tiene, crede, predica, et insegna la Santa Cattolica et Apostolica Romana Chiesa; ma, perchè da questo Santo Ufficio, per le cose confessate da me, nella mia spontanea comparitione e confessione fatta sotto li 17 di settembre (. . . spazio vuoto . . .) sono stato dichiarato lievemente sospetto d'apostasia dalla Santa Fede Christiana all'empia setta Mahomettana, d'essermeli col cuore adherito tenendola per buona e vera legge, credendo, se fossi morto in essa, di poter salvare l'anima mia; per tanto, volendo io levare dalla mente de' fedeli di Christo questa lieve sospitione contro di me concetta, abiuro, maledico, e detesto la detta setta Mahomettana con tutti i suoi riti e superstitioni, e generalmente ogni e qualunque altra setta, heresia, et errore che contradica alla Santa Cattolica et Apostolica Romana Chiesa.

Prometto e giuro di non incorrere mai più in questo o simili errori e di non havere familiarità o pratica con apostati, o heretici, o che siano sospetti d'apostasia o heresia, e se conoscerò alcun tale di denontiarlo a questo Santo Ufficio, o vero all'Inquisitore o Vescovo del luogo dove mi trovarò.

Giuro anco e prometto d'adempire intieramente tutte le penitenze imposte da questo Santo Ufficio, e se per l'avenire io contravenessi alle dette mie promesse e giuramenti (del che Nostro Signore mi guardi) m'obligo e sottometto a tutte le pene da Sacri Canon, Constitutioni generali e particolari contro simili delinquenti imposte e promolgate.

Così Iddio m'aiuti e questi suoi Sacrosanti Evangeli, quali tocco con le proprie mani.

Io Andrea Muscat sudetto ho abiurato, giurato, promesso, e mi sono obligato come di sopra; et in fede del vero per non saper io scrivere, ho fatto un segno della Santa Croce nella presente cedola di mia abiuratione di propria mano in Malta.

V

Una sentenza definitiva emanata dall'Inquisitore contro la violazione della legge ecclesiastica di astinenza

A.I.M., *Processi*, 61, ff. 488v-489r.

Invocato dovunque il nome di Nostro Signore Giesù Christo, della sua Gloriosissima Madre sempre Vergine Maria, e di S. Pierto Martire, nostro Protettore, nella causa e cause vertenti tra il dottor Giovanni Battista Far-

rugia, Promotore Fiscale di questo S. Ufficio da una parte, et Giovanni Battista Chichigno, sudetto reo denontiato, inquisito, et confesso, per l'altra, per questa nostra diffinitiva sentenza, quale, sedendo pro tribunali, professiamo in questi scritti, diciamo, pronontiamo, sententiamo, e dichiariamo che tu Giovanni Battista Chichigno sudetto, per le cose sudette da te confesse, ti sei reso a questo S. Ufficio lievemente sospetto d'heresia, d'haver creduto che la Santa Chiesa non possa proibire il magnar della carne in giorni a lei ben visti, e conseguentemente puoi esser incorso in tutte le censure e pene da Sacri Canon, Constitutioni generali e particolari contro simili delinquenti imposte e promolgate, e per tanto sei obligato ad abiurare la detta heresia, e generalmente ogni e qualunque altra heresia et errore che contradica alla Santa Cattolica et Apostolica Romana Chiesa nel modo e forma che da noi ti sarà data, doppo la qual abiura siamo contenti assoluti ad cathelam dalla scomunica nella quale per le cose sudette puoi esser incorso.

Et acciò che questo tuo delitto non resti totalmente impunito, e per l'avvenire sii cauto e per essemplio a gl'altri acciò s'astenghino da simili delitti, e dal Signor Iddio ottenghi più facilmente misericordia e perdono, t'imponiamo che per un mese debbi digiunare ogni venerdì e sabbato, et in un mercordi di detto mese debbi (a piedi scalzi — *parole poi cancellate*) visitare la Madonna delle Gratie di Casal Zabar, e per doi anni prossimi debbi confessarti sacramentalmente quattro volte l'anno, e di consiglio di tuo confessore communicarti nelle quattro solennità di Santa Chiesa, cioè per la Pasqua di Ressurrectione, per la Pentecoste, per l'Assontione della Beatissima Vergine, e per il Natale del Signore, e per detto tempo debbi ogni sabbato recitare la corona.

Così diciamo, pronontiamo, sententiamo, dichiariamo e penitentiamo in questo et in ogni miglior modo e forma che di ragione potiamo e doviamo. Ita pronuntiarì.

A. PIGNATELLUS,
Inquisitor et Delegatus Apostolicus.

ABBREVIAZIONI

A.I.M.	: Archivum Inquisitionis Melitensis
A.O.M.	: Archivio dell'Ordine di Malta.
A.S.I.	: Archivio Storico Italiano
A.S.V.	: Archivum Secretum Vaticanum
Bibl. Casan.	: Biblioteca Casanatense
Barb. Lat.	: Barberini Latino
Borg. Lat.	: Borgia Latino
Bibl. Naz.	: Biblioteca Nazionale
Bibl. Vat.	: Biblioteca Vaticana
Chigi Lat.	: Chigi Latino
Mel. Hist.	: Melita Historica
R.M.L.	: Royal Malta Library
S.S.	: Secretaria Status
Urb. Lat.	: Urbinato Latino
Vitt. Eman.	: Vittorio Emanuele

MALTESE FAIRY TALES

by FELIX KARLINGER

(Translated by IMOGEN TAUSSIG)

[The following is a translation of Prof. Felix Karlinger's comments on the Maltese tales included in the volume *Inselmärchen Des Mittelmeeres* edited by him and published in 1960 by Eugen Diederichs Verlag in the series "Die Märchen Der Weltliteratur Herausgegeben von Friedrich von der Leyen". The translation, which is taken from the "Concluding Remarks" on pp. 305-309 of the volume, has been kindly provided by Frau Imogen Taussig, of the Maltese-German Circle. Thanks are due to Dr. F. Damato, D.O. (Oxon), D.O.M.S. (Lond.), for drawing our attention to Prof. Karlinger's authoritative contribution to the comparative study of Maltese folk-tales — The Editor.]

Greek fairy tales form a strong link between Malta and the Turkish and Arabian areas. This is revealed in the Maltese dialect which cannot deny its Semitic origin. But also many Italian words have slipped into the vocabulary and fairy tales often bear a striking resemblance to those of Southern Italy and Sicily. In this context the fact that Malta is orientated towards the West with regard to religion — i.e. Rome is more important than Byzantium — may be of certain significance. This becomes particularly apparent in Maltese legends. Thus Malta forms a link between Roman culture of both the East and the West and has become the pivot of the entire Mediterranean area.

The main reason why "The Seven-headed Dragon" was included in this volume is its graphic and vivid description. The attractive narrative makes it easy to forget that the linking of both plots — the exchange of a sheep for a dog and the fight against the dragon assisted by animals — is probably not of local origin because two of the dogs are no longer mentioned in the second half of the fairy tale. Probably, originally all three had to perform a particular task for their master. The fact that the dragon and the dog conduct their fight in such a chivalrous manner — even of doing so in rounds — is a particularly clever move on the part of the narrator.

The next story "Leila and Keila" is a farce, popular in Asia Minor, in which the cheating of an unjust Governor is justified. Both the nomenclature, the compulsion to wear a veil, and the entire action are typically oriental.

In "The Son of the Fisherman" the princess atones for insulting her non-aristocratic husband during the wedding night. Her departure, dressed as a man in order to win back her spouse who is living abroad, is a characteristic approach which is particularly well known and popular in Romance literature of the West. In romances and ballads this theme appeared in Spanish lyrics and is also found in many folk songs.

The next fairy tale "The Prince, The Girl, The Basil And The Stars" is also akin to Italian and Spanish song poems. A clever maiden first conquers the prince by solving a riddle, then by her wise prudence, and finally gains his love.

The language of flowers may be considered as characteristic of Latin countries. The maiden places basil on her balcony and tends it with care. This signifies that she is not betrothed and would like to get married. Basil and carnation are synonymous in flower language, both being symbols of a young man, while the rose takes the place of a young girl. It is only possible to understand typical Latin love lyrics if one knows these symbols: all one has to do is to substitute "lover" for carnation and "beloved" for the rose. So, if a maiden carefully tends a flower that is the symbol of a young man she proclaims that she does not have a sweetheart. As soon as she is engaged carnations and basil disappear from her balcony. When the son of the king asks the young girl about the basil it is not actually a riddle but a question asked in jest, which the girl parries with a real puzzle.

In "The Princess Who Only Wanted to Marry the Most Handsome Prince" the clever maidens in the two previous fairy tales are succeeded by a representative of the same social class who is not only stupid but conceited into the bargain. The devil himself punishes her for her arrogance and, like the princess in "King Thrush Beard", she is drastically reformed by the ordeal and is eventually rescued by the three sons of her chambermaid. The youngest and bravest finally takes her home as his bride.

Not a demon but a good fairy cures "The Proud King" of his defects. Half fairy tale, half farce, the narrative derives its charm from its gay yet contemplative mood. It conveys a true precept without raising the pedagogic index finger in a pedantic manner as in the case of other fairy tales devoted to morality. Once again the initial phase is the betting motive, and as in fairy tale No. 15 a little sorcery helps the cause of good to triumph. In the following fairy tale a king is also cured — actually in a double sense: a stupid woman not only saves his life but also cures his bad habit of making a fool of simpletons. Here the formula is to cure by laughter. This remedy is immediately tried out twice and benefits both beast and man. But probably the farcical attitude conceals the magic spell of nudity, still greatly cherished in the beliefs of the common people of the South. The end is rather surprising, probably to establish the predominance of the farce.

In "The King Who Broke His Word" we find a fairy tale which, as far as I know, only bears resemblance to Abyssinian and West Indian tales (see Enno Littmann, *Publications of the Princeton Expedition to Abyssinia*, Leyden, Vol. 2, 1910, and *The Fire on the Mountain and Other Ethiopian Stories* by Harold Courlander and Wolf Leslau, New York, 1956). In the first narrative of this collection the king is also enlightened in a similar manner with regard to his shortcomings. The affinity of both fairy tales, down to the smallest detail, is so striking that it must be assumed that our Maltese version is akin to African tales which found their way to the Mediterranean Islands via Egypt.

In "Queen Flower of the World", the original title of which does not appear in Maltese but in Italian as *Fior del Mondo*, the queen with such a poetical name is not as would be expected, good, and the magician bad; it is just the contrary. However, the manner in which the wizard evades the snares of his enemy does not appear convincing, so that one gains the impression that the fairy tale has been passed on in a mutilated form. It is no longer possible to reconstruct the

exact original meaning. Nevertheless, the wizard is probably supported by a wise white magician, while the queen is a witch in disguise. The powers of light and darkness wage their battle in a magic land. We have purposely added this fragment of a fairy tale in order to demonstrate that even in the South, so steeped in tradition, story-tellers may suffer from lapses of memory whereby a changeling materializes.

On the other hand the next fairy tale "The Wicked Magician and the Apple" runs true to form and enlarges upon the theme. The young hero rescues his fellow prisoners who had been turned into animals and escapes on a magic horse, in reality a bewitched prince.

"The Ogress" is our witch from "Hansel and Gretel", however without a witch's powers, who merely uses the oven to roast her victims without turning them into gingerbread. Her husband shares her taste and has no magical powers either. The clever maiden outwits her adversary in the well-known manner and gives the ogress' husband her roasted enemy to eat. The farcical tone is intensified by exaggerations terminating with the witty rhyme which is difficult to translate. "Appa" is more or less the equivalent of our "hopsa", but it is impossible to render the last rhyme in German. Hardly another Maltese fairy tale exists in which food is discussed to such length. The menu alone proves that this is a Mediterranean story. Broad beans always appear in island fairy tales. This also includes a type of vetch that can be eaten unripe and raw. In Malta capers are just as common as olives and they are eaten with bread.

"The Ugly Giant" is not a monster but an enchanted prince. The theme of the maiden in the snake pit and the lion's den is typical of the East as well as of Northern Europe. On the other hand the shark episode is new to me. Possibly this is the expression of the insular mentality. As there are no wild beasts on the small island fishermen often have nightmares about man-eating sharks.

The name for "Little Pepper" in fairy tale No. 32 is "Bżara" in Maltese. It really refers to green pepper which is a popular dish on the island either roasted or fried in oil. This fairy tale was chosen as an example of narratives that form a sequence such as we find in Germany. The same type of fairy tale also exists in Sardinia, except that the dog bites the man's behind which is more in keeping with its farcical aspect.

We know the "Messengers of Death" from Grimm's fairy tales.

"The Penitent and the Devil" gives a completely unorthodox example of a sermon and the ethics are expounded in such a gay and reflective manner in order to obtain a pleasant effect. Wouldn't it be nice to induce political zealots to adopt a similar doctrine!

This narrative is immediately followed by "Blanket of Fire", a fairy tale steeped in morals. This is not a purely Christian example of a sermon because Buddhist influences are apparent. The comparison of the two fairy tales Nos. 34 and 35 was made to demonstrate how much the subject matter and structure of fairy tales and legends may vary.

With a papal legend of occidental approach we bid farewell to Malta, the island situated at the crossroads of the Eastern and Western Mediterranean region.

MALTESE LEGENDS OF THE SIBYLLA⁽¹⁾

By BERTHA ILG

Translated by VERA VENOUR

[This study, originally published by Bertha Ilg in 1914, was unknown in Malta until 1959, when I read the title *Maltesische Legenden von der Sibylla* on the fly leaf of her book *Indianermärchen* which was on display at the Book Exhibition held in Kiel during the International Congress for Folk-Narrative Research 19.8.59—24.8.59. On the 23rd September, 1959 I wrote to Frau Koessler-Ilg, who was living at San Martin de los Andes, Argentina, and asked her whether she could let me have a copy as it was not available at any library in Malta. On the 15th December, 1959 she replied: "I have no time just now to go over the chaos of old papers, but as you seem to be interested I send you the one copy left. Can you copy it and give it back to me? If I can find in the meantime another copy you may keep it. It is not a big work, only a few leaves, but I have the feeling that nobody gathered these fables, or what they are . . . I wonder if you find something interesting in the Sibylla tales! . . ." On May 6, 1960 I wrote saying: ". . . As for your *Maltesische Legenden von der Sibylla* I have had it copied and I am returning it to you with many, many thanks. . . I am sure it is an important contribution. Except for Fr. Magri, who mentions the *Sittazbrilja* motif in one of his tales, I think nobody has ever collected these fables."

Dr F. J. Damato, M.D., D.O. (Oxon.) D.O.M.S., was good enough to prepare a tentative translation from the German original and on the 23rd September, 1963 I informed Frau Koessler-Ilg that I intended to publish a translation of her Maltese Legends of the Sibylla in the "Maltese Folklore Review." She agreed to this and by 1968 a fresh translation with a view to publication had been made out by Mrs Vera Venour, of the Maltese-German Circle, through the good offices of Her Excellency Frau Wollenweber, wife of the then German Ambassador to Malta, and with the co-operation of Mr J. Pisani, at that time Chairman of the Circle, and of the Rev. J. M. Milne, M.A., B.D.

Grateful thanks are due to all who have in any way helped towards the publication of this important study. — The Editor]

1. — *Is-settisibella* or *Settusibilla*, The Wise Ruler

This beautiful woman of great wisdom lived from the time of Adam's sin to the birth of Mary, that is for exactly 4000 years and some days. She was full of confidence and had the most ambitious plans, and this was the reason: All young girls from Adam's and Eve's first daughter to the birth of Mary were ensnared and brought to fall by the Tempter so that they ended in the eternal fire. The clever *Is-settisibella* thought that only in her, the most beautiful of women, the wisest of the wise and the proudest of the proud, could the Son of the Master, who was to become man, take flesh. She could divine all things and from the beginning gave advice to the Master and prophesied what would become of this one or that one were he to be created. She was held in high esteem and her courage was so great

(1) Originally published in *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde in Berlin*, Heft I, 1914. For Legends of the Sibylla confused with the Queen of Sheba, see Bousset in *Herzog's Realencyclopaedie für Protestantische Theologie* 18, 265 (1906). R. Koehler, *Kleinere Schriften* 2, 87, 1900. W. Hertz, *Gesammelte Abhandlungen* 1905, S. 436. Kuehnau, *Schlesische Sagen* 1, 555, 617 (1910).

that she knew neither fear nor restraint. Nothing was new to her. She smiled at inventions and only said that a thousand years ago even the stupidest had known about it. "To you it is new today because of the effort it took to rediscover it. You remain small people". But she never thought about the birth of a girl destined to be the mother of the Son of God, because the Master had never withheld anything from her. She had always been privileged and claimed all honours for herself alone. In return she concerned herself with the great and small events and ruled with a firm and wise hand. She knew how to make nature bow to her wishes and also the hearts and spirits of man.

No human soul knows when the Master had created this assistant. Some of the wise hold that she has existed from the beginning of the world, others that she is one of the angels who fell with Lucifer, and yet others see in her the creature whom the Master had destined to be Adam's wife, who found her too clever and wise to be his equal when she was meant to be subject to him. The beauty of Is-settisibella never faded because she remained chaste and pure, although the times were corrupt. She had a supernatural air about her which enchanted and her wisdom was not of an earthly kind.

She was the sister of the strong Samson, the wise Solomon and the patient Job, but she was by far superior to all three in strength, wisdom and patience. She was older than they and her wisdom and other virtues were of the ages. She had been ruling for some thousands of years when the Master gave those three to her as brothers. They had a great respect for her, but feared her because she knew everything and she rather liked to start not only quarrels but also lengthy wars. For she was also a fighter and led her people under various disguises.

She was also particularly capable and learned as a doctor. One day, during the years of peace between wars, she started to write a book on Medicine, for she knew a cure for every disease. The first book dealt with the most serious inner diseases which doctors today call incurable. She described the treatment and named the important herbs. At that time nobody but her had any knowledge of these. The second book also dealt with inner diseases, but those that could be more easily recognised by outward symptoms. So she wrote books about all the ills that can afflict man until she had filled nine books. The tenth and last now was not meant for those who had some knowledge of medicine but for the ordinary people who wanted to cure their small ailments themselves. It dealt with headaches, indigestion, treatment of eyes that could not bear the light, and earache. It mentioned sprained limbs and women's complaints. For all these there was a simple treatment — hot poultices, warm drinks, scalding for fingers attacked by worm whitlow or scabies; for other ailments she advised blood letting and leeches, for stiff limbs bathing in seawater until they become supple again, for warts on the skin there was the wolf's bane (*tenghuda*). She gave the recipe for the "spiced wine", a mixture of many odd things including the blood of various animals and a number of herbs — a drink to treat shock. From her also comes the recipe of the potion of the seven mixtures, which many have found a blessing although the doctors speak against it. It consisted of seawater, soup of boiled coxcomb (common celo-

sia, amarante), cloves, yellow safran, seeds of maidenhair (capelvenerae), orange peel and red pepper (2).

Compared with the other books, though, this tenth was almost worthless; it did not deal with anything difficult. In short, the ten books contained the essence of all wisdom. The thoughtful reader could even work out from them how long a life would last or whether the life of a patient or a newly born child was worth preserving or destroying. There was written in them of love, of the power of wisdom and riches and how to obtain and to keep them. It was a learned work of such excellence that no ordinary man could ever have written it.

Now she locked the ten books in a glass case and wrote on it: "Anyone who wants to learn to be a doctor, come to me!" She placed the glass case so that passers-by could not miss it. Naturally it was seen and talked about by many. It also became widely known that this wisest of women had used in her recipes everything nature provides from worms and poisonous animals to plants and diverse waters. Everything had been explained but the knowledge was later lost and that is why we now have so many incurable and infectious diseases. But on with the story:

One day a young man came to her and wanted to know the price for the ten books. She said: "One hundred gold pieces, the large ones with my brother's seal on them." The young man laughed scornfully as it seemed too much to him. Now he was one of the richest and noblest in the country. Is-Settisibella, or as other called her, Settusibilla, replied: "Without these my books you will never attain knowledge. But a doctor without this knowledge is worth less than a donkey, for the latter can do no harm. You would do well to buy the books." But he began to haggle and to bargain. After much haggling, at last he went away and she burnt one of the books as she had threatened, the first and best one she burnt. The next day the young man came again and was surprised to see only nine books. He had taken her threat for empty words. Now he tried to bargain even more and said: "A hundred gold pieces with the Sultan's seal for ten books — for nine surely much less." But she demanded a hundred as before. Again they did not agree and angrily the young man left. So she burnt a second book, and to make a long story short, she destroyed nine books, but she never lowered the price. The young man at last bought the tenth book for this high price and behold, the important things were not in it. She ridiculed him and said: "You were a fool to hesitate to give a hundred gold pieces for the ten books. You are a fool because knowledge will never enter your head. You remain a fool because the book cannot help your foolishness. Now go and do not let the gravediggers wait too long." And she was proved right. The young man became an incapable doctor and had to pay heavily for his failures. Now the story continues:

Once it so happened that Solomon, while they were having one of their quarrels, suffered from an eye disease to such an extent that he could not

(2) The narrator, a street labourer, has an exact knowledge of most plants to be found on the island. He enjoys a certain reputation among the people as an expert of the 'old mixtures'. As he indulges a lot in quack healing and is afraid of the police, he revealed the above 'medical book' of the Is-Settisibella only very reluctantly.

bear even subdued daylight or the light from his oil lamps. An evil sup-
puration formed and he tore at his lashes in pain. He suffered greatly and
despaired like a beggar beset by dogs. But he did not want to ask his sister,
the clever Settusibella, for help, because he knew she would give it only
with mockery and scorn or not at all. So he tried all kinds of remedies.
He had herbs brought to him from far and near, he bathed the affected
parts continuously and even tried sorcerers with their magic, he, the king
and judge. But the evil got worse with every day and he lived in the con-
stant fear and terror of growing blind, helpless like a leper. So he suffered
for four whole years and almost daily he tried a new cure. Quacks and
charlatans now had free access and made fat profits. At last he saw that all
his efforts were in vain and he said to himself: "I must try to get the
remedy out of my sister by a ruse. She will not freely help me and to ask
her humbly is beneath my dignity."

So he called a large crowd of children in his city to him and told them:
"Gather together and run and skip along the streets rejoicing and shouting.
I shall reward you handsomely. Run, as if by chance, towards the palace
of my sister and there make an even louder noise. If she comes out to ask
the cause of your shouting, tell her: 'We are shouting and rejoicing be-
cause Solomon, our Sultan, is at last healed from his eye disease and can
enjoy again the light of day and of his thousand oil lamps.' Then listen
carefully what she says and tell me word for word. Your reward will be
great."

So the children, who could think of no merrier task, went along and
made an indescribable noise. When they came to the palace of Settusibella
she came out as expected wondering what it was all about (for she was of
a very inquisitive nature and had to get to the bottom of everything) and
enquired the reason for the children's merrymaking and the children an-
swered: "Our Sultan's eyes have been healed and he can see the light again.
That is why we are happy and merry." She answered: "I can well believe
it. As a clever man he will have touched his eyes only with his elbows."
The children went back and reported everything word for word. Then
Solomon struck his forehead and exclaimed: "As I thought! To touch with
the elbows means not to touch at all, so now I will give up all my cures."
From then on he only bathed his eyes by holding them open in a basin
with clean water. Soon they were clean and free from the poisonous and
suppurating tissue that had formed.

The pitiless Settusibella who herself rules over great kingdoms, lived
for a long time together with Solomon. This she did to test him and to
discover the secret powers he possessed within him. So it also came about
that Settusibella was the first cause of his downfall. He betrayed himself
to her during his hours of leisure and pleasure. For Settusibella never gave
without return and was always intent on her own advantage. She often
quarrelled and disputed with Solomon. He often got very angry because she
could always excel and outwit him. If they happened to talk about the first
parents she would ask him: "What did Eve think when she knew she
was to become a mother?" And Solomon answered: "She felt a consolation
to be so blessed." But she laughed at him and said: "Wrong. She was
in fear of herself, a fear growing to madness, so that Adam had to escape

and hide from her until her time had come." Or she asked Solomon: "Was it according to the Master's will that Eve became a mother a second time?" Solomon answered: "Certainly, he wanted to populate the earth." But Settusibella mocked him, "Wrong. You can tell by the consequence: Cain, the child of sin, conceived against the commandment of the Master, carried a curse and lived only to kill the fruit of the second sin committed on Eve. The Master would have had other ways and means to populate the earth had he so wanted." For Settusibella well knew history of old, for she had lived from the beginning and was in communication with all the spirits. She knew in whose body one of the wonderful pearls was carried and she could tell its way exactly. She herself believed that she carried a pearl within herself which probably explains her indescribable pride, for she always hoped to become the mother of her Master's Son. We will tell of this and then break off the story.

First we must say that she solved in a short time the most difficult problems which Solomon and other wise men had taken weeks and months to think up in order to confuse and shame her. And as she surpassed Solomon in wisdom she set him problems in her turn, which he was never able to solve. So there was always quarrel and strife between the two. Each wanted to play the master, and whenever Settusibella seemed to be submissive for an hour, Solomon could be certain that she planned mischief against him. But they ruled over the whole world and had great power over hearts and spirits. Solomon also believed he felt the wonderful pearl within himself and that this was the source of his inner powers.

And now we will tell where her belief that her body was blessed eventually got her.

She liked to live together with young girls. It was her pleasure to watch them grow in body and soul. She founded a kind of school. It had a different name in those days, but we will call it a school. In this school no girl could be admitted unless she was physically developed. She explained to parents who wanted their daughters admitted before their time, that spiritual growth is in relation to physical growth and that therefore she could accept for education only fully developed girls. She kept these girls, who all came from the best families, until their eighteenth year, no longer. After this age their education was completed. Mostly she had 15, sometimes 17 girls. Now there was something mysterious about this school and the pupils were sworn to silence. Further it was the custom that good families sent their daughters to the school of Settusibella before they were married, and so it happened that Mary⁽³⁾, the future Mother of God, also came to this school and had to remain there, despite her tears, which would have moved anyone, even those who have a stone in the place where the heart should be. But not Settusibella.

The mistress had introduced a particular custom. Each morning she asked the girls, who had to appear singly before her, what they had dreamed. Sometimes she would explain the dreams. But she did not do this merely to satisfy her curiosity. One girl for instance would tell her she had dreamt of a beautiful dress, another of half eaten boiled broad beans (a favourite

(3) See De Nino, *Usi e costumi abruzzesi* 4, 16; Dähnhardt, *Natursagen* 2, 263 nr. (4c)

dish of the Maltese), the third of a handsome young man, and so on. She dealt briefly with all these girls and was only intent to learn what the quiet Mary had dreamed. She seemed most concerned about this and she had a feeling as if this maid carried the pearl, that sanctifies the body, and not she, Settusibella, herself. But strangely, Mary never dreamed, which pleased the mistress so much, that she marked her out from all the others. She told herself again and again: "The conception of the Son of God will be preceded by a dream, that comes from the pearl. I myself must be the Chosen One and shall be the Beloved of the Master."

One day she again asked the quiet Mary and she told her joyfully: "I dreamt that a seed germinated in my womb, became a plant and threw out shoots, until it was a tree whose leafy branches spread out over the world, giving shade and rest." So the quiet Mary told her in all simplicity, but the mistress was beside herself with rage and frustration, and she tore out her hair which was twice the length of her body. She beat her head against the wall, bit her tongue until it bled, rolling herself on the floor like an unclean animal, uttering wild sounds as of madness.

Heaven was watching this wild fury, and because she was the greatest teacher, had lived from the beginning, and had been marked by so many favours by the Master, which made her believe she was blessed by the divine pearl, they had pity on her, and perhaps also wanted to turn her wrath away from the quiet girl Mary.

So an angel flew down to earth and said to her: "Be quiet, Lady. Whatever you demand will be granted to you, but the one desire you must renounce, to become the Mother of the Son of God. This favour cannot be granted to you, it is reserved for a pure virgin. So ask another favour."

But the great, wise lady now began a mad raging, worse than before and the angel was horrified when he saw her behaviour. Thrashing like a wild animal, and with the most degrading gestures that left nothing of her greatness, she screamed like one possessed: "I want to live in Hell forever!" At that moment a chasm opened, a yawning pit, and she plunged down into the underworld.

Since then she goes on living there as she had lived on earth. She lives and cannot die, she is doomed to remain there for eternity, because for her, who has known about the pearl and its meaning, there can be no eternal death. But she does not feel the fire and the torment that allows the damned no peace. She lives relatively happily, still reigning, if only over the Kingdom of Shadow, but still a sovereign.

But the serene and quiet Mary unknowingly prepared to become the Mother of the Saviour. Now one of those days it came to pass that Lucifer, who until then had ruled over the dominion of hell, was charged with an errand by his new mistress, the Settusibella, which he was to carry out immediately. Now hear:

Until that time no maiden had resisted him, in fact there was no virgin except the quiet Mary. All of them were fallen girls and all of them doomed to live in hell. So Lucifer resolved to tempt the quiet Mary and then to present the proud Settusibella with the proof of her fall. He took the shape of a handsome and winning young man and appeared before the serene

and beautiful Mary. With subtle flattery in his voice he said: "You fairest of the fair, there can never be a sin in submission that is freely granted, but only when forced upon you, or given frivolously and without thought. You can freely grant me a favour, a kiss. Let me kiss you. Your purity and all that is radiant and good in you will be awakened and will raise you above your companions. Nothing you do could ever overshadow your destiny, everything can only make it shine more brightly. You will understand, and this will make you receptive and prepare you. Let me be your teacher." And the quiet Mary, the only girl of her time who was not destined for Hell, said: "Do as you think right," inviting him with a movement of her hand to come closer. But hardly had he bent over her face when she, with the flat of her child's hand, hit him so hard on the back of the neck, that he gnashed his teeth loudly. The whole world heard this gnashing, it was a terrible earthquake, even the sea left its bed. Ever since the devil carries the mark of her blow on his neck, which is bruised and swollen. And so the quiet Mary fulfilled the words that were written from the day the Lord expelled Adam and Eve from the garden: 'A virgin will come who will smite your neck and crush it.'

Thus ends the story of the clever Settusibilla. The like of her will never exist again according to God's will. She had misused the Master's gifts, brought Solomon, the wise king, to a wicked end, and had incited the nations against one another. Power had not lain well in her self-willed hand, therefore the Lord and Master took it from her (4).

2. — The Wise Solomon And His Clever Sister Is-settisibilla

The wise Solomon had a sister Is-Settisibilla or Sittazbrilja (5). It often happened that the two of them teased each other with riddles. And as the clever sister always, or almost always, had the right solution, Solomon was often annoyed, and he quarrelled with her over trifles.

Once they talked about the story of Joseph, who was king in Egypt, and got to the point, when Putiphar's wife tried to seduce Joseph. So Is-Settisibilla asked her brother: "What would you have done in Putiphar's place, what would have been your judgement?" Solomon said: "The appearance was against him. And he had never heard his wife utter a lie or false words. So it was right that the coat the woman held in her hand was used as evidence." Is-Settisibilla laughed at her brother and said: "You men will never see the obvious. You base your judgement on irresolute and obscure words and yet you have the temerity to continue appearing as ruler and judge. Putiphar should have judged easily and simply by the coat which his wife held in front of him. If the coat was torn in front, Joseph must have been the attacker and guilty; if the back was torn, as

(4) The narrator, a simple, sincere man, is somewhat inclined to mysticism and likes to talk in obscure allusions. He takes his explanations very seriously. Often he comes after days to correct some point 'in order that nothing is altered or misunderstood of the old words of the forbears, which tradition has passed from son to son'.

(5) In Sicilian legends Solomon's sister is called Sapienza or Stella. (Pitrè, *Fiabe e leggende sic.* 1888 p. 127, 129).

was in fact the case (I saw it myself), then she was the attacker and guilty. But the judgement of men is like an earthenware pot, that has a sound as long as it is whole and not in fragments."

And Solomon wondered at her wisdom but would not admit it, because it had again annoyed him and he only said: "Your talk is all very well, but it reminds me of an image made of soft clay, which takes shape under one's hands by chance, and one attaches no value to it. Such a likeness may turn out to be good or bad, but it does not last and is therefore worthless. Conclusions can easily be drawn in this way."

But Is-Settisibella saw through him and answered disdainfully: "If I draw you a picture of the physical appearance of Putiphar, would you be able to draw conclusions from it as to his character and habits? This is more than a clay image." Solomon did not want to appear unsure of himself and asked her for the description. Is-Settisibella only said: "It is enough for you to know that his beard and moustache were white, though the hair on his head was dark without a streak of white. What, my clever brother, do you infer from that?"

Solomon had no sure answer to this and just answered in general phrases. And he passed as a wise and really clever man. She answered him: "Those who think a lot and work with their head, will soon have white hair and become tired. Those who eat and chew a lot and use their mouth and jaw, will soon have a white beard. So you can easily judge his character."

Another time brother and sister again discussed many important things, such as other people accept without question, right or wrong. But Is-Settisibella thought nothing unnoteworthy and accepted nothing easily as truth. She had a great ability not to allow anything to become commonplace. And they talked about Eve and her relationship with the serpent. Solomon talked about what he had heard, Is-Settisibella about what she had seen. And then they quarrelled. But at last she half convinced him against his will. She explained: "Eve was a friend of the snakes. She played with these reptiles and it was they who made her want to taste sin with Adam against the will of the Master, who had given them an appointed time. And as the wicked angel knew how close she was to the serpents and how she loved them, he took their shape and tempted her again, and she learnt corruption. But Adam knew nothing about it. The Lord and Master was angry with the unclean woman and the frivolous, blind man. He ordained that both would feel unwell at fixed times according to the phases of the moon. So it remained for a long time, until the Master changed this so that only the woman suffered this affliction, because man did not know how to cover himself decently. But this happened much, much later and only after the men also had borne children, who were without exception weak and crippled, since man had to attend to his heavy work and could not take much care of himself". So Is-Settisibella talked with Solomon and spoke many a true word.

They also talked about Cain once and Solomon had his own ideas. But Is-Settisibella knew more and told him the following, in order to show whose child he was:

Eve bore twins, first a girl whose father was Adam, then a son whose father was the serpent, or the other way round, but probably it was as I

have said. And Adam had no love for Cain, he was drawn to the girl, who was very beautiful. And the Master said: "These two children are meant for each other, they shall be man and wife and they shall found a new generation." But now it happened, that Eve again gave birth to twins, this time a son they called Abel, and a daughter. Now this son was Adam's child and the girl had the same father as Cain. Eve then had many more children, but here we will mention only these four.

The children grew up and one day Abel said to his father: "I do not like my wife, I am devoted to the one who is promised to my brother. Give her to me. Cain shall be content with my wife." Adam was very surprised at this, not knowing who the father of the other two was. He was particularly fond of Abel and Cain's sister. He went to Cain and tried to take his lovely wife away from him by force, since words and threats were in vain. Now Cain became very upset and could not contain his grief and hatred. At last he said: "We will build altars and offer sacrifice. The one whose smoke rises upward shall have the beautiful wife. If the smoke from both fires rises upward, it shall remain as it was at birth — each shall have his twin sister for a wife."

Now it happened that Eve had heard this exchange and wanted to help her favourite Cain, for she loved him dearly. She hurriedly went and poured water around Abel's sacrifice so that no flame could start. The brothers knew nothing of this. They lit their pyre, but the water which had wetted everything on the outside did not allow the fire to spread. It only burnt in the centre of the pyre and behold, the smoke rose straight to the sky, while Cain's sacrifice only blazed without smoke, or only very little from the sides. Abel rejoiced and turned homewards to possess his beautiful sister, Cain's wife. But Cain ran after him and slew him. He had seen the water around Abel's pyre.

And so great grief came over Adam and Eve.

FOLKLORE NEWS

MALTA FOLKLORE SOCIETY

In 1964 a group of folklore enthusiasts formed a Malta Folklore Society and at a general meeting held on December 21, 1964 at the Anglo-Maltese League Headquarters in Valletta, the following Committee for 1965 was elected:

Hon. Presidents:	Ant. Cremona, D.Lit. J. Cassar Pullicino, A.L.A. Charles G. Cassar, M.D.
President:	C.A. Micallef
Secretary:	J. Sammut
Treasurer:	Mro. J. Magri
Members:	Chev. J. Galea, K.M., F.S.A. M. Abela L. Azzopardi G. Cardona.

The Society's Statute spells out the objects for which the Society is established, i.e.

- (a) to preserve Maltese Folklore, to make it known and to encourage the practice of it in its traditional forms;
- (b) to promote Maltese folklore by means of lectures, broadcasts, demonstrations, publications, festivals and other like methods;
- (c) to promote and encourage research into and study of customs and traditions, and other manifestations of Maltese folk-life, the origins, development and practice of Maltese folk dances, songs, music and costume and their relationship with those of other countries.

Membership of the Society is open to all who are interested in the above, subject to approval by the Committee consisting of a Chairman, a Treasurer, a Secretary and five other members.

The Statute contains a provision whereby, in the event of the Society ceasing to function, all its effects, including money, shall be deposited with the Director of Museum to be utilized as he deems fit for the promotion of Maltese Folklore Studies.

The following were elected to form the Committee for 1971:

Hon. Presidents:	A. Cremona, D.Lit. J. Cassar Pullicino, A.L.A. Charles G. Cassar, M.D.
President:	Joe Dalli
Hon. Secretary:	Publius Borg, Dip. Educ.
Hon. Treasurer:	Paul Ascjak
Organiser of Activities:	Carmel Bonavia
Members:	M. Rose Gatt, B.A. (Hons.), B.A. (Gen.) Chev. Raffaele Bonnici Cali Charles A. Micallef Joseph Sammut.

Folk-Music Activities

Since 1965 the Society has been responsible for the organisation of the Innarja Folk-song Competition held at Buskett on the night of the 28th June. At the request of the Society the well-known Maltese composer Charles Camilleri composed **Three Popular Maltese Dances** (I — Dance of Youth, II — Carnival Dance, III — The Dance and the Kiss) which were published by J. Curwen & Sons Ltd, London, in 1967 and since then recorded on Maltadisk by Audiovision Productions, 43/15 Zachary Street, Valletta. These dances, which were composed in order to foster folk-dancing in the Maltese Islands, have been performed on various occasions. Their musical style is derived from the Maltese National dance tune known as **Il-Maltija**. The Society has also encouraged local dance groups to include the **Maltija** in their repertoire and to wear the national costume when participating in dancing competitions abroad.

Lectures

Public lectures were also held under the auspices of the Society, viz.:—

16th June, 1965	Mr Charles Camilleri	Folk-music motifs in modern composition
14th December, 1967	Mr Thomas Foster	Aspects of Maltese Folk-Art
1st February, 1967	Mr J. Cassar Pullicino	Four Centuries of Maltese Carnival
15th March, 1967	Mr John Bezzina	Good Friday Traditions, with illustrations from Malta, Sicily, and Spain
28th March, 1968	Mr J. Cassar Pullicino	Ninu Cremona Folklorist, followed by the first public showing of a film, in colour, on Ninu Cremona produced by the film unit of the Department of Information.
15th February, 1971	Mr I. Zeto	Folk-Art in America

Exhibitions

In 1971 the Society staged an exhibition of Maltese Customs at the National Museum, Valletta. Originally billed only for the period April 15—30, 1971, the exhibition proved to be so popular with Maltese and foreign visitors alike that it was extended up to and including Sunday, May 9, 1971. A report on this exhibition appears elsewhere in this issue.

An exhibition of Maltese Ex-Voto was also planned during the year. Arrangements are being made for this exhibition to be staged at the National Museum during 1974.

The Society was also invited to cooperate in organising an Ethnographic Exhibition in the University Library on the occasion of the First Congress on Mediterranean Studies of Arabo-Berber Influence which was held on April 4—7, 1972.

Other Society News

(i) In February, 1968 the Society was authorized by the Ministry of Education to hold its meetings at the National Museum and to show the same Museum as its address on letterheads.

(ii) The Malta Folklore Society is entitled to appoint a member to the Council of Din l-Art Helwa, an Association established for the purpose of preserving the historic, artistic and natural heritage of the nation.

(iii) The Society is making arrangements for the printing of a booklet containing various Maltese Legends broadcast over a number of years in the monthly folklore programme edited by Mr J. Cassar Pullicino. J.C.P.

MALTESE FOLKLORE MOVEMENT

The years 1968-70 marked an active but short-lived interest in folklore among Maltese students. This enthusiasm took concrete shape late in 1968, with the formation of the Moviment Folkloristiku Malti. The circumstances leading to the founding of the Movement were clearly explained by its founder, Mr Henry Frendo — at that time a Law student and until recently Editor of the influential Maltese daily *Il-Hajja* — in a Press Release handed out to the Press on the 4th December, 1968: "The idea of setting up a folklore movement originated on Wednesday, 13th November, following a lecture by Mr Guzé Cassar Pullicino at the Catholic Institute in the series organised by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Tourism as part of the Festival of the Arts. This lecture was illustrated with slides and films showing characteristic Maltese crafts and customs which are slowly dying out. Recordings of Maltese folk-music had also been played — folk-tunes that were really beautiful but which most of the Maltese present at the lecture had not even

heard of. Since that time I have brought together a number of students and others interested in folklore with a view to setting up this Movement. The aim of the Movement, according to its statute, is to kindle the Maltese national spirit and not to let anything destroy the traditions, the customs and other elements of our characteristic way of life."

Mr Frendo went on to explain the activities proposed to be carried out by the Movement. "To this end the Movement will . . . arouse public interest, especially among young students and awaken the national conscience so that the traditional customs of the Maltese people will not only be retained but also enhanced."

"The activities of the Movement, including the collection of folkloristic material, will range over all aspects of Maltese tradition, especially in the following fields:

- (a) Popular feasts and seasonal customs
- (b) Maltese Folk-Song and Dance
- (c) Traditional Costume, local food and folk-crafts
- (d) Folk-Tales and Popular Legends
- (e) Children's Games, Festivals and popular sayings
- (f) Beliefs and other customs of the Maltese people."

The sudden awareness of a national identity which has come to the fore since Independence in 1964 animated these youths in their activities. Mr Philip Bianchi, Secretary of the Movement, explained in a letter to the *Times of Malta* on December 19, 1968: "It has been realized that in international meetings abroad the Maltese group is usually the only one that is incapable of saying or doing anything to characterize its nationality. The Movement does not plan to limit itself to research work. Its main aim is to be dynamic, as far as possible, and to attempt to preserve and, in certain cases, promote or revive Maltese characteristics which could give the Maltese a national identity to be proud of."

Following the formation of the Movement, the writer of these notes gave a series of lectures to members of the Society and helped the Committee in formulating its programme of activities. Mr Bianchi reported in the *Times of Malta* of December 29, 1969: "With the full cooperation of its members . . . the Movement wishes to undertake field research — sending people into the villages to dig up material, take photographs, tape-record quotes and songs and look up everything in connection with our folklore . . . We intend to have permanently organized folk-singing and folk-dancing groups. Various outings were organized by the Movement last year, one of which was a conducted tour to Il-Mithna tax-Xarolla, the only restored Maltese wind-mill in existence, at Zurrieq, but which has hardly ever been visited by anyone . . ."

Very successful was the Movement's Christmas Carol group, dressed up in traditional Maltese costume, which for two years in succession, with the help and encouragement of the Government Tourist Board, toured hotels, restaurants and night clubs in Sliema and St Julian's singing typical Christmas Maltese carols. The Movement's secretary records that "it was not only the tourists who joined in humming and clapping to the beat but also the Maltese audiences themselves, people who at that moment undoubtedly remembered what their ancestors may have taught them as children, and realized that some use could be made of such intrinsic folk material."

The significance of this performance by the students is well expressed in the following letter addressed to the President of the Movement on the 26th December, 1969:

"Dear Mr Frendo,

I am delighted to have the opportunity of expressing to you, as representative of the Maltese Folklore Society, the tremendous pleasure which my husband (the Chief Justice of Bermuda) and I had from your most pleasant entertainment last evening (25 Dec.). It was particularly refreshing to us, as parents of both "ex" and current university students, that your society had taken the trouble and effort on Christmas night to entertain guests staying at the Malta Hilton — gave us a perfectly superb and well studied programme. My husband and I warmly congratulate you and your colleagues upon your sincerity and dedication. The performance which your society gave last evening must indeed be most exemplary to students throughout the world who, in many cases, are

far too concerned with demonstrations of various kinds, to appreciate the advantages of university education . . .

Yours faithfully,
(Lady) Anne Abbott."

Most of the student members of the Movement have since left the University, and with them the enthusiasm marking the activities seems to have fizzled out. We hope that future generations of students will take up where they have left off and fulfil the noble ideals of the founding members of the Movement Folkloristiku Malti.

J.C.P.

FOLK-LIFE EXHIBITS IN GOZO MUSEUM

The Gozo Museum housed at the Casa Bondi within the Citadel contains various exhibits reflecting ancient folk-life. The annual reports on the work of the Gozo Civic Council, under whose immediate jurisdiction the Gozo Museum falls, do not record the work that has gone into the formation of this modest collection of tools and household objects between 1962 and 1966, which is in large measure due to the good will shown by the Gozo Civic Council and its then President Dr A. Tabone, and to the drive and enthusiasm of the late Henry J. Fiteni, at that time Commissioner for Gozo.

Shortly before his death in May, 1969, Mr Fiteni gave me details of various items acquired by or donated to the Museum that are of interest to the student of local folk-life. On the 15th July, 1963 the following exhibits were passed to the Custodian: 1 large jar, 1 distaff (reed), 1 distaff (metal), 1 brewing bowl, 5 cotton gins, 1 old flint gun, 1 old terracotta pan (tigan), 1 cotton separator (čikk ta' l-imdaq), 1 old brass mortar and pestle (mehrież u lida). To these, on the 18th July, 1963 were added a set of 6 red copper measures from Gurdan Lighthouse, 1 red copper funnel, 1 antique wine press, 1 mule saddle, 1 hardstone base of an old wine press and 2 tapestry combs of an antique cloth loom.

On the 23rd July, 1963 the following articles collected from a Mr Portelli, of 10 Trux Street, Gharb, were placed in store in the Citadel pending transfer elsewhere: 1 loom (with accessories), 1 cotton gin, 1 plough, 1 pottery beehive, 1 antique sofa known as kanapé, 1 lace roller (mkebbba), bobbins charged with thread, 2 sacks full of cotton, and 1 cotton spinning roller.

On August 19, 1963 other items followed, including 3 antique hay forks and an old wine or olive press.

Two baked clay water storage pitchers (żir tal-fuhhar) were added on April 2, 1964 while on the 5th March, 1965 Mr Fiteni passed on the following articles which had been collected from sundry persons for exhibition in the Gozo Museum: 1 antique stone cooker (kenur), 1 large bicycle wheel (penny farthing), 1 lace pillow (trajbu) complete with lace and bobbins, 1 lace pin cushion, 1 large lace pillow (trajbu kbir) complete with collapsible stand, 1 lace mattress, 1 wooden bobbin winder, and 1 wooden linen winder (incomplete).

Other donations to the Gozo Museum, Mr Fiteni added, included a mithna tat-tgham, and a mithna tal-miexi

It is well to place on record also that one of the pioneers in this field was Mr L. Zammit Haber, of Xewkija, who, encouraged by the folklorist Father Manuel Magri, collected considerable material linked with local crafts and implements. A small part of his private collection was passed to the Museum Authorities, including two giant wooden cart wheels which he had bought from Kemmuna, 1 double plough, 1 sheep's shear (geżzież), very large and made of iron (not exhibited), a "Y"-shaped wooden instrument very rarely used for trussing straw, as well as a cotton balance (miżien) with pebb'e weights and scales made of rush work (gummar), and a wooden sieve for grain (delu) with leather chute.

Other exhibits at the Gozo Museum include firing petards (maskli), some of them dating from the days of the Order, and a set of 19th Century costumes donated by the late A. Cremona, D.L't.

It is hoped that more items illustrating ancient folk life and tradition will continue to be added to the Museum exhibits, especially if larger premises are provided to house the collection.

J.C.P.

MALTESE FOLKLORE EXHIBITION

An exhibition of old Maltese Customs was organised by the Malta Folklore Society at the National Museum between Thursday, 15th April and Sunday May 9, 1971.

The atmosphere of the exhibition was both elegant and relaxed; it was deliberately intended to make Maltese Folklore accessible to as many people as possible. The fact that it was clearly much liked by the public meant that Folklore, so utterly neglected in the past, has been popularised as a result of sustained publicity by scholars and others in the Press and on the air since the post-war period and recently through the wider mass appeal of T.V. in such locally originated programmes as *Wirt Artna*.

In his opening speech the President of the Society, Dr C. G. Cassar, stressed that "we should present to and teach our children the customs, the usages and traditions of our forefathers, especially now that we are an independent nation. For this to be achieved there must be co-operation and union between the Government, the Folklore Society, the Civic Committees and the Schools."

"It is important also that studious people like Mr Cassar Pullicino and others who have our Folklore at heart will keep up the study of the traditions of our country. It has to be these people who, through their studies, will continue the work begun by Father Emmanuel Magri, Vassallo, Busutil, Cremona, Preca and Badger. In our schools our children are taught who our Masters were and what was done during that time. Unfortunately few are those who learn what our forefathers did, how they lived, their daily work, their pastimes, their customs, their traditions, their crafts, their festivities, all of which is our inheritance."

The exhibition was given full coverage by the Press and generally elicited favourable comments. Our own reactions, which appeared in the *Sunday Times of Malta* of April 25, 1971, are here reproduced to show this Review's appreciation of the Society's initiative in holding this exhibition.

"The organisers have brought together an interesting selection of works and objects. R. Bonnici Cali's colourful paintings depicting scenes from ancient Maltese life is a veritable tour de force. The 95 pictures — about 50 more could not be shown for lack of space — range over a vast field of human activity broadly classified under five headings: Old Crafts and Occupations, Dress and Costume, Street Vendors, Parish Feasts and Seasonal Festivals, and Other Customs and Traditions. A wealth of detail has gone into the composition of the pictures.

"Scenes depicting ancient costumes are perhaps well known owing to the persistence of the craze for antiques. Many a traditional character — be he hawker or worker — springs to life again in Bonnici Cali's paintings. The weaver at his loom (*newl*), the cotton beater (*daqqaq tat-tajjar*), the female roof beaters (*il-ballata*), and the itinerant knife grinder (*sinnien*), all have their place here.

"Under Feasts and Festivals one immediately notes the connection between the greasy pole (*gostra*), a popular seaside sport, the May Pole, which declined in the years between the two World Wars, and the *Kukkanja*, a Carnival attraction introduced by Grand Master Zondadari in 1721. The official bonfire ceremony on St. John's eve under the Knights is shown side by side with the popular version of the custom which has survived to this day. One gets a fleeting glimpse of the joyful faces on the swing slung under a tree on Ascension Day (*Lapsi*), the blessing of animals on the feast of St. Anthony Abbot (January 15) and the enthusiasm and rivalry which characterise the traditional horse races on *Mnarja Day* and the 8th September Regatta.

"One could go on and describe the intricate labyrinth of popular ritual and practice — from the grief-stricken mother invoking St. Julian to restore her 'change-ling' son to health, to the significance of the divination rite which lies at the root of the *kućija* on baby's first birthday and on to guitar playing and folk singing, to love and romance, with a meaningful engagement party (*ir-rabta*) and a grand marriage ceremony — in fact, through the whole sequence of life ending with funeral customs that have gone out of fashion and a number of other usages which are still happily with us.

"It would be a great pity if these exhibits were to be dispersed among different owners, destroying the unity of purpose which inspired Mr. Bonnici Cali to undertake the work as a labour of love. Could not the authorities acquire the whole

collection for the Nation and place the paintings in one of the halls of the proposed Folk Museum at Mdina?

"A selection of unbaked clay figures representing typical early 20th Century Maltese characters is another attraction. They form part of a larger collection and are the work of one Scicluna, known as Ta' Rużarja, whose relative Mgr. Giorgio Scicluna bequeathed them to the Museum in March, 1939.

"Various other objects, some of them in glass cases, figure in this exhibition. A few pictures showing 18th century costume and lent by the Royal Malta Library supplement those by R. Bonnici Cali. There are specimens of oil lamps (fjakkli) used on feast-days, old Maltese jewel boxes, models of Maltese dghajsa and of a Gozo boat with lateen sails spread out, lace bobbins and others, much bigger and pear shaped, for making tassels, a cowrie shell (bahbuha) and other amulets against the evil eye, scissors formerly employed for trimming lampwicks. A few silver ex votos and some copper plates used for printing scapulars are of special interest for the study of devotional lore in Malta. Also on view are masons' and other work tools belonging to the Antiquities Section of the Public Works Department, a saddle cover of local manufacture lent from a private collection, some agricultural implements, spinning wheels and other items associated with the old cotton weaving industry.

"A set of old Maltese measures, primitive musical instruments, such as the drum (tanbur) and the friction drum (rabbaba), together with a life-sized mannequin dressed in genuine 18th century costume and another one showing a typical Maltese woman wearing the ghonnella or faldetta are among the National Museum's contributions to the exhibition. A miniature loom from a private collection, and previously used for making baby's swaddling bands, rounds off this survey of ancient Maltese folk-life.

"Those who attended the opening ceremony welcomed the statement by Mr. V. Castillo, Secretary at the Ministry of Education, Culture and Tourism, who deputised for his Minister, that preparations for the setting up of a Folklore Museum at Vilhena Palace, Mdina, are in an advanced stage. Mr. Castillo appealed to those present, and through them to the public at large, to come forward with donations of suitable material. May we hope that at least some of the objects kindly lent for this exhibition will be transformed into gifts and donations or permanent loans to the Folklore Museum?

"The life of our people has often been confused with that of its rulers in which it has been completely lost. Past dominations have left deep traces in the people's dress, food and play no less than in the faces and surnames of each Maltese. Hence the need of discovering the life of the humble folk and reconstructing their history through the evidence of popular literature, traditional customs and beliefs."

J.C.P.

MALTESE FOLKLORE IN FILM DOCUMENTARIES

Over the past 12 years or so there has been a welcome interest in amateur filming of Maltese documentaries with a decided folklore content or bias.

Members of the Malta Amateur Cine Circle blazed the trail with a series of 16 mm films covering (I) the bread-making process "From Corn to Bread" (II) Tunny Fishing (III) Il-Maltija — Malta's National Dance.

Since 1962 the Department of Information's Film Unit has been able to produce some excellent documentaries in which the spirit and content of Maltese seasonal customs are re-captured and presented with great gusto. Among these one may mention (i) The Blessing of Animals on the Feast of St Anthony Abbot (ii) Maltese Carnival (iii) The Good Friday Procession (iv) The Easter Sunday Procession (L-Irxox) at Cospicua and Vosa (v) L-Imnarja Festival and (vi) The 8th September National Festivities. Two other valuable productions are those dealing with (a) Maltese Festa and (b) Crafts of an Island.

The Malta Broadcasting Authority produced nine programmes on M.T.V. between October 1964 and July 1965 devoted to the dying crafts of Malta. Details of these documentaries, which included live interviews by Lawrence Mizzi with various artisans and craftsmen, are given elsewhere in this issue (p. 277). Between December

1965 and May 1966 the undersigned presented six illustrated talks on M.T.V., produced by Mr M. Spiteri on behalf of the Authority, under the general title *Drawwiet ta' Dari* (Customs of the Past). The subjects treated were: (i) Maltese Christmas (ii) Birth and Early Childhood (iii) Children's Rhymes and Games (iv) Funeral Customs and the Good Friday Tradition (v) Courting and Betrothal and (vi) Maltese Wedding.

Since January, 1970 public interest in the subject has been maintained through the fortnightly presentation of an extremely popular M.T.V. programme *Wirt Artna* (Our Heritage) co-ordinated by Charles Coleiro and Tony Parnis. Although not exclusively devoted to local folklore, one or more contributions with a folklore content is included in practically every edition. The following details are given for record purposes:—

19.1.70 The Horn (Against the Evil Eye), *Ganutell* (tinsel) with gold and silver thread, and Maltese Farmhouse — 22.7.70 Street Niches and Statues in Rabat (Gozo), Maltese Cooking Utensils — 16.2.70 The Cheese Basket — 2.3.70 The Friars' Medicine, The Washerwomen's Spring, The Faldetta, The Maltese Wall-Clock — 16.3.70 The Windmill (Part I), Holy Week Customs, The Altar of Repose at the Imdina Cathedral, The Purkan, (Woollen blanket or shawl), Explanation of the *Passju* (Passion) Game. — 30.3.70 Easter Sunday Procession — 13.4.70 The Sale of Farm Produce in the Past, Maltese Chests of Drawers, The Windmill (Part II) — 27.4.70 Fruit Baskets, Maltese Landscape (photographic study), The *Vedette*, Popular Cures of the Past, Edward Caruana Dingli (Characters and Sketches from Maltese Life) — 11.5.70 Songs by Mikiel Abela (il-Bambinu) — 8.6.70 Old Method of Roof Construction, The Making of Nougat, Boats with Lateen Sails — 22.6.70 Field Irrigation, The Game of Bowls, The *Imnarja* Horse-races — 5.10.70 The Regatta, Balconies in Valletta, Angling from the Cliffs — 19.10.70 Maltese Ex-Votos — 2.11.70 Old Maltese Funeral Carriage — 16.11.70 St Martin's Day, The Monti (Jewish) Fair, Lampuki Fishing — 30.11.70 Bird Trapping, The Hunter's Bag — 14.12.70 The Midnight Sermon on Christmas Eve — 28.12.71 Maltese Christmas Folklore, New Year Customs, The Crib — 11.1.71 Bell Ringing — 22.2.71 Carnival in Bygone Days, Maltese Women's Fashion, The Maltese Country-dance, Maltese Folksongs (with songs on villages, festas, rivalry and love) — 8.3.71 The Maltese Cab (including interview with Censu Friggieri), People's Sunday — 22.3.71 Street Niches, Good Friday Statuary Groups — 5.4.71 Funeral Customs of the Past, Good Friday Customs — 19.4.71 Cane Work, The Blessing of Homes at Easter Time — 3.5.71 The Wheelwright — 17.5.71 Making Merry (on traditional seasonal feasts: Assumption Day etc.) — 30.5.71 Maltese Door-Knocker — 14.6.71 Kite Flying, Customs on St John's Day — 28.6.71 The *Imnarja* Festival, Street Vendors — 11.10.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part I), The Threshing Floor — 25.10.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part II), Songs of Love — 8.11.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part III), Drying of Fruit and Vegetables on the Roof — 22.11.71 Courting and Marriage Customs (Part IV), Gozo Lace.

For four years in succession M.T.V. has participated in the Golden Harp Folk-Film Festival held annually in Dublin, Ireland. The entries dealt with (i) Maltese Festa (6 days of a Maltese Festa) (ii) The Windmill (iii) An Eye to Reckon With (The Evil eye in Malta) (iv) *Pizzi Pizzi Kanna* (Maltese children's games). The research for (i), (iii) and (iv) was carried out by John Bezzina, that for (ii) by Charles Abela Mizzi. In 1970 Malta succeeded in tying with Russia for Third prize, while in 1971 she was awarded the Third prize and the Bronze Harp.

In 1968 Australian Television produced a 1-hour programme on Maltese rural life entitled *Two Trumpets for St. Andrew*. The documentary, which was shot on location at Luqa, presented a cross-section of village life, with its variegated under-currents — centring on band club rivalry, social classes, festa-partiti, family events such as marriage, funerals, etc., and party political allegiance — held together by a unity of purpose that inspires communal effort in organising the yearly festivities in honour of the patron saint of the village. Although the film has not been released in Malta it has been shown on Intertel in Australia, Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom.

BOOK REVIEWS

JEREMY F. BOISSEVAIN, *Hal Farruġ: A Village in Malta*. Holt, Rinehart and Winston (New York). 1969. 104 p. Illustrated. (Case Studies in Cultural Anthropology).

The author of this book, a former Chief of CARE Mission in Malta during 1957 and 1958, is well known to a wide circle of Maltese in all walks of life. Like his previous monograph *Saints and Fireworks: Religion and Politics in Rural Malta*, on which he occasionally draws for material, the present work is based on research carried out in Malta between July, 1960 and September, 1961 under a grant from the Colonial Social Science Research Council. It was first presented as a course of lectures to first and second-year students at the University of Amsterdam during the 1967 spring term.

Professor Boissevain gives us a study of a typical Maltese village whose name, like the names of the persons and saints who figure in this account, has been changed to protect the privacy of its people.

In the author's words, the case study "examines the way in which Maltese in general and the people of Farruġ in particular earn their living. It moves on to look at the family, the wider network of relations, and the way in which new kinsmen are acquired through marriage, which is viewed as a game of strategy. The social distinctions that the apparently egalitarian people of Farruġ use to set themselves apart from each other are also examined. The focus then shifts to the role of religion and Church in the village. After examining the religious and secular groups and institutions which give a certain structural form to the village, the conflict between the partisans of rival saints, band clubs and political factions in the village is discussed. A final chapter deals with the way Farruġ is connected with and forms part of the nation as a whole and the important part individuals play in the process."

Dr. Boissevain studies the small village community of Farruġ sympathetically. Parish events, festivities and politics are subjected to a rigorous anthropological analysis in which unimpeachable academic standards are linked with an urgent contemporary concern. He illustrates this analysis by statistical and other material collected from individuals and families or after on-the-spot observation of social, political and religious events. The result of this investigation is a realistic picture, replete with detail and bubbling with activity as we watch the interplay between atavistic forces and survivals, traditional outlooks, an accepted body of custom and new arrivals or additions to the scene of popular ritual and belief in Farruġ.

The study on the social position of the Church in Malta — the role it occupies in the family, and in economic, social and political areas, is fascinating. Equally noteworthy are the chapters on the Process of Marriage and the Sources of Prestige. The underlying motives of patronage, both at the religious and socio-political levels, are cleverly identified and exposed. It is difficult, however, to single out any particular aspect of the study without upsetting the correct balance which the author has wisely preserved in his treatment of the subject.

During various periods of residence in Malta, Dr. Boissevain has made a special study of local feasts. In *Saints and Fireworks* he examined the importance of the cult of saints and the bitter rivalry between *festa partiti*, with vivid descriptions of village festive life. In *Hal Farruġ* he has carried his analysis of conflicts and factions further so as to include an assessment of the effect which deep-going divided loyalties and ideological cleavage are exerting on the structure of the Maltese village *festa*. The façade of this institution's fabric is impressive enough: the parish feasts not only continue but they are sometimes bigger, more crowded and noisier than ever, for there is more money in circulation, and transportation is continuously improving. But the bangs and flashes of the yearly fireworks are apt to blind the superficial spectator to the realities of the situation, and divert his attention away from the visible chinks in the armour.

Dr. Boissevain is right in pointing out some aspects of the change that is going on. There are fewer people actively participating in the game of *festa partiti* as a result of the intrusion of national politics into the traditional area of parish politics. There is also a more general trend toward secularisation: the con-

fraternities, which provide the corporate centres for the competing groups of saintly partisans, are slowly dying. Emigration and other factors have dealt a severe blow to the band clubs — the focal point for all village activity — and few clubs are now able to muster a local contingent of bandmen so that they have to rely on hired musicians from outside the village. The Ecclesiastical Authorities, on their part, have been determined for many years to put an end to festa rivalry by reducing secondary feasts and eliminating the secondary *partiti*. These and other factors are slowly but surely gnawing at the very roots of the Maltese parish festa.

The useful list of "Recommended Reading" for the Cultural Area shows that the Mediterranean has recently begun to attract the attention of anthropologists, one reason being, according to the author, that "anthropologists are coming to realise that anthropology is the study of all mankind, not just of primitive, peasant or non-Western man". In a special sense, therefore, the case study under review is of interest to those particularly concerned with Mediterranean studies. It provides an example of a Mediterranean society, however small, which has adapted to its own use many traits and characteristics taken over from the Christian and Moslem traditions with which these islands have been in contact over the centuries.

One serious omission in this otherwise scholarly publication is the lack of an analytical index. Presentation is lucid but never simplistic, and it should combat any tendency there might be to dismiss such studies as academic exercises in which familiar things are discussed in unfamiliar language. Although its special value will be for anthropologists, sociologists, folklorists and the like, it is scarcely less useful to the general reader interested in the development of seven-year-old independent Malta, where "the encapsulated rural village is being absorbed into the nation".

J.C.P.

GUZE GALEA, *Xoghol u Snajja' ta' l-Imghoddi*. Department of Information, 1969. 198 p. Price 5/-.

This is a book about dead or dying arts and crafts. In his Foreword the author explains that "the crafts and occupations mentioned in this book are those that have now died out or that are in the process of going out of existence; therefore I have left out various crafts, such as weaving or pottery, because although they are admittedly old, they are still going strong and providing employment for many people". There has indeed been a revival of some Maltese craft industries, but the inclusion of these two particular crafts would not have been out of place considering that (a) in the case of weaving, a whole chapter has been devoted to the related work of cotton spinning and beating, etc. and (b) in the case of pottery, only one potter (Peter the Potter) is known to survive who works at the potter's wheel in the traditional manner.

Be that as it may, this is a very useful publication which was originally issued serially in *Ir-Review* between 13th January and 17th August, 1968. The scope and merits of the book were clearly brought out in my introduction to this work, from which I reproduce the following paragraphs to complete this review of Dr Galea's book:

"They are crafts and callings that inevitably had to die out with the economic and industrial changes taking place in our island. Fortunately they are still very much alive in people's memory, both those that were linked with customs associated with particular feasts, traditional techniques of building, or the use of old vehicles and those other indoor occupations that have now disappeared from the scene of Maltese life. It is all the more fitting, therefore, that we should have in one book, information on the tools they used, the technical jargon employed within the crafts, together with details of the working processes, which crafts employed only males, and which others were also open to the womenfolk, and other data which will in time prove invaluable in filling in the blanks in our knowledge of the social history of the Maltese people.

"No one was perhaps better equipped for this work than Professor Joseph Galea, well-known as a prose writer and novelist, who in various writings and studies in Maltese or in English had already shown his interest in the old crafts and the

popular arts of the past and had given us vivid descriptions of traditional and typically Maltese characters both in his novels *San Gwann*, *Raġel bil-Ghaqal* and *Meta Nharaq it-Teatru* and in his article on *The Old Flour Mills of Malta and Gozo* in "Maltese Folklore Review" (Vol. 1, No. 2).

"In these writings Guzé Galea records and saves from oblivion the work connected with various crafts about which he has patiently collected much useful information. We see the unfolding picture of people inside their homes, in their fields or at their place of work, toiling steadily to earn their livelihood, or else indulging in their favourite pastime in far off days that are now well outside living memory. For this alone, not to mention the literary merits of the book, the author deserves the thanks of all who cherish the memory of what has been, as a living document that speaks to us and makes us appreciate the work and diligence of our people in the past".

J.C.P.

ANTON F. ATTARD, *Loghob folkloristiku ta' Ghawdex*, Union Press, 1969. 104 p.

We reproduce hereunder a translation of the preface which the editor of this Review wrote in appreciation of Mr Attard's positive contribution to a long-neglected aspect of Maltese Folklore.

"This collection of traditional games from Gozo could not have appeared at a more appropriate time. In the first place this was the most neglected branch in the study of the folklore of childhood in these islands, and in the second place, the practice of these traditional children's games had not only greatly degenerated in Malta but had also become grossly contaminated in the course of the past 30 years or so by foreign motifs and influences, mostly British, whilst in Gozo it had been better preserved as a living link with the life of once upon a time. It was therefore fitting that the first appreciable collection in this field should come from the island of Gozo.

"With the material brought together with such loving care by Mr Attard, it should be easier now to compare these Gozitan games with the ones we remember from our childhood days or that are known to have survived in Malta. We should also be able to determine the extent of the similarities between the two islands in this field, establish in which areas they supplement one another, and at the same time assess the importance of the games that are here presented against the wider framework of the social life of our people in the past. It is common knowledge that, as one may see from the present material from Gozo, such games were not always played exclusively by children but at one time belonged to grown-ups as well. Besides, the connection between many of these games and the critical historical events through which our forefathers lived emerges clearly from the motifs that one repeatedly finds in several of games — motifs like the 'prison' in the game known as *Salva* or the 'town' in the games *Tal-Ghuda* or *Gwerra Franċiża* — to mention but two games. One can easily see how these games are derived from the events of the past.

"Although the traditional games have been better preserved in Gozo, Mr Attard expresses his concern that "unfortunately many of the Gozitan games are no longer played, while various other games have only survived in parts". The wind of change has not spared the lore of childhood and it would be a shame were we to let it affect unduly the nature of our games, both in Malta and in Gozo. Not all change is a sign of progress; and we should not run away with the idea that a game is played better if we use the English word 'cat' instead of Maltese 'qattus'!

"On the other hand, it is well to remember that certain English words that crept in long ago into the game vocabulary have now become part and parcel of our tradition, e.g. the names of the games "Master", "Games", "Gakk" (Jack) or *Gardinaw* (guard in out). Whilst on this subject one might as well mention that much of the importance of Attard's work lies in the fact that he has recorded from living tradition the words and expressions used by children at their play. We believe that some game-names from Gozo have no counterpart in Malta; they are either archaic, obsolescent words or unusual grammatical forms e.g. *Qriba*, *Bzejqa*, *Brilli*, *Qabbuż*, *Tektikija*, *Trajjos*, *Irkieni* and *Haliba*.

"For about a year before publishing this book, Mr Attard had been taking an intelligent interest in folklore. In the present work we see that he has also drawn on his experience as a school teacher in the primary schools and, as far as possible, he has classified the material according to the objects used for playing — games with almonds, pen games, button games, etc. This should prove of great help both to the general reader and to those who wish to compare local games with those of other countries.

"Earlier on we have said that this is the first appreciable collection of traditional games in these islands. Such other details as can be gleaned from the older Maltese dictionaries from De Soldanis to Falzon may be useful to record the names or words used in certain games, but would tell us nothing about the manner of playing the games. Vzo. Busuttill had sent a description of ten (10) games to the great Sicilian folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè who eventually published it in his *Archivio per le Tradizioni Popolari* (Vol. XVII, 1898). As Mr Attard explains, others may now add to and complete his collection. In this way, it may yet be possible to compile one vast repertory of the traditional games of Malta and Gozo, and also to study the material in detail and compare it with that of other peoples with whom we have come in contact through the ages.

"While we congratulate Mr Attard on his work and encourage him to continue his researches, we would like to conclude by saying that enough information is given under each game to enable anyone to use this book in organising Maltese games as an activity for children both in the Government schools and in private or other institutions instead of limiting this activity to the games of other countries. In this way we may yet manage to preserve this part of our heritage and bring up the younger generation in a truly Maltese tradition in so far as games are concerned. This is as it should be in a country that has only recently achieved independence."

J.C.P.

Inselmärchen des Mittelmeeres, Herausgegeben von Felix Karlinger. Dusseldorf — Köln, Eugen Diederichs, 1960. 336 p.

This volume in the series "Die Märchen der Weltliteratur" published under the general editorship of Friedrich von der Leyen is of special interest to the study of Maltese folk-narrative. The 74 tales included in this book make up a representative selection of stories from the islands of the Mediterranean region, which is here considered as a geographical unit worthy of separate attention. Malta is represented by 18 tales (nos 19-36) selected from the collections by Bertha Ilg, *Maltesische Märchen und Schwänke* (2 Bde. Leipzig, 1906/07) and by Hans Stumme, *Maltesische Märchen* (2 Bde; Märchen im Original und in Übersetzung, Leipzig, 1904). An equal number is devoted to the Greek islands, made up as follows: Cyprus 5, Rhodes 1, Lesbos 3, Karpathos 2, Crete 3, Thera 2, Syros 1 and Eubœa 2. There are 16 other stories from Sicily, 6 from Sardinia, 7 from Corsica and 9 from the Balearics.

The numerical allocation of tales in this collection shows that considerable importance has been given to the material from Malta. This is also borne out by the careful study, evaluation and comparison of the Maltese tales made by Prof. Karlinger in his Nachwort, which is reproduced elsewhere in this issue (pp. 336-338). A select bibliography at the end enhances the value of this publication.

Of the 18 Maltese tales, 15 were selected from Ilg's published collection. However, the following extracts from letters addressed by her to the writer of this review show that she expected the selection to include also some of her unpublished material.

On the 15th December, 1959 she wrote "... my Editor Diederichs... will publish in a few months a book called "Inselmärchen". It contains a part of my *Maltese Fables*... A very nice collection, issued by the celebrated Prof. von der Leyen... One day, looking for a certain ms. I found a small bundle of Maltese fables, unprinted, unpublished, but in German. So I sent them to Prof. v. d. Leyen and he took, I suppose, some of these works for the *Inselmärchen*. Very good tales, perhaps the best ones I gathered..."

On the 12th July, 1960 she referred once more to this publication and said: "... in the book (*Inselmärchen*), which you will get if I can make it possible, there are part of my Maltese fables... I am not sure if the fables contained in the *Inselmärchen* are taken out of the books you have (i.e. *Maltesische Märchen und Schwänke*). After having closed (sic) the two books for the printers, I went on to collect and I sent these remains, too, to the dear

old Professor. He is, so he is considered, the greatest folklorist of today; wrote beautiful things..."

On the 7th September, 1960 she expressed some concern at the delay in publication: "... I am upset; the *Inselmärchen* must be ready by now and he (Prof. von der Leyen) retains yet my works. He is 86." However, on October 20, 1960 I wrote to her saying. "Last week I received a 'recensionsexemplar' of the *Inselmärchen des Mittelmeeres* from the publishers.

The unpublished stories to which Frau Koessler-Ilg refers in her above-quoted letters are now in my possession and it may yet be possible to have them published in accordance with her wishes.

The annotations and indications of sources (pp. 325-329) constitute, in themselves, a valuable contribution to the comparative study of Maltese folklore, especially where reference is made to BP (Johannes Bolte und Georg Polivka: *Ammerkung zu den Kinder-und Hausmärchen der Brüder Grimm*. 5 Bde., Leipzig, 1913-32) and Aarne (Antti Aarne: *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen*, FFC 3, 1910). These annotations are here reproduced, with the addition in square brackets of an English translation after the title in German, for the benefit of such of our readers as may not have ready access to this publication:

19. Der siebenköpfige Drache [The Seven-headed Dragon] (Stumme Nr. 34) — BP I, 548; II, 451 und 503. — Aarne 304 — s.a. "Drache" in "Handwörterbuch des dt. Aberglaubens", Berlin 1929.

20. Der Fischersohn [The Fisherman's Son] (Stumme Nr. II) — BP III, 94.

21. Leila und Keila [Leila and Keila] (Stumme Nr. 8) — vgl. Gluck, "Le Cadi dupe".

22. Der Prinz, das Mädchen, das Basilikum und die Sterne [The Prince, the Maid, the Basil and the Stars] (Ilg Nr. 3) — BP I, 188; II 503. — Aarne 304, 570, 851. — Llano Roza de Ampudias: *Cuentos asturianos*, Madrid 1925, Nr. 4, 132, 133, auch Espinosa.

23. Die kluge Königstochter [The King's Clever Daughter] (Ilg Nr. 10) — Leyen II, 162 und 245.

24. Die Prinzessin, die nur den allerschönsten Prinzen heiraten wollte [The Princess who wanted to marry the handsomest of all Princes] (Ilg Nr. 11) — BP I, 443 — Ernst Philippson: *Der Märchentypus von König Drosselbart*. Greifswald 1923.

25. Der stolze König [The Proud King] (Ilg Nr. 5) — Aarne 1620 — Andersen: *Des Kaisers neue Kleider*, kann nur bedingt als Parallele gelten.

26. Die Frau, die den kranken König heilte [The Woman who healed the sick King] (Ilg Nr. 21) — s. unter "Nacktheit" in "Handwörterbuch des dt. Aberglaubens".

27. Der König, der sein Wort brach [The King who broke his word] (Ilg Nr. 20 — s. unser Nachwort S. 307.

28. Königin Weltblume und der Zauberer [Queen "World Flower" and the Magician] (Ilg Nr. 17).

29. Der böse Zauberer und der Apfel [The Wicked Magician and the Apple] (Ilg Nr. 14) — BP I, 45, 98, 544; II, 134, 274, 340; III, 18.

30. Die Menschenfresserin [The Female Cannibal] (Ilg Nr. 42) — BP I, 115, 126, 498, IV, 272. — Aarne 327.

31. Der höfliche Riese [The Polite Giant] (Ilg Nr. 41) (bei Ilg im Titel fälschlich "Der höfliche Riese") — Seitenstück "Frau Holle" — BP I, 215.

32. Pfefferchen [Little Pepper] (Ilg Nr. 47) — Martti Haavio: *Kettenmärchenstudien*, FFC 89 und 92.

33. Der Tod und seine Gesandten [Death and his Messengers] (Ilg Nr. 54) — BP II, 293.

34. Die Beichtende und der Teufel [The Penitent and the Devil] (Ilg Nr. 57).

35. Die Feuerdecke [Blanket of fire] (Ilg Nr. 44) — Ähnliche Moralia in: Jacob Schmid, "Kleine Bauernlegend oder Heiliger Hirten und Bauern Leben...", 3 Teile, Constantz 1734.

36. Der König und sein Sohn, der Papst wurde [The King and his Son who became Pope] (Ilg Nr. 19) — Schicksalsmärchen. BP I, 324; III, 305 — Aarne 930-949.

J.C.P.

J. BEZZINA, San Ġorġ Dejġem Harisna: *Studju Storiku-Folkloristiku*. Empire Press, 1971. 32 p.

This survey of the popular cult of St George in Malta originally appeared in the Maltese daily *Il-Hajja* between July 19—23, 1971. In the author's words, it sets out "to give information about streets and localities in Malta named after St George and to show, from the mass of evidence thus brought together, that from the earliest times St George was one of the patron saints of Malta and that he always protected our island . . ."

The study under review shows how the special devotion towards St George which the Knights brought with them from Rhodes was grafted on to a much older and stronger native cult dating probably from early medieval times. The author puts forward the hypothesis that "although we do not know when the first chapels in honour of this Saint were built, we believe that with the coming of Count Roger their number increased and at the same time the popular cult grew; then when the Crusaders returning from Palestine began to recount the wonderful stories about St George which were current in those lands, the devotion towards the megalomartyr of Cappadocia spread throughout the whole of Europe and to Malta." Although this sounds plausible enough, more spade-work is still necessary to bolster the theory.

Duzina's Apostolic Visit of 1575 has yielded much valuable information regarding the extent of the Georgian cults surviving in 16th C. Malta. By a judicious use of this source material Bezzina has been able to correlate the localities of the rural chapels and other small churches dedicated to the saint that were visited by Duzina with those of important natural defence posts under the charge of the Dejma. It is thus possible to trace the main lines of the pre-16th C. cult along three different lines: (i) from Marsa and Qormi, Gebel Ciantar, Ghar Lapsi, Ghajn Lok (Fawwara), Zebbuġ to Rabat (ii) from Zurrieq to Birmiftuh, Zejtun, Ghaxaq, and Birzebbuġa, (iii) from Birgu and Cospicua, on to Valletta, Gżira, B'Kara, St Julian's, Gharghur, Naxxar, Mosta, Wardija and Mellieħa.

The note on the procession which originally took place on Ascension Day (Lapsi) from Zurrieq to St George's church at Birzebbuġa and which later was transferred to other dates of the calendar in different parishes makes most interesting reading. This fruitful line of research was already tried out successfully in the author's article *L-Ghar tal-Virtut u L-Ewwel Insara f'Malta* (The Cave at Virtut and the Early Christians in Malta) which was likewise approached from the historical and folkloristic angles. (See *Telestar u Il-Berqa* of 7 January, 1970).

The scope of the present study is limited to the manifestation of the Georgian cult in Malta. For a supplementary account of the early cult of St George in the island of Gozo the reader has to dig up Mr Bezzina's article entitled *San Gorġ ta' Ghawdex — Qabel u Matul il-Hakma Gharbija* (St George of Gozo — Before and During the Arab Domination) published in *Il-Berqa* of the 13th July, 1962.

All in all, this pamphlet is a commendable piece of diligent work which should stimulate others to illustrate more hitherto unknown aspects of the popular cult of medieval saints in these islands.

J.C.P.

A. CREMONA, *Folklore Maltese*, estratto dalla rivista "Folklore", n. 1-2, IX Annata, 1954, Napoli, pp. 24.

IDEM, *Le relazioni etnografiche del folklore narrativo e leggendario delle isole di Malta*, estratto dalla rivista "Maltese Folklore Review", Vol. 1, n. 1-3, 1962-66, pp. 46.

Dr. A. Cremona, who is a well-known grammarian, has also for a long time been an established Maltese writer of prose, verse and drama. What is not so well known is that he had for many years also been in the forefront of Maltese folklore studies. In his short stories and sketches, in some of his poems, e.g. *Saħħara* (Witch), and above all in his play *Fidwa tal-Bdiewa* (The Peasants' Ransom), he conjures up pictures of Maltese life replete with folkloristic detail. However, our aim here is to concentrate on these two studies, which reflect the mature judgement of a veteran in this field.

In the 24 pages of *Folklore Maltese* Cremona surveys the field of Maltese folklore and gives information on the main motifs and principal constituent elements of the subject. In so doing he charts out for future students the broad lines for a comparative study of local customs and beliefs, emphasizing the inter-relationship between Language and Folklore in Malta — a subject with which he himself dealt at length in 1939 in a lecture to the *Għaqda tal-Malki* (Università) which was published in 1944.

Cremona's interest in local traditions and beliefs dates back to the early twenties. His more important studies are: *Race, Language and Myth* ("Melita", Vol. 1, 1921, pp. 394-405); *Maltese Funeral Customs* ("Melita", Vol. II, 1922, pp. 249-259). *Some Myths and Beliefs in Maltese Folklore* ("Melita", Vol. III, 1923, pp. 111-120); *Weather and Husbandry Lore in the Isles of Malta* ("Archivum Melitense", Vol. VI, 1922, pp. 1-32); *Maltese Death, Mourning and Funeral Customs* ("Folk-Lore" (London) 1923, pp. 352-357; reprinted in this issue pp. 301-304); *Is the Maid of Malta a Myth?* (Offprint from "Journal

of the Malta University Literary Society", 1934, 8p.) *Folklore u Lsien Malta* (Folklore and Language in Malta) (offprint from "Lehen il-Malti", 1944, 20p.) and *Fdal u Qwiel Qodma fil-Ħrofa ta' Jannar, Frar u Marzu* (in "Il-Malti" 1950).

By and large, the conclusions reached by Cremona over a period of more than 34 years appear in condensed form in the study under review, written in Italian for an international journal that has since ceased publication with the demise of its editor, the late Prof. Raffaele Corso. In fact *Folklore Maltese* may be considered as a synthesis of Cremona's views on the nature and origin of Maltese folklore. Above all, one is impressed by his balanced statements and mature judgement — the fruit of long and patient study — no less than by illuminating comparisons with the material from other countries that was available to him.

The main aspects of folklore touched upon in this study are: mythology (with notes on *il-Ħāres*, *il-Gawgaw*, *l-Għafriid*, *il-Belliegħa*, etc.), exorcisms (*M. Kliem ir-Riqi*) on which he contributed a note in *Il-Malti* in 1931, superstition (e.g. evil eye), weather and husbandry proverbs, marriage and death customs, feasts, old fairs, folk-tales, children's games, male and female costume. This is by no means the whole field of Maltese folklore; such topics as popular legends, folk-song and dance, ancient crafts, folk-prayers, traditional food, old farmhouse constructions, popular art (e.g. ex-votos) could easily have been added. However, in a survey of this nature it is difficult to deal adequately with the subject within the limits set by the size of the periodical. Besides, the present study was originally written before the War, entitled *Mito, Lingua e Razza a Malta*, at a time when it was intended to publish in Italy a historico-literary periodical devoted to Malta — an idea which eventually came to naught. So many additions were made to the original study that the author had to give it a fresh title with a wider connotation.

Mythology and costume are well covered. As regards agriculture one is struck by the way in which Cremona managed to string together various threads of information to establish valid comparisons with Sicilian folklore. The same may be said of similarities that are noticeable in marriage and death customs and in popular feasts.

Folk-narrative presents more difficulties and Cremona feels the need of a more detailed and comparative treatment. He writes: "*Uno studio comparativo fra queste favole e quelle continentali, fra cui particolarmente della Sicilia e dell'Italia, rivela non dubbie analogie non solo nello scheletro del tema ma ancora nei particolari, quantunque la favola maltese è riguardata dal Magri di una natura caratteristicamente locale e di origine fenicia o preferencia.*"

The author returns to this theme and deals with it at greater length in his other study *Le relazioni etnografiche del folklore narrativo e leggendario delle isole di Malta*. Cremona here expounds more fully his views on the relationship between Malta's folk-narrative tradition and those of Sicily, Italy and some other Continental countries. One might as well point out that, although the main body and final text of this study were written in recent years, the comparative material on which it is based had been collected at the time of his early linguistic activities when, under the influence of Sir Temi Zammit, he had managed to shake himself free from the spell and charm of Fr. Magri's writings and theories. Thereafter, with scientific detachment he recognised in his studies the importance of the two elements, Semitic and Romance, which between them make up the larger part of both Language and Folklore in Malta. In this sense the study under review has to be read in conjunction with *Weather and Husbandry Lore* (1922) and *Folklore u Lsien Malt* (1944).

In *Le relazioni etnografiche* ... we find other aspects of Dr. Cremona's painstaking method. His writing is disciplined: the material presented in a historical light assumes fresh dimensions against the varied background of comparisons between local tales, legends, riddles, sayings and popular customs and those of Sicily and Italy. In the process, Cremona shows how and to what extent Fr. Magri, and others preceding him, who worked practically on the same material, persisted in upholding a Phoenician origin for our folktales and thus stultified all efforts at comparative study.

Cremona's study has elicited favourable comments from Professor Paolo Toschi, of Rome, who has, since 1932, accepted for publication in his authoritative periodical "Lares" studies on various aspects of Maltese traditional lore or folk poetry (Cf. *Lares*, Fasc. III-IV 1966). Prof. Toschi *inter alia* makes one very important comment: "*Per quanto riguarda la composizione delle fiabe avremmo desiderato che il Cremona avesse fatto piu' frequente ricorso ai "Types of the Folk-tale" di Aarne e Thompson, e al "Motif Index of Folk-Literature" di Stith Thompson.*"

The words of the eminent Italian scholar underline, if anything, the need of studying the Maltese material against the wider background of international or Mediterranean folklore. If more scholars will come forward to undertake the analysis of our folk-narrative material, we will be able to classify the motifs and the tale-types, as suggested by Toschi, in accordance with internationally recognised systems of classification. Such work, however, pre-supposes material help or encouragement from institutions or universities that is sadly lacking so far.

Cremona is now in his 92nd year. His lasting merit as a folklore scholar is that he has studied and compared on a scientific basis the material collected by Fr. Magri and others. Very few such studies have been made in Malta. In his work Cremona leans mostly on similarities with Sicily and Italy, while Fr. Magri was more inclined towards the East, intent as he was on the Phoenician theory which has since been debunked. Other comparative studies awaiting the attention of scholars should cover Calabria, Spain, North Africa from Egypt to Morocco (which Stumme has tentatively illustrated), as well as Syria and Lebanon. Cremona has done his part. Let others carry on the good work on the foundations laid by Magri, Cremona, Ilg and Stumme.

J.C.P.

Obituaries

ANTHONY CREMONA, D.Lit. (1880-1972)

The death of Dr Anthony (Ninu) Cremona on January 4, 1972 a few months before attaining the age of 92 removes a highly respected scholar and man of letters from the scene of Maltese studies. The appreciation of his contribution to Maltese folklore studies which appears elsewhere in this issue had already gone to the printers when we heard the sad news of his death which, though not unexpected, nevertheless came as a shock to his many friends in all walks of life.

There is little that I can add to my review of his work. He was deeply moved when, on the 28th March, 1968, the Malta Folklore Society, of which he was a Hon. President, honoured him with a commemorative talk on his folklore studies and with the first public showing of a documentary film on his life and activities produced by the Staff of the Department of Information.

Students of Maltese folklore owe a great debt to Mr Cremona and it is hoped that the esteem in which he was justly held in academic circles in his lifetime will take a tangible form by the publication of his folklore studies in one volume — hopefully on the initiative of the Royal University of Malta which conferred on him the honorary degree of D.Lit. in 1960.

Miss VIOLET ALFORD (1881-1972)

Miss Alford's death on February 16, 1972 brought to an end an exceptionally long and active life. Her valuable contribution to the study of the dance tradition and folk customs of Western Europe has been placed on record by Douglas Kennedy in the Winter 1971 number of *Folklore*, to which was appended a list of more than 100 books and other publications.

Her first introduction to Malta was through her brother, the Rev. Canon Leslie Alford, who served as Army Chaplain with the local Garrison from 1912-1915 and who had a sizeable collection of lantern slides of the Island. In 1946 she contributed a brief comparative note on *The Maltese Parata* in the *Journal of the English Folk Dance and Song Society* (Vol. 5, No. 1). On the 3rd May, 1960, during a brief visit to Malta she delivered a lecture, *Folk Dance and Drama*, in the University Theatre, Valletta, which later appeared in the *Journal of the Faculty of Arts* (Vol. II, No. 1, 1960). In her lecture she was able to give more elaborate comparative data on both *Il-Parata* and *Il-Maltiija*.

In August, 1960, on behalf of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of the EFDSS* she invited the undersigned to send a contribution to the *Journal*, which appeared in 1962 under the title *Dance and Song in Malta*. Miss Alford welcomed the publication of the *Maltese Folklore Review* in 1962 and was a firm believer in the idea of a folklore centre in Malta. She also encouraged the present writer to follow up her own researches on *The Cat Saint* with particular reference to the cult of St Barbara and St Agatha in Malta.

J.C.P.

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