

SALIENT POINTS FROM THE NOTES OF JOSEPH CASSAR
PULLICINO FOR A HISTORY OF MALTESE COSTUME

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J.D.Evans, refering to cult figures and ornamental objects preserved at the national museum, expresses the doubt that most probably, the costumes of those figures showed only the dress of temple officials, and unfortunately, we have no knowledge so far, of what the everyday dress of our forefathers was like. Through the examination of an incinerated piece of cloth by Sir Themì Zammit, excavated from the debris of Tarxien, we know that there was already the use of textile and woven fabric, showing considerable knowledge of interlacing.

The same doubt could be also applied to the Roman period. Cicero, who visited our island, confirms that women's garments were woven in Malta, while Diodorus Siculus extolled the local artisans for their expertise and in making textiles famous for their fineness and softness. But did the natives adopt Roman fashions as shown in statues, or did they have fashions of their own?

According to Count Ciantar, the first knowledge of a cloak for men is the kapott with a hood attached to it, simplified for the lower classes into a mantar, a long cloak thrown around the shoulders, rendered famous in Spain and Italy for its use by bandits and others wanting to conceal their identity.

Between 1266 and 1530 under the Angevins, Aragonese and Castillians, costumes in Malta were definitely of Spanish or Sicilian type, and we know that Jews used to sell clothes in villages, notwithstanding that in 1473 the Consiglio Popolare forbade trading of wool and cotton yarn outside Birgu and Rabat.

Apart from the writings of Count Ciantar and Canon Agius de Soldanis, it is strange that the best knowledge we have of costumes in Malta, comes from travellers' accounts about Malta.

In his "Studies in Maltese Folklore", J. Cassar Pullicino states "...the influence from nearby Sicily, which goes back at least to Norman times, was strong and sustained. One must recall that the prizes captured by the Maltese privateers from the fifteenth century onwards, included, no doubt, rich clothing material from the Levant. The presence of Turkish and Moslem slaves may have introduced small items of dress which were later incorporated with the native costume. Moreover, Maltese traders from the Three Cities were venturing afield as far as Spain and Portugal, and they brought back with them sumptuous dresses and expensive materials for their wives, who flaunted their superb costumes during the Carnival of 1765".

Ignazio Saverio Mifsud, writes in his journal, that it was a great pleasure to see a superb array of dresses of no mean value, donned by masked women from the Three Cities, almost all of whose husbands were businessmen, who brought them to Malta after dealings in Spain and Portugal. It could be said that these dresses were richer than those worn by the Maltese nobility.

Under the Order's rule, we come across legislation against excessive and extravagant fashions and inordinate show, which had a serious economic impact on the spending powers of the family. It is known that "garments, gloves, slippers, were richly embroidered or woven with gold and silver, or with sequins, pearls and other jewels" which were also used in baby layette.

The Church, likewise, had to resort to legislation to curb dress innovations, but more so to impose rules on dress of clerics priests and canons, condemning those "who will dare to dress secular dress or dress not proper to the order and dignity of

his state, to the penalties stated by the Sacred Canons, according to the Council of Trent and the Apostolic Constitutions".

Dealing with Maltese costume, the faldetta or ghonnella merits special mention. Its origin has given rise to conflicting arguments. Beginning with the assertion that it was once considered to be the female national costume, G.P. Badger refers its origin to the oriental veil, Aldo Farini to the black mantle said to have been worn as a sign of mourning by the exiles of Celano in about 1212, who came to Malta, while Amy A. Bernardy assumes it to be the typical female attire in the Mediterranean. J. Cassar Pullicino refers to a limestone stele from Carthage, dedicated to Persephone, dating from the third or second century B.C., on which was represented a woman in Hellenistic style, wearing a headgear similar to a faldetta. Whatever the origin, the faldetta was in use in Malta since 1227, the date fixed by Aldo Farini, and later on it was modified for country or city use. In the country it was white or green, while in the city it continued to be black, but the more modest type, the fulgana was of blue cotton, covered all over with white spots or flowery designs.

The Knight Camilio Spreti warns his fellow Knights against women hiding in their manta or faldetta, especially after dark: guard yourself at night time, particularly, against those evil women, who, completely enveloped in their mantles, pursue their abominable trade of allurements, importuning the passer-by, while seeking to cloak their sin under pretext of begging alms."

Contrary to these abuses, in time nearer to us we find the faldetta in use by the female members of the M.U.S.E.U.M., a lay organization, as a symbol of virtue and humility against the outrageous modern fashions from the coutouriers of Paris, Rome, and other countries.

In conclusion, it is worthwhile visiting our Bibliotheca where one can find various manuscripts containing pictures or drawings of male and female costumes. Outstanding artists who made use of their art to illustrate such costumes, are F. Zimelli, C. De Brocktorff, H. Bellanti, Edward Caruana Dingli, Gianni Vella and others. Modern reproductions are now available, and the original engravings or lithographs in colour are very much sought after.

(Xi Attivitajiet Folkloristici (ikompli minn pagna 72))

Folklor Malti Tahditiet minn Guido Lanfranco lill-Istudenti tan-New Lyceum (Science), Il-Belt, fil-15, 16 u 18 ta' Ottubru 1979, illustrati bi slides bil-kulur.

Old Views of Malta--Changes in the Recent Past Tahdita minn Guido Lanfranco, fil-Catholic Institute, (bhala parti mill-Gimgha Storika tal-Ghaqda Storika ta' Malta) illustrata minn slides bil-kulur, li saret fl-20 ta' Novembru 1979.

Introduction to Maltese Folklore Tahdita minn Guido Lanfranco lill-membri tar-Rotary Club (Malta), fil-Hotel Phoenicea, fid-19-5-80, illustrata bis-slides.

Different Aspects of Maltese Folklore Tahdita illustrata bis-slides, minn Guido Lanfranco, f'Din l-Art Helwa, il-Belt, fit-22-5-80, taht l-awspici tal-Ghaqda tal-Folklor.

Ahbarijiet Folkloristici li gkopru attivitajiet li saru matul 1979-80, jigu irrappurtati f'harga ohra ta' l-Imnara.
