

The Woman in Gozitan Folklore

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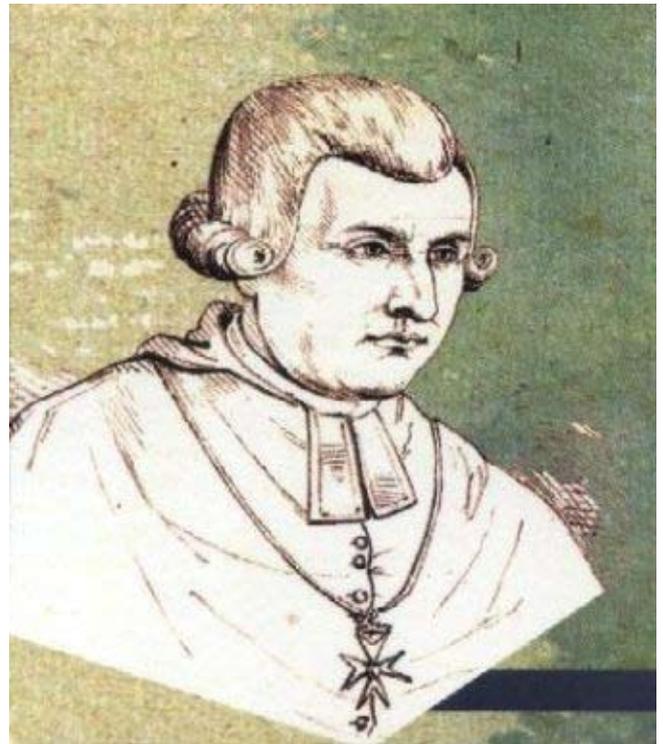
Birth and Infancy

Our next item is to examine the beliefs and the traditions of the Gozitans regarding women when giving birth and during the infancy of their children. For the majority of Gozitans a baby boy was more welcome than a baby girl. It has to be admitted there were exceptions, for example in a family where all the children were males, the birth of a baby girl was a joyful occasion since it was considered as the fulfilment of a great wish. However, it goes without saying that in a family of girls, the wish for male children was very strong indeed. At least this was the position until a few years ago considering what this proverb has to say: *Hafna subjien bsaten u tmien, hafna bniet ilahhqu l-bicčiet* - if you have many boys, prepare walking-sticks and top hats, many girls prepare pieces of cloth. So girls were good for the traditional craft of weaving which was so common in Gozitan homes. Many girls in the same family did not bring luck. In fact, there is a belief which still currently exists that out of every six girls in the same family, two of them must be infertile or remain childless. In Gozo there is also the belief that if a pregnant woman craves for some food, she should be given two bites just in case she was to give birth to twins, and if it happens that while she is craving she touches any part of her body, it was thought that the baby will be born bearing a mark resembling the object she was craving. For example, if she craves for a fruit and while craving she touches her belly, the baby will be born with the mark of that fruit on her belly. Moreover, whoever fails to give a craving woman a bite or two of the desired food, will be punished with a sty in his eye.

In Gozo pregnant women who are about to give birth show full trust in Heaven: *Il-Bambin jagħtielha tajba* - may Baby Jesus give her a successful delivery, or, *'K Alla jrid kollox ikun sew* - if it is the will of God, everything will be all right. As soon

as the midwife goes into a house of a woman who is about to give birth, she says: *Gesù Nazzarenu* - Jesus the Nazarene, and she repeats the same words as soon as she enters the room where labour was to take place.

In Gozo we also come across strange customs which may have their roots in antiquity. For instance, in the past there existed in Xaghra a strange custom. Pregnant women would squat on a huge block of stone – maybe a Neolithic megalith – so as to ascertain themselves of a successful delivery. According to the Gozitan writer Gian Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis there was a traditional beverage which helped mothers during their labour. This was called *čumnata* and was made from wine, spices, cinnamon, and cloves boiled together. During pregnancy it is the mother who suffers from the pangs of childbirth, while the midwife goes on with her work with the same strong voice as before, so much so that a saying from the village of Munxar goes like this: *Il-muluda mikduda, u l-qabla tgħajjat* - the woman in labour is worn out,



Gian Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis.
(Source: www.stgeorge.org.mt - October 2013)

while the midwife makes a lot of fuss. Some women who seem to take too long to give birth will make use of a passion flower to expedite parturition. They throw a withered passion flower in a bowl of water and as soon as it starts opening they feel their first labour pangs. In Gozo the belief was so strong that even women who were not expecting a child, who happened to see a withered passion flower opening they said they felt the beginning of pain as if of labour.

Women used to make pious vows to have a good delivery. Objects associated with these pious promises used to be left as ex-votos in some churches, especially at the Sanctuary of Our Lady in Qala or at the Franciscan Conventual Church in Victoria.

As already pointed out, Gozitans were not that happy with the birth of a baby girl. When a girl was born, they used to say: *Meta titwieled tifla l-ixkupa tieħu qatgħa* - when a girl is born the besom gets a fright, or: *Id-dota marret* - the dowry is gone, or else: *Ommha tilfet il-gradenza* - her mother has lost her clothes chest. All this means that with the birth of a girl the family will have someone to clean the house, but the mother will now have to give dowry to her daughter.

Whenever a new baby is born in any family, the mother invites all her relatives, neighbours and friends to come and stay – *jiġu joqogħdu*. For this purpose it is enough for her to send her grown up son or a grown up boy of her neighbours. In the past they

used to treat these guests with traditional sweets, cookies and drinks. Nowadays a more elaborate party is held. Guests will try to guess after whom the new baby has taken.

Naturally, the birth of a new baby is risky both for the mother and for the child itself. If a mother decided to present her baby in church, she was not expected to go out for work before she had presented it. In Gozo, babies are often presented to Our Lady of Ta' Pinu. Nowadays, the small church of St. Anne at Dwejra also receives many mothers who opt to present their babies to St. Anne.

It is thought that the risk brought about by the birth of a child will last for forty days. During this period it is said that the mother is in her puerperium - *mniefsa* or *bl-infasa*. De Soldanis also says that when a woman who is in her puerperium mentions another woman who is also in her puerperium during the said period of forty days, one of them will die. This superstition may have reflected the high mortality rate among the mothers of bygone years.

The first water in which a mother washed her baby was said to have healing properties. Therefore, when a baby fell sick it used to be washed again in the first water in which a healthy baby had been washed. The people of Munxar used to believe that in this way a sick baby could be healed. This type of cure may also be reminiscent of the miraculous healing of babies according to Apocryphal Gospels which used to occur whenever a sick baby was dipped in the water where Baby Jesus had been washed.



St. Anne Chapel, Dwejra.
(Source: www.gozodiocese.org - October 2013)

Gozitan mothers, like their Maltese counterparts, greatly dreaded the evil eye which could somehow harm their children. So they used to use all sorts of amulets such as horns, shells, and other similar objects to ward off the evil eye. If a child fell sick, they used to believe that the child was not theirs. In Gozo they used to take sick children to the tomb of Saint Corrado at the Qala Sanctuary dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady. After a child had been lowered down into the tomb, the mother used to pray: Change him/her and bring me mine! Another place where Gozitan

mothers took their sick babies was at St. Elias on a small hillock between Xewkija and Ġhajnsielem when in olden times there stood a small chapel dedicated to this prophet of the Old Testament. At this place, mothers used to recite the same prayer. In both cases mothers used to believe that the sick children used to be replaced by their real healthy ones. In remembrance they used to leave the clothes on the spot as an ex-voto. In the case of St. Elias, Gozitan priests used to discourage this custom.

Gozitan mothers had such a fixation about the well-being of their sons and daughters that even while having them washed they used to recite certain rhyming lines wishing them to grow normally as every child should. To this effect, in Xewkija and in other villages, while washing their babies, Gozitan mothers used to make the sign of the cross on their babies' bellies while reciting the following lines:

*Tikber kull jum u kull lejla
bħall-faqqus tal-bħajra.*

You grow up every day and every night,
like small water melons.

*Tikber kull jum u kull nhar
bħall-faqqus tal-ħjar.*

You grow up by day and by night
like small cucumbers.

*Tikber kull jum u kull ljieli
bħall-ghanqud tad-dwieli.*

You grow up all days and all nights
like bunches of grapes.

It is said that the greatest wish of every woman is that of becoming a mother having her own children. For them she is prepared to do everything, as the proverb says: *L-omm ġħal uliedha, ħalliela u giddieba* - for her children the mother was prepared to be a thief and a liar, meaning she was ready to work, to toil, to strive to earn something for the family, especially when the husband's income was not enough. In a family of farmers, the woman helps her farming husband in all his work.

The Woman in Traditional Work and Crafts

When a baby is born, the woman most sought after is the midwife (Maltese *qabla*, now known as *majjistra*). *Majjistra*, a Maltese Romance loan-

word, literally means a female expert. Not every woman is a midwife. The midwife should be well taught and trained in her delicate work because many times the destiny of the new born baby is in her hands. The midwife should know how to give a helping hand during labour, how to wash, clean and swaddle the baby. She should even know how to christen the baby in case of an emergency when a child is too weak and there is very little chance of survival. In Xagħra there was the custom of keeping a glass of water at hand after the birth of a child until it was christened, just in case the need arose to baptise him or her urgently.

When the baby is healthy enough and survives, he/she is taken to church to be baptised. In the past the child used to be christened on that very same day when he/she was born, or at most the day after. The baptism ceremony was a very simple one and used to take place near the baptismal font near the main door of the church. The mother usually was not present for the ceremony. So they used to hire a woman to carry the baby. She was called *ir-reffiegħa* (the carrier). She used to carry the baby to church and back home.

Sometimes misfortune befell the baby's mother and if she died for some reason or other she could not suckle her baby. In bygone times people were more conscious of the nourishing value of the mother's milk and the fact that babies who were fed on their mothers' milk seldom fell sick. For this reason they did everything possible to give their babies the natural milk of another woman, who was known as *l-imreddgħa* (wet-nurse), when the natural mother could not do this. This woman was either a mother whose baby had died, or who used to suckle her baby for a longer time than was normal. Well-to-do families even prepared a special room in their houses for the wet-nurse to sleep in and used to give her good food. Those children who were brought up by the milk of the wet-nurse used to be taught to respect that woman who nourished them with her milk when they were babies.

A new baby will create considerable extra work for the family. In the past there were no disposable nappies. The baby's swaddling clothes had to be washed very often in order to be used over and over again. One can imagine what were the washing needs of a very large family whose members used

to come back in dirty clothes from their work in the fields or from other places where one could not be expected to keep clean. Moreover, in those times, clothes used to be thicker than modern ones as they were locally woven by means of traditional looms. Therefore it was a very hard task to have all the family's clothes washed. This was also women's work. The washing as such was done by means of a wooden pounder called *marżebba*, an instrument shaped like the sole of the foot. Washer women used to beat dirt out of the clothes by the pounder on the washing place consisting of a large block of hard limestone called *maħsel* near a cistern or a natural spring. Some women used to take soiled clothes to the washing place called *il-Għajn tal-Ħasselin*, the washers' spring, consisting of an arched roofing covering a natural spring with stone troughs where the washing could be carried out. There were several places like this in Gozo especially in Victoria in Fountain Street, now known as Fontana, in Lunzjata Valley, Għajn Tuta in Kerċem, in Għajnsielem, Nadur and Xagħra. There were also washer women who used to go round washing people's clothes to earn some money especially where there was a large family and it was impossible for the mother to cope with her family's washing needs.

Sewing is also a traditional craft, and a large number of Gozitan women could sew. In every locality of the Gozitan isle you could find the village tailor who could sew all kinds of dresses and outfits, mostly for special occasions or *festa* days, the celebrations held in honour of the patron saint. There was also the specialised tailor who sewed wedding dresses and who was known to all and sundry. When a couple was about to get married, the bride used to go to that tailor who she considered the best to sew clothes, to order the wedding dress. On the wedding day guests would praise (or unobtrusively find faults with) the bride's wedding dress.

In the past there were specialised tailors, including the faldetta tailors - *ta' l-egħnienel*. *L-ghonnella*, the faldetta, required a special skill to be sewn beautifully according to the customers' wishes. It is regretted to note that this old and traditional craft has now completely died out.

Apart from the tailoring craft one can also mention embroidery, a craft well practised by a considerable number of Gozitan families. Sometimes this



L-Ghonnella.

(Source: <http://www.treklens.com/gallery/Europe/Malta/photo511619.htm> - Thomas Schembri (copyright) October 2013)

traditional craft attains a very high standard as can be attested by work carried out by village girls and women who create real works of art, more often than not free of charge, for churches, clubs and other special occasions.

In the past, even more than today, many Gozitan women were wives of farmers. The work of the farmer never ceases. It is an unending and varied work, and the wife used to accompany her husband for work in the fields. What was the woman's role in the fields and at the farm? Although we know of women who used to dig in the fields, the digging was usually done by men. The wife usually helped with the sowing, the planting and the harvesting of crops. The woman, with the sickle in her hand used to harvest wheat and *sulla*, (Gozitan clover), and with the mini-scythe she used to cut grass for her animals. Woman collected ripe fruit, grapes, tomatoes, picked potatoes and collected cotton pods and cumin plants. The conveying of these

products from one place to another was, of course, her husband's job.

The woman used to take out the sheep and the goats to graze in the fields. At the farm she used to milk the cows, the sheep and the goats. With their milk she knew how to make cheeselets, dry them, wash them in salted water and preserve them in pepper. She used to sell cheeselets both fresh, in their traditional container, or dried preserved in pepper. So the making of cheeselets and their preservation was all done by women.

In the past, the woman used to dry fruit in the sun, such as figs and tomatoes, and preserve them for the winter months. She used to wash in the sea the wool taken from her sheep on St. Anne's day, and then weave it herself at home or take it to the female weaver to make *fradi* (sing. *farda*), types of local mats, blankets, and other draperies woven by the traditional looms. She used to spread out hard lumps of wool in old mattresses to make them soft and comfortable to rest on.

Wives used to help their husbands on the threshing floor. The work on the threshing ground was men's work, but women used to help in tying up sheaves of long hay, filling up of big bundles of hay in large sheets and special nets, in sifting wheat in different kinds of sieves, and washing it clean, ready to be taken to the windmill to be ground into flour. When brought back from the windmill the women used to sift it once more to separate the bran, semolina and flour. They used to cook fine semolina for their children, a traditional meal called *ghasida* (porridge). They used to take the flour to the bakery to make bread for the whole week, where in most instances they used to knead their own dough in the traditional baker's trough.

Many Gozitan women who were not housewives were engaged in various traditional crafts of the island. One of the foremost and most ancient of crafts was that of weaving. As a matter of fact in most Gozitan houses scattered throughout the villages of Gozo, there were ancient looms whereby Gozitan women and girls used to weave traditional fabrics made of cotton and wool. Cotton was cultivated here in Gozo and was of the best quality, so much so that nobody was permitted to export seeds out of these islands. There was the white cotton and the brown

cotton. Draperies woven on local looms could be dyed in various colours according to the needs by the dyer, another old craft which has completely disappeared from this island. But this was a craft practised by men.

Weaving had also attached to it other traditional works and crafts. Female workers used to separate cotton from its pod (*idommu*). Afterwards, other female workers used to remove the seeds from the cotton with the traditional cotton carding machine. Carded cotton, that is cotton with the seeds removed, was then beaten and thrashed by a man specialised in this work known as *id-daqqaq*, to render it soft and workable. At this stage women once again took over from men and they used to spin the soft cotton on the spinning wheel to change it into fine threads. The traditional tool for this work was called *magħżel* or spinning wheel. Threads were then wound on a traditional reel known as *imkebbba*. The threads on the reel were then turned into a warp by another woman known as *is-seffieħa* to be folded up by yet another woman known as *it-tewwejja* ready for weaving.

In bygone years, Gozitan farmers used to spend more time in the fields than farmers do nowadays



Cotton cultivated here in Gozo was of the best quality, so much so that nobody was permitted to export seeds out of these Islands.

in order to plough their fields with the traditional plough drawn by animals, to thresh the wheat on the threshing floor by means of his mule or donkey, to dig the fields with his traditional hoe or to harvest his wheat or *sulla* with the traditional scythe or sickle. These tasks always meant that the farmer spent long hours exposed to the mercy of the sun's rays. To protect himself from the strong rays of the sun, he used to wear the traditional Gozitan hat. Such hats used to be handmade in the village of Qala. This work was called rattan or palm-work. Some women from Qala used to go round collecting pliable palm fronds from all over Gozo. Usually they used to get it for free, but women would in turn give one hat free of charge to her supplier. Life in Gozo was so simple up to a few decades ago! A woman and her children used to prepare plaits, and then the rattan woman used to sew the plait in such way to give the shape of a hat. First she rounded up the cap, then the middle part and finally the brim. She also used to make all sorts of fans, both for men and women, baskets, panniers and other containers of great utility in the house.

A traditional craft which has tied its name with Gozo and has become synonymous with this island is that of lace-making. Since this craft became well established in Gozo around the middle of the nineteenth century, Gozitan women have become famous for this work. The lace industry in our island



Lace making - the traditional craft tied to Gozo.
(Source: <http://www.flickrriver.com> - October 2013)

became the livelihood of many Gozitan women who worked hard and raised the level of lace making in our island to an international level. Famous foreign personalities, kings and queens and members of the British royal family, tourists and visitors, and others were astonished by the fine workmanship produced by our Gozitan women on their lace pillows. To speak about Gozitan women and at the same time fail to mention Gozo lace, would be missing a most important aspect of the folkloristic way of life in Gozo.

There are other crafts in which Gozitan women have been successful. When the tourist industry became more lucrative during the sixties, there evolved as if out of nothing the new crafts of crochet and knitting. Gozitan women started handmaking all sorts of jerseys, pullovers, sweaters and other similar close-fitting garments to be sold to tourists. This work was easier than that of lace making, could be completed in a shorter time, and fetched better prices. One could then see women knitting wherever they happened to be and whenever they had a chance. Either when they were not so busy with other work, or while they were waiting for the bus, or their children coming out of school, and on every other suitable occasion, our women knitted garments with those two long needles.

However, Gozitans are not only adapted to just perform delicate crafts. Up to some fifty years ago when our roofs were sealed with *deffun*, which is ground pottery used as cement, Gozitan women used to beat the roofs with a kind of crushing and smoothing tool for roof surfacing. One could see them with this special tool, known as *marżebba* in Gozitan, beating the rough surface of the roof to render it smooth and slightly slanting to carry rain water to the side dictated by the roof-maker. This was not very lucrative work, but it could be done without having the need of pursuing a course of training. Therefore, many Gozitan women used to earn a small amount of extra money from this kind of work.

Betrothal and Marriage

We shall now consider ancient customs and superstitions associated with betrothal and marriage, some of which have died out long ago,

others persist to this day. When a girl had grown up to marriageable age, there was the custom to put a flower pot on the balcony or on a stone jutting out of the wall - *ħarriēga*. During this time women were not allowed to go about alone in the streets except very early in the morning when they were also expected to wear a kind of cloak and cover their faces. Married and unmarried women used to wear different cloches, but this custom died out long ago. In large churches, e.g. the Cathedral, men and women attended the Church service in a segregated manner: women stood in the main aisle or in the middle of the church, while men stood in the naves or in the side chapels. This custom has been retained even to this day in certain village churches in Malta, but in Gozo it no longer exists. It is said that, at the end of the 19th century, young men attending the Christmas night service at the Cathedral used to pelt attractive young girls sitting in the main aisle with hazel nuts!

Even in bygone years marriage was preceded by betrothal, *l-egħrusija*, referred to in legal circles as *l-isponsali*. After all the arrangements were made, the bridegroom would give the bride a ring known as *iċ-ċurkett tar-rabta*, engagement ring, which was a golden ring in the shape of two clasped hands to signify the bond of love between the couple. At the times of the Order of St. John this ring was presented in the mouth of a prime fish. On the other hand the bride reciprocated this gift by another gift consisting of a decorated silk handkerchief. The exchange of these gifts meant that the couple now had given their word to each other that they would definitely get married. Should anything go wrong, the case would end up in court.

The betrothal ceremony, so to speak, was followed by the marriage contract, *kitba taż-żwieġ*, before a notary. When the marriage contract was drawn up, the bridegroom promised to take the bride to some popular folk celebrations, such as St. Gregory's Day and *Mnarja*, both of which are local folk festivals of the first order. This custom was introduced in Gozo from Malta.

The wedding then followed. Before the couple promised, (in Maltese - *jagħtu l-kelma*), to love and be faithful to each other, a mixture of aniseed, aromatic herbs, salt and honey was prepared and

rubbed on the bride's lips so that her mouth uttered only sweet words. After the wedding the bride did not go straight away to her house but spent another week in her father's house. After this she was received with much pomp in her husband's house whose relations gave a great feast which was called *il-Ħarġa*. Thereafter, the bride took abode in her husband's house.

Death

Nobody can avoid death. We often get this warning by a Maltese proverb which says: *Ħadd wara Ħadd, fl-aħħar tasal ta' kulħadd* - Sunday after Sunday, at last everyone of us will have his day.

In olden times when death occurred in any Gozitan family, the relatives of the dead person would hire a group of female beggars to watch the dead person all night long and pray for the repose of his soul. After this charitable act, the family would recompense these beggars by giving them some money for their services. In the times of the Order of St. John there were female mourners, *newwieħa*, who bewailed the dead persons by their loud cries and lamentations during funerals. They used to wear a long veil or trail of a gown known as *kurkar*. As soon as they entered the dead person's house, they used to lop off the vine in the yard and throw away all the flower pots from the windows and balconies right into the street. They used to look for the best piece of china and break it to pieces against the door jamb. Then the fragments were mixed up with black soot and ashes and boiled. The mixture was smeared on the door jamb of the main door. After this 'ceremony' they sang rhymes with much wailing and sighing until they knelt down near the corpse and thereafter kept on mentioning the good deeds and virtues of the dead person and all the members of the family would then join in.

Funerals

When a relative died, women in Gozo used to stay indoors for whole weeks and went out only early in the morning to hear mass. This went on for no less than forty days. Nowadays, they stay in only for the short period of three days. An ancient custom required that women should not cook food for three days. Therefore, food used to be provided by friends or relations, even distant relatives.



The finger gesture used to ward off the evil eye.

As regards clothing, both married and unmarried women used to wear black attire from head to foot, and also used to cover their heads and faces with a black crepe. During their first week of mourning, they could not wear either a hat or a hood, and used to go out with the *faldetta* on their heads with which they also went to church. Until very recently, following the death of parents, the daughters would wear black for three whole years, for a sibling two years, for other relatives one year, and for friends several months.

In the past, and even nowadays, several women are notoriously known to cast evil eye spells on whoever and whatever they happen to look at. To avoid being affected by the evil eye of these people one has to point out fingers in the form of two horns. Some women used to make this gesture under their pinafores, or else wear amulets or a horseshoe. On Easter Saturday they used to fumigate their houses with burnt dried blessed olive leaves from Palm Sunday of the year before.

Gozitan Women and Folk-Medicine

To cure their little children who had had a fright, mothers used to wash them in water in which flowers from the Holy Sepulchre had been strewn. In the case of toddlers who were about to start walking, mothers used to let them go just when the bells of Easter Saturday would start ringing at about 10 o'clock in the morning.

Some Gozitan women were very much sought after because they had the know-how of putting dislocated bones in place. People who twisted their ankles or wrenched their arms used to call on a certain woman in Żebbuġ, to have their disjointed bones put back in place.

We have also many other folk medicinal remedies to cure disease and other ailments which affect mostly women. When a woman did not menstruate normally they used to prepare a liquid medicine concocted from *sarsaparilla* (*Smilax sarsaparilla*) which in Gozo is somewhat rare. If menstruation was more copious than normal, Gozitan women used to drink lemon juice. With regard to abdominal pain due to menstruation they used to take camomile, lemon and orange-blossom water, or even a piece of warm wool. For excessive menstruation they used to consume considerable quantities of fresh fruit.

To minimise the effect of hot flushes during menopause, Gozitan women used to wet their foreheads with a piece of cloth dipped in vinegar, or drink a concoction made from the boiled roots of Bermuda grass or dried reed leaves. They used to drink a glass of this folk medicine a day. For headaches and migraine they used to put a potato cut into two slices on their foreheads or wash their feet in warm water.

When a married couple remained childless the fault for infertility was generally attributed to the woman. However, when it turned out that it was the man to blame after all, he was made to eat blood pudding made from bull's blood because this way it was thought that his fertility increased. It was also thought that a holy picture of St. Elizabeth over the bed increased fertility as this holy person became pregnant when she was well advanced in age. It was also thought that a woman who walked at night when it was full moon had her fertility increased, according to the old saying: *Jekk fil-qamar thuf, issaħħan il-ġuf* - if you wander about when it is full moon, you make the womb get warm.

In the past unexpected pregnancy, especially out of wedlock, took a much longer time than it does today to become evident. Clothes were loose and baggy, not to mention the *faldetta* (or *ghonnella*) which also concealed the shape of a

woman's figure from the public eye. In fact, a Maltese proverb says: *Mara bil-ghonnella la taf x'ghamlet u lanqas x'kellha* - you cannot know what a woman wearing a *faldetta* has done, or what she has had. There were also in the old days certain plants which could cause an abortion in the case of an unwanted pregnancy. So nothing is new under the sun!

Unmarried women, including nuns, were prone to be stricken with several diseases like cancer and tumours of the womb. They used to try to cure them by putting poultices on their bellies. They also got liquid herbal folk medicine to cure jaundice (*isewwu l-fliexken għas-suffejra*). For venereal diseases they used to wash the affected part by warm water in which the plant of *vervain* (*Verbena officinalis* L) had been boiled.

A female breast is obviously different from that of a male and it is more liable to get infected or become cancerous. To cure an abscess in this part of the body they used to put poultices made from bran or even pigeons' droppings! To cure boils they used to put tomato slices on them, or poultices made from *ħobbejża*, (common mallows - *Milva silvestris ambigua*), or warm water fomentations. For lumps in the chest, very often indicative of cancer, they used to put a clump of warm wool to mitigate pain. They also put the holy picture of the saint to whom they showed devotion. In the case of a malignant cancer, the result would often be of disastrous proportions. Whenever, due to lack of hygiene, a woman's breast got infected when suckling her baby, it was thought that all this displeasing effect was caused by the evil eye. To avoid being affected by the evil eye they used to warm some oil in a spoon on a kerosene lamp and smeared their breasts therewith before bringing their babies closer to their breasts. To wean and stop suckling her baby, mothers used to wrap their breasts with bandages or wash them with warm vervain water (*ilma tal-buqexrem*).

Conclusion

My final message here is that our people should take interest in all their heritage, whether it be natural, historical, or folklore so that our past will not be forgotten. As a people we should be proud of our folklore.

We should always keep before our eyes the importance of our entire folk heritage whether it be traditions, customs, legends, anecdotes, folk-games, crafts and so on. Our own learned kinsmen were among the first people in these Islands to take interest in folklore, collect and study folk material from both islands, without which our island's heritage would surely be much poorer.

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