

SOME RECENT COMMUNICATIONS ON THE FOLK MEDICINE
OF MALTA

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Introductory

Apart from the numerous previous investigations on local folk medicine I recently made further efforts to collect information on the subject, urged by the need to prepare a local television series of seven programmes, eventually screened from May to July 1980, under the name of "X'Użaw in-Nanniet li l-Mediċina Skartat"(What Grandmother used, Discarded by Medicine).

Much of the present material was collected after my repeated call for information through the television authorities during 1979. Other details were obtained through numerous contacts in all walks of life. The sources quoted were independent and uninfluenced by literature, and the remedies put forward genuinely based on direct experience.

By far the majority of the details collected during 1979 and 1980 added very little unrecorded material, as they were mostly repetitions or mostly slight variants of previously recorded information, but they were all of great value, even if only as confirmation of what we already know.

I am not entering into the merits or otherwise of the treatments and remedies listed here, nor am I associating them with previous publications, but my intention is merely to publish some of my records and make them available for reference purposes.

The remedies are here grouped according to the ailments they are meant to alleviate. Numbers in brackets refer to sources listed at the end of this article. Technical names are my inclusions, and only as a first instance.

I Integumental Conditions

On fresh wounds, place leaves of plantain (biżbula=Plantago species)(29), also used on suppurating boils(1,9,26b); reed-mace tops (buda = Typha angustifolia & T.latifolia)(29); leaves of tulliera (Inula viscosa and Jasonia glutinosa)(10); leaves described as Weraq ta' San Rafel(11), plant undefined; a poultice of Elder leaves (sebuka = Sambucus nigra)(11) or Sambuka; leaves of Kromb or cabbage family of plants(=Brassica species)(20); To stop bleeding from cuts and wounds sprinkle raw ground rice and bandage it(18), fine downy feathers of the heron, cobwebs, or pepper spread over the wound(1), and stone masons often bore a fresh hole in globigerina limestone(Franka and dip their wounded finger in the dust, or sprinkle the dust on the wound(39). On infected wounds oily dripping from the liver of the żagħruna (species of dogfish=Squalus, Centrolophus or Squalus species) in the sun and stored in a bottle at home to use on wounds and their infections(23). Use an ointment on wounds (balzmu)(26b)undefined, but is also a term used for an egg that is left to dry from the feast of the Assumption of Our Lady (25th March) and used a year after, mixed with oil(29), used also against boils(1). On boils could also be applied ointment(taba)made by some nuns(25)or Friars of St.Theresa, at Cospicua(1); leaves of Mallow(Hobbejza)(21)(=Malva species);leaves of fennel(Busbież = Foeniculum vulgare); "leaves"(=phyllantodes) of Butcher's broom (bella-donna, a name which in Malta is unfortunately given wrongly to Ruscus aculeatus) washed in clear water and put on boil to draw out pus(5);leaves of walnut(gewż)(9); membrane from an egg(1); an ointment made from almond oil mixed with sugar, placed on a clean bandage on the boil(7), also a piece of pumpkin mashed up for a poultice(7).

For more serious boils and carbuncles(tračna) or some wounds, ingwent ta' Frenč. (ointment from Frenč of Gharb, Gozo), and bukexrem (vervain=Verbena officinalis)(8), a vine leaf (26b,35), or that of kohlrabi(Ġidra=Brassica sp., of the cabbage family)(26b) poultice of long marrow leaves(Qara twila=Lagenaria species)(30), bread crumbs and milk placed on the affected skin(29).

For an abcess in the foot(grada) a roasted onion bulb bandaged on the heel during the night(3), bread crumbs boiled in milk, renewed several times(1), or a poultice made from a white species of land snails about 1½ins long, ground alive with its shell, mixed with oil and placed on the sole of the foot(23); the species fitting this description is presumably Bulimus decollatus.

For witlow (diehes), wrap in leaves described as 'weraq tal-Madonna' (species undefined)(25), also suggested for a boil (25); one could immerse the witlow in boiling water(30); cover with roast onion bulb(25), leaf of kohlrabi(18), which is most probably also the one described as 'werqa tat-tabā' by a correspondent(15), but in most cases one suggests the use of bread crumb in milk(1,3,5,18,25), but when the pus is released, rose petals are placed on it to help dry it(22)

Sea urchin spines(rizzi) in the skin can be treated with roasted onion bulb(5,25). The spine prick of a fish could be treated by rubbing on it the liver of the same fish,(26b), and that from the scorpion fish(skorfna) or dragon fish(tračna) (Scorpaena and Trachinus species respectively, known for painful and poisonous spines) merely urinate on the skin so affected(1). To prevent mosquito 'bites' have available pennyroyal plants(pliejju=Mentha pulegium)(10)

Small pustules can be treated with flowers of wild thyme (sagħtar (Thymus capitatus), kept with oil in a jar(21), kohlrabi leaves(20), or rub with boiled oil(7); some used to expose the skin to the sun(7), both the latter presumably in conditions of eczema, also treated with vervain(bukexrem)(8), and horse-tail(denb iž-žiemel=Equisetum ramosissimum)(9), decoctions.

Heat rash in summer(ħafas) could be subdued by rubbing cucumber slices(ħjar) on the skin(1), but one suggests that the only remedy is to go swimming(19). Barber's rash can be counted red by rubbing every day with the liquid from boiled tulliera, after evaporating the water by half during the boil, and refrain from shaving for a week (18).

Corns need tomato slices as treatment(18,25,38), but one can also use slices of stem segments of the prickly pear (pal tal-bajtar=Opuntia ficus-indica)(10), or bread crumbs soaked in vinegar, bandaged on the corn for three days before going to bed(18).

Bruises can be treated with rue (fejġel=Ruta bracteosa) fried in oil(29), and scalds or burns can be prevented from deteriorating by putting on them fresh split inner pulp of prickly pear segments(26b) or spreading beaten egg white(18), unless you use a teaspoonful of bicarbonate in tepid water(18), or cooled boiled tea without milk(1); in some cases the byssus of the noble pen-shell(ħarira tan-nakkra=Pinna nobilis) is spread over the burn.

In cases of scalp scale in infants, use almond oil(25,26) or seeds of castor(30)(=žerriegħa taž-žejt ir-riġnu). To strengthen hair use equal parts of rum and castor oil(18), but some still insist that the oil from a fried ocellated skink(xaħmet l-art=Chalcides ocellatus) is good for scalp and hair(29).

Hard skin from infection and subsequent swelling may be relieved by ointment made from beeswax melted in boiling oil (21). Ringworm patches can be covered by green, immature carob pods (ħarrub aħdar=Ceratonia siliqua) opened in two (1,29,30); cowry (baħbuħa=Luria lurida) (1,9,25); mother of pearl buttons in oil and lemon left to the cold of the night (1). The mother of pearl (cowry or buttons) are put in lemon juice until dissolved in the cool night air before use (9,10,18). Others suggest painting the ringworm site with ink (1,30). For fungus infection of lips (xliega) rub with kerosene.

Warts (felul) can be moistened with spurge latex (ħalib tat-tenghud = Euphorbia species) (10), or else take an olive twig, remove its leaves, burn its tip, and without touching the wart approach it as closely as possible; the treatment is repeated until wart shrinks away (18,37).

Against skin discoloured patches use leaves of walnut (10), and against general skin disease apply vervain (29,30) which has been boiled, and drink (29). It must come from Frenċ of Gozo (30).

II Body Fluids and Circulatory system

Damaged capillaries from bumps and blows (gundalla, tbengil, kuħħala) use rue, boiled (6,11) in oil or fried (1) or both treatments (10,25), or use borage (fidloqqom=Borrago officinalis) to circulate it (10). Others suggest rubbing the affected area with butter (18), but on the latter one could also press a penny (5). The use of the blood leech for such conditions (20) appears misplaced.

For swellings use Elder leaves decoctions (25,26), if in ankles and feet place in elder water (28), but leaves in multiple of threes (e.g. 9) should be used in the name of the Holy Trinity, after the style of Frenċ (8). Rue and oil (22)



POPULAR MEDICINAL PLANTS

- 1 DENE 2-ZIENEL 2 FEJGEL 3 NIGEM 4 FIBLOQQOM
5 XPAKKAPJETRA (ALL X 1)

and black or white ointment(ingwent iswed jew abjad)(8)(made from beeswax and oil) can also be employed against swellings. Inflamed areas necessitate the use of Rosemary water(klin = Rosmarinus officinalis)(10), boiled barley(xghir)(29), or a poultice of bran(nuhhalala) boiled in half a pint of water(18).

Chilblains are treated by washing or immersing in warm water of boiled stinging nettle (hurrieq or horrieq = Urtica sp.) some specifying the Roman nettle(hurrieq ta2-zibeg=Urtica pilulifera)(5). Nettle is suggested in a general way(3,11,18, 22,27,28).

With the intention of 'purifying the blood'(tisfija tad-dem) the 'roots'(actually rhizomes) of Bermuda grass(niqem =Cynodon dactylon) is recommended as decoction, (8,21,26) or boiled parsley(tursin)(26), or leaves of Mallow (Hobbejza = Malva species)(30). Others recommend Fumitory (Daḥnet l-Art =Fumaria species)(1,26,29), with the white flowers, boiled in milk(29), the one considered by the country people to be the 'male' fumitory to be used by men, the one considered 'female' by women(26); investigation revealed that the 'male' is with whitish flowers, the 'female' plant with pinkish ones. Needless to say, the many forms and varieties of fumitory are hermaphrodite, and they are neither monoecious nor dioecious.

To alleviate blood pressure(hypertension) again Bermuda grass water has been recommended(8,8b,26,26b), also the water of boiled olive leaves(28), eating of raw garlic with bread(5), and boiling Cumin(kemmun) and Vervain in the same pot, drinking their water(22). What was considered to be 'excess' was removed by applying the medicinal leech or blood leech to a vein, and when full returning it to sand to regurgitate and reapplied(5,1,25).

Varicose veins could be relieved by applying a poultice of chamomile(kamumella) and bran in a handkerchief(20), or handage dry broad beans which have been thoroughly chewed, on the affected vein.(18,29). Vervain is also recommended(8).

To subdue piles(morliti) called for various strategy. Boil maize fibre(xuxa tal-qamh ir-rum), pour the water in a basin, and sit in it(26); you can also boil some garlic, or pour vinegar, and sit in it(26b);you can also sit for the vapour of a mixture of boiled garlic, chamolile and Pellitory (ħaxixet ir-riħ or xeħt ir-riħ=Parietaria officinalis)(8). After using the boiled garlic treatment go straight to bed(29). Someone suggests 'senza parilja', (corruption of salsapariglia), a species of Rough Bindweed(salsa pajžana=Smilax aspera)(1), but some used to boil Garden Leek (kurrat=Allium porrum), poured the water in a chamber-pot and sat for its vapour(35). Yarrow is still occasionally cultivated(ħaxixa tal-Morliti = Achillea millefolia) for use against piles(34).

To control blood sugar in diabetes, the Lemon Verbena has been recommended(lwiza or alwiza=Lippia citriodora or Aloysia triphylla)(8,10,16,30)by boiling it and drinking its water. Others suggest drinking the water from boiled Endive (indivja=Cichorium endivia)(29). But Spiny Chicory (qanfuda=Cichorium spinosum) is also used boiled(8,10,16), where also it could be mixed with 'lwiza'& 'senzaparilja' which becomes very bitter, but should be divided into three bottles(8); the same source, influenced by Frenč tal-Għarb, recommended a diagnosis for blood sugar by pressing a fingernail from on hand into that of another; if some red is still visible there is no sugar, if none there may be some. This may be based on the viscosity of the blood related to its ability to travel freely through the fingertip capillaries.

Jaundice (suffejra) has long necessitated the use of Squirting cucumber (Faqqus il-Hmar=Echballium elaterium) whose fruit is split and squeezed to produce a yellowish which is brought near the nostrils to invite the yellowish tinge of jaundice out of one's system(1,5,17,22,26), but one suggested the use of Horsetail(8) and another a mixture of boiled plants taken as a drink after cooling, made up of Bermuda grass, vervain, pennyroyal, mint(nagħnih) and Micromeria or small-leaved micromeria(Xkattapjetra or Xpakka-pjetra or spakkapjetra or saghtrija=Micromeria microphylla=Satureja microphylla)(28).

The latter plant, however, is mostly popularly used against bladder or kidney stone(1,9,10,11,5,16,17,20,21,25,26,27) but one insisted that the Gozo plant is the only one to be recommended(8), and also suggested the use of boiled maize fibre with an orange split into three(for reasons already mentioned) and adding sugar;instead of there being one orange split up into three, one could use three oranges.(8). For kidney function and to stimulate urine, one should use local boiled barley water(26,26b,25),boiled onions(29),micromeria(16), bermuda grass water(5),boiled spiny chicory(26),maize fibre (11,16)and horsetail(9), the latter being mostly also recommended for gall bladder trouble(marrara)(8,10). Spleen trouble can be remedied by drinking the water of boiled wall,white land snails(bebbux tal-ħitan tat-tramuntana,species undefined).

To control what is described as a fright(qatgħa)several remedies have been suggested. One can drink extracts by boiling rhubarb(rubarbru)(26),and White horehound(marrubja or marrubija=Marrubium vulgare)(10). A more popular treatment was to drink the water after boiling a pup of a dog(2,25,26).

But there were those who went to some old woman who fixed some mixture of herbs in a bottle(issewwi flixkun)(22,30), to drink some of the mixture and go out for a walk(30); such a bottle from Tarxien was bitter, but apparently contained cumin and thyme, and could also be taken to stimulate the appetite(22). Then there were those who recommended the victim of a fright merely to urinate, and then drink some wine with a piece of charcoal in it(11), or urinate on a broom(19).

III Skeletal system

For spraine and dislocations especially in feet and fingers, the commonest remedy suggested was the rubbing and massaging of the part with Rue(fejġel) in hot oil(1,2,3,5, 15,15,17,25,26,26b,30), some stressing its use also in bone pains(2,11,15,17). Instead of plaster for sprains one can massage with warm oil(20). For pain in the bones one can also rub with face powder(26), warm oil(7), boiled thyme to wash(29), or boil 'tulliera' in edible oil and massage while hot(5). On the knee cap, one can boil and mash some broad bean, put in a piece of cloth, and press on the knee while hot(6). In weakened muscles, massages with ingwent ta' Frenċ and powder are recommended(8).

In arthritis use vervain(26a,26b) and Erba Maria(9)(probably a corruption of the Italian Erba amara=Pyrethrum species obtainable formerly from chemists). It has also been suggested to use Rue for rubbing arthritic spots, or rub and massage with bulbs of Squill (Basal tal-Għansal=Urginea maritima)

IW Nervous System, Pain, Sense Organs

Pain in the knee can be relieved with poultices of bran and 'senapa' (sinapis powder obtained from pharmacists) (1), but rheumatic pains require Squill bulb applications(1,10), cumin(10), Rue(1), and Rue massages with powder(8).

Headaches have persecuted humanity at all times, and remedies include putting slices of fresh potato tubers on the forehead(2,3,5,13,18,21,25,29) sometimes addition of coffee on the potato slices(presumably powdered) is recommended(26a, 26b,30); Rose vinegar (ħall il-ward) petals of roses(1) in vinegar, especially with petals of the French Rose(Warda Xand-rija)(=Rosa gallica)(21), or vinegar with Thyme or roses and flowers from the Holy Sepulchre of Holy Week(1). Vinegar on its own is also recommended(29). Headaches from exposure to the sun can be relieved by beating the white of an egg and this is placed on the head(5).

Eye troubles are various, and treatment adapted accordingly. Inflammation of the eyes is treated with washing by means of cooled milkless tea(5,30) or chamomile tea(1). Chew Rue leaves in the mouth and breathe out the fumes on the inflamed eyes(30), which treatment is also recommended for conditions of pterygium(qarnita tal-ghajn) (30), but an especial intervention against this condition is the use of the ring with an orange or reddish stone which is placed on the eye whilst a recitation is made of the following verses, as told to me by the old woman interviewed(30): "Saħlib id-dew id-dew/
San Mattija San Mattew/ Iltqajt ma Gesu Bambin/ Qalli int fejn sejra/Ghedtlu ghandi ghajneja tugani/Qalli mur fil-gnejna tieghi/Hemm busbieza helwa helwa/ Zrajta b-idejja, saqqejta bi dmugh ghajnejja/Issib lil Santa Margerita/Tnehhi l-Ghabra u l-qarnita/Issib lil-Santa Lucija/Ittik id-dawl u d-dija."

(Cross of God in God/St, Mathhias, St. Matthew/I met the child Jesus/Where are you going, he asked/My eye is painful/He told me Go to my garden/There you find a sweet fennel/I sowed it with my hands and watered it with my tears/You'll find St. Margaret/to heal the fogginess of pterygium/You'll find St. Lucy/to give you light and brightness)(30). The stone on the ring was said to be "the bone of the eye of an octopus" (30) but there is no anatomical feature of the sort, and the stone is most probably the operculum of a marine gastropod snail, Astraea rugosa. For a sty throw seven barley grains in a well(3).

Ear ailments are mostly summed up as pain in the ear, and remedies include: putting in an oily bit of cottonwool and tie a handkerchief around the head to keep the ears warm(7); insert in the ear some byssus fibres of the penshell mixed with oil(25,26,29,30); place a paper cone in the ear burn it half way down and put out the flame(29); boil a litter of mice in oil and put in a jar to use in ear pain(29)!

Remedies against toothache: put in the painful molar a particle of clove(musmar tal-gronfol)(1,30) or sinapa(25); but someone recommends the victim of toothache to draw up some whisky with his or her nose, and this should do the trick(22)

Sciatic pains(xjatika) can be relieved by rubbing Squill and Rue(1). Oven bricks heated up and wrapped in a cloth were placed on the site of pain, but bruised caper leaves(kappar=Capparis spinosa, inermis) in a piece of paper placed on the leg finally gave results(32).

To subdue a nervous condition 'roots' of Bermuda grass are recommended (10,8), or drink boiled Lemon Verbena(Lwi2a); For mental disorders have a priest read over the patient(1) and as an anaesthetic merely use the **club** on the patient's head(1)

V Colds and Fevers in General

A standard treatment for a cold (rih) was the use of cupping (fintusa) (20, 21, 22, 25, 26, 26b, 28, 30), which mainly consisted of a piece of candle stuck to a coin, put on the back of the patient, lighted, and suffocated by an overturned tumbler; some preferred to tie a piece of cloth around a coin (20, 22, 26b, 30), moisten with oil at a tapering upright tip, place on the patient's back, and the rest as above. The tumbler was usually considered best if termed 'tal-ponc' (punch tumbler); when the swelling drawn into the tumbler marks the extinguishing of the flame, remove everything, quickly massage the site, cover the body and give some rum to drink (30). Another treatment was a poultice of bran (16) mixed with linseed oil (3), or boil and drink some plant material (unspecified) obtained from the pharmacist (26b).

In fevers there was also a standard procedure which consisted of cutting open a live rabbit, and while still alive was placed on the patient's belly (3, 12, 28, 30, 31, 26b) when it turns blackish (12) or starts stinking (26b) it would have absorbed the fever and would die because "if the rabbit lives, the patient will die, and if the rabbit dies the patient will live" (31); the same treatment has been specified for typhoid fever (30); instead of a rabbit, puppy could be used for the same conditions of fever (22, 30). Someone suggested skinning a rabbit and putting it on the forehead while still warm (2). Other remedies for feverish conditions consisted of drinking donkey milk (39), slicing fresh potato which is then placed on the forehead (4, 16, 25); better if it is sliced into four, and when it becomes blackened it would indicate that it absorbed the fever (12). Boil flax (kittien) and place as a poultice on the back or the chest (15) in colds fever; apply a leech on the patient, obtained from the nostrils of a bull (17).

Other measures against fever consisted of the use of land snails(4,26) break shell and leave alive(26b)or remove shell and use flesh(28), put in oil in a piece of cloth, and tie on the hands and feet of the patient, or just on the feet. Alternatively obtain yeast from the baker, mix with oil, and put on palm of the hand sole of the feet to extract the fever(22). Otherwise, simply rub oil pn the palms and soles(16).

In cases of undulent fever(deni rqi) one could break up some garlic, mix with some sugar and drops of water, expose to the coolness of the night and drink first thing in the morning(22), or boil yellow flowered thorny thistles,as Star Thistle or Mediterranean Star Thistle(Xew tal-Gĥatba(10) 'Xew tal-Warda Safra'(29)=Centaurea nicaense) and drink it. Others have used some unspecified twigs of trees(22) drinking the boiled liquid.

For fainting Hall il-Ward before mentioned is used(30), and for other unspecified conditions due to change of weather, one can take some sulphur with water or sweetened milk(29).

VI Gynecological aspects

Against venereal diseases, the 'Tulliera' is recommended(1). for proper development of girls, one could use Fumitory with the pinkish flowers,mentioned before, and for boys that with whitish flowers(26b). To encourage the monthly cycle in girls boiled red wine with sugar could be given(33). During birth, some midwives used to say"St.Thomas, widen the aperture and narrow the head"(8b); this is a variant of the usual one we know invoking San Blas(Blasius) instead of St, Thomas, but the latter widened the aperture of Christ's wound,to believe, and may therefore be considered qualified to aid parturition. In cases where mothers have excess milk in the breasts, a puppy could be applied to ease the strain(12).

VII Children's Ailments

During bathtime, babies could enjoy Mint added to the water(21) or buy powdered Myrtle(Riñan or Rañan=Myrtus communis) from the pharmacist, or powder it yourself, and use it to sprinkle on the navel of infants to prevent diseases(35). Babies release urine in the bath, and I was informed, that some mothers or persons bathing the child make it drink some of the bath water mixed with urine, before any detergent is added, to prevent diseases(31). If the child doesn't sleep, give it some alcoholic drink(3). A child with fever could be treated by means of the live rabbit opened up on the child's belly to absorb the fever(10), and if the child's forehead is too warm, moisten with oil(3), but if it is a cold, camphor oil could be rubbed on its chest(26,35). To encourage wind in children, laurel leaves could be mixed with their drink(10), and to control diarrhoea, make them drink boiled Lemon Verbena, before mentioned, (29), and an infected (reddened) lining of the child's mouth persists, dip its 'dummy'(gažaza) in glycerine(3). A deformed child may be helped if it is buried up to the neck in cow dung(1).

To ensure proper nourishment, children could be given grapes(10), and the water of boiled barley(11). But to prevent disease, one could bathe the infants in water where one includes white flowers from around the Holy Week statues of Senglea(19), but a sick child can be bathed in water to which Fumitory has been added(21), unless you want to make it drink the water from a boiled puppy(21). If all measures appear ineffective, a sick child can always be taken to a priest who will read holy passages from his holy Books(21). Baths could also be given with water containing Vervain, to children who are not only sick, but also weak(21).

VIII Respiratory system Disorders

For nose congestion one recommends water in which salt is dissolved, and one washes into nostrils(13,25), or rub some oil in the nostrils(3). Tonsils, Throat, troubles can be alleviated by gargling with local barley water(9,22,30), or fill a sock with roasted salt crystals, and tie around the neck on the throat(18,29), but one can also treat the throat with external poultices of boiled apples of the season(30).

Cases of bronchitis poultices of flax obtainable from the pharmacist(35) could be applied, or else with White Mustard (Gargir=Diplotaxis eruroides)(1). Other unspecified poultices are also recommended(28) to be placed on the upper regions of the back. Borage(already mentioned) can be taken as a tea(infusion)(27). But the predominant use of Borage is in Coughs, symptoms of various respiratory ailments. For this purpose Borage tea is extensively used(1,5,11,15,16, 18,21,22,25,26b,27,28,29,30); one could also take honey(1,10, 16)with milk(20,29), or with borage(26), or honey with lemon (8,9,26). One could use Pellitory(before mentioned)(16) roasted and made into a poultice(28). The local Carob is used boiled with sugar added to make Carob juice(Gulepp tal-Harrub) and taken as drink(3,7,9,11,16,20,26), and as a variant of this it was suggested to boil together carob and Fig(Tin=Ficus carica)with sugar for the same purpose(21). One can also use Mallow(25), Vervain(4,9), Horehound(Marrubium)(26), glycerine with milk(18), drink red wine(3), the water from boiled flowers of Sulla(Silla=Hedysarum coronarium)(26). A mixture of Borage, Horehound, Carob and honey can also be taken(26b), but a warm piece of woollen cloth can be placed on the chest, besides drinking the juice of a lemon, perforated with a fork, and placed on a window exposed to the cool air of the night(26,29) Haxixa ta' Santa Marija(probably Pyrethrum before mentioned) is also recommended(29).

The more serious whooping cough (Soghla konvulsiva - often corrupted into 'konversiva'(8) can be relieved if the patient is taken near the sea to breathe sea air(22), or by cutting up an onion, the pieces alternating with sugar and drops of water, placed out in the cool of the night(22,26b) and eaten in the morning(26b)and during the day(22); garlic can replace the onion or go with it(22). Otherwise drink the juice of a lemon after being cut into three pieces(8) (for reasons already described), or drink borage tea to encourage mucus(17). In cases of breathlessness, one can drink water of Bermuda Grass((8) or drink the juice of lemon with honey(8)in cases of asthma as also partake of water of boiled Southernwood(Erbabjanka=Artemisia sp.)(10,30), which plant could also be added to Pellitory, roasted, and used as a poultice(21).

IX Complaintes of the Alimentary System

Uneasiness or indigestion and stomach pains could be relieved by drinking the water of boiled Mint(3,11,21,26,28,30), and for general intestinal disorders Chamomile(Kamumella) is widely used as an infusion(1,5,7,9,10,11,16,20,26,26b,29) and for gas one could drink the juice of boiled laurel leaves (5,11,20,28), but one could boil together Mint, Laurel and Cloves with sugar and some brandy to drink(28). One can also drink the boiled extracts of Southernwood(11),Horsetail(1,8), onion(11),and Elder(29),the latter also for hiccups. For various intestinal discomforts poultices can be prepared with flax(13),Sinapis(19,29),Pellitory(21), and a mixture of flax, Southernwood and leaves of the Bitter Orange(Laring tal-bakkaljaw or Zupperit=Citrus aurantium var.bigaradia)(29), and bran with chamomile(7). Extract or Essemce or Orange blossoms(Ilma zghar) is also recommended(1,21,17,sometimes also with toast bread(29); Pennyroyal(1).

For intestinal discomforts, further suggestions are forthcoming, encouraging the use of oil(9), almond oil(7,26), or boiled olive leaves(11). Boiled Prickly Pear blossoms are also taken(5,17); someone still recommended a split live rabbit on the belly(9) as is done for fevers.

Tapeworm(Duda) can be discouraged by eating the inner threads of pumpkin(Qara Hamra)(5), or its seeds(1,8,29) after having taken a purge or laxative of salt, before and after the seeds(8). As a purgative, Senna leaflets(Cassia species) were obtained from the pharmacist, and here called Sena(35,36). But one can also take lemon juice from a lemon cut up and exposed to the cool of the night(28), partake of a mixture of salt and rhubarb(26), or drink the water in which land snails (Bebbux=Helix aspersa) have been boiled(1,10). In cases of diarrhoea(vixri, fetha) flowers of Prickly pear(5) can be boiled and water taken as drink; they could be fresh or dried, and about a dozen used(10). Three 'Weraq tal-Madonna' species undefined), taken three times(8); the triple conditions are for reasons already explained, and only the plant supplied by Frenç tal Gharb, Gozy is suitable(8). Decoctions of Quince(Sfargel=Cydonia vulgaris) are recommended also against loose bowels(22,28) and other infections of the intestines(1, 17,26,27) and in cases of dysentery(1,28) in the form of a jam(1); for the latter condition one can also use seeds of pumpkin(1). Constipation, on the other hand, can be relieved by drinking chamomile tea(21,28).

X Miscellaneous

Apart from offering the use of roasted salt for belly ache in a horse(26), it was recommended to give leaves of Reed(Qasab=Arundo donax) to rabbits suffering from diarrhoea(26). Elder and a perforated lemon in the cool of the night both suggested for conditions left undefined(26b). Advice was

given, never to drink decoctions of Horsetail after milk(8). Ear mucus in rabbits demanded the application of kerosene(26); The use of "Ziemel tal-Baħar" (Seahorse) for a condition described as "terzana tal-bard"(probably Tertian fever or Malaria) appears unusual, unless it is Horsetail. In any case, to avoid disease and trouble, one can always put some olive leaves in one's pocket or make the 'horns' sign with one's fingers behind one's back, thus countering the evil eye(19)

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In Conclusion The foregoing article includes only information collected between summer 1979 and that of 1980. Most of it is not new, but of interest to confirm previous knowledge of local folk medicine, presenting variants thereof with the addition of some new concepts.

In no way is it to be assumed that the present author is recommending, supporting or otherwise encouraging the use of the remedies listed; the article is merely intended to show what others have used, being of folkloristic interest.

Plate 2, facing page 84, shows some of the plants mentioned in this article.
