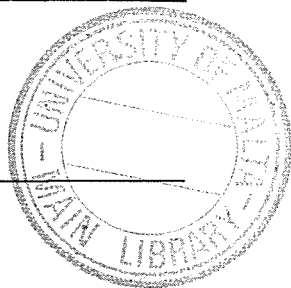

THE FIELD OF MALTESE FOLKLORE

J. Cassar Pullicino



BEFORE a proper study of Maltese folklore can be made one has to acquaint oneself with the ground already covered by others and with the material collected or published on the various aspects of the subject. It is most important that one should have a conspectus of the subject in its broad outline so as to identify the areas so far unexplored and at the same time relate comparable type of material with one's own findings as items of tradition arranged within an accepted scheme of classification.

Such an arrangement is necessitated by the intricate fabric of Maltese folklore, which is today beset by many difficulties. More and more the culture "imported" into the islands in the wake of improved contacts with the outside world, a better standard of education, the presence of a sizeable non-Maltese community, and the cumulative effect of social pressures calculated to discard "local" folk-speech and manners — all these are pushing back the frontiers of Maltese folk-culture and transforming out of recognition the traditional ways of thought and behaviour. Admittedly, social and economic progress is welcome and inevitable; but as one probes deeper into the matter from the point of view of folklore studies the conviction grows that though much has been saved which otherwise would have been lost, a considerable portion of tradition is fast disappearing out of sight and mind, and much more remains to be done before sufficient documentation is assembled from which the student can attempt to reconstruct the picture of ancient Maltese folk-life.

The collecting of folklore in Malta so far has been haphazard and intermittent, due more to personal initiative or foreign interest in the language than to any organized scheme primarily motivated by an ardent desire to rescue the vanishing folk-culture of these islands.¹

¹ Worthy of note is the pioneering work of G.P.F. Agius De Soldanis (1712–1770) whose MS collection "Apoftegmi e proverbi maltesi" was published by Dr. Giovanni Curmi in *Malta Letteraria*, Nuova Serie, Vol. III (1928), and M.A. Vassalli's *Motti*,

Nevertheless, considerable progress has been recorded in the present century. Side by side with the impressive work of Italian and German scholars, such as Luigi Bonelli, Hans Stumme and Bertha Ilg, in the collection of folktales and folksongs,² there has been the invaluable material rescued from oblivion by Fr. E. Magri, consisting mainly of weather proverbs and folktale texts,³ the monumental *Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs* issued by Professor J. Aquilina in 1972, and the present writer's collection of texts, with variants, comparative notes and commentary, of traditional lullabies and children's rhymes, of popular riddles (M. *ħaġa moħħaġa*), of exorcisms and popular religious poetry, of legends and folktales, *blason populaire* or collective nicknames, and of traditional ballads, the

aforismi e proverbi maltesi (1828). Some interesting material was included by 19th C. historians in their work because they considered it cognate with their field of study. Such were the legends and accounts of local customs appearing in G. F. Abela's *Della Descrizione di Malta* (1647) and Count G. A. Ciantar's edition of Abela's work *Malta Illustrata* (Vol. 1, 1772), as well as P. P. Castagna's *Lis Storia ta Malta bil gzejer tahha*, 3 vols. (1880–1890), A. Ferris's *Descrizione storica delle chiese di Malta e Gozo* (1866) and *Memorie dell'inclito Ordine Gerosolimitano esistenti nelle isole di Malta* (1881). Vincenzo Busuttill's *Holiday Customs in Malta* (1894) and his two articles "Demopsicologia Maltese: I – Canti", *Archivio per lo studio delle tradizioni popolari* (A.S.T.P.), Palermo–Torino, Clausen, Vol. XVI (1897), pp. 432–435; and "II – Giuochi fanciulleschi maltesi", *ibid.*, Vol. XVII (1898), pp. 400–405, also fall within this category.

- 2 L. BONELLI, *Saggi del folklore dell'Isola di Malta, con prefazione di G. Pitre*, Palermo, 1895, "Il Dialecto Maltese", *Supplementi periodici all'Archivio Glottologico Italiano*, Torino, Loescher, 4a Dispensa 1897, pp. 53–98; 6a Dispensa, 1898, pp. 37–70; "Contrasto popolare maltese", A.S.T.P., Vol. XVII, 1898, pp. 7–10.

H. STUMME, *Maltesische Studien*, Leipzig, 1904; *Maltesische Märchen, gedichte und Rätsel in Deutscher Übersetzung*, Leipzig, 1904.

B. ILG, *Maltesische Märchen und Schwänke*. 2 vols., Leipzig, 1906; "Maltesische Legenden von der Sibylla", *Zeitschrift des Vereins für Volkskunde in Berlin*, Heft I, 1914, pp. 63–71; English translation by Vera Venour published in *Maltese Folklore Review*, Vol. I, No. 4, 1973, pp. 339–347.

B. ILG und H. STUMME, *Maltesische Volkslieder*. Leipzig, 1909.

B. KOESSLER-ILG and J. CASSAR-PULLICINO, "200 Maltese Folksongs collected in 1909–1912", *Maltese Folklore Review*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 1962, pp. 8–39.

- 3 E. MAGRI, *X'Ighid il Malti jeu l-Għerf bla miċtub tal Maltin*, 1905 – originally published serially in *Kotba tal-Moħħdija taż-Żmien* (K.M.Z.) Nos. 1–62 (1899–1907); *Ħrejjef Misserijietna* – K.M.Z. Nos. 15, 18, 29, 38–39 (1912–4); *X'Ighid il Malti fuq id Dinja ta' Taħt u fuq ir-Rjeh* – K.M.Z. No. 44 (1905); "Precis de Mythologie Maltaise", *Actes du XIV Congrès International des Orientalistes, Alger, 1905*, Deuxieme Section, Paris, 1907, pp. 23–35 – reprinted in *Maltese Folklore Review*, Vol. 1, No. 2, 1963, pp. 102–109.

latter being still unpublished.⁴

Over the past 40 years or so there has been a growing public awareness of the national heritage, including folklore, as a result of radio and T.V. programmes, of generous press coverage of local folkloristic events, and of *ad hoc* exhibitions organized and sponsored by the Maltese Folklore Society, by some Parish Councils and others. Besides, during the same period some pertinent audio-visual material has accumulated in the archives of *Xandir Malta* (formerly Rediffusion Co. Ltd.) – valuable material such as traditional guitar tunes, bell-ringing from different parishes and other characteristic local sounds, lullabies now all but forgotten, improvised folk-singing, interviews with old people and practitioners of dying crafts. It is also known that various traditional artefacts, household pottery and old prints representing typical Maltese scenes and characters are housed both at the National Museum and in private collections.

Between 1964 and 1971 much useful material of direct interest to the folklorist was collected in the course of a Survey of Contemporary Dialectal Maltese undertaken jointly by Professor J. Aquilina, Head of the then Department of Maltese at the University of Malta, and Professor B. S. J. Isserlin, Head of the Department of Semitic Studies in the University of Leeds. The two Professors considered that, as a result of the transformation affecting the Maltese style of life in general, “many traditional arts and crafts are disappearing: old methods in occupations like agriculture or fishing, and with them old-fashioned implements, are passing out of use: and with their disappearance the relevant vocabularies likewise pass out of the language. It seemed important to us to register such vocabularies in particular

4 G. CASSAR PULLICINO, “Bejn Rahal u Laqam” (Village rivalries and nicknames), *Lehen il-Malti*, 1944, pp. 21 – 26; “Pauline Traditions in Malta”, *Scientia*, Vol. X, 1944, pp. 19 – 31; “Norman Legends in Malta”, *ibid.*, Vol. XI, 1945, pp. 152 – 165; “Pirates and Turks in Maltese Tradition”, *ibid.*, Vol. XIV, 1948, pp. 164 – 189; “The Order of St. John in Maltese Folk-Memory”, *ibid.*, Vol. XV, 1949, pp. 147 – 175; “The French Occupation in Maltese Tradition”, *The Sundial*, Vol. IV, 1947, pp. 27 – 32; “Ghana u Taqbil it-Tfal”, *Lehen il-Malti*, April – Ġunju, 1948, pp. 33 – 66; “Tahnin u Ghana tan-Nieqa”, *ibid.*, Sett. – Diċ. 1949, pp. 107 – 127; “La Maddalena in una leggenda maltese”, *Lares* (Firenze), Anno XVI, Fasc. 1, 1950, pp. 177 – 182; “Canti sulla Passione nelle isole maltesi”, *ibid.*, Anno XX, Fasc. III – IV, 1954, pp. 138 – 158; “Nursery Vocabulary of the Maltese Archipelago”, *Orbis* (Louvain), Tome VI, No. 1, 1957, pp. 192 – 198; *Haga Mohgaga u Tahbil il-Mohh Iehor*, Parts I – IV, 1957 – 1959; *Skungrar u Orazzjoni fil-Poeżija Popolari Reliġjuża f’Malta*, 1981.

while they were still available for investigation".⁵ Fortunately for us, the tapes produced were duplicated so as to provide one set each for Leeds and Malta, and the full data acquired were thus preserved in the shape of tapes, notes, etc. as archives for future reference. A number of sketch drawings were also made in the field concerning old-fashioned crafts, arts, techniques etc., together with black and white photographs as well as some colour shots and one or two film sequences were taken. Apart from this survey, very few, if any, schemes of questionnaires with village notabilities, school teachers and students, parish priests and other correspondents have been worked out with an academic purpose and with copies of tapes and photographs available for reference in Malta.

Since 1960 there has been an active 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 traditional bread-making process "From Corn to Bread", (ii) Tunny Fishing and (iii) *Il-Maltija* – Malta's National Dance. Between 1962 and 1970 the Department of Information's Film Unit produced some excellent documentaries in which the spirit and content of Maltese seasonal customs were re-captured and presented with great gusto. Among these one may mention the blessing of animals on the Feast of St. Antony the Abbot, Carnival, the Good Friday procession, the Easter Sunday procession (*l-Irxoxi*) at Cospicua and Vittoriosa, *l-Imnarja* festival and the 8 September festivities. Two other valuable productions were (i) Maltese *Festa* and (ii) Crafts of an Island. These documentaries, together with others selected from among those included in various T.V. programmes produced by Charles Coleiro since 1970, could well form the nucleus of a Folklore Archives for which there is a crying need now if we are to keep a proper record of traditional folk-life in these islands.⁶

One positive development in this direction has been the opening of a Folklore Museum at Vittoriosa in 1970, followed by another one, relating mostly to rural culture, at Victoria, in Gozo, in 1983. Besides the arrangement and display of artefacts and other exhibits for educational purposes and as a tourist attraction, these museums will be in a position to fulfil their full role when scientific archiving of material

5 J. AQUILINA and B.S.J. ISSERLIN, eds, *A Survey of Contemporary Dialectal Maltese: Vol. 1 – Gozo*, Leeds, 1981, Preface, p. iii.

6 For further details see the present writer's note on "Maltese Folklore in Film Documentaries" in *Maltese Folklore Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 1973, pp. 353 – 354.

will be taken in hand, with proper cataloguing of objects, and details of provenance and locality, size, approximate date, use, technical terminology, etc.

Various kinds of materials are therefore available, and well-meant initiatives have been started. However, what is sadly lacking is a sense of direction, a unifying purpose to inspire, guide and coordinate these various interests and establish the essential link between academic institutions, museums, private collectors and local independent scholars.

The situation outlined above underlines the urgent need to provide a broad outline of the field of Maltese Folklore to serve as a guide for would-be collectors, whether amateurs or not. Far too many people in Malta seem to think of folklore exclusively in terms of folk-singing, which they inaptly term "folklore singing", or of village festas. At the other extreme there are those who fallaciously believe that anything that is old should automatically be considered as being part and parcel of local folklore.

It is important to let people know that folklore is about. The present writer's initial concept of folklore was directly influenced during the last war by the two definitions of the famous Sicilian folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè. The first one dates back to 1894, when Pitrè wrote the preface to *Bibliografia delle tradizioni popolari d'Italia*. The following is the relevant extract:

Il folklore abbraccia la vita fisica a morale dell'uomo in tutte le sue manifestazioni, cominciando dalle vesti, dagli alimenti, dalle pratiche domestiche e religiose, e finendo alle credenze, alle ubbie, alle tradizioni orali, che rivelano i pensieri, gli affetti e lo spirito multiforme di esso nella novella, nel canto, nella sentenza, nell'arguzia; partendo dagli espedienti primitivi per procurarsi da vivere (caccia, pesca, agricoltura) e scendendo giù giù fino ai mestieri tutti, alle occupazioni onde si campa la vita sulla terra e sul mare, in città e in campagna, sui monti e nelle miniere.⁷

More carefully worded is the later definition which Pitrè gave of the domain of folklore in his inaugural address at the opening of a 'Corso di Demopsicologia' at the University of Palermo on 12 January 12, 1911. The operative part reads as follows:

Per noi la demopsicologia studia la vita morale e materiale dei popoli civili, dei non civili e dei selvaggi . . . Questa vita è documentata dai diversi generi di tradizioni orali

⁷ Quoted by Giuseppe Bonomo in his comments on G. Pitrè's *Che cos'è il folklore*, (reprinted) Palermo, 1965, p. 60.

ed oggettive. Fiabe e favole, racconti e leggende, proverbi e motti, canti e melodie, enigmi e indovinelli, giuochi e passatempi, giocattoli e balocchi, spettacoli e feste, usi e costumi, riti e cerimonie, pratiche, credenze, superstizioni, ubbie, tutto un mondo palese ed occulto, di realtà e di immaginazione, si muove, si agita, sorride, geme a chi sa accostarvisi e comprenderlo . . .⁸

Opinions about what folklore means have varied considerably during the last half century or so, both in Europe and in the United States. Although Pitрэ's concept of folklore is still substantially valid today, there have been various modifications and extensions to its scope. To illustrate this I quote the definition given by two eminent American scholars of international repute, Stith Thompson and Archer Taylor, whom I had the good fortune to meet and discuss local folklore problems with at an International Congress in Kiel in 1957. Stith Thompson says:

Although the word folklore is more than a century old, no exact agreement has ever been reached as to its meaning. The common idea present in all folklore is that of tradition, something handed down from one person to another and preserved either by memory or practice rather than written record. It involves the dances, songs, tales, legends, and traditions, the beliefs and superstitions, and the proverbial sayings of peoples everywhere. It also includes studies of customs, of traditions, agricultural and domestic practices, types of buildings and utensils, and traditional aspects of social organization, but for these latter aspects there seems to be a general agreement to consider them, when found in a primitive or preliterate society, as a part of ethnology rather than folklore. This latter division of labour is largely a matter of convenience and is not universally accepted. At least among literate people all the subjects mentioned above are considered as folklore, since all of them are truly traditional.

Archer Taylor writes at greater length:

Folklore consists of materials that are handed on traditionally from generation to generation without a reliable ascription to an inventor or author. Although proverbs, ballads, and other items of folklore are often credited to a particular person, this is itself a stylistic peculiarity of the genre and the individual's claims are ordinarily dubious in the extreme. If they are capable of proof, we find that the material has suffered alteration or adaptation in the process of transmission. The "communal recreation" proceeds characteristically according to associative rather than logical ways of thinking. The materials handed on traditionally may be physical objects, ideas or words. The folklore of physical objects includes the shapes and uses of tools, costumes, and the forms of villages and houses. The folklore of gestures and games occupies a position intermediate between the folklore of physical objects and the folklore of ideas. Typical ideas transmitted as folklore are manifested in the customs associated with birth, marriage, and death, with the lesser events of life, with remedies for illnesses and wounds, with agriculture,

8 G. PITRÉ, *Che cos'è il folklore*, Palermo, 1965, p. 20.

the trades, and the professions, and with religious life notably with Christmas, Easter, and other holy days or saints' days. Verbal folklore includes words considered for their own sake and words occurring as connected discourse. Typical words that the folklorist studies without special regard for their use in connected discourse are place names, personal names (both family and Christian names) and nicknames. Folklore in the form of connected discourse includes tales of various kinds (*märchen*, jests, legends, cumulative tales, exempla, fables, etiological tales), ballads, lyric folk song, children's songs, charms, proverbs and riddles. The study of folklore consists in the collection, classification, and interpretation of these traditional materials. Classification involves interpretation to some extent. Interpretation seeks to discover the origin, meaning, use, and history of these materials, to state and explain their dissemination, and to describe their stylistic peculiarities.⁹

To arrange the material of Maltese Folklore which we have been speaking about we could perhaps benefit from the experience of other, much bigger countries and utilize, with necessary amendments and adaptations, one or other of the working systems of classification devised for the purpose. An adaptation and simplification of A. Van Gennep's sub-division of French folk-material in his *Manuel de Folklore Français Contemporain*¹⁰ would produce the following scheme for the arrangement of local folklore material:

FROM THE CRADLE TO THE GRAVE: Pregnancy and childbirth – Baptism – Infancy and Adolescence – Engagement and Marriage – Death and Funeral Customs.

PERIODICAL CEREMONIES: 1. *Seasonal Cycles & Movable Feasts* – Carnival and Lent – Easter – May-Midsummer (SS. John, Peter and Paul) – All Saints – The Twelve Days – 11. *Fixed Popular Ceremonies* – Candlemas – 1 April – First of May – Ascension Day – The Assumption – 8th September.

CALENDAR CEREMONIES: Cult of the Virgin and Saints – Patron Saints and their feasts – Rural Chapels and Ceremonies – Popular iconography (*if not preferred under "Folk Arts"*).

FOLKLORE OF NATURE: The Sky – The Earth – Rain and Drought Ceremonies – Stones and Prehistoric Folklore – Water: sources and miraculous springs, sea – Popular Fauna and Flora.

MAGIC AND WITCHCRAFT: Witches – Folk-prayers, Exorcisms and Magic Formulas – Divination – Evil Eye – Amulets and Talismans.

FOLK-MEDICINE: Popular Remedies – Saint Healers.

IMAGINARY CREATURES: Changelings – Giants (ogres) – The Devil – Ghosts and Apparitions – Creatures half-man and half-beast.

FOLK LITERATURE WITH CHANGING TEXT: Tales and legends – Coarse and obscene speech – Play on words and Anecdotes.

FOLK LITERATURE WITH FIXED TEXT: Proverbs and Sayings – Wellerisms –

9 *Funk and Wagnalls Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology and Legend*, edited by Maria Leach. London, 1975, pp. 402 – 403.

10 Tome III, 1937, pp. 11 – 56.

– Fables – Riddles – Hawkers' and Other Street Cries – *Blason Populaire* (collective nicknames).

FOLK-MUSIC AND FOLK-SONGS (including Noël's).

GAMES, TOYS AND PASTIMES (including counting rhymes, musical instruments and Folk-Dance).

SOCIAL AND JURIDICAL FOLKLORE: Bells and Weather-Cocks – Special groups and types (e.g. hanged persons) – Trades and Occupations – Fishing & Agriculture – Property Marks.

DOMESTIC FOLKLORE: The Dwelling – Construction, Contents and Annexa – Regional Cookery and Sweets.

FOLK ARTS: Popular Iconography – Symbols and Emblems – Tattooing – Stone Carving – Pottery and other crafts – Popular Pictures – Dress and Costume – Ex-Votos – Folk-Drama – Puppets.

A more elaborate classification, with detailed questionnaires under each topic, has been worked out in the Scandinavian countries, where research in the fields of ethnology and folklore has reached a higher level than elsewhere. A detailed scheme for the classification of folklore material was prepared in Sweden in 1934 by Prof. Herman Geijer, Dr. Aake Campbell and Dr. Sven Liljeblad and a modified version of it was used in the *Landsmaalsarkiv* (Dialect and Folklore Archives) at Uppsala. The Swedish system, which embraces both the spiritual or oral lore, and the material, was successfully adapted, with minor changes, for use in the Irish Folklore Commission's office in Dublin. This is what Sean O'Suilleabhán, late Archivist to the Commission, said about the Swedish classification at the Third Symposium on Folklore held at Indiana University in 1950:

It begins with the lore, both spiritual and material, of the people settling down on the land. This embraces legends about the house, the field, the land and all that goes with it, and also oral traditions. Then next we have the question of how people support themselves after they have once settled on the land. There is the study of hunting and fishing and implements and oral lore about them and the like. Then we come to the study of the household, the cultivation of land, the planting of crops, work within the house, the light and heat in the home, food, utensils, cleanliness, and so forth. From there we go on to the study of commerce, communications and trades, shopping, buying, selling, markets, and the like. From these things we go on to the study of the community, the people of the parish or whatever unit they are working in, the relation of master and servant, the relations between the rich and poor, the family as a unit, names, personal names, surnames, and the like. Then the administration of the law, land tenure, education, religion, the growth of towns and villages. Next they take the human being from before birth until after his death . . . Then you have nature lore in all its aspects, and folk medicine. You have the calendar, time, place, and the year. Next comes a very important branch – custom and belief, which runs through all cultures. Next we come to mythological tradition starting with devils, witches, hags, and the like . . . Next we have historical traditions consisting of what people remember or think they remember about the living and the dead. In Ireland we have another sub-division which we call religious tradition, very important in our Irish folklore. We finally get round to popular

folk literature. First of all the international folk tales . . . Then we have folk songs, proverbs, riddles, psalms, prayers and so on, sayings and anecdotes . . . Finally one comes to amusements and pastimes of various kinds . . .¹¹

The following is a summary of the classification appearing in *A Handbook of Irish Folklore* published for the Folklore of Ireland Society in 1942 to serve as a guide for collectors of Irish oral traditions.¹²

SETTLEMENT AND DWELLING – The District – Local land division and tenure – The Dwelling-House (house furniture, building) – Temporary Dwellings – Relics of the past (old buildings, castles, towers, etc.).

LIVELIHOOD & HOUSEHOLD SUPPORT – Care and management of livestock – Folklore of Domestic Animals and Birds – Agriculture – Trades and Occupations – The Fire – Food and Drink – Meals – Luxuries – Household Vessels and Utensils – Personal and Domestic Hygiene.

COMMUNICATIONS & TRADE – Travel by land (paths, roads, carts and carriages) – Travel by water – Spreading News and Information – Business and Commerce – Fairs and Markets.

THE COMMUNITY – Work and Labour – Dress – Rich and Poor – Social Intercourse – Social & Family Relationship (including surnames, Christian names and nicknames) – The Practice of Religion (including fast and abstinence, baptism, confirmation, blessing of houses or boats, processions, pilgrimages) – Education – Legal Administration (including the making of wills) – Possession of Land or Property – Villages, Towns and Cities – Military Service.

HUMAN LIFE – The Sexes – Youth and Age – Individual Characteristics – The Human Body – Bodily Functions & Activities – Challenges – Contests and Feats – Sickness – Death – The Wake – The Funeral – The Return of the Dead.

NATURE – The Sky and Solar System – The Atmosphere (including wind-lore, rain-lore, thunder, and lightning) – The Weather – The Points of the Compass – The Four Elements – Natural Features (including stones, the sea, caves, hills, wells) – Trees & Plants (including medicinal use of plants) – Other Growths – Birds – Mammals – Fishes – Insects and Spiders – Crustaceans – Reptiles – Molluscs – Worms.

FOLK-MEDICINE – Health and Illness – Avoidance of disease and illness – Diagnosis of Disease – Medical materials (e.g. herbs) – Medical practitioners in olden times – Care of the Sick – Common Diseases and Ailments.

TIME – Measurement of Time – Important Dates & Periods – Patterns and Local Festivals – Pilgrimages – Feasts and Festivals of the Year – The Days of the Weeks – The Months of the Year.

PRINCIPLES & RULES OF POPULAR BELIEF & PRACTICE – Boundaries – Fate – Divination – Individuals credited with Supernatural Powers (including the Evil

11 S. THOMPSON, ed., *Four Symposia on Folklore held at the Midcentury International Folklore Conference, Indiana University, July 21 – August 4, 1950* . . . Bloomington, Indiana, 1953, pp. 260–261.

12. Sean Ó Súilleabháin, *A Handbook of Irish Folklore*, 1942, pp. xix–xxxi.

Eye) – Talismans – Sorcery and Witchcraft – Emblems, Numbers and Colours – Speech and Silence (including exclamations and ejaculations, curses, swearing and affirmations, charms) – Traditional Code of Right and Wrong – Fictions (child bogeys, etc.)

MYTHOLOGICAL TRADITION – Origins – Supernatural Beings – Devils – Demons – Witches – Giants – Mythical Champions and Warriors – Wizards – Changelings – Spirits – The Nightmare – Ghosts and Apparitions – Sub-human Persons – Water Beings – Supernatural Places (including haunted houses, submerged villages, churches, houses) – Hidden Treasure – Supernatural Phenomena – The Afterworld.

HISTORICAL TRADITION – Individual Persons – Important Historic Events – Local Happenings – The Island in Tradition – Traditions about foreign countries.

RELIGIOUS TRADITION – God – The Angels – Christ and the Blessed Virgin – The Saints.

POPULAR ORAL LITERATURE – Storytellers and their Art – International Folktales told locally – Hero-tales – Male characters in folktales – Female characters in folktales – Animals and Birds in Folktales – Tales of Magic – Romantic Tales – Religious Tales – Humorous Tales – Animal Tales – Speech attributed to animals, plants and objects – Didactic Anecdotes – Tales of Origin (of certain animals, etc.) – Place-Names – Prayers and Charms – Songs and Airs – Proverbs, Bywords and local Expressions – Riddles.

SPORTS AND PASTIMES – Occasional Pastimes and Celebrations – Festival Amusements and Games – Other Games (including Games-Rhymes & Card Playing) – The Playing of Music – Dancing – Singing – Dramatic Entertainments – Active Pastimes and Tests – Pastimes with Animals or Birds (e.g. dog-fights, bird trapping & shooting) – Toys.

Another alternative would be to turn to one of the book classification systems used for the arrangement of libraries. Here, too, one should heed the conclusion reached by Bonser and Garside that “an examination of the various published classifications, such as the Dewey decimal classification used in most public libraries and the more scholarly classification of the Library of Congress, showed that none of these ready-made schemes offered a really satisfactory classification of folklore”. In view of this, in 1955 these two librarians produced for the Folklore Society, London a new and comprehensive classification which, in itself, was intended to be “an important contribution to the study of folklore, in the broad and scholarly sense of the word as accepted by the Society”. In the words of Bonser and Garside,¹³ “an examination of the schedules themselves will show that the classification of the various aspects or elements of folklore

13 W. BONSER and K. GARSIDE, “The Classification of the Library of the Folklore Society”, *Folklore: Transactions of the Folk-Lore Society*, Vol. LXVI, June 1955, pp. 267–281.

proceeds in a logical sequence from man himself, through his various activities and the physical world which governs or interests him, to his religion, and ends with narrative folklore and the incidence of folklore themes in literature, music and the arts.’’

The subjoined summary of the schedules of this classification includes a few amendments to make it adaptable for local use;

MANKIND

- (i) Men – Women (fertility and barrenness) – Children (twins, etc.)
- (ii) Birth (couvade, changelings), – Baptism – Infancy – Baby Language
- (iii) Love, Courtship and Marriage
- (iv) Death and Burial – Mourning
- (v) Domestic folklore (threshold etc.)

HUMAN ACTIVITIES

- (i) Occupations and Industries (agriculture, fishing, building, etc.)
- (ii) Folk Arts and Crafts (stone work, lace, weaving, filigree, basketry, etc.)
- (iii) Medicine
- (iv) Law
- (v) Food and Drink
- (vi) Games and Pastimes (including Folk-Dance and Song)
- (viii) Feasts and Fairs
- (viii) Other Social Customs
- (ix) Dress and Costume

ANIMAL, VEGETABLE AND MINERAL WORLDS

- (i) Animals, birds, fishes, insects, reptiles, fictitious beasts (A – Z under each)
- (ii) Trees, fruits, flowers, vegetables (A – Z under each)
- (iii) Rocks and stones, gems, etc. (A – Z under each)

NATURAL PHENOMENA

- (i) Sky (sun, moon, stars)
- (ii) Earth (hills, caves, etc.)
- (iii) Water (sea, wells and springs)
- (iv) Fire
- (v) Weather (thunder and lightning, rain, wind)

CALENDAR CUSTOMS

- (i) Movable Feasts (Carnival, Easter, etc.)
- (ii) Seasons
- (iii) Fixed Feasts (Candlemas, Midsummer (St. John’s Day and *L-Imnarja*), Christmas, etc.)
- (iv) Patron Saints and their feasts.

MAGIC AND SUPERNATURAL

- (i) Superstition in general (including changelings)
- (ii) Devil lore
- (iii) Giant (ogres), monsters, dragons
- (iv) Ghosts and Apparitions

- (v) Magic (Charms, exorcisms and incantations, talismans, spitting, crossroads)
- (vi) Divination (omens, dreams)
- (vii) Evil Eye – Luck – Taboos – Astrology
- (viii) Witchcraft and Sorcery
- (ix) Occult, Fortune-telling – Sects

RELIGIOUS FOLKLORE

- (i) Christ and the Virgin Mary
- (ii) Apostles, Saints and Hagiology
- (iii) Miracles, Ex-Votos
- (iv) Cult of the Dead, etc.

NARRATIVE FOLKLORE

- (i) Myths and Legends
- (ii) Folk-Tales – Fables
- (iii) Nursery Rhymes – Folk Rhymes
- (iv) Proverbs, Riddles
- (v) Ballads and Folk Songs, Street Cries
- (vi) Folk Prayers (including, if so preferred, exorcisms and incantations)

MISCELLANEOUS ASPECTS

- (i) Numbers
- (ii) Colours
- (iii) Names (nicknames, place names, etc.)
- (iv) Symbolism (cross, emblems, etc.)
- (v) Folklore in literature, art, music
- (vi) Other topics (shop signs, etc.)

Although classification systems are inevitably arbitrary, it is hoped that any one of the above schemes will be enough to give a broad outline providing proper orientation in approaching the field of Maltese Folklore. Material collected and arranged under the main headings may then need to be further sub-divided; detailed classifications in respect of various topics have been worked out, as in the case of folk-narrative, where Aarne-Thompson's *The Types of the Folktale*,¹⁴ accepted by scholars in various countries as a basis for their work, has been successfully used, with some additions, by G. Mifsud-Chircop for the classification of the Maltese material.¹⁵ These specialized systems, however, fall outside the scope of the present study.

14 A. ARNE – S. THOMPSON, *The Types of the Folktale: a classification and bibliography*, 2nd ed., Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 1961.

15 G. MIFSUD CHIRCOP, *Type-Index of the Maltese Folktale within the Mediterranean Tradition Area* – Unpublished thesis for the degree of Master of Arts in Maltese, University of Malta, 1978.