MALTESE FOLKLORE

TRADITION AND HERITAGE

MALTESE FOLKLORE

TRADITION AND HERITAGE

JOSEPH C. CAMILLERI

BDL Publishing

© Book Distributors Limited
(+356) 2138 0351

www.bdlbooks.com

First edition, 2015
Reprinted, 2018
This edition, 2024

The author wishes to thank Mr Anton Miceli, an official personnel from the Ministry of Culture, for his help regarding the Malta Summer Carnival; Mr Martin Azzopardi (*Is-Serkin*) who owns Crystal Palace *pastizzi* shop in Rabat; Mr George Sammut. A special word of thanks goes to the author's wife, Grace Camilleri.

MALTESE FOLKLORE

TRADITION AND HERITAGE

Previous page: A nonagenarian cloistered nun in St Catherine's monastery, Valletta.

ISBN: 978-99182-12-53-8

Contents

Introduction

The Maltese archipelago consists of a number of small islands – mainly Malta (the main island), Gozo, Comino, Cominotto, St Paul's Islands, Filfla and Manoel Island. Only Malta, Gozo and Comino are inhabited. This archipelago lies in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea. These islands are almost arid, rocky and devoid of natural resources, except for globigerina limestone, which is used for building and sea salt. However, since this archipelago is blessed with many hours of sunshine, solar energy has been developed in recent years.

Parched fields lined with rubble walls and agrobuildings, such as the *girna* and the *razzett*, are distinctive and form an integral part of the Maltese countryside. Typical villages, with their flat-roofed houses and small chapels in narrow streets and alleys have survived. These still have their characteristic tiny shop full of items for sale jammed right up to its entrance. The village greengrocer and the baker still exist along these streets. In these villages, the most dominant feature is the baroque parish church with its bell towers and the dome reaching towards the blue sky. The heart of these villages is the main square enclosed by townhouses, buildings housing band and political parties clubs, and traditional bars serving *pastizzi* and coffee or tea. Even the parish priest's office is usually found in or near this square, while the local police station is often located in a nearby street. Every old village has its own 'Main Street',

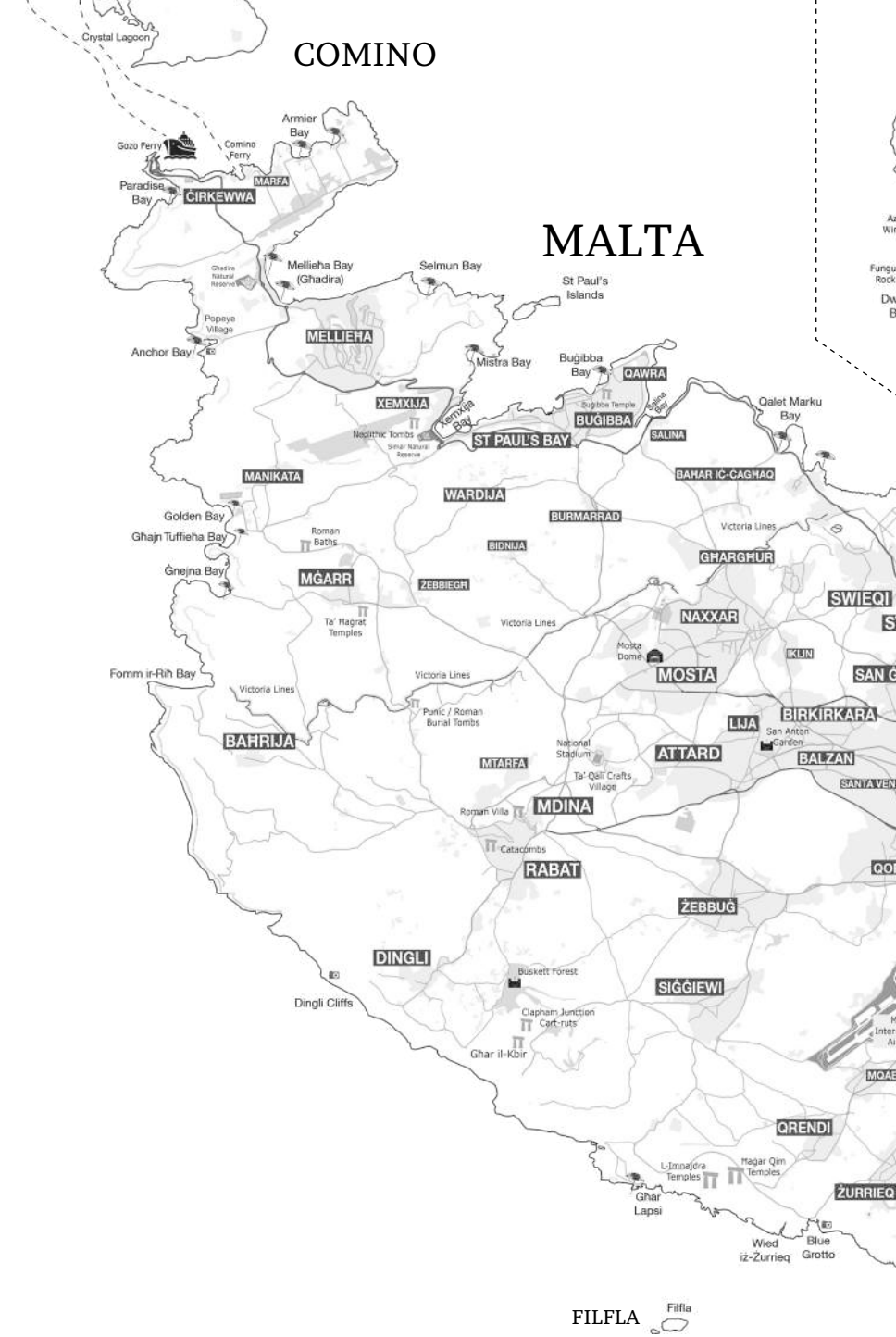
An old Maltese gentleman enjoys a quiet moment in Valletta.

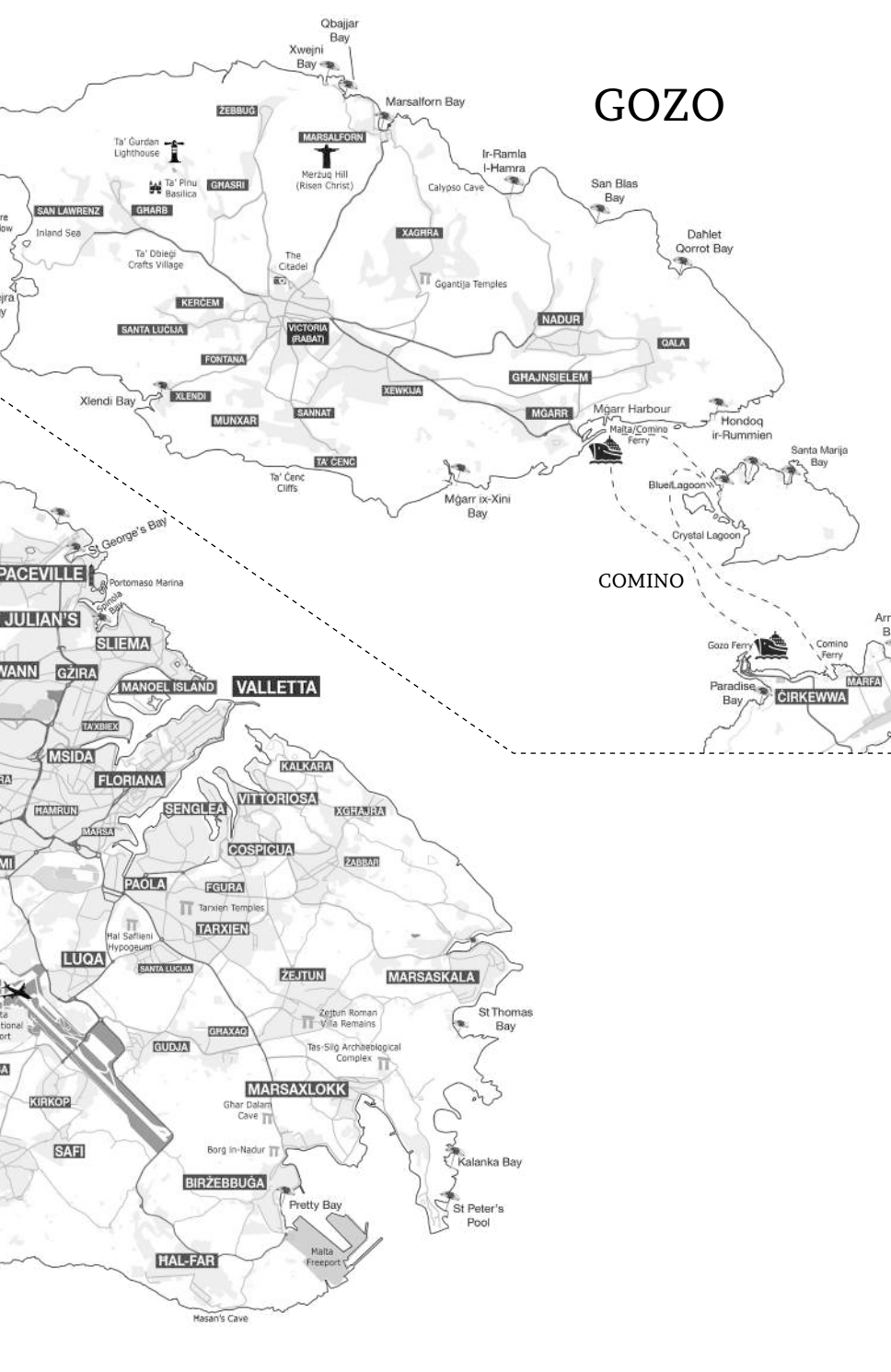
which in the past was referred to by the locals as '*Stradarjali*' ('Kingsway'). In this street one sees more townhouses and possibly other old chapels and a shop or two.

Large old towns also continue to breathe. Some of them were elevated to the status of city either by the Grandmasters of the Order of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta, or by the British. A few of these cities were surrounded by kilometres of defence walls, making them gems of fortified cities. Cases in point are Mdina, Valletta and its suburb Floriana, the Three Cities (Vittoriosa, Cospicua and Senglea) and Gozo's Citadella.

The Maltese archipelago supports a large population that has created its own characteristics, distinguishing itself from its neighbours in Sicily and North Africa. These characteristics are the centre of attraction for the visiting tourist who is keen to get to know Malta better during his or her stay. Some have been included in this book to help the reader to better appreciate the Maltese heritage – a heritage which was handed down from one generation to another, making the Maltese archipelago unique and at the same time European and Mediterranean.

The traditional Maltese tile is still being crafted by hand.


COMINO
MALTA
FILFLA
Crystal Lagoon
Armier Bay
Gozo Ferry
Comino Ferry
Paradise Bay
ĊIRKEWWA
MARFA
Mellieha Bay (Ghadira)
Selmun Bay
St Paul's Islands
Popeye Village
Anchor Bay
MELLIEHA
Mistra Bay
Buġibba Bay
QAWRA
XEMXIJA
Xemxija Bay
BUĠIBBA
Qalet Marku Bay
ST PAUL'S BAY
SALINA
MANIKATA
BAHAR IĊ-ĊAGHAQ
WARDIJA
BURMARRAD
Golden Bay
Ghajn Tuffieha Bay
Roman Baths
BIDNIJA
Victoria Lines
GHARGHUR
Ġnejna Bay
MĠARR
ZEBBIEGH
NAXXAR
SWIEQI
Ta' Ħaġrat Temples
Mosta Dome
MOSTA
IKLIN
Fomm ir-Riħ Bay
Punic / Roman Burial Tombs
LIJA
BIRKIRKARA
BAHRIJA
National Stadium
ATTARD
San Anton Garden
BALZAN
MTARFA
Ta' Qali Crafts Village
Roman Villa
MDINA
Catacombs
RABAT
ŻEBBUĠ
DINGLI
Buskett Forest
Dingli Cliffs
SIĠĠIEWI
Clapham Junction Cart-ruts
Ġhar il-Kbir
QRENDI
L-Imnajdra Temples
Ħaġar Qim Temples
Ġhar Lapsi
ŻURRIEQ
Wied iż-Żurrieq
Blue Grotto
Filfla


GOZO
Qbajjar Bay
Xwejni Bay
Marsalforn Bay
ZEBBUG
MARSALFORN
Ta' Ġurdan Lighthouse
Ta' Pinu Basilica
GHASRI
Merżuq Hill (Risen Christ)
Ir-Ramla l-Ħamra
Calypso Cave
San Blas Bay
SAN LAWRENZ
GHARB
Inland Sea
XAGHRA
Dahlet Qorrot Bay
Ta' Dbiegi Crafts Village
The Citadel
Ġgantija Temples
KERĊEM
NADUR
SANTA LUĊIJA
VICTORIA (RABAT)
FONTANA
QALA
GHAJNSIELEM
Xlendi Bay
XLENDI
XEWKIJA
MUNXAR
SANNAT
MĠARR
Mġarr Harbour
Malta/Comino Ferry
Ħondoq ir-Rummien
Santa Marija Bay
TA' ĊENC
Ta' Ċenċ Cliffs
Blue Lagoon
Mġarr ix-Xini Bay
Crystal Lagoon
COMINO
St George's Bay
PACEVILLE
Portomaso Marina
JULIAN'S
SLIEMA
WANN
GŻIRA
MANOEL ISLAND
VALLETTA
Gozo Ferry
Comino Ferry
Paradise Bay
MARFA
ĊIRKEWWA
TA' XBIEX
MSIDA
FLORIANA
KALKARA
VITTORIOSA
HAMRUN
SENGLEA
XGHAJRA
MARSA
COSPICUA
ZABBAR
PAOLA
FGURA
Tarxien Temples
TARXIEN
Hal Saflieni Hypogeum
LUQA
SANTA LUĊIJA
ŻEJTUN
MARSASKALA
St Thomas Bay
Żejtun Roman Villa Remains
GHAXAQ
GUDJA
Tas-Silġ Archaeological Complex
MARSAXLOKK
KIRKOP
Ghar Dalam Cave
SAFI
Borġ in-Nadur
Kalanka Bay
BIRŻEBBUĠA
Pretty Bay
St Peter's Pool
HAL-FAR
Malta Freeport
Hasan's Cave

The Maltese Islands

The National Colours

The Constitution lays down that the National Flag '…consists of two equal vertical stripes, white in the hoist and red in the fly.' It also includes a representation of the George Cross, which was awarded to the Maltese, by the British monarch, King George VI, during the horrible days of the Second World War. This cross is edged in red and placed in the canton of the white stripe.

Not all scholars agree on the origin of these colours. Some are of the opinion that these were given to the Maltese by Count Roger of Hauteville when he landed in Malta in 1090 to liberate the Islands from Arab control – the white-and-red being part of his family's coat of arms. Others argue that these colours were given to the Maltese by the Aragonese monarch, King Alfonso V, in 1428.

One of the Norman legends expresses popular belief that the colours were passed on to us by Count Roger who, as Joseph Cassar Pullicino writes in his *Norman Legends in Malta* and published in the magazine, *Scientia* (1945): 'It is a widespread and deeply implanted belief in Malta that the white and red colours of the National Flag were bestowed by Count Roger

A house in an alley, Mdina.

The Maltese flag flutters atop the Auberge de Castile, Valletta.

who, having freed the island from the Arabs, raised Malta to the rank of a small nation, granting it the privilege of its own banner and shield.' This legend states that the colours are supposed to have originated from the Count's coat of arms, when in fact, in 1090, armorial bearings were still unknown. Moreover, Goffredo Malaterra, the Count's scribe, did not refer to them at all.

The King Alfonso story is supported by a document kept in the Mdina Cathedral Archives. This document states that in 1428, on the occasion of a visit of ambassadors from Malta to Valencia, the Maltese representatives asked the sovereign for an official shield. E. R. Leopardi notes, in his publication, *Malta's Heritage* (1969), that: 'The king pointed to his chest clothed in white, then holding forward his red cape he said; "these colours will be your shield and your flag."' Unfortunately, this document dating from the 18th century does not include

any references to the original manuscript.

In Mdina, Malta's ancient capital, we find traces of these colours. The baptismal font at the Cathedral contains the white-and-red shield. This font belongs to the Norman Cathedral destroyed by an earthquake in 1693. The former Norman Cathedral's main wooden door, which is well preserved as a sacristy door at present, includes the white-and-red shield carved into it. This door is dates back to 1520. Finally, the Cathedral Museum, which is located a few metres away from the Cathedral, houses pieces of art that include the white-and-red shield.

The George Cross, on display at the Military History Museum, Fort St Elmo.

Moreover, in the Mdina Cathedral Annunciation chapel, there is a large painting commemorating the deliverance of Malta from a siege with North African corsairs. In this painting we see St Paul flying on a white horse, fighting the corsairs. As a background, there is a walled city flying a white-and-red flag.

The Rubble Walls (*Il-Ħitan tas-Sejjieħ*)

One of the characteristics of the Maltese countryside is the rubble wall (also known as 'rock wall'). These walls divide fields into small portions in which the farmer grows vegetables and fruit for the local markets, as well as onions and potatoes for export. Grapes, Malta's cash crop, are also grown.

In some areas rubble walls are low – less than two metres high – while in other areas they could be much higher. These walls serve various functions. They mark the contours of fields, pathways, terrain and open spaces. They also preserve the soil acting as a sieve, allowing rainwater to flow through while holding back the soil. Moreover, rubble walls provide a home for many species of flora and fauna. The caper plant is a case in point. This plant's buds are very popular in the Maltese kitchen as they provide a distant flavour to many local dishes.

A rubble wall located in the limits of Marsaskala.

Our Lady of Providence chapel, Siġġiewi.

location of the cave started to grow. Later, this developed into the present devotion towards Our Lady of the Cave.

Mellieħa has another famous cave chapel. In this chapel, one finds a Marian fresco on one of the cave's walls depicting Our Lady and baby Jesus underneath which an altar was erected. Part of the cave ceiling is also covered by paintings, while the chapel also has several other altars. Next to this cave chapel there is a museum housing votive offerings the local people commissioned or donated to express their gratitude towards our Lady for a miracle at sea or at work.

There are many other cave chapels throughout Malta, such as the St Paul the Hermit chapel at Wied il-Għasel, a valley in Mosta.

Some chapels were built either by the locals, by members of the Maltese aristocracy, or by members of the Order of St John. Usually, these chapels were erected to fulfil a vow. The chapel

The Houses and Dress

The Maltese Clock (*L-Arloġġ tal-Lira*)

It is believed that it was Grand Master Manoel Pinto de Fonseca (1741–73), a Portuguese, who introduced the Maltese to clock making. He wanted a special clock to decorate one of the magisterial palace courtyards, so he employed a clockmaker surnamed Clerici for this purpose. This clock was affixed on a turret on one side of the courtyard, where its gongs could be heard from every part of Valletta. The clock has four dials: one showing the time, the other the phase of the moon; the left dial denotes the month, while the right one registers the date. It is decorated by four bronze figures representing Moorish slaves holding hammers. The central figures are larger than the side ones.

The Maltese were carried away by the sound of the strikes of this clock, which filled the air around the palace. A small replica of this clock is found in the sacristy of the parish church of the Annunciation at Balzan.

After the introduction of the palace courtyard clock, clocks started to become popular with the Maltese. Many middle class Maltese and members of the aristocracy started planning to have a clock in their houses while the clergy wanted a clock

A typical Maltese clock hanging in an old workshop in Valletta.

Ditta Darmanin in St Paul's Street, Valletta, specialize in Maltese clocks.

for the parish church sacristy or parish priest's office. This created a demand for clocks, which led to the introduction of clock making in Malta. Three types of clocks started to be produced locally. There was the church clock fixed to the church's façade, adorning one of the belfries, as well as the mantelpiece or *gradenza* (chest of drawers) clock which also started to be made locally. The latter was popular with both the clergy and the middle class. Finally, there was the wall-hanging clock know as '*l-arloġġ tal-Lira*' or the 'Maltese clock'. Later, in the middle of the 19th century, the grandfather clock was also introduced to the local market.

The most popular clock was *l-arloġġ tal-Lira* (literally, 'the one Lira clock'), which reached Maltese homes in the 18th century. It was a time when the art scene in Malta was dominated by the French artist, Antoine de Favray. This painter produced many works of art showing Maltese house interiors, some of which include the Maltese clock.

corbelled supports called '*saljaturi*', some of which are plain and some heavily carved. Timber, stone, or wrought iron structures are placed on top of the stone shelf to complete the balcony. Some balconies had little peep-holes to enable the resident to see who was at the door without being seen.

There are three types of balconies in Malta. The stone type are the oldest. Some historians believe that these balconies were simply an addition to the stone parapet. At first, stone balconies were produced with plain panels, but by time, these started to be carved with various designs, the most popular being the eight-pointed cross, a symbol which the Maltese islands inherited from the Knights of St John. Sometimes, a recessed shell (*arzella*) enclosed the balcony doorway to accompany the stone balcony design. Balzan has a heavily carved balcony in its village core, while the villages of Gozo – including Għarb, San Lawrenz and Rabat – can all boast of

A decorated limestone balcony, Gozo.

An ornate wooden balcony in St Ursola Street, Valletta.

a large patrimony of carved stone balconies. These are open balconies, with no canopy to provide shade or protection from weather conditions. In the baroque period, the stone panels of open balconies were replaced by balusters. These balusters became very popular and soon they started to appear also on top of roofs.

Similar to the stone balconies we find wrought iron balconies. The only difference is that these have iron panels instead of stone ones. Wrought iron panels were heavily decorated and were mostly manufactured at Naxxar. By time, the main door and the ground floor openings started to include a small window to lighten up the room. These were protected by wrought iron panels. The designs of the balcony panels, the stairs railings, and the window and main door openings had similar panel designs, and they were truly works of art.

Finally, there are the timber balconies. These are closed balconies with glass which offer protection from weather conditions. They can also serve as extra space for the family, such as, for example, a children's play area. The standard Maltese timber balcony has three to four glass 'windows' in the front, and one on each side. The bottom panels are usually made of solid wood with no openings at all. Some historians believe that timber balconies were introduced by the Knights of St John. According to Bosio's history book (published in 1602) about the Order, the aerial drawing of Valletta does not depict any building having a timber box-shaped balcony. It is believed that the first closed timber balcony was made around 1679 to cover the corner balconies of the Order's main palace – the Palace of the Grand Master (today's Presidential Palace) in Valletta. These timber and glass structures had the purpose of joining the rooms on the sides of the Palace.

A closed balcony with an adjacent timber-floored counterpart.

The Door Knockers (*Il-Ħabbata*)

Old Maltese houses used to equip the main door with a mechanical doorbell. This consisted of a handle attached to a wire which was further attached to a coiled spring that shook the bell when pulled. A further piece of equipment for the main door was a mud iron scraper embedded in the ground. The purpose of this scraper was for anyone entering the house to scrape mud off their shoes before proceeding inside. Some iron mud scrapers were made in the form of an animal, the most popular being a dog.

While visiting the core of an old village one would notice that, apart from the bell and iron mud-scraper, every townhouse or middle class dwelling door had a ceramic or metal knob, or a brass door knocker on each of its two wings. The knobs helped the resident to either open or close the door wing more easily. Sometimes, instead of the door knobs, one could find a pair of door knockers. These knockers gave a more elegant look to the main door, making it more stately. Usually these knockers reflected the status of the head of the family who lived within the walls of the particular house.

In Malta, there are different types of knockers. The traditional type consists of a ball or boss with holes at the sides from which a heavy semi-circular ring hangs. Usually, in the middle of this ring, is a small ball which hits against a round boss fixed to the door at a lower level. These types of knockers – often coloured black – can be found on all types of urban or rural buildings, and even farmhouses. As these were popular, they were made by local craftsmen, especially those of Naxxar.

By time, more elaborate knockers were imported. Sometimes, the knocker ball was transformed into the head of a slave; sometimes, a lion. Both the slave- and the lion-shaped balls had holes in their faces from which a semi-circular ring hung. Other types consisted of a plain ball with the semi-circular ring

Maltese door knockers come in all shapes and forms.

on Saturdays before the maid left the household to spend the weekend with her family.

The Maltese Farmhouse (*Ir-Razzett*)

Scattered all over the Maltese islands, we find various farmhouses (popularly known as '*ir-razzett*', plural '*l-irziezet*'). We find these dwellings either in the open countryside or clustered together outside village cores. The open countryside farmhouses are encircled by patches of fields enclosed by dry stone walls (*il-ħitan tas-sejjieħ*), surrounded by prickly pears and carob trees.

According to some researchers interested in architecture, these dwellings were influenced by the Arabs. But Anthony Luttrell has a different opinion. He thinks that the Maltese farmhouses with their courtyard plans could have been influenced either by Roman or Sicilian countryside buildings. These buildings, which were erected by countrymen, had to meet several purposes. They had to offer shelter as well as security to the farmer and his family. They also had to accommodate the rearing of animals, that is, they had to provide space for the safe-keeping of animals during the dark hours of the night and offer storage space for the animals' food. The walls had to be ideal for the Mediterranean climate, with its long, hot, dry summers and short, cold, windy, winter days. The stone used was that offered by the geology of the Maltese archipelago, that is, limestone (*franka*).

History had a great influence on these dwellings. During the Medieval and the Knights' times, landings by corsairs were common and frequent. This entailed that farmhouses should be built inland rather than along the coast. Most of these dwellings were erected in the centre or south of the island of Malta. Usually, they were built in some narrow or meandering

Xarolla windmill dating back to 1724 and St Andrew's chapel in Żurrieq.

The Knights gave great importance to windmills and silos, as there was always a shortage of wheat in Malta. Locally grown wheat was never enough to feed the entire population. This problem increased with the coming of the Knights and their 'entourage', which included servants, slaves, soldiers and attendants. To make matters worse, many Rhodean families, whose livelihood depended on the Knights, decided to face exile with them. They left Rhodes in 1522 and settled in Malta too. To solve this age old problem, in the late Middle Ages, Malta had started to import grain from Sicily. At the time, since Malta formed part of the Kingdom of Sicily, it also had the right to buy this commodity without paying the export tax. The Knights worked hard to extend this privilege.

In order to store grain, the Knights built granaries (*il-fosos*). These were considered to be part and parcel of the system of defence, as these were seen as a protection against sieges and naval blockades. Valletta had 70 granaries built in hard rock in front of the Fort St Elmo. Castile Place was another locality

The granaries (here in Floriana) or *fossos* are bell-shaped reservoirs, each covered with a large stone cap, carefully sealed with mortar when full of wheat.

in Valletta, which included granaries with 15 of them in front of the Auberge de Castille. Floriana had the largest amount of granaries. These were built in front of the parish church in a square which bears their name to this day, Granaries Square. This is also the largest square in Malta. It was Grand Master Fra Gregorio Carafa who thought of building more granaries on the other side of the Grand Harbour. He built about 24 of these in Senglea and Birgu.

Maltese windmills have their particular characteristics. They are located outside the built-up area of the villages, on high land to make good use of the wind. The base of these windmills is usually squarish, but we find some that have a circular base. A windmill at Lija is a case in point, while we also find another such windmill at Qala, Gozo.

some bad quality stones and mortar to build this windmill. Because of this, an order was issued to dismantle it. It was then rebuilt in the 1780s. Its name originated from the Christian name of the last miller. He was Ġużeppi Grech who was popularly known as '*Żeppu ta' Kola*' (Joseph, son of Nicholas). This windmill still has its sails and is open to visitors. It contains a museum of objects which were used by a miller's family. There are tools linked to the milling trade as well as items found in domestic circles.

The Maltese House (*Id-Dar*)

Traditional village houses in Malta were at first inspired by the countryside farmhouses. On entering such houses, one finds a long room called '*l-intrata*' ('the hall') which leads to an open courtyard (*il-bitħa*). The rest of the house consists of rooms of different sizes which surround this courtyard. The courtyard contains a flight of steps which leads to a first floor room or two. The rest of the first floor consists of a rooftop. At the back of the house there might be a little garden with fruit trees.

After the Maltese and Knights' victory of the Great Siege of 1565, the Knights decided to construct a city–fortress which served their needs. Valletta started to be built. During those times, baroque concepts which had become popular in early 17th century in Italy, became desirable to the Knights. Several façades inside the city were given a decorative appearance to bring them in line with what was happening in Italy. Several main buildings such as the langues' small churches were all dressed up with baroque façades. Cases in point are the churches of St James, St Catherine and Our Lady of Pilar. Moreover, corners of building blocks had to be decorated with sculptural decorations, which also reflected this style.

Villa Marchese, Attard. Painting by Anton Schranz the elder (1769-1840).

After 1650, timber balconies were introduced in Valletta and these further enhanced the façades. These balconies were mostly made by a great number of Turkish slaves living in Malta at the time. They were master craftsmen in various trades, especially in carpentry. The balconies started to be decorated according to baroque designs inspired by the great Italian architects such as Borromini, Bernini and Cortona. The corbels (*saljaturi*) which support these balconies bear such flowery and decorative carvings.

Maltese architects and master masons got to know of this influence either by studying Italian buildings from books or by visiting the Eternal City of Rome. They also had the opportunity to study works of resident Italian architects who were in Malta working for the Knights. Architects such as

The flamboyant baroque windows of Casa Bolino, Valletta.

Blondel and Carapecchia all created buildings with baroque façades. Valletta could be compared to other contemporary towns in central Europe, such as Palmanova in North Italy.

The idea of a baroque house reached the towns and villages of Malta. The rooms of these houses have extremely high ceilings; slender stone slabs are perched on wooden beams or upheld by arches. Courtyards are spacious and staircases are charming. There is also a number of small rooms which were usually used as bedrooms. These rooms were easy to warm up on a cold winter's night. All these features give the Maltese house a special character.

These houses also incorporate a *kantina* (cellar). When the houses were built, the masons used to get the stone from the site itself. This not only offered free stones but was also in line with the Maltese belief that if stones were carried over a

An elegant 18th-century rococo staircase inside a Valletta palazzo.

A typical Maltese townhouse, Siġġiewi.

The Maltese Headgear ('*L-Għonnella*', '*Il-Faldetta*' or '*L-Istamina*')

A well-known characteristic of Maltese folk heritage is the female headgear which is known locally as '*l-għonnella*', '*il-faldetta'*, or '*l-istamina*'. Many folklore writers consider this headgear to be the Maltese national costume. The *għonnella* can be described as a large hood made of rich silk stiffened at the top by means of cardboard. A part of the *għonnella* rests over the head while it was held by the hands at the sides.

The *għonnella* used to be made in different colours. In the countryside it was either white or green. Sometimes a bride wore a white *għonnella* as headgear for the wedding ceremony. The towns of Żabbar and Żejtun had their own special colour – spotted blue. In the cities, especially in Valletta and Floriana, as well as the Cottonera area – Birgu, Isla and Bormla – the most popular colour for this headgear was black. This colour remained the most popular with Maltese women all over the islands when the *għonnella* was being phased out.

The *għonnella* is still popular among tourists. In souvenir shops one often finds a doll wearing the *għonnella*. These dolls which come in various sizes all wear the black *għonnella*. The *għonnella* was also featured in paintings by the French painter Antoine de Favray. Introduced to Malta by the Knights, he managed to produce a great deal of paintings for the Maltese upper classes. Some of these paintings depict women wearing the lace veils or the *għonnella*. The *għonnella* is still popular in today's art scene, as a recent sculpture placed next to the entrance of the national hospital, Mater Dei, depicts Our Lady with the child Jesus wearing the *għonnella*. Moreover, the *għonnella* used to be a popular feature in former travellers' accounts and other published manuscripts.

It is a popular belief that the *għonnella* appeared in the brief historical period of the French rule. It is said that the *għonnella*

A woman wearing the Maltese female headgear or *għonnella*. Painting by Edward Caruana Dingli.

started to be worn by Maltese women as a protection against the excessive gallantry of the French troops. However, Sir Harry Luke, who was a former Lieutenant-Governor of Malta between the years 1930 and 1938, was of the opinion that the *għonnella* had much older origin. Moreover, it is known that from the 16th to the 18th century, the *għonnella* was worn by women coming from all social classes. This is because these were mentioned in marriage contracts and formed part of the dowry.

Other scholars believe that the *għonnella* developed from a large skirt which was thrown up over the head. It was a common practice in the countries surrounding the Mediterranean Sea for women to put the back part of the upper skirt over their heads. This was still the practice in the countryside after the Second World War. In Turkey, this is called the *'charshaf'*. This tradition developed into a *ċulqana*, which was made of blue cotton with white spots or a flowery design. The *ċulqana* remained in use in the two large communities of the town of Żabbar and its neighbouring town Żejtun. The Żabbar women used to visit several villages and towns wearing this *għonnella* in order to sell capers. These were placed in a cane basket which they had to carry by hand.

Some women had one or two *għonnelli*; but there were others who were luckier, as they had even five. Up to the First World War, the *għonnella* was in general use, but between the wars, it began to fall out of favour.

Some female members of the MUSEUM, a lay religious organisation continued to wear the *għonnella* until quite recently. There were a few women who continued to wear the *għonnella* in the villages especially in Gozo. According to the local newspaper, *The Times* (6 Apr. 1991), the *għonnella* disappeared from the streets of Victoria, Gozo, with the passing away of Ċensa Vella who died at the end of March 1991. She was one of the last Gozitans who was seen wearing

Transport

The Maltese Harbour Boat (*Id-Dgħajsa tal-Pass*)

Malta has a rich patrimony of boats (*dgħajjes*). Unfortunately, some of these boats, such as the Gozitan boat (*id-dgħajsa tal-Latini*), have been lost. Still, we can enjoy a variety of locally made boats which are quite unique. Some popular boats are the *kajjik*, *luzzu* and *fregatina*. The most popular boat (*dgħajsa*) is the *dgħajsa tal-pass* (the Maltese harbour boat). This boat is

Left: Detail of a Dodge T-110 bus in front of the Tritons fountain, Valletta.

Below: Old postcard showing Maltese *dgħajsas* at Kalkara.

made of a variety of woods, such as mahogany, ash, teak and redwood.

The Maltese harbour boat is mainly seen in the waters of Malta's Grand Harbour (*Il-Port il-Kbi*r). It is a long but elegant boat, which can be quickly rowed across the waters because of its weight. It is used mainly as a passenger boat. Some writers refer to the *dgħajsa tal-pass* as the 'scousin' of the Venetian gondola. However, Joseph Abela, a scholar of local seacrafts, says that this boat's origin is lost in time. He is of the opinion that the *dgħajsa tal-pass* and the gondola are two different boats, as the environmental conditions in which they operate are completely different. He continues to argue that the *dgħajsa tal-pass* has a symmetrical hull while that of the gondola is asymmetrical. Moreover, only the *dgħajsa tal-pass* has a keel.

The earliest pictorial evidence of a *dgħajsa tal-pass* goes back to a work of art created by W. Schellink. This was made during

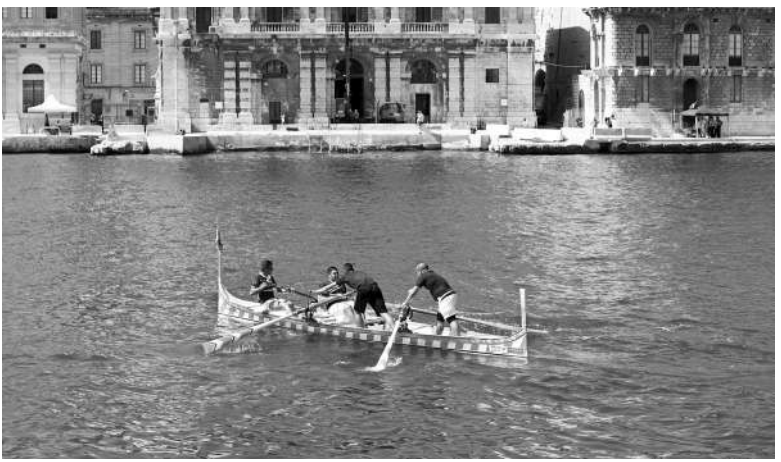
An old postcard showing a harbour boat approaching Barriera Wharf, Valletta.

for the services of the Maltese *barklori*. Many *dgħajjes tal-pass* used to gather around warships to ferry the sailors ashore. By time, the harbour boat became a symbol of the presence of the Royal Navy in Malta. When the last British Naval Commander was about to retire, the residents of Kalkara, the village next to Birgu, presented him with a silver model of the *dgħajsa tal-pass*.

Apart from ferrying sailors ashore, the harbour boat used to be loaded with lace, clothing materials, stationery, souvenirs, sweets, tobacco, coffee, as well as Ceylon tea and other products which were sold to the naval personnel. These products were displayed in boxes, built for the purpose, that were fixed to the boat's sides.

According to Charles Flores, the affection of the Royal Navy towards these harbour boats was shown when a boat was taken by the Royal Navy to Venice to take part in a British Empire-based traditional boat race. The Maltese harbour boat crew were Maltese rowers, who worked at HMS *St Angelo* (the then headquarters of the British power in Malta). The Maltese carried the colours of the day to the delight of those sailors who had gambled a week's beer on it.

The ability of the *barklori* is shown in the two regattas which are held annually inside the Grand Harbour. These regattas take place on 31 March, Malta's Freedom Day, and the feast of the Nativity of Our Lady, known locally as '*il-Bambina*' ('the infant Virgin') or '*il-Victorja*' ('Our Lady of Victories'), which takes place on 8 September. The localities around the Grand Harbour – those of Vittoriosa (Birgu), Cospicua (Bormla), Senglea (l-Isla), Kalkara, Marsa and Marsamxett (the Marsamxett side of Valletta) – take part in all the categories of this race. Birżebbuġa also takes part in these races. They all compete for the Aggregate Shield. The 8 September regatta commemorates the Great Siege victory of the Maltese and the Knights over the Ottoman Turks. At first, according to Charles Flores, it consisted of some Knights' galleys symbolically



Rowers training for the 8 September regatta in the waters of the Grand Harbour.

chasing away the Order's foes from the Grand Harbour. By time, these galleys were replaced by the powerful harbour boats and a regatta was born.

Nowadays, one can see these harbour boats mainly inside the main inlets of the Grand Harbour. They are also found as replicas in maritime museums. Some souvenir shops sell little dainty models and there was a time when small gold or silver brooches were also produced by local gold- and silversmiths. These brooches were especially popular with the female family members of the *barklori*.

Unfortunately, most of the present fleet of harbour boats are over 50 years old. During the days when the British Mediterranean fleet made good use of the harbour, one could find some 200 to 300 boats on the Grand Harbour's waters. However, at one point, quays were built along the Valletta side for the British warships. This was a great blow to the boatsmen as they started losing clients. Today, there are only about 35 harbour boats.

A fisherman steering his *luzzu* out of Marsaxlokk harbour.

The building of a *luzzu* is a trade passed on from father to son. The most popular localities where the *luzzijiet* (plural of *luzzu*) are manufactured are Senglea and Kalkara. Both of these lie within the Grand Harbour. The first thing the boat maker does is to prepare the main beam which runs all along the length of the boat. This is called '*il-prim*'. Against this beam smaller supports, referred to as '*il-majjieri*', are fixed. Both the *prim* and the *majjieri* form together the skeleton of the boat.

The next step involves the covering of the skeleton with planks to form the body of the boat. These planks are made from red deal wood. The boat maker examines these planks, one by one, to see if there are any cracks in between. If he finds any, he has to fill them and repaint the whole area where these cracks were found. The whole boat will be painted according to the colours ordered by the fisherman. While painting is taking place, the fisherman hands in the name of the boat to be included in the boat's decorations.

When these boats are not out at sea, they are kept in a special fishing harbour called '*menqa*'. This harbour is rectangular in shape, with a surrounding pavement so that the fishermen can place their fishing nets close to the boats, ready to be taken aboard when needed. There are few examples of a *menqa*. St Paul's Bay has a well-preserved *menqa* in the village core. This harbour is very close to the fishing quarters of this locality. Another *menqa* is found in the main tourist resort of Gozo, Marsalforn. This is located at one end of the bay, very close to the sandy beach. The *menqa* offers a spectacular view of the boats. Some float on the waters of the *menqa* while others lie face down on the pavement for maintenance works.

Apart from the *menqa*, boats are kept in special sheltered inlet harbours. One of these is Wied iż-Żurrieq. This is a natural, narrow inlet, which offers protection from winter storms. Close by there are the small one- or two-roomed stores in which fishermen mend and keep nets. However, when the

Marsaxlokk's open air market is a great place to buy fresh fish.

The eye of Osiris is meant to ward off the evil eye.

how to prepare special dishes which include *lampuki*. The most popular are the *lampuki* pie and fried *lampuki*, served with potatoes and vegetables.

The *luzzu* has its own culture. Each fisherman has his family's heritage of colours, which are passed on from father to son. Even to this day, we find fishermen still using the colours that belonged to their grandfathers. These are very rarely changed. They believe that a colour change would bring bad luck. The old fishermen were very superstitious. They believed in the evil eye, so made sure that the eye of Osiris decorated the body of their boat.

The Marsaxlokk fishermen like to invite the parish priest to bless the boats and nets at the start of the *lampuki* season. This ceremony takes place around 15 August. All the fishermen try to get a small piece of dry olive branch, which is blessed on Palm Sunday, to be placed next to a crucifix fixed underneath the main shelf of the boat.

The Malta Bus (*Il-Karozza tal-Linja*)

The first mechanised land public transport in Malta was the train. This was inaugurated in 1883 and had only one line, the Valletta–Mtarfa line. The railway passed through Floriana, Ħamrun, Santa Venera, Birkirkara, Attard, Rabat, Mdina and Mtarfa. It was created mainly to serve the people employed with the British Services, to reach home as quickly as possible. The Maltese could use this means of transport, but tickets were rather expensive. In 1905 two new types of transport were introduced. These were the tram and the buses.

At first, privately-owned buses were used. These buses were introduced by an Englishman who brought some vehicles over to Malta to start transporting people to and from the most popular spots of the island. The first team of buses consisted of a single-decker, four double-deckers and a lorry. They were introduced at a time when many Maltese were trying to find

2851, 'Lusitania' named after the *Cunard* liner torpedoed on 7 May, 1915.

Entertainment

Carnival (*Il-Karnival*)

At present, there are two types of Carnival festivities being held annually in Malta. The traditional Carnival is held during the week before the start of Lent (Ash Wednesday). This Carnival has a long history as well as traditions and typical sweets associated with it. It is held mainly at Valletta and Floriana, as well as Victoria, Gozo. Moreover, other localities organise their own typical Carnival festivities, known as mini-Carnivals. Another Carnival is held in summer. This was introduced in 2008 thanks to the initiative of the St Paul's Bay Local Council, and entrusted its organisation to Mr Paul Chetcuti.

The traditional Carnival starts on the last Thursday before Lent. On this day, a ceremony is held in Valletta, where the Carnival flag is raised and the Carnival anthem is played. This is followed by the Carnival traditional dance, popularly known as '*il-Parata*' together with some other dancing. On the following day, Carnival activities are held at the Carnival enclosure, where the Carnival anthem is once again played followed by dancing competitions. Finally, a défilé is organised throughout the main streets and squares of Valletta, headed by a special float – the King Carnival float. In this défilé, all the decorated

Carnival scene in St George's Square, Valletta *c.*1900.

triumphal floats, floats with people dressed in costumes, carts and cabs, together with bands of bandmasters in grotesque attire playing lively marches, take part. Sometimes, men dress up as women, and vice-versa, the women in men's clothes.

On Saturday, the Children's Carnival is held. In the morning, the celebration starts with the playing of the Carnival anthem, followed by dancing inside the enclosure. Finally, the King Carnival float enters the enclosure and another défilé is organised. In the afternoon, the Carnival anthem is played once again followed by competitive dancing. The Grand Défilé then makes its way through the main Valletta streets and squares. At night, a general merrymaking activity takes place with the participation of live bands and dancing, where the public is invited to take part.

On Sunday another Grand Défilé is organised, this time starting from Castile Place in Valletta and ending in the

Children and adults alike flock to Valletta during Carnival weekend to see the brightly coloured triumphal floats.

with fine cutlery and tableware. A special linen tablecloth, a low lying vase with flowers, and lit candlesticks all form part of the festive scenes. All items are usually used thrice a year – for Christmas, Easter and the feast lunch.

Fireworks are also manufactured by the supporters of the band clubs. On the eve of the feast, the air fireworks starts the show, lighting up the dark sky with many colours and filling the air with noise. Then the ground fireworks are displayed, one by one, an hour before midnight. Many people leave their houses and crowd the square to admire this spectacle. If the square is by the sea, some families take a boat to watch the display while enjoying the sea breeze.

Before returning home, when the feast comes to an end, families usually stop at one of the nougat stands to buy two blocks of nougat, one white and one dark brown. Some also buy some small blocks to offer to friends and workmates when they return to work. The day following the feast day is not a working day for many workers. It has been a custom for whole families and close friends to spend this day on a beach. This is called '*xalata*'.

For the *xalata*, families share cars decorated with paper decorations. Some join buses hired by the band club. In the past, these buses used to host two or three instrument players. On the way to and from the beach, the people would sing loudly accompanied by guitars and accordions. The day on the beach is spent swimming, drinking, eating a packed lunch and enjoying the company of friends and family. When the *xalata* is over, a carcade is formed touring the streets and squares of the locality. This creates a carnivalesque atmosphere.

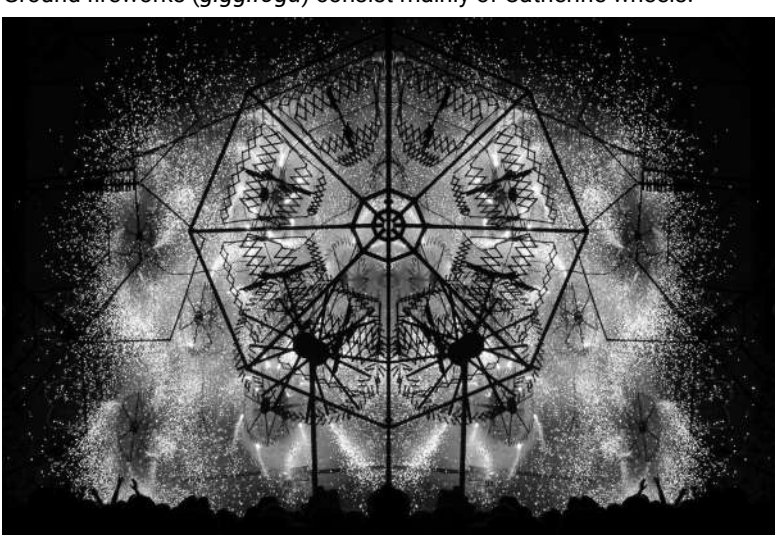
A week later, the statue is taken from its plinth and placed inside its niche in the church. From that moment on, the parishioners start dreaming, planning and contributing towards the next feast, trying to improve on the previous one.

Fireworks

In Malta, town and village feasts are mainly held throughout the summer months. One of the main characteristics of these folk festivals are the fireworks or civilian pyrotechnics. In Malta, fireworks were first introduced by the Knights who used to hold fireworks displays in honour of St Barbara. The Maltese enjoyed themselves watching these fireworks light up the night sky and with the help of some Sicilians, they quickly learned the skills of firework production.

At first, during a town or village feast, several soldiers employed by the Knights, were asked to gather on the church parvis before the beginning of the feast procession. They were expected to fire a salute in honour of the saint whose feast was being celebrated. This tradition was later replaced by the firing of *maskli* – mug-shaped 'tins', made of iron or bronze, which when filled with powder and set alight, produced a

Ground fireworks (*ġiġġifogu*) consist mainly of Catherine wheels.



smoke bombs'). These are mainly used during daylight, especially in the morning during the High Mass (*il-Kantata*). The *tiri tal-wieħed wieħed* are also popular especially during the Gozitan feasts. These bombs are displayed from time to time, one by one and are also referred to as '*tir*' (shot).

Fireworks are produced on a parish level. They are made in the *kamra tan-nar* (fireworks factory) built on the outskirts of the locality. The person in charge of fireworks production is a holder of a police licence. The fireworks factory consists of two sections, a workshop and a store. The running of these fireworks factories are governed by strict rules that every one has to follow. Safety is of utmost importance while working in these factories.

Although there is great danger in fireworks production still the Maltese continue to nurture a special love towards them. The recipes for manufacturing particular bombs are considered to be a closely guarded secret. This is mainly due to the rivalry that exists between the different localities and between the various band clubs found in the parish itself.

The displays are becoming more and more elaborate and spectacular. The most popular are those of Lija and Imqabba.

Traditional Folk Singing (*L-Għana*)

Sometime in their history, Spain, Sicily and Malta have all witnessed North African occupation. This left an imprint on the lifestyles and cultures of their people. A characteristic of this influence is the melody and verse-rendering of folk singing. This imprint is manifested in flamenco singing in Spain, while in Sicily, we can hear it in either the *filastrocca* or *cantastorie*. In Malta, this cultural influence is found in *għana*. This singing has been defined by Charles Coleiro as '…a composition of

amoeban jingles improvised on the spur of the moment and answered by an equally extemporised verse.'

Għana is sung by two or more singers called '*għannejja*', who seat themselves at two opposite ends of the stage, retorting answers to each other in rhyme without any planning or meditation. *Ġħannejja* vie with each other regarding their ability to sing without searching for words. The theme varies according to the circumstances of popular interest. In some instances, satire is also used, dealing with the faults or character of the singers themselves. The singing involves musical accompaniment by three guitarists. The lead guitarist is called '*Il-Prim*' (the prime). Between each stanza of *għana*, the lead guitarist plays *il-prejjem* in which he or she shows their skills at guitar playing.

The tunes are somewhat wild in general, but they also involve romantic beauty and harmony. As the singing starts, the audience tries to follow all the words being sung closely. Clarity of expression in the performance is expected out of every *għannej*. Moreover, the audience also expects singing to include correct rhyming and a theme that is maintained throughout the song.

There are various types of *għana*. The *spirtu pront*, which is the most popular type of, consists of short stanzas, normally sung by a group of two or more singers. This type of folk singing takes place in the form of a song duel. This generally has two styles of singing. The first style is called 'the hitting back'. If four singers are involved, the first singer sings with the third person, while the second singer does his or her part with the fourth singer.

The second style is known as the 'impromptu reply'. While the singer starts his or her first two lines, the second singer continues the rest of the stanza. It is normal practice for the singer who finishes the last two verses to start the next stanza. This is called '*għanja maqsuma*' or '*għana bil-qasma*' which means

Food

The Dark Crusty Loaf (*Il-Ħobża*)

Malta has a type of bread that is peculiarly local. At first sight, it is similar to bread found in other parts of the Mediterranean, such as in Italy, Sicily and Portugal. The Maltese bread (*il-ħobża*) consists of an outer crunchy crust with an inner part which is very soft. Some prefer to eat it when it is warm. Most Maltese like to have lunch or dinner served with a least one slice of this bread. All agree that to get the best out of Maltese bread, one has to eat it fresh, that is, it should be eaten on the same day that it is baked. There are many types of Maltese bread such as '*tas-Salib*' ('of the cross'), '*tas-Sikkina*' ('of the knife'), the '*ftira*' and '*tal-Kexxun*' ('of the drawer').

The Maltese bread recipe has not changed over the years. It is made with simple ingredients: flour, yeast, water and sea salt. In order to produce bread, the baker (*il-furnar*) and his team (usually his family members) need to have lots of patience. A love towards their trade is also a must. Production starts in the small hours of the day. The baker starts by taking a piece of *ħmira* (yeast) of the day before, which is then mixed with the day's new dough. Then the whole dough mixture is kneaded until the dough turns white. Some flour is scattered on top of this mixture, which is then covered with cloth. The

An assortment of Maltese delicacies accompanied with bread and oil.

mixture is then placed in a warm place for some hours until its volume doubles.

The next step in bread production involves a great level of skill. The baker cuts the mixture into small portions. He gives the portions the shape of a typical Maltese loaf and places them onto wooden trays covered with flour. While this process is being carried out, the oven is lit and when its temperature rises to 500 degrees Celsius, the loaves are placed inside. Baking time is expected to take about an hour and a quarter. When baking is over, the baker takes a long wooden shovel to take the bread out of the scorching oven.

Every town and village used to have its bakery (*il-forn*). In large towns, one could find more than one bakery. The town of Qormi has a reputation for producing the largest supply of Maltese bread. Although this locality hosts a large population,

The locals will vehemently claim that Maltese bread is the best in the world.

did not want to starve the people, so they sent them Maltese bread. These loaves were rejected by the Maltese leaders and were sent back accompanied by *ġbejniet*. It is believed that during the night, St Paul was seen flying on a white horse chasing the corsairs. At dawn the corsairs' camps disappeared from sight. Mdina was saved, and so were the Maltese islands.

Honey (*L-Għasel*)

Malta has been involved with the production of honey since time immemorial. Honey is referred to as the health-giving 'gold'. The word 'Malta' derives from the Greek word for honey or 'land of honey', '*Melitos*'. This means that the production of this commodity existed during the time of the ancient Greeks. The Romans considered the production of honey as one of Malta's chief products. The Roman name for honey is also quite similar to the name the Romans used to refer to Malta, '*Melitai*'. In fact, Malta was called '*Melita*' by the Romans.

One of the major historical events that took place during Roman times involves honey. Caius Verres, a prætor of Sicily, who also governed Malta, treated his subjects very cruelly and extorted from them heavy sums of money. Cicero, the great Roman orator refers to a number of precious goods which Caius Verres carried away from the Islands. These included four hundred jars of honey, as well as large quantities of Maltese cloth, fifty cushions for sofas and a candelabra, together with the Temple of Juno's precious ornaments.

Honey remained popular with the Maltese until sugar was introduced. The climate of Malta is ideal for the production of honey because of its mild winters. Some localities, which offered bees plenty of sweet-smelling fodder, became famous for the quality of their honey. These include Fawwara in Gozo and Comino. But the most famous locality for honey

Punico-Roman apiary at Imġiebaħ, limits of Xemxija.

production is Mellieħa, as its district 'l-Imġiebaħ', meaning 'beehives', indicates.

Honey is often mentioned in old documents. A document of 1579 refers to a farmer's petition to build a wall around his hives at Mellieħa. He wished to protect his honey production from the herds of goats and flocks of sheep which were taken out to graze by the shepherds in the area. Moreover, there is an old stone apiary in Mellieħa with 40 apertures that is no longer being used.

Unfortunately, there are not so many beekeepers left in Malta, although their numbers have recently increased. Almost each season has its own typical honey. Spring is famous for the production of clover (*silla*), and at this time of year, bees produce clover honey. In early summer, the Maltese fields are rich in thyme (*sagħtar*), so summer is the time for the first jars of thyme honey to appear on the market. Finally, autumn is

the time for carob (*ħarrub*) honey. Each variety has its typical fragrance and colour. But besides these, bees also produce propolis, which is the ideal natural product to protect everyone from nasty colds and flu symptoms.

Jars of honey are available in open-air markets, groceries and supermarkets. Honey is still considered to be a precious commodity and it makes an ideal gift for both the local and foreign recipients.

Nougat (*Qubbajt*)

Every feast has its own particular sweet. Christmas Day has its *qagħaq tal-għasel* (honey rings), Easter has its *figolla* (a large, double biscuit pastry with honey-marzipan filling) and the towns' and villages' feast days have *il-qubbajt* (nougat). This word is Semitic and is derived from the Arabic language. Sicily,

The old display furniture for nougat selling has been retained.

Malta's neighbouring island, has a similar sweet, and it is possible that it originated during the times of Arab rule, as both Malta and Sicily experienced long years of Arab subjugation.

A bar of Maltese nougat consists of a mixture of nuts, honey and raisins. Every nougat maker has his or her own nougat mixture, which is kept secret and is safely guarded by all the members of the nougat 'factory'. All nougat makers inherit the trade from their fathers and grandfathers. Most of them hail from the town of Żebbuġ. No wonder that during a feast day, the most popular nougat hawker's cry is '*iż-Żebbuġi hawn*' ('here comes the Żebbuġ man').

We find three different types of nougat. There is honey nougat, carob nougat, and that which is made from a mixture of both these main ingredients. Nowadays, we find small bars of nougat covered with delicious chocolate. The latter were created to increase the variety of nougat available on the local market.

In former days, at the end of the locality's feast day, before returning home for a good night's sleep, the father and the rest of the family used to visit one of the stalls selling nougat (*imwejjed tal-qubbajt*) and buy a large bar to take home. It was not unusual for the family to buy one, two, or more bars of different types to suit everyone's taste. Sometimes, the father used to buy another bar or two as a 'souvenir' of the feast for his employer or workmates. Another custom, which has now died out, was for a young man to take a bar of nougat as a gift to his girlfriend's family.

Nougat is sold in highly decorated stalls set up near the parish church where the feast is being celebrated. These nougat stalls have two tables. The lower table is large and is used for displaying samples of each kind of nougat available for sale. At the end of this table there are two special small glass 'windows' for displaying larger samples of nougat highly decorated with coloured icing. On the upper table, there is a decorated scale

It is not a Maltese *festa* without the nougat stand.

The Victorian interior of the Valletta covered market in Merchants Street.

Works in Malta, was sent to England and France to acquaint himself with new construction technology.

When he returned, Mr Zimelli was assisted by an Englishman, Sir Charles Fox, and a Frenchman, Monsieur Victor Battard, to draw up a market plan. The construction was carried out by Salvatore Fenech. Stockport engineering firm, Emmerson and Murgatroyd of the Heaton Foundry, produced the cast iron works. This market occupied a whole Valletta block. Mr Emmanuel Galizia eventually replaced Mr Zimelli and proceeded to England to acquire more professional information regarding the new market's roof. On 30 November 1861, the Valletta market was opened to the public. It hosted 205 stalls rented at either £15 or £18 a year. There were also 72 storerooms with an annual rent of either £10 or £12.

One of the many old gold and silver shopfronts in St Lucia Street.

structural changes to the premises. Republic Street also has a corner minimarket named 'Wembley', which has preserved the original wooden green shop-front, as well as the iron staircase.

In Merchants Street, parallel to Republic Street, there is the confectionery outlet, C. Camilleri and Sons. This shop was opened in 1843 and it still sells sweets. It has since been modernised, but the old atmosphere has been preserved. In Valletta, in quite a number of back streets, such as St Paul's Street, Old Bakery Street and St Lucia Street, one can still come across a number of old shops selling various wares, from ironmongery to bedding. When one steps inside these shops, one still gets the feeling of having stepped back a century or more: only the products on sale have changed.

One of the main characteristics of Valletta is the cluster of shops, mainly in Santa Lucia Street, selling gold and silver items. Most of these shops still retain their black or dark blue wooden shop-fronts. Some of them sell modern gold and silver

The old bar signs in Strait Street hark back to its golden navy days.

items, but others deal in items of old-fashioned gold Maltese jewellery, which are really works of art.

Strait Street is being revived. Old buildings are being taken up as restaurants and wine bars. In summer, small tables are brought out onto the street and food and drink are served. This street was the former Red Light district of Valletta. But since the British soldiers and sailors left Malta, it suffered a decline. Many of its bars and entertainment spots closed down. The women who used to work as barmaids lost their jobs. Nowadays, new restaurants are opening and social night life is gradually returning to this Valletta district.

Rabat, Mdina's neighbouring locality, has some old shops in St Paul's Street. There are *pastizzi* shops with their traditional small square tables, the small oven and the ever busy shop counter. Behind this counter, there is always a kettle with boiling water ready to serve tea or coffee. Patrons come here for their *pastizzi*. Usually, they take one or two *pastizzi* and tea or coffee. The *pastizzi* are served in small glass plates, while tea and coffee are served in small glasses. While having their snack, the customers spend some time discussing the latest

Some local bars are veritable time capsules.

Two other localities that have kept their old well-known confectionery shops are Msida and Ħamrun. The Busy Bee coffee shop in Msida, has been modernised, but kept its traditional atmosphere and sweets. Its white marble makes this coffee shop unique. The same can be said about Elia in Ħamrun. This confectionery and coffee shop has been enlarged, but has kept its wall shelvings filled with chocolate boxes and its counter is always full of sweets the company continues to produce for the local market.

Another type of old shop is the bar. Their names reflect the love the bar owners had for their bars. We find names such as 'Second to None Bar', 'Friend to All Bar', and 'First and Last Bar'. A bar in Victoria reflects the political sentiments the owner had towards the British: 'The Glory of England'. These bars are usually found in squares or the locality's main streets.

Some bars are well-known for the way they prepare the *ftira*. Its fillings vary from bar to bar, but the most popular are

tuna, beans, capers and herbs. The bar owner tries to keep his special ingredients a secret.

The parish band clubs also have their own bars. In these bars, the patrons either play cards or watch television. They also discuss the latest street decorations for the village feast or the latest development of their club's fireworks factory. There is always the warm company of old friends who sit together after a long day at work. These men gradually return home for a welcoming hot supper in the company of their families.

Wine (*L-Inbid*)

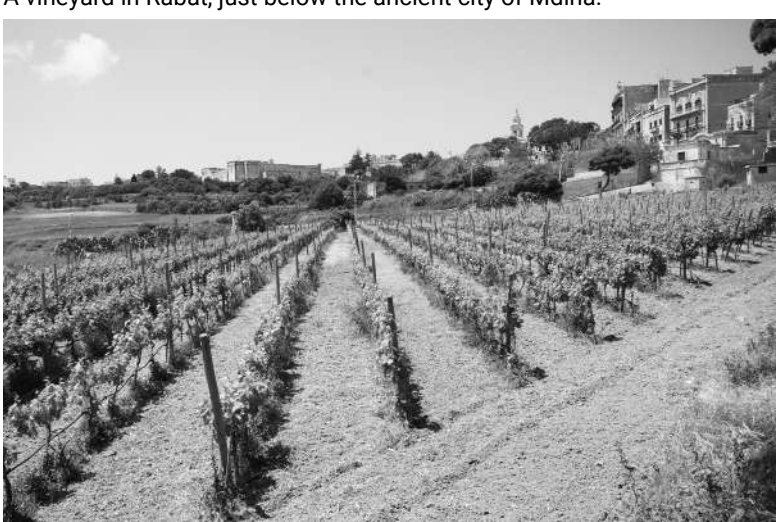
Some believe that it was the Phoenicians who introduced vines in Malta. They planted two varieties of vines: the *Girgentina* (a white grape vine) and the *Ġellewża* (a red grape vine). By time, these two vine varieties flourished and adapted themselves to the long, hot and dry summer days and to the poor quality of soil. These two varieties are still popular with wine consumers. In the 1970s, wine production became more professional, and other varieties were introduced with the aim of satisfying the local market. But problems soon cropped up. The Maltese farmer was reluctant to switch to these new varieties as he was not ready to leave his fields unproductive for several years. On the other hand, in 1994, one of the wineries introduced a project to encourage the vine farmers to grow quality grapes. Modern planting methods and drip irrigation were looked into.

To meet the growing demands of the local market, more, new varieties of vine were planted and other grapes varieties started to be imported. After Malta joined the European Union in 2004, protective levies were lifted. As a measure for survival, the local wine producers started to look for higher quality wine production.

In Malta, the vine is not expected to produce high quality grapes before at least three years after it is planted. In winter, the plant is pruned leaving just two or three branches with their dormant buds. This agricultural activity is carried out to protect the vine from the onslaught of the winter's winds and to ensure that the following year's crop will be of better quality. In April, the stalks start sprouting new shoots. By June, grapes start developing, sheltered between the vine's leaves. During the early summer months, the grapes grow, ripening until harvest time, which is usually towards the end of August. Harvest usually starts after the feast of the Assumption on 15 August, popular known as '*Santa Marija*'. The first grapes to be harvested are the *Ġellewża*, then the *Girgentina* grapes follow. All harvesting activity must be over around the middle of September.

Harvesting grapes is a very delicate process. Grape-pickers hold the bunch of grapes in their hands, then place it gently in

A vineyard in Rabat, just below the ancient city of Mdina.



the small grapes will start to hang from these wooden frames sheltered by the large leaves of the vines. Walking along these paths under the hanging ripening grapes is a pleasant thing to do during a holiday, especially if the garden is enriched by a playing fountain or a niche at the far end. In former days, paper bags were placed around the ripening grapes to save them from hungry birds and insects.

The garden owner takes a great pride in the grapes and sees that when they are ripe enough, they are either turned into wine or placed in the centre of the dinning table, ready to be eaten after a long and delicious lunch. The best local wines are drunk in winter. In former days, when men returned home from work, they used to wash themselves and hurry off to the band club or the village's wine shop for a pint (*pinta*) of wine. Here, while they drunk wine, they met friends, exchanged the latest news about the parish or about some current topic. Political news was also included in the conversation.

It is a custom in Malta to start drinking September wine during the feast of St Martin in mid-November. In former days, wine consumers used to try to visit the village's wine shop to taste the new annual wine. They usually ordered

A Roman Italic amphora used to transport wine (Gozo Museum of Archaeology).

some nuts to be washed down by the newly produced wine. At St Paul Shipwreck church at Valletta, a confraternity of wine growers and restaurant and hotel owners was established. The members of this lay confraternity, known as '*fratelli*' used to organise a feast, every mid-November, in honour of their patron saint, St Martin. The Maltese used to joke about this confraternity's *fratelli* calling them unreliable as they are always drunk. St Paul's still houses the chapel dedicated to St Martin, even though St Martin's fraternity has now ceased to function. In this chapel, there is a large altarpiece showing St Martin together with a representation of the Annunciation.

In Malta there is no wine route, but several wine festivities are held annually. The two major wine companies organise their own wine festivals, while the villages of Qormi, Siġġiewi and Nadur organise a wine festival.

Maltese Food (*L-Ikel Malti*)

Maltese food has been influenced by French and Italian cuisines, as well as those of North Africa. The traditional dish is stewed rabbit (*fenkata*). As this takes a long time to be prepared, the rabbit meat almost falls off the bones. The Maltese love to serve the stew's rich tomato sauce with spaghetti as a first course. Nowadays, rabbit sew is also being served as a main dish with vegetables and chips or oven-cooked potatoes.

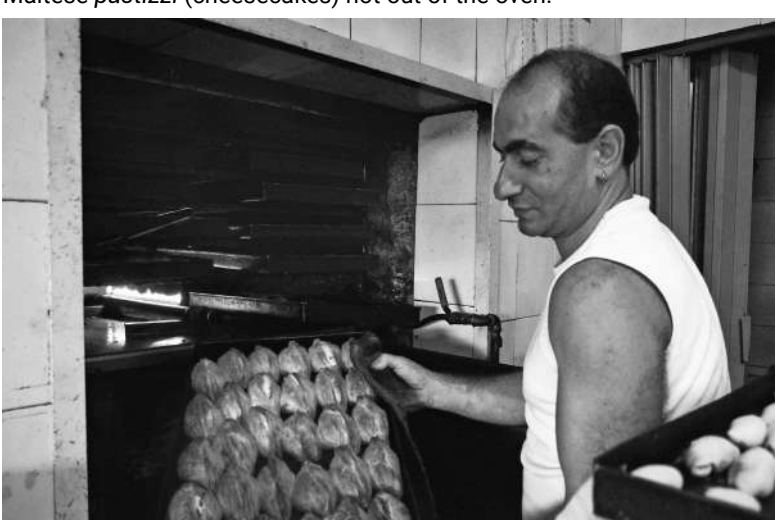
Another popular dish is roast potatoes (*patata l-forn*). This is usually served as Sunday lunch and during family gatherings. The main ingredients of this dish are onions, potatoes, water, fennel and pork chops (*kustilji tal-majjal*). Strangely, this dish is simply referred to as 'roast potatoes', even though meat is one of its ingredients. This dish, which is irresistible due to its delicious taste, is usually served with Maltese bread.

Another popular dish is ravioli (*ravjul*). The Maltese have made their own adaptations to this dish. The dough is traditionally homemade and it is filled with a mixture of eggs, ricotta (*rikotta*) or cheeselets (*ġbejniet*). Seasoning and freshly cut parsley sprigs (*tursin*) are also added. When they are ready, they are placed in boiling water on a steady, low temperature. Then, they are served with garlic flavoured tomato sauce and grated cheese. A normal serving consists of between ten to twelve ravioli pieces. Sometimes, when ravioli is filled with spinach (*spinaċi*) and ricotta, a creamy mushroom sauce replaces the traditional tomato sauce.

A typical seasonal dish is the dolphin fish or Dorado (*lampuka*). This fish is caught from mid-August to November or December. It is either served fried with chips and vegetables, as a pie, or baked with potatoes and seasoning.

Traditionally, the Maltese buy their vegetables at the local market. They usually buy seasonal vegetables for their soups.

Maltese *pastizzi* (cheesecakes) hot out of the oven.



Qassatat are pastry bags filled with either ricotta, spinach or peas.

During winter, soup is made from cauliflower, cabbage, pumpkin and kohlrabi. Another popular vegetable soup is the *minestra* that includes a quantity of pasta. There is also another version of the *minestra*: the *kawlata* – a soup which includes smoked pork.

When the family is either on a shopping spree or facing a time-consuming activity, snacks replace the main dishes. One of the most famous snacks is cheese cakes (*pastizzi*). These are very tasty, and once you try one, they become irresistible. They are made from puff pastry in the form of a bulging envelope. We find three types of *pastizzi*: ricotta (*tal-irkotta*), peas (*tal-piżelli*) or anchovy (*tal-inċova*). The last type are usually popular during Holy Week. There is another type of *pastizzi*, which is referred to as 'waxy' (*tax-xema'*). These are either ricotta or peas. The ricotta *pastizzi tax-xema'* are circular in shape, while the peas ones are shaped like half moon. Aside from *pastizzi*, are the bag-shaped *qassatat*. They are bigger and are sometimes

Honey rings have a crunchy crust filled with soft and moist treacle.

filled with ricotta or peas. Both *pastizzi* and *qassatat* are eaten slightly hot.

A tasty summer snack is *bigilla* and *galletti*. *Bigilla* is made out of broad beans (*ful*), garlic (*tewm*) and hot chilli pepper (*bżar aħmar jaħraq*). As this mixture is served in bowls, people serve themselves by means of *galletti*, which are dipped into the mixture. These *galletti* are made of semolina, are hard and blend well when dipped into the soft *bigilla*. Another snack is cheeselets (*ġbejniet*). There are three types of *ġbejniet* – soft (*tal-ilma*), peppered (*tal-bżar*) and dried (*moxxi*). The most popular are the soft *ġbejniet*. These are served with tomatoes, olive oil and freshly cut vegetables.

The Maltese are proud of their sweets. Most of the main traditional feasts are associated with particular kinds of sweets. On Christmas and New Year's Day, confectioneries sell honey rings (*qagħaq tal-għasel*). During this festive season, lunches usually finish with the traditional trifle. This has its

roots in British tradition but has been adapted to suit the local taste. This is made of a combination of custard and jelly with remnants of cake. Carnival brings the *prinjolata*: a large cake in the shape of a little mound, cut into slices. This cake is covered with almonds and coloured candied peels. There are also the *perlini* made of almonds covered with an icing coating in pale colours. Lent introduces the *kwareżimal*. Ingredients include ground almonds, demerara sugar and cocoa.

On St Joseph's feast day (19 March) the *zeppole* (*sfineġ ta' San Ġużepp*, or *żeppoli*) make their appearance. These are pastries filled with sweet ricotta. They are then topped with powered sugar and nuts. Easter offers the *figolla*. It is made up of two large biscuits of various shapes held together with almond paste, covered with coloured icing sugar and decorated with a half dark chocolate egg. This important feast day is also celebrated with large chocolate Easter eggs, brown chocolate rabbits and white chocolate lambs.

Figolli are all the rage at Easter.

The town and village sell the traditional nougat (*qubbajt*). There are two types of nougat: the soft white variety, made of nuts, candied fruits and cherries, and the hard, dark brown type, consisting of a mixture of sugar and nuts. The latter has a high content of nuts with caramelised sugar.

There are also non-seasonal sweets, such as *kannoli*, which are made of tubes of sweet, deep-fried pastry filled with ricotta, sugar, spices, chocolate and candied peel. Another sweet available throughout the year is *imqaret*. To taste *mqaret* you have to come across a man frying these date-filled pastries. These are best eaten hot, straight from the pan.

Finally, the Maltese have three types of ice creams: countryside (*tal-kampanja*), grandmother's (*tan-nanna*), and cinnamon. The last is the most popular and is still served during special receptions such as christening and wedding parties. As this ice cream includes spice, it was considered to be a luxury. Some scholars are of the opinion that this type of ice cream was introduced by the Arabs.

Trade, tradition and charm - St Lucia Street, Valletta.

Bibliography

Abela, J., 'The Valletta Market', *The Sunday Times*, (19 Apr. 1981).

Abela, J., 'Traditional Maltese Boats', *Vigilo*, 19 (Feb. 2001), 22–5.

Anon., 'Carnival Sweet Heritage', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Feb. 2013), 19.

Anon., 'Easter Time, Time for Sweets', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Mar. 2013), 19.

Anon., 'Fenkata', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Jun. 2014), 19.

Anon., 'Figolli', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Apr. 2014), 23.

Anon., 'Lampuki Season', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Sep. 2012), 21.

Anon., 'Maltese Traditional Trifle', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Dec. 2013), 18–9.

Anon., 'Never Say No to Nougat', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Aug. 2013), 19.

Anon., 'Niches – Immortal and Paternal Eyes', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Apr. 1996), 42.

Anon., Pastizzi, A Typical Maltese Snack, Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Apr. 2013), 19.

Anon., 'Patata l-Forn – Maltese Roast Potatoes', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Jan. 2014), 18–9.

Anon., 'Prinjolata', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Feb. 2014), 19.

Anon., 'Quaint Shops of Character', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Aug. 1996), 42.

Anon., 'Ravjul', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Oct. 2012), 21.

Anon., 'Some Maltese Sweets to Taste', *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Jun. 2013), 19.

Anon., 'Soothing Soups', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Jan. 2013), 19.

Anon., 'Summer Time – A Time for Some Light Maltese Food', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Jul. 2013), 19.

Anon., 'Traditional Maltese Ice-cream', Chris Grima, ed., *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Aug. 2014), 19.

Anon., 'Zeppoli (Sfineġ ta' San Ġużepp)', *Day by Day, Malta and Gozo*, (Mar. 2014), 19.

Attard, A. F., 'In-Nar ta' l-Arju', *Festa Santa Marija*, Soċjetà Filarmonika Leone 2003, 47–51.

Attard, R., Azzopardi, R., *Antique Collecting in Malta*, (Midsea Books: 2008).

Azzopardi, C., 'Gozo Lace an Introduction to Lace Making in the Maltese Islands', (Gozo Press, 1992).

Azzopardi, J., 'Rubble Walls', *Vigilo*, 18 (Oct. 2000), 23–5.

Azzopardi, M., 'The Colourful Buses', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Nov. 1999), 25.

Benoit, M., 'The Għonella – Excess Baggage', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Apr. 1993), 37.

Benoit, M., 'Windmills – Many a Tale to Tell', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jan. 1994), 20–3.

Bezzina, J., 'Folklore Museum at Ta' Kola Windmill', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Dec. 1996), 71–4.

Bezzina, J., *The Typical Farmhouse of Gozo*, Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jan. 2001).

Bondin, R., 'Return of the Valletta Market: Another Promise to the People Kept', *The Democrat*, (21 Oct. 1989).

Borg, C., 'A Family Affair', *Let's Gozo – It's all about Gozo*, 1 (Sep. 2011), 32–5.

Carabott, S., 'Round and Round the ta' Bir Għeliem Windmill', *The Times*, (21 Nov. 2012).

Cassar Pullicino, J., *Studies in Maltese Folklore*, (Malta University Press, 1992).

Camilleri, J. C., 'Dgħajsa – the Maltese Gondola', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Nov. 1994), 41.

Camilleri, J. C., 'The National Colours', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Aug. 1993), 61.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'Carnival, a Colourful Spectacle', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Feb. 1994), 37.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'Norman Legends in Malta', *Scientia*, (11 Apr. 1945), 152–65.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'Old Customs in Retrospective', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jul. 1999), 54.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'Oral Poetry in Sung Form', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Nov. 1996), 56.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'Superstitions Compared', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Apr. 1999), 54.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'The Faldetta', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jan. 1998), 56.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'The Protective Eye', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Oct. 1997), 56.

Cassar Pullicino, J., 'The Traditions of a Maltese Feast', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jul. 1997), 56.

Cini, G., 'Baroque Stone Carvings Underscore Valletta's Heritage', *The Times* (21 Jan. 2002).

Cremona, M., 'Quaint Shops of Character', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jan. 1994), 46.

Cutajar, J., 'Bright colours of a winter Carnival', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Feb. 1997), 27–30.

Fenech, N., 'All About Maltese Houses', *The Times*, (23 Jan. 2008).

Flores, Ch., 'The Elegant Dgħajsa and the Regatta', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Sep. 1994), 24–7.

Fsadni, Fr. M., 'The "Girna" Corbelled Stone Hut', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Nov. 1993), 61.

Gatt, B., Reflections of a luzzu, Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jan. 1998), 49–51.

Graham, H., J., Cecil Higgins Art Gallery and Museum, (Cecil Higgins Art Gallery and Museum: 1987).

Grima, R., The Valletta Market, *The Sunday Times*, (19 Apr. 1981).

Jaccarini, C. J., 'Ir-Razzett, the Maltese Farmhouse', *Vigilo*, 14 (Jun. 1999), 27–30.

Lanfranco, G., 'Changing Maltese Marriage Traditions', in Woman's World and Weddings Supplement, *The Sunday Times*, (7 Mar. 1993).

Leopardi, E. R., 'Malta's Heritage', (Malta, 1969).

Mizzi, P., 'Maltese Furniture – Il-Gradenza', *Heritage*, p.1580.

Mizzi, P., 'Maltese Furniture – The Coffer – Is-Senduq', *Heritage*, p.1246.

Portelli, P., 'Rubble Walls', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jul. 2000), 25.

Sammut, L., 'Spare the Market', *The Sunday Times*, (12 Apr. 1981).

Strickland, A., 'Balconies – Their Origin', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (May 1993), 25–8.

Strickland, A., 'Maltese Door Knockers', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jul. 1998), 25.

Terribile, T., 'Stone Crosses', *Vigilo*, 12 (Oct. 1998–Jan. 1999), 27–9.

The Sunday Times, (14 Aug. 2005).

The Sunday Times, (25 Jun. 2006).

The Sunday Times of Malta, (2 Nov. 2014).

The Times, (30 Apr. 1981).

The Times, (15 Oct. 1983).

The Times, (25 Jul. 2005).

The Times, (4 Aug. 2005).

The Times, (15 Aug. 2007).

Times of Malta, (28 Jul. 2014).

Zammit, V., 'Countryside Chapels', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Jan. 1995), 25–6.

Zammit, V., 'Il-Karrozin, the Horse-Drawn Cab', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Feb. 2003), 32.

Zammit, V., 'The Colourful Maltese Dgħajsa', Peter Darmanin, ed., *Malta this Month*, (Apr. 2005), 8–10.

Index

A

B

C

D

E

F

G

H

I

K

L

M

N

O

P

Q

R

S

T

U

V

W

X

Z