STUDENTS

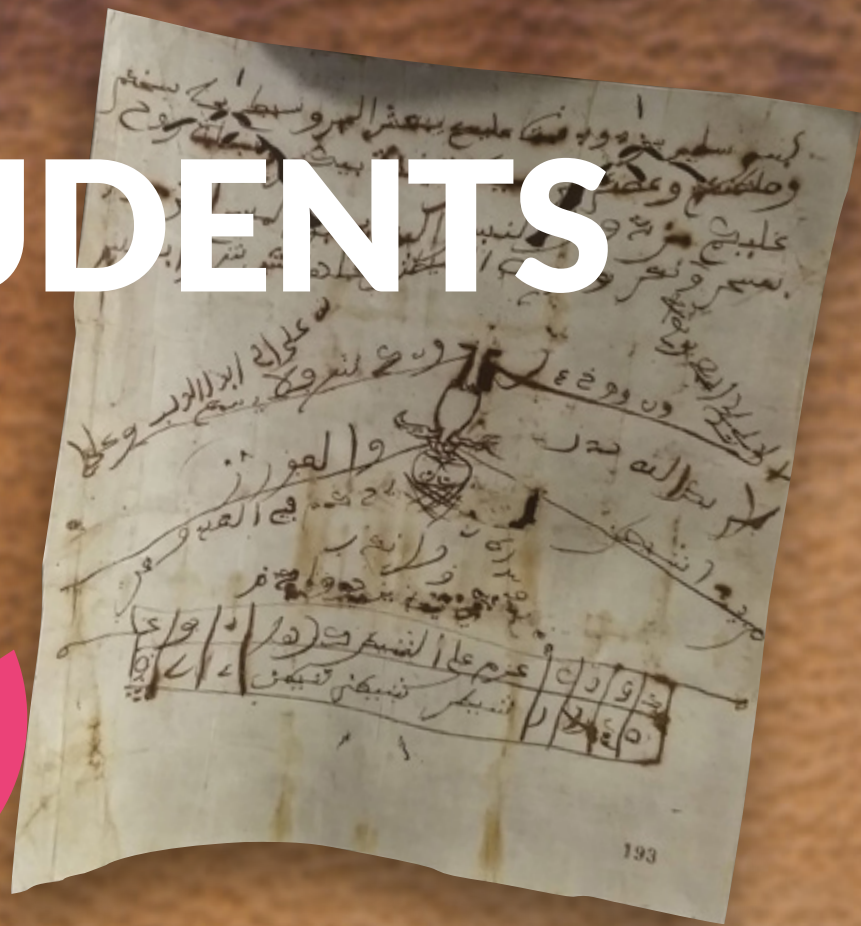## Curses and protection against misfortunes

Yanika Schembri Fava

Stories, superstition, and rituals belong to every culture the world over. They give rise to magical sayings and versifications which stand the test of time, proof of their relevance in people's lives.

Yanika Schembri Fava (supervised by Dr Bernard Micallef) focused on Malta's own expressions and sayings and their social function within society as part of her thesis. In the past people believed they needed protection from curses. Rituals were created as a form of magical versification powerful enough to calm an entire community. These rituals also served as a means of proof, if you will, that a particular misfortune had been overcome. These verses served both those who exorcised: *"San Barnabaw, jekk haw' xi daqqa t'għajn tmur minn haw', San Pietru ta' Ruma, jekk haw' xi daqqa t'għajn terġa' lura"* ("Saint Barnabas, let the evil eye turn away from us, Saint Peter of Rome, let the evil eye go back home", Carmena Fenech), and those who cursed, *"Seħta bedudu jdur ma' jdejk, u jaqtagħlek nofs idejk"* ("May the curse worm its way around your hand and cut half of it off", Judith Schembri).

Schembri Fava researched the folklore behind these magical verses and spoke to people who still believe in them. She felt that this approach was vital to help bring these verses to life by speaking to those who still give voice to them. The interviews helped colour intonation, body movements, rituals, and any other accessory that was an essential component in carrying out the magical ritual.

It is important that every so often such versifications are researched. They need to be preserved so that changes in tradition can be studied over the years, effectively mapping cultural changes. Such reflections dig deep into a part of Maltese society.

Schembri Fava hopes to develop these studies into a book on popular Maltese superstitious verses. **T**

This research was carried out as part of a Bachelor in Maltese at the Faculty of Arts, University of Malta.