

## MEDICAL BOOKS IN THE MALTESE LANGUAGE

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MEDICINE has been practiced in Malta since prehistoric times and the life of the inhabitants of this island has been allieviated by medical science throughout the course of history.

Studies and research have now established that originally our Megalithic temples not only served for religious worship but also for rituals of divination and for the practice of the art of healing. one of the best known finds in such a temple is a little statue representing a fat woman reclining in a trance indicating some system of hypnotic therapy.

It is also worthy of notice that one of the earliest descriptions of Malta, that written by St Luke the patron saint of doctors, in the year 60 AD mentions certain facts which have a bearing on treatment and cure of sickness and disease.

The Roman remains in these Islands bear witness to principles of Sanitation and Hygene in domestic and social life. When the Arabs came to Malta they were at the zenith of their cultural attainments amongst which Medicine occupied a prominent place. The influence of their ability in the art of healing could not but have beneficial effect on our islands; in fact certain popular beliefs and practices as well as sayings, evince an oriental flavour inherited from the Arabs.

Medicine established itself as one of the foremost professions in our island with the advent of the Knights hospitalers of the Order of St John of Jerusalem later known as the Order of Malta. The Knights were reknowned for their courage in the face of the enemy and for their humanity towards the sick. They maintained hospitals which provided the best care and treatment available at the time, opened Medical schools under the direction of prominent masters and provided the best equipment and service obtainable.

The standard of Medical practice in our island was maintained high even after the departure of the Knights of St John. Teaching in our Medical School and Hospital keep abreast with clinical and therapeutic advanced made elsewhere and the Medical and Health services continued uninterruptedly and efficiently.

It is reasonable to expect that such a long tradition of Medical lore and practice did engender in the Maltese race and innate appreciation of the Art of Aesculapius and a sense of friendly disposition towards its disciples. Such feelings are expressed in popular manifestations of esteem and respect which are not lacking in our islands, but more effectively in writing and in the publication of books on Medicine and aligned subjects of which there are quite a few.

In Malta, considering our population and other limitations a number of books have been published dealing with various aspects of Medical science and Clinical practice. Maltese doctors have published works on their specialities or on their particular line of research. The earlier works were issued during the period of the Knights in Malta, but since then, other publications saw the light from time to time and up to the present there has been built up an appreciable collection of books on Medical subjects written by Maltese authors. Such books were written in foreign languages to reach a wide range of readers. Formerly texts were written in Latin: *De Postrema Melitensi Lue* by Laurenti Masciàc in 1677, Italian: *Della Medicina Traumatica* by Michelangiolo Grima in 1773, German: *Anfangsgründe Der Muskellemre* by Joseph Barth in 1786 and French, but lately Maltese doctors have published their works in the English language which has assumed an international character, however there were also few who wrote in Maltese, the language of the people of Malta.

Those doctors who were the first to write their works in Maltese had to face a good deal of opposition; in publishing their books in Maltese they challenged a mistaken notion that our language was inadequate to express technical terms and abstract ideas. The Maltese Literature at that time consisted mostly of narrative prose and sentimental poetry, the rest was devotional matter.

Those pioneers, Prof. Pisani and Dr. Galizia, exposed and discredited the fallacy of unsuitability of our language and demonstrated that any work on Medical subjects can be written and published in Maltese.

Prof. S.L. Pisani published his book on Midwifery *Il-Qabla* in 1883; and Dr. J.S. Galizia's book *Ktieb ta' l-Infermieri* was issued in 1904. Since then, similar books continued to appear at first occasionally, later on more frequently although admittedly Medical Publications in Maltese remained scarce.

The cause of this scarcity is not to be attributed to any deficiency of the Maltese language as a vehicle of expression but rather it is the result of various factors and circumstances of a

social and economic nature prevailing in our island.

For centuries, the education of the masses was primitive if not neglected, with the result that ignorance was widespread and very few people could read or write even their own language. In such a situation books were hardly of any avail although as a matter of fact they were urgently needed to fight ignorance.

But also after the introduction of compulsory education in our island the publication of textbooks of Medicine in Maltese remained infrequent for reasons of an economic nature. The writing and compilation of a book on a Medical subject entail a long period of study, research and dedication, its actual publication is very expensive, and considering the restricted number of readers interested in it, serious doubt arises about the financial feasibility of the venture.

In spite of these obstacles however books on a wide range of Medical subjects have been issued in the Maltese language; there are books and brochures for adult readers and there are also text books for student nurses, midwives, health inspectors and health visitors.

The subjects dealt with are mostly related to clinical or preventive advice and treatment and include manifestations of diseases care of the sick, injuries and first aid, maternity, midwifery, pediatrics, personal and environmental hygiene, war casualties. It is interesting to note that certain factors of an epidemic or endemic nature which prevailed in our island from time to time have contributed to a spate of publications about those particular afflictions of maladies.

In the close of the 19th century and the early years of the present century the infant mortality was really deplorable in our island; it rated amongst the highest in Europe. The medical profession was much concerned about the pitiful loss of infant life and some Maltese doctors actuated by a sense of benevolence decided to publish instructions and advice on ways and means for the proper care and protection of babies and infants. They decided to do this in Maltese, the language of the common people so as to reach the lower classes amongst whom the neonatal and infantile mortalities were rampant. *It-trobbija tat-tfal jew Twissijiet għall-Ommijiet* (The care of the child and advice to mothers) by Dr. L. Manche and Dr. E.L. Vella in 1901; *Tagħlim għall-Ommijiet fuq it-Trobbija ta' Uliedhom* (Instructions to mothers on the care of their children) by Dr. E.L. Vella in 1906; *Is-saħħa tal-Ulied* (The health of the offspring) by Dr. F. Borg in 1911; *It-trobbija tat-tfal* (The care of children) by Dr. G. Bonnici in 1932; *It-trobbija bil-*

*Halib tas-Sider* (Mothers milk for infant feeding) by Dr. A. Critien in 1940.

Such books were of inestimable value in the campaign against infantile mortality, but concurrently with infantile mortality there was a distressing incidents of morbidity and permanent injuries amongst young mothers. To eliminate such baneful effects doctors and educationalists published books in Maltese for the guidance and advice of expectant mothers, and woman in general. Besides Dr. S. Pisani's work already referred to there was Dr. G.B. Schembri's *Ktieb għall-Idejn il-Qabla* ( The Midwives handbook) published in 1896. *Tagħlim għall-Ommijiet* (instructions for Motherhood) by Dr. E.L. Vella in 1906; *Kura Indispensabbli Għan-Nisa Kollha* ( Useful treatment for women's ailments) Anonymous published in 1920; *Twissijiet lill-Ommijiet Żgħażaġħ* (advice to young mothers) Anonymous published in 1936; *Obstetrica* (Obstetrics) by J. Mario in 1939.

Notwithstanding the rapid progress made with care and treatment of the Mother and Child, works in Maltese on Maternity and Child Welfare continued to appear such as *Pariri Għall-Ommijiet* (Advice to Mothers) by Dun Charles Vella in 1959; *Xi Grazzja ser ikollna Tarbija* (You are expecting a baby) by Dr. F. Bacioi also in 1959; *L-Omm u t-Tarbija* (The mother and Child) by Dr. M.A. Decesare in 1961; *L-Omm* (The Mother) by Dr. E.Licardi (no date).

In our country the idea that nursing is not just a menial occupation was spreading rapidly in the early decades of the current century and was exercising pressure for the adaption of a system of recruitment and training for the Nursing Service. Dr. J.S. Galizia felt the need of such a service and he published his book of lesson on General Nursing – *Ktieb ta' l-Infurmieri* (The Nurse's Book) in 1904. He was followed by Dr. F. Borg who in 1906 published his book on the care of the sick in sudden illness *Għajnuna fil-Mard Għal Għarrieda*.

Later on when nursing was established as a profession and a school for nurses was opened at St. Luke's where courses of studies were organised leading to qualifications recognised for reciprocity purposes by competent authorities abroad texts were published for the student nurses and also for students following other courses for instruction in health and related subjects e.g.: Health Inspectors and Health Visitors. The following are some of the text books in Maltese. *Tagħlim fuq il-Mard Mentali Għall-Infurmieri* (Instructions on Mental Diseases for Nurses) by Dr. P. Cassar in 1950; *Is-Sahħa Tiegħek* (Your Health) by Dr. E. Agius in 1953; *Lezzjonijiet għall-Infurmieri* (lessons for nurses) by

Dr. J. Morava in 1956; *Manwal Għall-Infermieri* (Manual for Nurses) by Dr. J. Morava in 1957; *Iġjene Popolari* (Popular Hygiene) by E. Camilleri in 1963. *Manwal għall-Infermieri – Anatomija u Fisioloġija* by Dr. J. Morava (no Publication date).

It is to be noted that certain epidemiological episodes in our country had given rise to the publication of a commentary of a descriptive nature of such occurrences. The earliest of such publications was issued in 1901 when the island was threatened by a sharp epidemic of plague in a neighbouring country: Dr. Caruana Scicluna published his brochure *Kelmtejn fuq il-Pesta u kif Teqridha* (Few words of advice on Plague). In 1936 an outbreak of the same disease occurred in Malta and a book *Malta u l-Gwaj tal-Pesta* (Malta and Scourge of Plague) by T. Borg made its appearance. *Taħdidiet fuq is-Saħħa* (talks on Health) by Dr. J. Morava was published in 1950 to allay apprehension against Poliomyelitis which was threatening the island.

About 1938-39 on the eve of the second Great War there was much tension in our island and people were anxious and alarmed about possible hostile attacks; there was much talk about the terrible effects of gas warfare and high calibre bombing. Under those circumstances it was considered advisable to issue instructions in Maltese about preventive methods and first aid measures in case of emergencies. The following pamphlets and brochures were issued by the Civil Defence Office. *Twissijiet Dwar Attakki mill-Ajru* (Warning and advice against Air Raids) in 1935; *Tagħlim kontra l-Gass* (Instructions for the prevention of gas contamination) 1935; *Twissijiet Dwar Attakki bil-Gass* (Warning and Advice Against Gas Attacks) 1938; *Noti Qosra – St. John's Ambulance* (Short Notes for the St. John's Ambulance Brigade) 1938; *L-Ewwel għajnuna lil min ikorri fi Zmien ta' Gwerra* (First aid to the injured in war time) by Dr. P. Galea in 1939.

Health is a matter of national importance and every self respecting nation endeavours to cultivate and promote it. For this reason various means have been adapted to make the people conscious of the importance of good health and appreciative of the benefits resulting therefrom. The most effective method to stimulate public opinion is to educate the people by appropriate information in print. Such a course of action was feasible only after the first quarter of our century when popular instruction had spread noticeably and a good proportion of the people could read at least in their own language. However, attempts had already been made to instill in the minds of the people some knowledge of hygiene and medical care *Tagħlim Qasir u Hafif fuq Iġjene jew sanità* (Brief

instruction on Hygiene and sanitation) was published by Dr. T. Zammit in 1901. *Nibżgħu għal saħħitna* (let us take care of our health) by A. Preca was issued in 1902. *Kif għandha tinżamm id-Dar* (house management) by Dr. E. Vella in 1907.

Later other publications on personal and environmental hygiene were issued and still make their appearance from time to time. The following are a few of them. *Il-Iodin u l-Hajja* (Iodine and Life) by S.L. Bensusan in 1927; *Il-Gmiel ta' Gisimna* (The beauty of the Human Body) by Dr. G. Bonnici 1939; *Tagħrif ta' Htiega għall-Mara Maltija* (Useful hints for the Maltese woman) by C. Carbonaro in 1950.

Books and pamphlets explaining preventive or curative methods against particular infections of diseases were issued during periods of endemic prevalence. For instance *Il-Halib tal-Mogħża* (The goat's Milk) by Dr. A. Fava in 1931 was published to combat the speed of undulant fever which for ages had prevailed as a hazard to the health of the people of these islands. *Tagħlim* (Instructions) was issued by the society for prevention of Venereal Diseases in 1929 following a flare up on the incidences of that infection. *Xieħda tat-Tobba* (Doctor's Evidence) Anonymous 1970 was published with a view to encourage proper treatment against tuberculosis.

Maltese doctors and others never failed to spread their knowledge and educate the public in Medical Matters; they contributed in the Maltese press and published books on a variety of subjects even of a highly specialised character such as *Flora Maltija Medċinali* (Maltese Medical Flora) by C. Penza in 1969. *Duwa u Semm Fil-Hxejjex* (Medicinal and Poisonous Elements in the Maltese Flora) by G. Lanfranco in 1975. *Mediċina Sportiva* (Medical notes for Sportsmen) by Dr. J. Muscat in 1977.

This list of books on Medicine and Allied subjects in Maltese is not complete, there are others which have been omitted but from the ones mentioned here it will be realised that the Maltese language could be adapted to express in print for the benefit of students and of readers in general any work on Medical Science.