

# MALTA IN 1575

## SOCIAL ASPECTS OF AN APOSTOLIC VISIT

By

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The year 1575 marked a very important event in Maltese History. An Apostolic Visitor, Mgr. Pietro Duzina, was sent to Malta to report on the state of the Maltese Islands, and the result was the establishment of the Holy Tribunal of the Inquisition in Malta. Previously the power and authority of the Inquisitor had been vested in the Bishop; but times had changed. Unorthodoxy was creeping in both among the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, to whom the Islands were granted by Charles V of Spain in 1530, and among the richer and educated classes of the Maltese, some of whom fell under the influence of the new teaching of the Reformers. Moreover, it was considered advisable to have an Inquisitor in order to implement the decisions of the Council of Trent which had only recently come to an end. The new office, however, soon proved to be a wedge between the temporal authorities, headed by the Grand Master of the Order of St. John, and the ecclesiastical state with the Bishop at its head. Thus, to quote a modern historian, "there were three rivals in little Malta each trying to oust the other — the Grand Master, the Inquisitor and the Bishop". (1)

### Events leading up to the Visit

My aim here is to point out certain aspects of Duzina's report which reveal illuminating glimpses of the social state of Malta in 1575 — facts which have been virtually ignored by historians. The report, which is a priceless mine of information, includes in its findings descriptions of parishes with their various churches and the number of houses and people making up these parishes, and there are references to legacies intended to relieve the poor both materially and spiritually. We get an insight into the primitive means of transport and the state of the roads, we learn of the prevailing belief in witchcraft, of baptismal and burial practices, of folk-festivals and customs, of parish and other dues, of expenditure incurred yearly by the Cathedral Chapter of Mdina, the ancient capital, and a thousand and one other things which the common people as well as the clergy were only too willing to bring to the notice of the Apostolic Visitor. All these elements and many more went to the formation of the obscure everyday life and activities of "our fathers that begat us", and the Visitor was sure to hear about any abuses prevailing among the clergy or ecclesiastical authorities, for both the people and the smaller clergy were full of complaints.

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1. Laferla, A. V., *The Story of Man in Malta*, Vol. 1, 1939, p. 91.

Before dealing more fully with some of these aspects of Duzina's report we must look backward over a period of about four centuries and try to picture what Malta was like in 1575. At that time Malta was just recovering from a very trying period: not long before, in 1565, the islands had withstood a long siege by Solyman's hordes under the command of Piali and Mustapha Pasha, aided by Rajjes Dragut. It is true that the Maltese and the Knights had emerged victorious from the struggle, uneven though it was, but the victory had been won at too great a cost. The male population had been cruelly decimated during the siege; there was havoc and destruction everywhere, the villages and all the country around had been laid waste and desolation reigned supreme (2). More trials and more hardships lay in store for the survivors of the epic siege; the depleted population had to be replaced somehow, the island's fortifications repaired and extended, and a fortress erected on Mount Scceberras in preparation for another Turkish attack. But the Knights and the Maltese proved equal to the occasion and during the short period of five years the wind-swept waste of Scceberras Hill was converted into a set of mighty fortifications rising up from the level of the sea. No pains were spared to achieve this almost impossible task; the European powers were asked to help and some of them contributed in arms and money. Cheap labour was imported and the lash was wielded with tremendous effect on the back of the Turkish slaves. Copper money substituted the local currency previously struck by the Grand Masters, but this mattered little so long as everyone had faith in Malta's mission to keep out the Crescent from the shores of Europe. *Non aes sed fides* was the motto which figured on the copper currency of the time; and it expressed very aptly the attitude of the island and its people in the first decade following the Great Siege of 1565.

Now all this was happening in a small island which still led a primitive existence and in which life was anything but easy. In the course of a long succession of foreign dominations the inhabitants had accustomed themselves to live peacefully side by side with, though quite distinct from their rulers to whom, with the exception of Islam, they were only bound by the bond of a common creed. The Maltese were characterised by the individuality of their language and their customs, and they lived outside the fortified castles and centres of government in tiny hamlets and villages. Meanwhile the islands were passing through a trying phase politically, ecclesiastically and economically. Politically there had been a considerable development since the days of Count Roger the Norman, and as a result of the institutions set up by, or rather wrested from their feudal overlords, the Maltese Popular Council had grown to enjoy some judicial and executive powers. With this gradual constitutional growth came the assertion, for the first time in Maltese history, of the right of the common people to be considered as an important factor in the economic life of the Island. Indeed, the importance of the *Castello a Mare* and of the fortified citadel of Imdina diminished while that of the Borgo, outside the *Castello*, and of Rabat, the suburb of Imdina, where the artisan classes and the commercial community mainly congregated, gradually grew until these classes, growing conscious of their own potentiality and the respect due to

2. *Ibid.*, p. 83.

them as a class, united together and obtained recognition as a force in the economic and political life of the island (8).

The assertion of civic rights and liberties, however, was very insecure under the iron rule of the feudal overlords and kings who, in the words of the late Sir A. Bartolo, "whenever it served their purpose, repealed without the slightest hesitation what with the greatest difficulty they had been prevailed upon to concede". Nor was this all: peculiar circumstances added to the darkness of the scene in those dark ages. "Every now and then", the same historian tells us, "the island from end to end rang with the clash of arms following the invasion of barbarian hordes, tempted by its utter defencelessness due to the grossest neglect of the rulers; every now and then it smarted under the scourge of pestilence imported by the invaders, groaned under the heavy yoke of the tyrant, sweated under the extortion of the oppressor and languished in the throes of misery" (4).

In the ecclesiastical field, too, the people were far from happy with their lot. More often than not the Bishop stayed away from his flock in Palermo, where life was more worth living, and the richer benefices were almost invariably assigned to foreign priests who enjoyed the favour of the Palermitan Curia. Besides, through an ill-advised policy, it happened sometimes that a foreigner unable to speak the language of the people was put in charge of the spiritual welfare of the faithful, and this, too, gave rise to justified complaints by the people who felt themselves deprived of the comforts and the paternal advice of their spiritual leaders (5). Economically, since the dawn of the 14th century the islands had become dependent on imports for their food supplies, while trade and commerce with the neighbouring countries were a prey to bloodthirsty pirates, Moslem and Christian alike, who infested the main trade routes of the Mediterranean. Intellectually, the islands were as barren as their rocks, and I. S. Mifsud in the 18th century notes with sadness the almost complete absence of Maltese writers between the birth of Christ and the coming of the Order in 1530 (6). Nor could it be otherwise, considering that, but for a grammar school run by the Cathedral at Imdina, instruction could only be obtained from a few ecclesiastics and was practically beyond the means of the masses.

This brief outline of Maltese life is amply borne out by the report of the Commissioners who preceded Grand Master L'Isle Adam and his Knights in 1528. Indeed, except for the Borgo and the city of Valletta, the islands had not changed much when Duzina carried out his Apostolic Visit. In 1528 the Commissioners reported adversely on the poor resources of the islands. They found that Malta was exposed to dangerous contagious diseases in summer, especially Malaria, which was in part due to the people's habit of washing linen in the public fountains. In 1525, this practice had been prohibited and the disease checked for the time being. The capital, Imdina, was situated inland, about seven miles from the ports, the *Castello* and the *Borgo*. There

3. Mifsud, A., *I nostri Consoli e le Arti ed i Mestieri*, In "Archivum Melitense", Vol. 3, Nos. 2-3, p. 37.
4. Bartolo, A., *History of the Maltese Islands*. In "Malta and Gibraltar", 1915, p. 61.
5. Mifsud, A., *Frammenti Storici* (Doc. XII), seguito al "La Cattedrale e l'Università". In "La Diocesi di Malta", Anno III, 1918-19, Nos. 7-8, pp. 203-5.
6. Mifsud, I. S., *Biblioteca Maltese* . . . Malta, 1764. Introduzione, p. xvii.

were cisterns within the capital, but the people took its water from the two fountains situated outside the town. Some other springs to the West supplied water to a few gardens near the capital. The western part of Malta was sterile but to the east of Imdina the country, though stony, could be brought under cultivation. The *Borgo* contained only a few houses for sailors, and it was but feebly defended by a small castle which was half in ruins. The island was very arid and devoid of any kind of forest or wood. Wood for fire had to be brought over from Sicily, or else, the people used thistles (*cardoni*) which grew abundantly, to heat their ovens. More commonly, however, they dried up in the sun the dung of cattle (*M. baghar*) and used it to cook their poor meals. The island was but thinly populated and houses were sparsely scattered in the various villages. The inhabitants ate little, the island did not produce food for more than a third of the population and the rest was obtained free from Sicily in virtue of an old privilege granted to Malta by the King of Sicily. So weak were the defences of the coasts that Turkish corsairs conducted their piratical raids with comparative impunity. Only in the matter of harbours was the island lucky: it possessed two harbours capable of taking in any large fleet and, although exposed to the fury of the Gregale, they had many creeks in which the ships could shelter. The island of Gozo was more fertile, but its only fortress was too small and unable to stand up against a small fleet, and it had no safe harbour (7).

Against this background Mgr. Duzina's report assumes an added importance. I shall try to present the main aspects of Maltese life in 1575.

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### Duzina at Naples

I recount an anecdote which probably led to Duzina's selection as Apostolic Visitor to Malta in 1574. In 1572 we find Duzina holding the office of Vicar to the Archbishop of Naples, Cardinal Carafa. In November of that year Don Juan of Austria, the hero of Lepanto, returned from an unsuccessful expedition against the Turks and, being in poor health, he stopped for some time at Naples where he arrived on the 17th November. Whilst in Naples he had a love affair with Diana Falangola, a lovely lady from Sorrento, by whom he had a child, later known as Donna Giovanna d'Austria. As soon as Diana's condition became known, all efforts were made to hush up the matter and the Viceroy of Naples, Cardinal Granvella, made arrangements for her admission into the Convent of Santa Patrizia. Here, however, the nuns belonged to the most select Neapolitan society and, with the backing of the Archbishop, who was instigated by his Vicar Duzina, they flatly refused to have Diana in their convent. Following diplomatic representations to the Pope by the Viceroy, in which the Pope's Nuncio in Naples, Antonio Sauli, took part, Pope Gregory XIII ordered the nuns of Sta. Patrizia to admit Diana in their

7. It has not been possible, so far, to trace the Report of the Commissioners among the Archives of the Order. A useful summary, however, may be read in J. Bosio's *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Illma. Militia di San Giovanni Gierosolimitano Parte 3a.*, Roma, 1602, pp. 30-31, and L. de Boisgelin's *Ancient and Modern Malta* . . . London, 1805, Vol. II, pp. 15-17.

convent. At this Carafa gave in and tried to persuade the nuns to comply with the Pope's instructions. Duzina, however, decided to carry on the struggle as he felt himself to be, in a certain sense, independent of his Bishop since he had been appointed directly by the Holy Office of the Inquisition in Rome. Through his influence with the Holy Office Duzina had all but succeeded when a false step on his part led to his expulsion from the Kingdom of Naples. A thief had been caught red-handed in the church of San Lorenzo and was imprisoned in the Archbishop's Curia. Duzina refusing to give him up for trial by the civil authorities, the prison door was then forced in and the prisoner taken away by the *sbirri* under the command of the *avvocato fiscale*, Pansa by name. At this Duzina's rage knew no bounds and, in the name of the Archbishop, he proclaimed the excommunication not only of Pansa and his men, but also of those who had sent them and connived at their action (*i loro mandanti et consentienti*). To this Granvella replied, among other things, by covering over the *cedoloni* proclaiming the excommunication with ink and paper, by hanging the thief in the square of San Lorenzo, and by ordering Duzina to quit the city within 24 hours and the Kingdom within one week. This was on the 6th March, 1573, and by letter of the 13th July, 1573 Philip III of Spain approved the action taken by his Viceroy in Naples. Following his expulsion, Duzina stayed on in Rome for fifteen months until on July 3rd, 1574 he was sent by Gregory XIII as Apostolic Visitor and first Inquisitor in the Maltese islands which he reached in the 1st August (8).

### Visit to the Churches

On Friday, the 21st January, 1575, Mgr. Duzina started his Apostolic Visit. Accompanied by the Vicar General, Don Antonio Bartolo, Parish Priest of Zurrieq, and by the Dominican Fr. Damiano Taliana, he visited the Cathedral church at Imdina. One by one he visited all the other churches and chapels in Malta and Gozo in the course of the next two months, and wherever he went he ordered repairs to be made, baptismal fonts to be covered, graves to be constructed, and stone crosses to be erected over the sites of unused chapels. During his stay in Malta Duzina issued instructions for the observance of decorum in churches, for the regulation of priests' conduct and for enforcement of the decisions of the Council of Trent.

Duzina visited about 430 churches or chapels, of which he deconsecrated 59 — 13 of them in Gozo. Among these there were churches whose revenue was insufficient to secure their proper maintenance and repair, others were too small while others again were in a ruinous state and it was indecorous to allow the celebration of Mass in them any longer. We read of the church of *S. Maria de Porta*, situated near the gate of Imdina, where Mass was occasionally said for the benefit of the labourers who worked in the vicinity. Duzina, however, considered the place too narrow, uncomfortable and indecent (9). In other churches there were no doors or gates to keep out animals and Duzina ordered their immediate repair or construction (10). He

8. Nicolini, Fausto: *Un'Amante Sorrentina di don Giovanni d'Austria*. In "Rassegna Storica Napoletana", Anno II, No. 2, 1934. See also R.M.L. Ms. 8, ff. 192-193.

9. R.M.L. Ms. 643, p. 46.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

also stressed the importance of absolute cleanliness in churches and ordered that floors should be swept clean at least once a week (11).

### Population

The Apostolic Visitor, however, was not concerned only with churches. He also left interesting details of the number of houses and inhabitants in some of our villages. To quote a few: Attard had a population of 665 villagers living in 165 houses: 300 people resided in 60 houses at Balzan, while Lija had 80 houses in which lived 400 persons. Zebbug, with its hamlets Hal Dwil and Hal Muxi, had 260 dwellings housing 1,200 people; 60 persons lived in 17 houses at Hal Bordi while at Hal Man 50 villagers resided in 12 houses. Other population figures show 1,200 persons at Bormla and 800 at Rabat and Imdina. Sundry housing figures include 116 households at Mosta, 100 at Tarxien, 60 at Zabbar, 203 at Żurrieq, 15 at Hal Millieri, 180 at Luqa, 7 at Hal Manin, 54 at Qrendi, 22 at Hal Lew, 42 at Bubaqra, 20 at Hal Tartarni, and 80 each at Gharghur and Gudja.

Now all these figures tend to show that at the time five persons made up the average Maltese family. And this is important, considering that as recently as 1943 the Government Cost of Living Committee came to the conclusion that the average Maltese family is made up of five persons. From the figures available we can argue the approximate population of the islands in those days. In 1590, that is, fifteen years after Duzina's visit, the Viceroy of Sicily ordered the Knight De Quadra to take a census of the Maltese Islands. The figures taken show 24,523 persons over the age of five years, 4,341 under five years and 3,426 persons belonging to the Order or forming part of the crews of its ships. This gives a total population of 32,290 — an increase of slightly more than 7,000 over the population in 1530. This increase becomes much smaller, however, if one leaves out the people belonging to the Order. It is believed that the population of these islands doubled itself during the 15th century and, according to the historian Bosio, the native population could not have exceeded nine or ten thousand at the end of the 14th century. Tracing the population trend still further back, we come to the first demographic figures. In 1240 Abate Giliberto reported to the king, Ferdinand II, that in Malta there were 47 Christian families, 681 Saracen families and 25 Jewish families while in Gozo there were 203 Christian families, 155 Saracen families and 8 Jewish ones.

### The people's condition

The above shows that between 1240 and 1530, that is, in the course of three centuries roughly, the population of the Maltese islands grew threefold. Now this increase took place in spite of the adverse conditions prevailing in these islands. For instance, there were the frequent raids of the Moorish corsairs with the consequent deportation of people into slavery; the expulsion of the Jewish community from Malta in 1492, serious epidemics — and privateering, which was at once a main source of wealth and a considerable steady drain on the population. The fear of a depopulated Malta haunted the *Università*, and time and again they prohibited privateering by Maltese

11. *Ibid.*, p. 609.

subjects on behalf of foreign powers. The reason is set out clearly in the following extract from a document dated 1449: “. . . *maxime ki piu volte simili fuste havi armatu ala insula prenominata et li homini oy marini di quelli ki vanno cum ipsi tali fusti mai havu tornatu et accusi è diminutu lu populu di la insula predicta*” (12). But there was another enemy — relentless, cold and cruel. Year in, year out in those medieval days “Chill Penury” repressed “the noble rage” of our forefathers “and froze the genial current of the soul”. Small wonder, therefore, that many Maltese were driven to despair and decided to leave the island for good in search of “fresh woods and pastures new”. In such times the island presented a very dismal picture indeed: “. . . *ex quo non pluit et tucti li seminati su suchi (secchi) in tantum quod populus intendat aufugere et se absentare ab hac insula propter penuriam et necessitatem maximam*” (13). The *Università* racked its brain in order to find a happy solution *quid fiendum et quo modo aut qua via debeant vivere pauperes et alii qui non habent vivere*. The peasantry formed the back-bone of Maltese social life and economy in those days and their defection would have been disastrous to the country. The terrible truth so aptly expressed by Goldsmith must have worried our forefathers of old:—

“But a bold peasantry, their country’s pride,  
When once destroy’d, can never be supplied”.

### Housing

Closely related to the question of population in the 16th century was that of housing. In Duzina’s day the building of the new city, Valletta, had provided a welcome relief to the dwellers of the towns. The coming of the Order in 1530 had accentuated the housing problem to a degree hitherto unknown in Malta. And this problem was essentially a town problem. Peasants and farmers were used to a rough existence; their needs were few, their huts or houses primitive and simple in construction and they had grown accustomed to change their abode whenever the tocsin was sounded to give the alarm of a Turkish raid. The development of domestic planning in Maltese villages during the period under review has been described thus — “Throughout the Middle Ages Malta must have been a very primitive country and it is doubtful whether any but the highest in the land had stone houses to live in. There was only one market town, Imdina, and the remainder of the population was probably living in wretched isolated farmhouses little better than huts . . . . It was probably not until the time of the Knights that a greater sense of security from piratical raids encouraged the farmers to build stone houses. The earliest of these are very simple rectangular structures, with a doorway in one wall, generally with a few slits above it (possibly to let out smoke from a fire built on the floor inside). These early houses can generally be recognised by the enormous size of the arch-stones of the doorway, which is sometimes pointed but more generally roundheaded. Sometimes in front of the doorway is a walled enclosure or farm yard, and the house may even be extended by one or two lateral wings to form a simple courtyard. Such

12. Mifsud, A., *L’Approvvigionamento e l’Università di Malta nelle passate dominazioni*. In “Archivum Melitense”, Vol. 3, Nos. 5, p. 181.  
13. *Ibid.*, p. 177 (footnote 2).

houses would all be single-storied. The foundation of villages, however, sooner or later led to the development of a "town house" type of plan, that is to say, a house not standing alone, but adjoining others on either side, with the entrance door opening directly on to a street. Here the courtyard for cooking, keeping animals, carts, etc. has to be at the back of the house, which cuts it off from the street. This is the reason for the typical Maltese domestic plan, on which the rectangular house, ranged along the street, is divided into three rooms, the central one being a passage through to the rear courtyard...." (14).

In the towns, however, and especially in Birgu, the question was more complex. The advent of the Order created considerable housing difficulties. 4,000 Greek Rhodiotas who had accompanied the Knights throughout their peregrinations tried to settle down with their masters in Birgu, which was already filled to capacity. Long before the year 1409 a flourishing shipbuilding trade had been carried on there, and gradually this small seaside village, the haven of the fisherman and of the seafarer, had grown in size and importance and affected its surroundings. The building of ships led to the building of palaces, houses and other dwellings on the summit of the hill at the southern end of the New City, as Birgu was then called. Shipowners, the lords of the fiefs of the Marsa, Bormla and Senglea (then known as Petra Longa) together with corsairs, shipbuilders, merchants and money lenders all vied with one another in building their houses on this site, which was considered to be the more aristocratic part of the city. Then came the Order with its influx of Knights, soldiers and Rhodiote refugees, and these swelled the population of Birgu. The demand for houses far exceeded the supply and a deadlock ensued. Yet the Knights were not dismayed; they boldly decided to take the bull by the horns and in 1531 Grand Master L'Isle Adam issued a set of strict housing regulations to check the growing practice of subletting premises without the knowledge and consent of the owner, and which included, among other things, special provisions to ensure that owners of unfinished houses be required to sell or leave or else complete the houses forthwith (15). But all this happened before Duzina reported on his visit; the building of Valletta a few years before had practically solved the housing problem, at any rate for the time being, and the Apostolic Visitor hardly refers to this aspect of life at all. Other pressing problems engaged his attention.

### Village Development

On reading Duzina's report one notices that several villages mentioned as a separate entity have lost much, if not all of their importance today. In the course of time tiny hamlets and villages gradually grouped themselves round a larger and more important village whose name now denotes the whole district in which the group of villages lies. To give some instances. Hal Bordi and Hal Man, though they still exist as placenames on the map, are no longer mentioned separately in any reference to the locality, and for all practical

14. Braun, Hugh, *An Introduction to Maltese Architecture*, 1944, p. 7.

15. Borg-Cardona, S., *The "Officio delle Case" and the Housing Laws of the earlier Grand Masters 1531-1569*. In "The Law Journal", Malta, Vol. III, No. 1, pp. 39-69. See also Darmanin-Demajo, G., *The Grand Harbour of Malta and its Surroundings in 1530*. In "Daily Malta Chronicle", Jan. 26, 1927.



purposes they have been incorporated into the parish of Attard. Hal Millieri, Hal Manin and Hal Lew have likewise been incorporated into the villages of Żurrieq, Qrendi, and Bubaqra respectively, while Hal Tartarni, which figures as a village in its own right in Duzina's report, today plays second fiddle to Dingli. For centuries there had been a gradual movement of the population from the shores inland. The Maltese writer A. E. Caruana in his novel *Inez Farrug* gives a vivid picture of the gradual desertion of ancient Maltese villages in the century preceding Duzina's visit. The Apostolic Visitor records at least one village, Melliġha, in such a state of flux and he mentions the Turkish peril as the main cause of such movements (16). We also read of a church at Rabat, in Gozo, which was almost in ruins. The houses nearby had been laid waste by the Turks, (17), and not only were no Sacraments administered but the inhabitants themselves had left, and its Rector had been living in Sicily for twenty four years.

### Church Grouping

Another important inference may be drawn from a close study of the grouping of churches in villages as described by Duzina. The church had not yet come to be the centre round which Maltese communal life turned. More often than not a group of three or four small churches or chapels lay quite close to each other. Following the Great Siege, with the gradual decline of Turkish power and with the increase in population, people began to feel the need for larger churches. The first and natural tendency was to enlarge existing ones, and the full development of this tendency roughly coincided with the period immediately following Duzina's visit.

In order to visualise how the churches were originally grouped let us take Birgu for an example and try to picture what it was like in 1575. A person living at that time might have seen a medium sized church surrounded by eight smaller churches. One of these stood on the left of the main edifice, so close as to be almost adjacent to it. The others were grouped irregularly to the right of it. Each chapel had a small burial ground attached to it and altogether they formed a cemetery on the slope of the hill and the chapels were grouped close to the principal church. The chapel to the left was named after St. Sebastian and those to the right were dedicated respectively to St. Anthony, St. Catherine, St. Andrew, the Visitation and three others to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin. In the course of time the small church of St. Sebastian was absorbed within the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament (18). From Duzina's visit we also know that at Naxxar, in Malta, three churches, dedicated to St. Agatha, St. Leonard and the Assumption respectively, almost adjoined the Parish Church (19), while a group of three churches lay in close proximity to the parish church at Siggiewi (20). At Qormi a church dedicated to the Annunciation was situated quite near the parish church and it adjoined the other small church of St. Michael (21). At Birmiftuh the church of the

16. R.M.L. Ms. 643, pp. 322-3.

17. *Ibid.*, pp. 232-236.

18. Darmanin-Demajo, G., *op. cit.*, Jan. 26, 1927.

19. R.M.L. Ms. 643, pp. 68-70.

20. *Ibid.*, pp. 117-118.

21. *Ibid.*, pp. 153.

Annunciation lay to the right of the parish church, and that of the Nativity to the left; to the North was situated the church dedicated to St. George, while that of St. Catharine was close to the parish church as well "*constructa prope Parochialem Ecclesiam*" (22).

These facts, and especially the arrangement of the Birgu churches, provide a new field of study to the student of Maltese Social History. The late G. Darmanin Demajo was a pioneer in this new approach to local history and he was quick to recognise its significance. He saw in it "a clue to a new field of study which might help us not only in tracing the origin of the existing parish churches in these islands but also the gradual formation of our villages and other populated centres". After deep study of the question the same writer outlined his theory thus — "It is therefore probable that similar groups of churches may have existed in these islands and that their metamorphosis in the course of centuries may have begun by the absorption of other churches (probably those dedicated to the same saint) into one church of larger dimensions when, on account of their decay, or for other causes, their reconstruction was considered necessary. The revenues and endowments of the churches so amalgamated would naturally accrue to the church which absorbed them. As time went on some other chapel was demolished or else was incorporated into the principal buildings, thus adding a new altar to it. This explains the irregular disposition of certain altars which we find in some churches. Thus all the smaller churches must have vanished in their turn, to give place to a larger and more beautiful edifice in which all the smaller suppressed churches would be found represented by an altar or a picture or even a statue, bringing with them under one roof the properties and burdens of the whole group" (23).

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The increase in population mentioned earlier in this study leads us to inquire into the factors contributing to its growth. Undoubtedly the increase was not due solely to the immigration of the Knights and their 4,000 followers, for such increase had been counterbalanced in part by unprecedented mass-deportations into slavery during the decade immediately preceding the Great Siege of 1565. Other forces were at work to bring about this upward trend in the demographic figures — contributing factors such as the tremendous impulse given by the Knights to traditional local industries, especially boat-building, weaving and sail-making, the various openings offered to men possessed of a bold, adventurous spirit, and a greater sense of security engendered by the gradual decline of the Turkish menace and by the protection afforded by the powerful Knights of the White Cross.

### Medical Services

Side by side with all this, in the intervening period between the Great Siege and the close of the 16th century, Malta began to enjoy to the full the benefits of the humanitarian and philanthropic ideals which inspired the work of the Order — essentially an Order of Hospitallers who had vowed to dedicate their

22. *Ibid.*, pp. 175-176.

23. Darmanin-Demajo, G., *op. cit.*, Jan. 27, 1927.

lives to the tending of the sick or the wounded and to the relief of the poor. Hence it was that the presence of the Hospitallers in the Maltese Islands brought about an all-round improvement in the existing state of hospital and medical services. This improvement took a concrete form later on in the century with the building of the Holy Infirmary close to the Grand Harbour. The measure of improvement thus brought about may be gauged from the following passage taken from E. Erskine Hume's work on the Knights Hospitallers: "They (the Knights) had been pioneers in hospital nursing; they had been the first to extend their ministrations irrespective of creed or nationality. The fame of the Sacra Infermeria attracted strangers to Malta, not only to study its organisation and methods, but to profit by them — to be nursed by knights with sixteen quarterings and to be fed off silver... There was the unheard of luxury of single beds, when in most hospitals the sick lay two or three to a bed. There were three hundred of these little canopied iron beds, standing in two long rows, each with its little bedstead in a niche built into the stone wall.... The canopies over the beds were, in summer, replaced by mosquito-nets, a great advance in themselves. In the floors below the soldiers and galley crews had equally commodious quarters. There were separate wards for medical and surgical cases, fever and dysentery patients being isolated. There were ample accommodation for convalescents and a special guardian and ward for the insane — yet these were times when such unfortunates were usually confined to prisons". (24)

### State of Maltese Hospitals

The Infirmary, however, had not yet been built when Mgr. Pietro Duzina visited Malta. It is true that at Birgu one of the Order's first acts had been the erection of a hospital of which some remains can still be seen — the building being now used as the Monastery of Sta. Scolastica. But apart from this there were only two inadequately equipped hospitals in Malta and Gozo to cater for the needs of the increasing population. Mgr. Duzina visited these hospitals and the description he has left us forms a unique document of the utmost importance to the social historian.

There was a small hospital in Gozo, named after St. Julian, which consisted of some dwellings in the vicinity of the gates inside the Castle. But Duzina found out that, instead of accommodating the sick, the building had been converted into a prison. Besides, it was impossible to admit any patients at all as there was no accommodation or any bedding equipment available. We can imagine how angry Duzina was at this unhappy state of affairs and he had good reason to issue strict injunctions that the hospital should no longer be used for any other purpose and that two beds, fully equipped with blankets etc. were to be provided out of the hospital's revenue of 3 *scudi* a year.

Outside Imdina, in Malta, there was Sto. Spirito Hospital, which seems to have fared no better than its counterpart in Gozo. Duzina's description of this hospital, whose origin is lost in the mist of antiquity and conjecture, is very important and we shall now turn our attention to it.

24. Erskine Hume, E., *Medical Work of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem*. Baltimore, 1940, p. 94

The present hospital building dates back only to the 17th century, but since time immemorial it has been used as a hospital. Local tradition claims St. Francis as the founder of the convent (25), but the earliest mention is dated 1370, though it is more than probable that the Convent was founded at an earlier date. The historian Rocco Pirri refers to the hospital as "very old" and writes:— "*D. Francisci fratres conven. ante annum 1370 sua habuere domicilia in suburbo Rabbatho juata antiquissimam domum hospitem sub eodem nomine S. Francisci, cuius Rectoriam uti di jurepatron. Rex Fridericus III F. Nicolao Papallae Panor. Franciscano concessit per litteras 4 Decembre anno 1370...*" (26). The Maltese historian Ferris puts down its origin as 1310 (27). Professor A.V. Bernard contributed the following interesting note in 1937: "It has been in existence since ancient times and used to be referred to as the Xenodochium or Royal Hospital, the rectorship being in the gift of the King of the Sicilies. It was originally attached to the Monastery of St. Francis which adjoins it and was known as the Hospital of St. Francis. It acquired its present title when Pope Innocent III dedicated all Christian hospitals to the Holy Ghost. It probably served the purpose of a leprosy asylum in the Middle Ages, the Franciscan Friars having since the earliest period of the foundation of their Order devoted themselves to the care of sufferers from this disease... But the records that exist of this hospital from about the 14th century show that it was used as a general hospital and in fact it remained the principal hospital of the Island until, on arrival in Malta of the Order of St. John, the Knights established their own Hospital" (28).

#### Hospital Administration

Duzina visited Sto. Spirito Hospital in the afternoon of Saturday, the 22nd January, 1575. So impressed was he by what he saw that he devoted considerable space to a description of the hospital in his report. At the time of his visit the hospital was administered by two procurators acting on behalf of the Jurats of Imdina, namely, Gabriel de Noto and Antonio Cassia. These assured the Apostolic Visitor that the church of St. Francis had always been used as a hospital, and in fact it was still being so used. Indeed, inside the church there were four beds, two on each side. A large house with a beautiful herb-garden attached to it adjoined the church, but patients could only be accommodated within the church proper, the upper part of which, towards the main altar, could be paved with planks. Inside the closed grating four beds, fully equipped, could then be placed. There were two patients to a bed (*duo tantum infirmi in lecto jacentes*), and bedding consisted only of a small linen cloth and a woolen mattress. One tari a week was administered to each patient by way of relief. Besides administering the hospital, the two procurators, who were deputed yearly for the purpose by the Jurats, paid a salary of three ounces a year to the Surgeon and it was also incumbent upon them to support foundlings. Another three ounces a year were paid as salary to the Chaplain, who said Mass daily and administered the Sacraments to the patients (29).

25. Caruana, A. A., *Monografia Critica della Cattedrale Apostolica di Malta*. 1899. p. 24.

26. Rocco Pirri, *Sicilia Sacra*, Palermo, 1733, Vol. II., p. 923.

27. Ferris, A., *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*. 1866. p. 113.

28. Bernard, A.V., *Report on the Health of the Maltese Islands for the year 1937*, p. xxxiv.

29. R.M.L. Ms. 643, pp. 47-48.

Mgr. Duzina was by no means satisfied with the state of affairs in Sto. Spirito Hospital. Nor did he feel happy when he came to know that the administration of the hospital was left completely at the discretion of the procurators who had no *ad hoc* set of hospital regulations to guide them in running the institution. To remedy matters Duzina laid down a set of rules which may be re-grouped as follows:—

(1) The hospital shall have a ward with a wooden floor and with an altar at its head.

(2) This ward shall contain beds up to eight in number, distributed four on each side.

(3) Each bed shall be fully equipped with mattresses with four sheets available for changing, and with two blankets in winter.

(4) Poor people stricken with fever shall be admitted and they shall be provided with all such necessities as are prescribed by the doctor.

(5) The old practice of taking in foundlings shall continue, and a note shall be kept of the admission, the name of the wet-nurse to whom they are entrusted and the period during which they are maintained at the expense of the hospital.

(6) As soon as these foundlings are old enough to be able to make themselves useful, the Procurators of the Hospitals shall see that they are engaged in some trade or calling, and they shall afford them all necessary help and guidance.

(7) For this purpose they shall keep a note of those who are so apprenticed and of their masters, and they shall submit a detailed report yearly to the Bishop or his Vicar.

(8) The Procurators *pro tempore* of the above Hospital, in order to merit eternal joy in Paradise through the exercise of charity, are exhorted to carry out their duty with befitting piety and devotion, and not to be guided by any motives of personal material gain (30).

The importance of the above rules is evident. They form the first set of hospital regulations for the running of Sto. Spirito Hospital and they offer interesting points of comparison with the elaborate "Stabilimenti" enacted by Grand Master De Rohan on the 17th March, 1795 (31). Here we have also an indication that, long before the *Ruota* system of taking in foundlings was established by the Order in Malta, arrangements were already in existence in this Xenodochium to provide for these innocent unwanted babies.

### Education

Education was another subject engaging the attention of the Apostolic Visitor. A few years before a Lutheran movement had been set afoot in Malta, and it exerted an evil influence on education because Fr. Andrea Axiac, the teacher of the school run by the *Università*, was one of the supporters of the movement. A certain Frenchman, Gisualdo, who kept a grammar school at Imdina, spread Lutheran doctrine among his pupils and his friends, and in this he was aided by Fr. Axiac. His meetings were attended by the best people,

30. *Ibid.*, pp. 622-623.

31. R.M.L. Arch. Univ. Ms. 45.

the cultured section of the community, some of whom accepted the new doctrine. Bishop Cubelles, who had the powers to act as Inquisitor, started proceedings against Gisualdo and his friends in 1546, Gisualdo was found guilty and burned at the stake and the others were admonished and set free. Fr. Axiac continued to teach at the school of the *Università* but in 1560 he was arrested and sent to Rome to answer the charges against him. With his departure the school closed down for a time and by the time it was reopened in 1568 the people's confidence in its teachers had been badly shaken by this incident and parents began to show great reluctance to send their children to the only school provided by the Government of the time. For further details the reader is referred to G. Gatt's article *It-tagħlim f'Malta* in "*Lehen il-Malti*," 1937, p. 14.

Duzina knew all this and a lot more. The ecclesiastical authorities must have given him a full picture of educational development in Malta. They naturally told him that for centuries the Cathedral, through its ecclesiastics scattered in different parts of the island, provided some instruction to the people and that "a few private schools, generally under ecclesiastical direction, were the sole means of instruction that the islands had to offer" (32). By the middle of the 15th century, however, several religious orders had settled down, the Minor Conventuals about the beginning of the 14th century, the Carmelites in 1370, the Augustinians in 1385 and the Dominicans in 1466. Education was fostered by these Orders and by ecclesiastics attached to hospitals, sometimes subsidised by the *Università*, which had its own school under the direction of a Magister; in special cases it provided funds to enable students to study abroad, in Sicily, or else exempted them from the payment of fees. To improve the standard of teaching the *Università* thought of setting up a college and made an unsuccessful attempt in 1537 to attract foreign teachers from Sicily by approving the grant to them of 20 ounces and free lodgings and maintenance. The expenses were to be shared between the *Università* and the Cathedral, the latter's grant being conditional on free schooling being given to 14 of its poorest clerics.

Together with the Bishop and the *Università*, the Cathedral contributed towards the salary of the Magister. Duzina made the following entry in his report: "*Al Maestro della scuola per la rata sua, toccando di pagar per l'altra metà alla città — 20 scudi*" (33). This formed part of the ordinary expenditure met out of the Cathedral's revenue. In Gozo, however, the Apostolic Visitor was informed that there was no "Maestro di Schola": the Deacons and the Rector of the principal church in that island complained to him that no expenses for paying a Magister were incurred out of the ecclesiastical revenue.

Up to 1574 the school of the *Università* at Imdina was usually held in a house owned by the teacher or else rented for the purpose. In 1575 Duzina records that he found the school within the church of St. Salvatore at Imdina. The use of the church premises for teaching purposes did not meet with his approval and he prohibited it in no uncertain terms, "*item mandavit quod in dicta ecclesia non habeatur schola*". There was another school at Birgu, within the church of St. Anthony, and here again he prohibited the teaching of children

32. Debono, P., *Sommario della Storia della legislazione in Malta*. 1897, p. 116.

33. R.M.L. Ms. 643, p. 50.

within it "*et in ecclesia dicta est gymnasium puerorum quod ... mandavit amoveri et pueros alibi docere*" (84).

That the school at Birgu was well attended may be inferred from the Rev. Anthony Vassallo's replies to Duzina's questions. Rev. Vassallo was the Rector of the church of the Annunciation at Birgu, and he informed Duzina that he did not read Christian doctrine in church because the children of the place went to school. As regards the manner of selecting the *Magister* Don Antonio Bartolo's evidence shows that the teacher was not subjected to an examination, nor did he make his profession of faith especially if he was Maltese by birth.

The Apostolic Visitor recommended that a Seminary be erected, the necessary funds being provided out of the proceeds of a tax on ecclesiastical benefices. This was in accordance with the decision of the Council of Trent regarding the erection of Seminaries and the tax was approved by the diocesan synod in 1591. By that time, however, the idea of a seminary had given place to a Jesuit College (85).

### Convent Life

Convent life in 16th century Malta presents an interesting picture. Duzina describes the nunnery of St. Benedict at Imdina, which combined the two convents of St. Scholastica and of Ss. Benedict and Peter. Let us try to reconstruct life within the convent in those days. There were fifteen inmates in all and they led a communal life, depending for their living on the convent's revenue and on the income derived from the work they produced. When a nun professed there was a sort of party given, attended by the new recruit and by her parents or relatives. Those of them who were poor were expected to bring with them 10 ounces as dowry, the richer 20 ounces. Early in the morning they had to attend Mass and receive Holy Communion at the Cathedral church nearby. Otherwise convent life was not very strict: every now and then the nuns were allowed to leave the convent and visit their parents or relatives, or even stay with them for a time. At Christmas and Easter, however, and at other specified periods of the year, they had to go back to the nunnery. In church they could speak to their relatives, whether male or female. Intellectual pursuits they had none, or very few; indeed, on examination the Apostolic Visitor found that none of them could write, "*moniales nesciunt scribere*". Things had been like that for a long long time. Then one day there came the Apostolic Visitor, a stern, pious prelate chosen by the Pope. Duzina was shown round the nunnery; he asked several questions and took note of everything he saw or heard. He addressed them with the help of the Maltese ecclesiastics who accompanied him throughout his visit. It must have been a long and tiring process, and the nuns must have wilted under his stern look. At last the Apostolic Visitor left, and the next thing they heard was that he had issued instructions for the better running of the convent. Henceforth girls under 16 years of age could not be taken in as inmates, nor could one profess before she had completed a year's novitiate. This, he informed them, was in accordance with the decisions taken at the Council of Trent. But this was not all: they were also

84. *Ibid.*, pp. 248, 257.

85. Pecchiai, P., *Il Collegio dei Gesuiti a Malta*. In "Archivio Storico di Malta", Anno IX, Fasc. II, 1938, p. 137.

prohibited from leaving the cloister to hear Mass, and they were no longer allowed to see relatives or friends in church. Secular girls living in the convent could not go out to their homes and return at will; such absences were to be limited to a minimum and then only for special reasons (36).

### The Clergy

We shall now consider the position and plight of the clergy. On no other aspect of life in Malta is Duzina's report more informative. The members of the clergy were given a chance to speak out, and so were the people, with the result that the Apostolic Visitor came to know of several facts which were not quite flattering to the ecclesiastical administration of the diocese. To begin with there were grievances by the clergy as a whole at the extortionate demands of the Bishop regarding the spoils of deceased ecclesiastics who, in those days, were not allowed to make a private will. There had been grave abuses of this episcopal prerogative, and Canon Andrea Fava testified that he himself had witnessed cases of priests who, before they had breathed their last, were stripped bare of their belongings, down to the door nails, and some priests had even been refused burial until the Bishop had first taken the spoils which were his due. A few years before, the Maltese Clergy, having protested against this practice, obtained a ruling from Pope Pius IV allowing them the right to make a private will, but the Bishop tried to side-track the issue and continued to demand the spoils on the grounds that the Pope's brief was null and void as it had not been confirmed by King Philip of Spain. Mgr. Duzina's probings into this matter put the clergy in a dilemma. For, they told him, if they declined to give the information required, they would incur his displeasure, and if they did speak they were sure to find their names in the Bishop's black books (37).

### Parish Priests

Then there was the case of the Parish Priests, who laboured under a very real grievance. From time immemorial they had been required to say early Mass and to serve in the choir of the Cathedral Church at Imdina for fifteen days a year. In practice, however, parish priests residing away from Imdina were unable to fulfil this obligation and they had to pay substitutes to do this service for them. They, too, had submitted an appeal to Rome, and now they repeated their complaint to the Apostolic Visitor who, seeing that they had a case, immediately took steps to redress their grievance. He personally enquired into the whole matter and as a result he issued instructions that parish priests were to be exempted from serving in the Cathedral, as they were in duty bound to serve in their own districts first and should not therefore be induced or encouraged to leave their parishes unattended (38).

### Simony

Cases of simony among the clergy were also brought to Duzina's notice. The lower clergy themselves were free with information on this subject, as most of them had suffered from this abuse. In the matter of ordination, for example,

36. R.M.L. Ms. 643, pp. 62; 623-627.

37. *Ibid.*, pp. 369, 373, 404, 423.

38. *Ibid.*, pp. 27-28; 631.



persons intended for the priesthood often had to pay a fee in order to secure ordination. The majority of such cases, however, had not been ordained in Malta but at Girgenti, in Sicily, at the hands of Mgr. Nicola de Valle, a Franciscan titular bishop who was so extortionate that he used to demand payment in advance even for the minor orders. Again and again we read, in the testimony of Maltese priests, statements like these: "*e ce lo pagai prima che m'havesse ordinato, e se non havesse pagato prima non me haveria ordinato*; or "*al quale pagai ... avanti la collatione di detti ordini, e lui proprio domandava li denari avanti che conferisse detti ordini*; or else, in the testimony of Don Leonardo Micallef, "*e 15 tarini mi bisogno' pagare per lo presbiterato avanti che mi facesse prete, anzi io, non havendo se non dodici tarini, mi bisognò vender una berretta che avevo di notte in piazza per tre altri tarini per far lo complimento e pagare*" (39).

### Education of the Clergy

The general standard of education of the clergy left much to be desired. Several priests admitted to Duzina that they knew no grammar, that they could hardly read or write, and if they did, they could not translate what they read. In one particular instance Duzina came to know that a person had been ordained priest without being examined at all, on the sole ground that he had served in the Sacristy for some years (40). Small wonder that Duzina found it necessary to suspend priests who did not come up to the minimum standard required. A closer study of the various statements made to Duzina on this point enables us to draw the conclusion that while the mass of the clergy were in this pitiable state of education, the parish priests and the higher officials of the church were, on the whole, adequately qualified for their important posts. We find, for example, that the parish priests of Zebbug, Qormi and Birmiftuh not only knew Latin but were also well versed in the duties of their offices and were also well spoken of by their parishioners. Again, Don Pacratius Micallef, who had held the post of Vicar at one time, besides being a fairly good Latinist, was also well acquainted with letters (41).

### Their Morals

In the field of morals the standard of the Maltese Clergy appeared to be satisfactory. Of course there are occasional cases of unchastity recorded in Duzina's report, such as that of Don Giuseppe Bellia, parish priest of Birkirkara, who was known to keep two mistresses, one at Birkirkara, Pawlina by name, and another who was more plump, at Birgu (42). But we cannot judge the whole body of the clergy by a few isolated instances, and if allowance is made for the low standard of morality of all classes all over Europe in those days, there is no reason to think that the Maltese clergy were particularly bad in this respect.

### Poverty Among Clergy

Some of the lower clergy lived in straitened circumstances bordering on poverty, and they had to seek other means of supplementing their meagre earn-

39. *Ibid.*, pp. 348, 352, 359, 361, 365.

40. *Ibid.*, p. 510.

41. *Ibid.*, p. 529.

42. *Ibid.*, p. 90.

ings in order to make both ends meet. A cleric informed Duzina that instead of wearing his dress long he only wore a jerkin and a cloak, the reason being that he was so poor that he could not afford a long dress (43). At Żebbuġ a priest stated that he could only make both ends meet by selling weaving combs which he himself made (44). But not all cases were genuine. In Gozo, for example, Duzina came to know that Don Laurentius de Apapis, parish priest of Rabat, had been acting as a public notary for some time. The Apostolic Visitor warned him that, according to the Council of Trent, he was liable to suspension if he persisted in his secular activities (45). To all clerics he specifically prohibited the exercise of the office of notary, as well as any connection with trade and commerce (46). This mention of clerics reminds us that at that time and for at least two centuries afterwards clerics were allowed to marry without losing all their ecclesiastical privileges. The Vicar General, Can. Antonio Bartolo, informed Duzina that the benefit of clergy was enjoyed by all clerics, whether celibate or not, that married clerics had to wear a hat and a cloak, and moreover they came under the jurisdiction of the ecclesiastical and not of the secular courts (47). Married clerics were still allowed in the 18th century, as can be seen from the fact that as late as 1772 Count G.A. Ciantar gives the number of married clerics residing in the various parishes of Malta and Gozo (48).

### Spiritual Welfare Generally

In the spiritual field the Apostolic Visitor found that there was much that called for improvement. At Attard, with 165 houses and 665 residents, which formed part of the parish of B'Kara, he was informed that it was not uncommon for people to die without the administration of the last Sacraments. Again at Dingli, owing to the distance from Rabat, the parish priest was called in when the patient was very ill indeed, and the priest then had to go all the way from Rabat partly on horseback and partly on foot (49). With the bad state of the roads and the primitive transport facilities it is small wonder that people sometimes died without the comfort of spiritual assistance "*propter huoi. distantiam plerumque homines moriuntur sine Sacramento*". At Birkirkara the people complained that many of them refused to go to confession as the number of people awaiting their turn was so great that the Parish Priest dismissed each penitent with but a few words in order to cope with everyone (50). In several parishes it was still the practice to baptize by immersion after stripping the child naked, and the baptismal fonts became full of excreta and other impurities which were not removed (51).

43. *Ibid.*, p. 378.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 433.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 561.

46. *Ibid.*, p. 614.

47. *Ibid.*, p. 408.

48. Ciantar's figures were based on a census taken in 1760. Vide Abela-Ciantar: *Malta Illustrata* . . . Lib. I, 1772. Not. VIII, p. 261.

49. R.M.L. Ms. 643, p. 286.

50. *Ibid.*, pp. 86, 90.

51. *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 88, 116, 247, 278.

In the celebration of Mass and of the Sacraments the Gallican rite was still being used, in spite of the decrees of the Council of Trent. Duzina suspended some priests for not being acquainted with the Roman ritual and he issued instructions to all the clergy that the Gallican rite should be discarded and the Roman rite used instead (52). A few other injunctions to the clergy merit our attention. Duzina ordered that during the celebration of Mass the officiating priest should not be barefooted, that he should wear the dress down to the foot and that the upper and lower lips should be carefully shaven. Moreover, Duzina prohibited the use of red wine for Mass, and forbade the clergy from having a superstitious number of candles on the altar, from saying Mass over hosts or wafers on which were written prayers and other superstitious words, or to give blessed candles or holy water to laymen or others suspected of superstitious practices (53). It must be pointed out that though we did not come across any actual cases of this kind in Duzina's report, similar prohibitions of sympathetic magical practices continued to be issued by various Maltese bishops in succeeding centuries.

As a result of Duzina's recommendations we find a greater discipline among the clergy, while old beliefs, practices and superstitions were discarded. But the change was gradual and for centuries traces of the old beliefs remained; cases of witchcraft, which the Church tried in vain to suppress, were not unusual and to this day we come across practices which were common in Duzina's day and which have now passed into the realm of folk-lore.

### Witchcraft

Among other villages, Duzina visited Naxxar, where some women were suspected of dealing in magic: they picked up laurel leaves and put them in the fire, with which they then fumigated sick animals, reciting some formula which Duzina, not being acquainted with the Maltese language, could not understand. Shortly before Duzina's visit, the Bishop called these women for trial and they had been set free under a pledge (54). The superstitious number of candles to which Duzina refers is probably the number 13, known as *Ta' Guda*, which people consider to be of evil omen, so that it is unlucky to sit thirteen at table, etc.

The mention of written prayers and charms points to the existence of sympathetic magic, of which we find traces long after Duzina's visit. Indeed, we read that in 1591 the Bishop decreed that it would be considered as a reserved sin to indulge in magic and similar practices. The decree specifically referred to people *qui magicas artes nempe maleficia venefica vel amatoria exercent; qui balneo infirmos lavant adhibita aqua benedicta nonnullis orationibus certoque oculorum, arborum numero, quibusdam mixtis verbis et alia huius generis* (55). In another synod we read of persons who indulged in the following practices: "... *et imaginibus morbus inducendo, aut expellendo, vel lavando*

52. *Ibid.*, p. 605.

53. *Ibid.*, pp. 644, 646, 647.

54. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

55. R.M.L. Ms. 6, f. 35r.

*balneo infirmos adhibita aqua benedicta certoque arbore oculorum numero quibusdam mixtis herbis ... item eos qui sortilegia auguria et alios divinationes fortunaq. contingentia quibusdam nobis seu caracteribus figuris, et cedulis verbis occultis predicuunt profetia terminum ... (56).*

### Birth and Baptism

As soon as possible after birth the child was christened. Duzina laid down that children should be named after saints and not be given pagan names. Judging from the names recorded by the Apostolic Visitor, however, such names must have been unusual and the majority of Maltese names recall popular saints of the Christian Calendar. We come across a good percentage of *Blas* (Blasius), *Kola* (Nicholas), *Nardu* (Leonard) and a few *Cosma* and *Damjan* (Cosimo and Damian). Now all these Saints were much more popular in those days than they are in the 20th century. St. Blaise was the protector of children against throat disease, and so strong was the people's devotion that several rural churches or altars were dedicated to the saint, while two localities, one in Malta and in Gozo, are named *San Blas*. At one time this saint was also invoked to ease the throes of childbirth, and one informant gave me the following lines which were uttered during childbirth:—

San Blas  
Wessa' t-toqba  
Çekken ir-ras.

(St. Blaise, make the opening larger and small the head)

St. Nicholas, like St. Valentine in English folklore, is particularly helpful to maidens in their search for a lover. Up to some time ago country lasses used to walk thrice round the stone statue of the saint at Siggiewi, where St. Nicholas is venerated as the patron saint, while they prayed thus:—

San Nikola tal-misrah,  
Zewwigni halli nifrah;  
San Nikola ta' biebna,  
Zewweg lilna w 'l uliedna;  
San Nikola taz-zuntier,  
Zewwigni halli nistrieħ.

(O St. Nicholas of the square / Find me a husband to make me happy /  
O St. Nicholas over our door / Find a lover for us and our children / O St.  
Nicholas of the church cemetery / Find me a man that I may have peace).

In some villages, if more than one marriage takes place in the same street within a short period, people say: "*Dahal San Nikola f'dit-triq* (St. Nicholas has entered this street).

Of the other Saints mentioned, St. Leonard was especially invoked to protect the inhabitants from the Turkish corsairs, who were a veritable scourge

to our forefathers in the age we are writing of. Ss. Cosmo and Damian are still remembered in old exorcisms recited during fumigation with burned olive leaves. The formula runs as follows:—

F'g'ieh San Kusman u San Damjan.  
 K'hawn xi ghajn tohrog minn hawn;  
 Minn fuq kulsivolja ta' bniedem  
 U kulsivolja t'animal;  
 Kienu tobba ta' Kristu  
 Ikunu tobba tar-ruh taghna.

(In the name of St. Cosmo and St. Damian / If there is evil here, let it go out / Let it depart from any man or any animal / They were the doctors of Christ / May they be the doctors of our souls).

One striking order issued by Duzina enjoined all parish priests to warn parents against sleeping in the same bed with infants, for fear of crushing them. We read that it was customary throughout the island to weigh little children in order to ward off the evil effects of disease or of fright. The ceremony was very simple. The child was made to kneel on the altar steps, holding a lighted candle in his hand while the parish priest read some prayers from the Gallican Missal over his head. In return for this service the priest received a gift in the form of a hen, two loaves, half a *kartoċċ* of wine, or, instead of a hen, three doves (57).

There were some peculiar customs connected with baptism practised by the Greek community in Malta. The cap used in baptism was washed by the midwife at her home, but later the washing took place in church, and the cap was placed in the *sacarium*. Among the same community menstruous women were not allowed to enter the church. Both these customs find their echo in modern Maltese practices and beliefs. People hold that, whoever does the washing of the cap after the christening should be considered as if she were a godparent for a period of forty days. Women in menstruation are still accredited with baneful influences, particularly harmful if they happen to touch foodstuffs with their hands.

### Marriage Customs

In Duzina's days marriage customs in Malta involved a very complicated ritual. The young man's first indication that there was a marriageable daughter was a pot of sweet basil on a stone bracket on the outside wall of her home. He then employed an old woman as marriage-broker (*M. ħuttaba*) to bring about the match, for it was not becoming on his part to declare his passion in person to his lady love. When his suit had been accepted, the contract settled and the dowry stipulated, the young man sent his beloved a present of a fish with a gold ring or a costly jewel in its mouth. Then, on the day of the betrothal feast (*M. ir-rabta*) he was introduced to her in the presence of her parents and friends and he offered her an engagement ring on which were engraven two

hands joined in token of fidelity, while she on her part reciprocated with a handkerchief edged with lace. On the day of the wedding, musicians and singers celebrated in couplets the praises of the happy pair, and handfuls of grain, rice and wheat were showered upon them on their return from the church for the nuptial feast. The wife ate in a separate apartment but after the repast she went and sat near her husband and drank out of the same cup. Eight days after the marriage she joined her husband in their new home.

Duzina gives us some other interesting details. Prior to 1573 there were no witnesses at the wedding ceremony. At Naxxar, the parish priest met the couple at the door of the church and asked them whether they were willing to ratify their consent to the marriage. This they confirmed on oath and then the priest blessed them according to the Gallican rite. This applied equally to widows and virgins. We also learn that at Rabat it had been customary since olden days to pay for a measure of wine and a big loaf, part of which was then blessed and given to the married couple according to the Gallican rite (58). In Gozo the priest received either a hen or a handkerchief for his trouble. Among the Greek community it was usual to give a ring and put a wreath of vines on the head of the bride. The newly wedded couple were also exhorted to abstain from sexual intercourse for at least three days. Duzina recommended a similar abstention (*triduo a copula carnali abstineant*). At the same time he prohibited ecclesiastics from attending at indecent wedding rejoicings (59).

## II-Kuccija

There is one particular custom connected with the dead which deserves special mention here. Duzina writes that on the evening of All Souls' Day (November 2nd) it was customary among the Greek community in Malta to carry to the church cooked grain boiled with raisins, almonds, and walnuts all arranged in the form of a cross. These things were distributed to those present who ate the food and recited a *Pater* or an *Ave* for the repose of the soul of the deceased. This ceremony was known as *Kuččija*, and was probably introduced in Malta by the Greeks. The word *kuččija* survives in modern Maltese, but it means something altogether different. By the middle of the 18th century the *kuččija* had already fallen out of use as a funeral rite and boiled wheat began to be distributed on the first birthday of a child instead (60). This simple ceremony gradually grew into an elaborate one which still takes place in Maltese families on the first birthday of the child. Relatives and friends are invited to the house and when all the company are assembled they present to the child, if a boy, articles such as corn and comfits, jewels, money, an inkstand, a rosary, a sword, etc. and, if a girl, needles, silks, ribands etc. The child's choice determines the future vocation, profession or character which he will assume on growing up. Thus, if he chooses the corn, it is a sign of generosity, if he prefers the inkstand he is destined for trade or for the bar, if he seizes the sword they trust in his valour, and so on and so forth.

58. *Ibid.*, p. 401.

59. *Ibid.*, pp. 414, 602.

60. R.M.L. Ms. 148a, p. 810.

## Feasts

In the 16th century the Maltese *fešta* had not yet grown to be the institution it is now. Rural feasts were only a small affair, though popular enthusiasm sometimes ran high. We read in Duzina's report that feasts often gave rise to manifestations of pious devotion combined with riotous merrymaking within the limits of the church itself. One such occasion was the feast of St. Agatha, at Rabat. On the eve of the feast it was customary for the people to assemble in large numbers and to keep the "wake" all night long within the church. This naturally led to unpleasant abuses and Duzina cut the Gordian knot by ordering that the gates of the church should in future be closed one hour after sunset and everybody expelled from the church (61).

Generous benefactors sometimes helped to liven up things. At Ghaxaq, for example, a certain Avellus Mangion had stipulated that after Mass on St. Mary's Day in mid-August fruit and wine should be distributed among the people attending the feast. The same thing took place at Qormi on St. Leonard's Day. A major feast in which people from all parts of the island took part was celebrated on St. Gregory's Day, when the clergy went in procession from Imdina, the ancient capital, to the village of Żejtun to commemorate the liberation of the island from a Turkish invasion.

Easter was celebrated, too, though here Duzina has not left us a clear picture. At Gudja, for example, which is a small inland village, it was not customary to bless Easter eggs, but it appears that children were blessed on that day. The distribution of palm leaves on Palm Sunday (M. *Għid iż-Zebbuġ*), of candles on Candlemas Day (M. *il-Kandlora*) and of ashes on Ash Wednesday (M. *L-Erba' tar-Rmied*) were common practices in Duzina's day and they still form part of the annual round of ceremonies to which the Maltese people are strongly attached.

And now to conclude. The Maltese social scene presented here is admittedly incomplete. This is partly due to the limitations imposed by the very nature of Duzina's report; but a lot more is due to our imperfect knowledge of the daily life of the Maltese people in the 16th century — their character and household life, the conditions of work and of leisure, the relations between capital and labour. This first study of social life in Malta may be followed by other essays of a similar nature covering various phases of Maltese history. The year 1575 has seemed to be a good starting point for in the years that followed the Great Siege of 1565 the people of Malta—Maltese and Knights alike — first clearly appear as a combined social unit. Henceforth there was a gradual development in local literature, art, music, learning and architecture from which these Islands benefited to a marked degree.