FOUR ANONYMOUS OLD MALTESE POEMS

Edited and with an Introduction

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In 1968, Captain John Bonavita, of Casal Attard, entrusted his family papers to the custody of the library of the Royal University of Malta. Since then, hundreds of the manuscripts have been filed and catalogued. The task of filing and cataloguing was no easy one, since the manuscripts number many thousands of folios, and came to the library in complete disorder. The work is still in progress, about a third of the archive still remaining to be processed.

The larger part of the collection comprises legal records and papers relating to the professional activities of various members of the Bonavita family, who were notaries, lawyers and judges, and spans the period from c. 1600 to c. 1850. However, during the cataloguing, many papers of a nature other than legal came to light, and these include some manuscripts in Maltese. Others may yet be found in the remaining unclassified papers.

The manuscripts in Maltese, apart from those published here, are as follows:

243 Ab Prayer: Duodecima dell’Immaculata Concezione, composta dal Padre Cappucino Fedele, 23rd September, 1831. It begins: Leina hares, o hanina. 12 verses.

243 Ae Three proverbs in Maltese.

272 Z Coronella del Bambino Jesù. It begins: Misbahha ‘l Vergini Maria. 9 verses.

289 D Proverbs in Maltese and Italian.

305 B(3) Sermon in Maltese.

305 B(4) Translation into Maltese of the ‘Miserere’.

Four of the Maltese poems found in the collection are published below. It should, however, be immediately stressed that, although the poems were found among the Bonavita Papers, this fact is coincidental only, and one need not for a moment regard any of them as having been composed by a member of the Bonavita family. The three oldest poems are certainly largely, if not entirely, popular
verses which were no doubt originally part of the large oral stock. Similar, and indeed almost identical, verses to some of those published here are recorded elsewhere; but it is fortunate that these particular verses have come to light and so prevented their perhaps being irrevocably lost. The dates of their composition are unknown, as is often the case with literature which was originally oral. The dates when they were committed to writing are likewise unknown, as there is no certain way of making any definite dating, although a fairly accurate dating can be conjectured for one set of verses.

The poems are given in their original orthography (as far as the availability of type-faces for printing will allow), together with a rendering into standard Maltese orthography, and with an English translation. While it must be stressed that the poems are not of any outstanding literary merit, they are nevertheless of interest for certain literary and linguistic reasons: as far as linguistic reasons are concerned, the poems contain certain words or expressions now obsolete in current Maltese usage. The orthography used differs from poem to poem, and none can be said with certainty to be in any particular one of the various systems of orthography used before the present standard system became official. Inconsistencies will be noticed: indeed, at times, the same word may be spelt differently in successive lines. It should also be stressed that no attempt has been made to render the English translation into anything other than straightforward prose, and on the whole the translation is kept fairly close to the original, rather than being a free version.

Before looking at each of the poems in turn, some general introductory comments must be made about early popular poetry in Maltese in order to give some idea of the background context. The oldest poetry was oral, the people having possessed their traditional poetry long before any of the verses were committed to writing. These old poems had been recited by the people’s ancestors at various times, and were then passed down from one generation to another with little or no change. Many of the oldest verses, usually containing only four lines, had a particular 'clinch' in the last line, and not infrequently were pertinent particularly to the Maltese scene or showed some particular aspect of the Maltese mind.

From the very beginning, as is hardly surprising, love, usually
required but also unrequired, formed one of the most popular themes. Some of the verses on this theme show both a charming frankness and purity, and cover the stages of love from its first expressions to references to weddings.

Another interesting and prolific type of popular poetry was that in a religious vein. Being originally very short, the length of some of these poems increased, particularly when they were composed in writing. In Malta, where religion was so deeply ingrained in the people’s minds and so strongly tied up with their lives, religious poetry became almost at one with the people’s belief. The poems in this religious vein were light and imaginative, but with an imagination to strike the common man, whose life revolved largely around the seasons of the year. In some of the longer poems a moralizing theme was introduced, dealing with the purpose of life and the foolishness of man. Until the mid-nineteenth century, however, the religious poetry of a more serious nature (as distinct from the traditional oral poetry of the people), although it attained quite a high level of expression in certain instances, was still somewhat formal and didactic, and was indeed rather shackled; it was not until the later part of the century that it managed to free itself.

A third type of verse which grew in popularity during the nine
teenth century was that of a half-comic and half-serious nature. Such poetry found fertile ground in Maltese journalism. Although it may have been of no literary merit, it nevertheless proved popular, and at least served to help to accustom people’s ears to the rhythm of Maltese verse.

Although there were other types of poetry, not least that on a historical theme, either factual or legendary, the three foregoing types have been specifically mentioned, since it is into these categories that the poems published below fall. Each is provided with an individual brief introductory note.

The editors would like to express their thanks and appreciation for considerable help in deciphering and interpreting certain difficult words and phrases in the manuscripts to Prof. J. Aquilina, Mr. J. Cilia, Mr. G. Degabriele and Miss Rose Agius.
DAK LI QALBI THOBBU

The verses below are almost certainly the oldest of all the poems published here. Although the date of their composition is unknown, the date at which they were written down may be conjectured with a reasonable degree of accuracy. They are written on two sheets, but are all undoubtedly in the same hand. One set of verses is written on a note of receipts for payments made to various people by a certain Margherita in 1807 and 1809, and it would seem probable that, being drafted on this sheet, the verses were written down soon after the later date indicated in the note.

Although the verses are of little literary merit, they are nevertheless particularly interesting in their manuscript form, because, in the case of some of the verses, one manuscript supplies a 'draft' version of what would appear to be the 'revised' version on the other. Two possible explanations may be offered for there being a 'draft' and then a 'revised' version. If the person writing down the verses were attempting to recall some verses he may have heard only orally and possibly at some distance in time, and was therefore not sure of certain lines, he may have made alterations as he searched his memory for the correct line. It is also possible that the person writing them down may himself have done a little 'editing' or altering in order supposedly to improve certain lines. In the first verse of the earlier version, the weak line 'Liebes culur di vinu' is replaced by the stronger sounding line 'Fuc l'istudiu cala dinu'. The last line also is more polished in the second version. The second verse shows the desire of the girl either to steal her lover's eyes or to win them from him at cards, and the last line is much tidier in the second version than in the first. The third verse is very weak in both versions, and is indeed weaker in the second than in the first.

Only some of the verses are numbered. However, an attempt has been made to arrange the verses in a suitable order, although it must be emphasized that this order is by no means necessarily the correct one: a different order could be equally plausible and satisfactory. It is indeed likely that no order at all is possible, the verses being several unconnected fragments and not one unity.

The general theme of the verses is one of love. However, unlike the love poem which appears later ("JIEN TQARRAQT BL-IMHABBBA") in this particular set of verses the 'speaker' in some of the verses is a man, while in others it is a woman.
Specia genni la inta na si;
Sont oba ma bojish;
Apricia, en hidelom,
Hauto ci kit ma tariyak.

de ci selb ci tebbu;
De ci feba ci siri;
Chew bu oronjau;
Chew bu biko;
De ci dembe chew biko.

2.
Chew bu me nheb ci dembe.
De ci biko;
Wang ci li;
Djep ci njere em sa;
Ingel ci ceti;
Bu nela b mido;
Goyo mirbachombo.

3.
Bileko epe fona nina;
Bweo fobo ceei do; biko;
Dinhe nishin ci biko;
Bu bble ci pon nati ne babombo.
JIEN TQARRAQ T BL-IMHABBA

This is a type of love poem, in which the 'speaker' is a woman addressing both a third person and her lover who has left her and then goes back to her. It is rather sad in tone, with a good deal of reminiscence in the development of the theme.

As with "INSARA TA' DIL-BELT", which appears later, this type of poem was quite common during the last century, the style being even more common than the theme. Such poems were normally composed of verses of four lines, the last line of one verse being repeated (usually in an identical way, but also possibly slightly modified or shortened) as the first line of the next verse. In this particular poem, the verses are written in the manuscript in continuous lines, giving the appearance almost of rhyming prose. In the transcription and the rendering into standard Maltese orthography below, they have been divided into four lines each, as this is the way such verses would usually be divided.

INSARA TA' DIL-BELT

This poem is of a type quite common during the last century, with a moral as its theme. It urges man to amend his life, since he does not know when death may come. It achieves its aim through an almost morbid tone, attempting to show the transitoriness of this life and the futility of placing too much emphasis on material things. Death is sure to come — and indeed it may come unexpectedly — so man's concern should be with death and what comes after, inasmuch as he should be spiritually in a fit state to meet his Maker when he dies. Despite the poem's almost morbid tone, there is nevertheless some very good language and appealing rhythm, serving to help the poem make an impression.

It is worth noting that J. Cassar Pullicino, whose contributions to the study of Maltese folklore are well known, collected some of the verses of this poem in Gozo during the last war, but by no means all of them. He was therefore particularly interested to have a copy of the poem in its entirety.
KURUNELL

This is a simple poem in a comic vein. It shows the hardships and regrets of someone who became a soldier, and who gives vent to his feelings by saying what he thinks about his commanding officer. Of no literary merit at all, and with a very weak ending, this poem is nevertheless interesting from a linguistic point of view. During the time of the British rule in Malta, and even more so during the past few decades, with much more education for the present generation and world-wide communications, a large number of foreign words were adopted into Maltese. The problem facing modern Maltese lexicographers is how to spell these words - should they be spelt in their original way, or should they be given a Maltese spelling? (For example, should one spell the word 'team' as it stands, or phonetically as 'tim'? Both versions are at present in use in Maltese). In this poem, certain English words and expressions of a military nature are given, and are spelt almost phonetically in the original. In the rendering into standard Maltese orthography, however, they have been given in standard English spelling.
1
(i) Dac li calbi tihobbu
Liebes culur di vinu⁴
(Fuq l'istudiu cala dinu)⁷
Chem hu smajar
Hu chem hu bel hleju
(Hu dac d)
Fommi demmu
Chem ihejnu⁵

(ii) Dauc b
Chem uma sbieh
Dauc hajneih
Li con nista nisracomlu
Ingib el carti u nilhab mihu
Isciorti tihi ech nirbahomlu

(iii) Forsi nirbahomlu
Gio taba cascietta nicconservahom
Biesc meta niltaca mihu
Flochom inghiedomlu

(iv) L'inquina fuc l'inquina⁹
Halli ihabbat el martell
Handec el hali fi calbec
Bih tinesam hu bih tintem

2
(i) He whom my heart loves,/Clad in divine colour,/He is entirely devoted to study,/How dark-skinned he is,/How sweet he is,/How attractive my mouth finds him.

(ii) How beautiful/Are those eyes of his:/If I could, I would steal them from him:/I will bring the cards and play with him:/What good fortune will be mine if I win them from him.
1
(i) Dak li qalbi thobbu
Liebes kulur divin
(Fuq l-istadju ghala dinu)
Kemm hu smajjar
U kemm hu hel hlejju
(U dak a)
Fommi demmu
Kemm ihejnu

2
(ii) Dawk gh
Kemm huma sbieh
Dawk ghajnejh
Li kont nista' nisraqhomlu
Ingib il-karti u nilghab mieghu
Ix-xorti tieghi jekk nirbahhomlu

[3]
(iii) Forsi nirbahhomlu
Go taba kaxxetta nikkonservahom
Biex meta niltqa'a mieghu
Flokhom inqieghedhomlu
* * *

(iv) L-linkwina fuq l-linkwina
Halli jhabbat i l-martell
Ghandek il-ghali f'qalbek
Bih tinqasam u bih tintemm
* * *

(iii) Perhaps I will win them from him./I will keep them safely in a box small box./So that, when I meet him,/I can put them in their place for him.

(iv) Anvil on anvil./Let the hammer strike./You have sorrow in your heart./It will break and finish you.
(v) My folly is over and my trance is finished:/I could not care less about you./I have done what I wanted to./Although you did not want me.
(vi) A nut of the almond tree/Planted in the middle of the Mandrag:/While I eat and drink,/You are dying of hunger and thirst.
(vii) Love me if you want to love me:/If you do not want to, it does not matter:/This time will pass and another will come:
(v) Spiċċa genni w intefajnghasi
Kont tieghek ma ġandix
Kappriccija jien ġhaddejhom
Allavolja int ma ridmix
* * *

(vi) Lewża tal-lewż melliesi
Miżrugha f'nofs il-mandragg
Jien nekol u nixrob
Inti mejta bil-guh u bil-ghatx
* * *

(vii) Hobbni jekk trid thobbni
Jekk ma tridx ma jimputtax
Ighaddi ż-żmien u jerga' iehor
U trid thobbni ma tistax
* * *

(viii) X'bolma hlomt dal-lejl
Li waqajt mill-gallarija
Ċejet l'hoqor hanini
U x'ferha feraħ bija
* * *

(ix) Ommi u missieri igemgmu
Ghalix inhraqt bin-namur
Żommni hanina żommni
Għax mnejn ġejet nerga' mmur
* * *

When you want to love me, you will not be able to.

(viii) What a dream I dreamed last night./That I fell from the balcony:/I landed in the lap of my darling./And how happy he was with me.

(ix) My mother and father grumble/Because I have been burnt by love./Hold me, darling, hold me./Otherwise I will return to whence I came.
(x) Omni halmi el pont
    Hu missieri hallimi el grob\textsuperscript{15}
    Sesa halmi insiehel\textsuperscript{16}
    Hu Pressulla halmi inhob

* * *

(xi) Haliesc il bahar sejer meugia
    uara meugia (ta rinella)
    Sejer meugia uara meugia
    Lahiar misc taiba beusa ta scibeiba
    Min mil chem hi helua beusa (ta) ta misseugia

* * *

(xii) Hu haliesc el macur\textsuperscript{17} (icciarruta) ta iscibejba
    Minsciur fuc el hait
    Hisipu hamiena hamra
    Halih jena spairt

(x) My mother taught me sewing/And my father taught me car-
    pentry,/Zeza taught me to keep myself busy/And Priscilla
    taught me to love.

(xi) Why does the sea go wave upon wave (at Rinella)/Go wave
    upon wave?/The best The kiss of a maiden (is not good)/
(x) Ommi ghallimmi il-pont
U misseri ghallimmi il-gropp
Żeża ghallimmi inxielgħi
U Priscilla ghallimmi inhobb

* * *

(xi) Ghalieq il-bahar sejjer mewża
wara mewża (ta’ rinella)
Sejjer mewża wara mewża
L-abjar mhix tajba bewsa ta’ xbejba
Min mil kemm hi ħelwa bewsa (ta’) ta’ miżżewża

* * *

(xii) U ghalieq il-maktur (tċ-ċarruta) ta’x-xbejba
Minxur fuq il-hajt
Hsibtu hamiem ħamra
Ghalih jiena sparajt

Than that How sweet is the kiss of that of a married woman.

(xii) And why is (the rag) the handkerchief of the maiden/Spread out on the wall?/I thought it was a red pigeon/And I shot at it.
(i) Spiccia genni hu intafa nasi
   Cont tihac ma handisch
   Capriccia jen haddeitom
   Handec isiet ma taranisch
   ... ... 
   [1]
(ii) Dac li calbi tihobbu
    Fuc l'istudiu cala dinu
    Chem hu smajar
    Chem hu hleju
    Dac demnu chem hihejnu
    2
(iii) Chem huma sbieh dauc hejnei
    Dauc hejneih
    Nisctiec (Li cont nista) nistacomlu
    Ingib el carti
    Hu nilhab mihu
    Forsi nirbahhomlu
    3
(iv) Geuua Gio cascetta nicconservahom
    Biesc filochom inchiehadomlu
    Binhar nithasciach bih
    Hu billeil bil pon natih neshomlu

B

(i) My folly is over and my trance is finished:/I could not care
    less about you,/I have done what I wanted to;/You will never
    see me again.
(ii) He whom my heart loves,/He is entirely devoted to study,/
    How dark-skinned he is,/How sweet he is,/How attractive I
    find him.
(i) Spiċċa ġenni w intefà’ngħasi
Kont tiegħek ma ġhandix
Kappriċċija jien ghaddejhom
Għandek iżjed ma tarańix

* * *

(1)

(ii) Dak li qalbi thobbu
Fuq l-istudju ghala dinu
Kemm hu smajjar
Kemm hu hlejju
Dak demmu kemm ihejnu

2

(iii) Kemm huma sbieħ dawk ghajnej
Dawk ghajnejh
Nixtieq (Li kont nista’) nisraqhomlu
Inqib il-karti
U nilghab mieghu
Forsi nitbahhomlu

3

(iv) Ġewwa ġo kaxxetta nikkinsevahom
Biex flokhom inqiegħedhomlu
Binhari nitgħaxxaq bih
U bil-lejl bil-ponn nagħtieb neħodhomlu.

(iii) How beautiful are those eyes/Those eyes of his:/I would like
(If I could) I would steal them from him./I will bring the cards
/And play with him:/Perhaps I might win them from him.

(iv) I will keep them safely in in a small box./So that I can put
them in their place for him:/By day I will delight in him,/And
by night I will hit him with my fist I will take them away from
him.
Canzonetta

1. Iena tkarract blimhabba,¹⁹
   U manafsc fein ghandi immur,
   Mita ipratkait imhabtec
   Mighi siptech traditur.

2. Mighi siptech traditur,
   Ghasil chiefer mort u halleitni,
   Uara li tant habbeitech,
   Ghal hattiehor ittradeidni.

3. Ghal hattiehor ittradeitni,
   Fsigha li cont mignun,
   Cont inhobboc u ghadni inhobboc,
   Halli incun li ghandi incun.

4. Halli incun li ghandi incun,
   Ghal hattiehor manhallics,
   Dejem habbeitec uinhobboc,
   Ghvovlia int mathobbnisc.

5. Ghvovlia int mathobbnisc,
   Ghal menu maghandecs turini,
   Lahracdina tant imhabba,
   Manidisc ruh innamuri.

6. Lahracdinom tant namuri
   Chif sahti u nahi tilfuli,
   Min dac ismien mignuna dejem,
   Mit a blerrur tiec Kaluli.

1. I have been deceived by love,/And I do not know where to
go:/When I experienced love with you/I found that you be-
trayed me.

2. I found that you betrayed me,/Because cruelly you went and
left me:/After I loved you so much/You betrayed me for an-
other.

3. You betrayed me for another/In a moment of madness:/I loved
you and still love you,/I do not care what happens to me.

4. I do not care what happens to me,/I will not leave you for any-
Kanzunetta

1. Jien tqarraqt bl-imhabba,
   U ma nafx fejn ghandi mmur,
   Meta ppmattikajt imhabtek
   Mieghi sibtek traditur.

2. Mieghi sibtek traditur,
   Ghax kiefer mort u hallejmi,
   Wara li tant habbejtek,
   Ghal haddehor ittradejmi.

3. Ghal haddehor ittradejmi,
   F'siegha li kont mignun,
   Kont inhobbok u ghadni nhobbok,
   Halli nkun li ghadni nkun.

4. Halli nkun li ghandi nkun,
   Ghal haddehor ma nhallikx,
   Dejjem habbejtek u nhobbok,
   Avolja int ma thobbynio.

5. Avolja int ma thobbynio,
   Almenu m'ghandekx turini,
   Jahraq dina tant imhabba,
   M'ghandix ruh in-namuri.

6. Jahraq dinhom tant namuri
   Kif sahhti u ruhi tifulli,
   Minn dak iz-zmien mignuna dejjem,
   Meta bl-errur tieghek qaluli.

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body else:/I have always loved you and still love you,/Al-
though you do not love me.

5. Although you do not love me,/At least you must not show me
this./To hell with this love./I do not have the heart for court-
ing.

6. To hell with these passions./They have ruined my health and
soul:/I have always been distracted/Since they told me of
your misdeed.
7. Since they told me of your misdeed, / I do not know that I gave you any cause for it; / Let me complain and grumble; / Because in this matter I am in the right.

8. In this matter I am in the right; / Because my darling went and left me; / How nasty are these sorrows; / How nasty are these grieves.

9. How nasty are these grieves; / And everyone pities me for them; / My darling asked me to forgive him; / After he changed me for another.
7. Meta bl-erur tieghek qaluli,
Ma nafx li tajtek kagun,
Halluni nilminta u ngemgem,
Ghax f’din il-haga ghandi ragun.

8. F’din il-haga ghandi ragun,
La hanini mar u hallieni,
Ghal m’akrahom dawn id-duluri,
U ghal m’akrahom dawn il-pwieni.

9. Ghal m’akrahom dawn il-pwieni,
U kulhadd fihom ighadimi,
Hanini talabni skuza wara
Li ghal haddiehor bidilni.

10. Wara li ghal haddiehor bidilni,
Issa msejken rega’ bdielu,
Li ma kontx ghax tant inhobbu,
Kieku xejn ma kien jiswielu.

11. Kieku xejn ma kien jiswielu,
Ghax qatt ma kont inhares lejh,
Kemm kien jibki l-imhabba tieghi,
U jara x’tilef minn go jdejh.

12. U jara x’tilef minn go jdejh
Ghax bhal li kienx isib,
U jkollu bilfors ta’ qalbu,
Dil-piena sa qabru jigib.

10. After he changed me for another,/Now the poor thing has changed his mind again:/If I did not love him so much/This would have been of no use to him.

11. This would have been of no use to him,/Because I would never look at him again,/How he would cry for my love/And realise what he had let slip through his hands.

12. He would realise what he had let slip through his hands,/Because he would not find anyone like me:/Whether he liked it or not he would have/To carry this sorrow to the grave.
13. [He would have to] carry this sorrow to the grave,/And always remember it/And the love I gave him/Since I was a little child.

14. Since I was a little child/My whole heart was drawn towards you,/And I want to spend my life with you/And it is my hope to be near you.

15. It is my hope to be near you,/And there to remind you of that time,/And to remind you of that love/With which we were bound together.
13. Dil-piena sa qabru ġgib,
    U jibqa' jiftakar fiha,
    U fl-imhabba li jien ġabbejtu
    Minn meta kont ċkejkna tarbijja.

14. Meta kont ċkejkna tarbijja,
    Qalbi kollha ngibdet ġejk,
    U niżtieq inhallas ġajti
    U x-xorti jkolli noqghod ġdejk.

15. Ix-xorti jkolli noqghod ġdejk,
    U hemm infakkrek f'dak iż-zmien,
    U nfakkrek f'dik l-imhabba
    Li biha rtbatna flimkien.

16. Biha rtbatna flimkien
    U rajna il-kelma sa ġhomorna,
    U biha marbutin nibku
    Meta l-kampanja mornja.

17. Meta l-kampanja mornja,
    Mill-mewr ġhall-firit skappajna,
    U kellna x-xorti kbira
    Li aħna ergajna ġeqajna.

18. U issa li ergajna ġeqajna,
    Iżjed ma nżidux nifterqu,
    Jien nifrah bik u int rifrah bija
    Bhalma kull frott jifrah b'werqu.

16. We were bound together with it./And we promised to be each
    other’s for ever./And bound with it we wept [for joy]/When we
    went to the country.

17. When we went to the country/We missed death by a hair’s
    breadth,/And we were very fortunate/To meet again.

18. And now that we have met again/We must never part again:/I
    rejoice in you and you rejoice in me,/As every fruit rejoices
    in its leaves.
19. Every fruit rejoices in its leaves, / And we rejoice in each other. / When we began this love / Some people were mistaken about it.

20. Some people were mistaken about it: / When I saw you, you returned to my arms. / This wish I always had, / That I should love you and you should love me.

21. I love you and you love me, / And thus we still stay for the rest of our lives: / This age will pass and the other will come
19. Kull frott jifrah b'werqu
U ahna nifirhu b'xulxin,
Meta bdejna din l-imhabba
Kirnu x'uhud imqarqin.

20. Kienu x'uhud imqarqin,
Meta rajtek ergajt fi bdani,
Din ix-xewqa dejjem kelli
Li jien namak, u int tamani.

21. Jien namak u int tamani,
U hekk nibqghu ghal hajjima,
Ighaddi ż-żmien u jerga' l-iehor,
U ghal dejjem tissemma mhabbitna.

22. Ghal dejjem tissemma mhabbitna
Ghall-fedelà li mxejna biha,
Ninhabbu b'imhabba sinciera
Li hadd minna ma jhalliha.

23. Li hadd minna ma jhalliha,
U anqas minna jerga' lura,
Ninhabbu b'imhabba kbira,
U ghandna nimmantenuha pura.

24. Ghandna nimmantenuha pura,
U fiha nżommu fem,
Ninhabbu b'imhabba kbira,
Li minn qlubna qatt ma tintemm.

again,/And our love will always be remembered.

22. Our love will always be remembered/For the faithfulness that
we showed:/Let us love each other with a true love./That
neither of us will forsake.

23. That neither of us will forsake/Nor go back on:/Let us love
each other with a great love,/And we must keep it pure.

24. We must keep it pure/And be constant in it:/Let us love each
other with a great love/That will never die in our hearts.
25. Min clubna Kat ma tintem,
Ghasc mita bdeina dasciscin²⁴ conna,
Conna barra il campagna,
Kalp il fiuri geua il gionna.

26. Fil campagna geua il gionna,
Ghañna intKaïna leuel darba,
Mita imhaptec dahlet fKalbi
Gialitni nocrop carba.

27. Gialitni nocrop carba
Mita raitec feini geit.

28. Mita raitec feini geit,
Kalp ta Kalbi daul ghaineja,²⁵
Chif ghaddielec il martàKabeC
Mita irtsact bissiggiu hdeija.

29. Mita irtsact bissiggiu hdeija
Scirh hasseit dahret mighi
Min allura ippersuadjet ruñi
Li inti ghandec tcun tighi.

30. Li inti ghandec tcun tighi
U ta hattiebor matcunsc,
Sa chem alla jatini haja
Min gioideja matmursc.

_fin qui s'estende l'ennu e non altro_

25. It will never die in our hearts/Because when we fell in love
we were very young:/We were in the country/Among the
flowers in the gardens.

26. In the country in the gardens,/We met for the first time:/When
your love entered my heart/It made me groan deeply.

27. It made me groan deeply/When I saw you coming towards me.

28. When I saw you coming towards me,/Heart of my heart, light of
my eyes,/How the sickness in your heart vanished/When you
25. Minn qlibna qatt ma tintemm,
Ghax meta bdejna daqs xulxin konna,
Konna barra l-kampanja,
Qalb il-fjuri gewwa l-gonna.

26. Fil-kampanja gewwa l-gonna,
Ahna lqajna l-ewwel darba,
Meta mhabbtek dahlet f’qalbi
Geghlimi nokrob karba.

27. Geghlimi nokrob karba
Meta rajtek fejni gejt.

28. Meta rajtek fejni gejt,
Qalb m’ qalbi dawl ghajnejja,
Kif ghaddielek il-mard ta’ qalbek
Meta ersaqt bis-siggu hdejja.

29. Meta ersaqt bis-siggu hdejja
X’ruh hassejt dehret mieghi
Min allura ipperswadejt ruhi
Li inti ghandek tkun tieghi.

30. Li inti ghandek tkun tieghi
U ta’ haddiehor ma tkumx,
Sa kemm Alla jaghtini hajja
Minn go jdejja ma tmurx.

Fin qui s’estende l’inno e non altro

moved your chair next to me.

29. When you moved your chair next to me/What a wave I felt pass over me:/From that moment I persuaded my soul/That you had to be mine.

30. That you had to be mine,/And you would not be anybody else’s:/As long as God gives me life/I will not let you go.

The song ends here and there is no more.
1. Insara ta' dil Belt
Geit naticom dil akbar
Illi il col ghandna i mutù
Tant chem akna sghar, u CKbar.

2. U dil Meut rchun darba bis,
Meta rchun mà iafu Kat,
Fein tmur ruKna la mutu
Ghia mà ghem ma tochrog cat.

3. Darba bis l'immutu taiep,
Ghala dheim mirbuchin,
Tcun darba il meut Kazina
Ghala dheim mitlufin.

4. Din l'akbar connà nafigha
Ghasc narau i Nies i mutu,
Min rilef il Missieru,
Ghandu rilef l'ommu ul CKutu.

5. Chif i mutù Irgiel ë Sciuich,
Ghech i mutu i Nisa ul Bniet,
Chif i mutu i Tfal ë Trabi
Ghech i Sphasach, ë Scebbet.

6. Iindifnu il Gogna mal Focra
IitKallat il ghadam mà trap
Ghiech ghem sci gmiel fil Kaia,
Uara il Meut, scein ma iinsap.

7. Ghandna akna l'ocbra taghna,
Mimliin bi trap, ë dut

1. Christians of this city, / I have come to give you these tiding:/ We must all die, / All of us, both young and old.

2. Death comes only once; / When that will be, nobody knows. / Wherever our soul may go when we die, / It never leaves there again.

3. We can have only one good death, / And we will be saved for ever. / There can be only one bad death, / And we will be lost for ever.

4. We have always known these tidings, / Because we see people
1. Insara ta’ dil-belt
   Ġejt naghtikhom din l-ahbar
   Illi lkoll ghanda mmutu
   Tant kemm ahna żghar u kbar.

2. U dil-mewt tkun darba biss,
   Meta tkun ma jafu ħadd,
   Fejn mur ruhna la mmunu
   Hijja minn hemm ma tohrog qatt.

3. Darba biss li mmutu tajjeb,
   Ghala dejjem mirbuḥin,
   Tkun darba l-mewt hażina
   Ghala dejjem mútufin.

4. Din l-ahbar konna nafuha
   Għar nara w in-nies imuru,
   Min jident ’il missienu,
   Għandu jident ’il ommu u ’l ħuru.

5. Kif imuru ġigel u xjuh,
   Hekk imuru n-nisa u l-biniet,
   Kif imuru t-tfal u t-trabi
   Hekk l-żghażagh u x-xebbiet.

6. Jindifnu l-għonja mal-foqra
   Jithallat il-ghadam mar-trab
   Jekk hemm xi gmiel fil-hajja,
   Wara l-mewt xejn ma jinsab.

7. Ghandna ahna l-oqbra tagħna,
   Mimaljin bit-trab u d-dud

dying. / He who loses his father / Must also lose his mother
and brothers.

5. Just as men and old people die, / So also do women and girls:
   / Just as children and babies die, / So also do young men and
maidens.

6. The rich will be buried with the poor, / The bones will mix
with the dust. / If there is any beauty in life, / After death
nothing will be found.

7. All of us have our graves, / Full of dust and worms. / They
Daun mai fachrunies iehor,  
Cul min teiler ghandu i mut.

8. Cul min igi fdina i digna  
Ghandu i mut, à i Kalligha,  
I Kalli il git, Chibiep, à Craba  
U cul Ghazis li ghandu figha.

9. Maghna mà gibna scein,  
Mà nechdusc Kagia oKra maghna,  
Chlief dnuhatna bis,  
U l'opri i taiba taghna.

10. Min tant ilbies li ghandech  
I chefnuch f'lagar lizar  
U ghal intiena tighach  
I checchiuch berra mi dar.

11. Ghecch iagmlulech il ghizies tighac  
Dauch li Chisibebech deiem fighom,  
Gal min taKdem, à tonfoch  
Challeit l'Alla ghaliaghom.

12. Gal erbgha à ghoscrin sigha  
Sci Kat iuri li iipchich  
La gheda i dach tal chiniepen  
Chat mà iiaichsep isietch fich.

13. Il Craba i gaudu gidech,  
U fich ma iiftacru scein,  
Feinu gismeche, chalp i dut,  
Feingha RuKech, Alla iaf fein.

remind us of nothing but that / Everyone who is born must die.

8. Everyone who comes into this world / Must die and leave it, /  
Leave his wealth, friends and relations, / And every dear one  
that he has in it.

9. We bring nothing with us, / And we take nothing else with us  
/ Except only our sins / And our good works.

10. Of all the clothes that you have / They will wrap you up in  
the worst sheet; / And because of your smell / They will  
kick you out of the house.

116
Dawn ma jfakkruniex iehor,
Kull min twieled ghandu jmut.

8. Kull min jigi f’din id-dinja
Ghandu jmut u jhalliha,
Ihalli l-gid hbieb u qriba
U kull ghaziz li ghandu fiha.

9. Maghna ma gibna xejn,
Ma nehdux haga ohra maghna,
Hlief dnuhiba biss,
U l-opri t-tajba taghna.

10. Minn rant iblies li ghandek
Ikeffnuk fl-aghfar lijar
U ghall-intiena tieqhek
Ikeccuk barra mid-dar.

11. Hekk jaghmlulek l-eghziez tieqhek
Dawk li hsiebek dejjem fihom,
Ghal min tahdem u tonaq
Hallejt ‘l Alla ghalihom.

12. Ghal erba’ u ghoxrin siegha
Xi hadd juri li jibkik
La hedda d-daqq tal-qniepen
Hadd/Qatt ma jahseb iżjed fik.

13. Il-qraba jgawdu gidek,
U fik ma jiftraku xejn,
Fejn hu gismek qalb id-dud,
Fejnha rubek Alla jaf fejn.

11. This is what your loved ones will do to you, / Those of whom you are always thinking, / For whom you work and provide; / And for whom you forsook God.

12. For twenty four hours / Someone will show that he weeps for you. / Once the bells stop ringing / No one will/He will never think of you any more.

13. Your relations will enjoy your wealth / And never remember you. / Where is your body? – Among the worms. / Where is your soul? – God knows where.
14. Do you want to know where? - Watch how you live: / A good life and a better death. / For as is life, so will be death: / A bad life, and a worse death.

15. With that loom with which you began the weave, / With that loom you will finish it, / Unless you cut it out / And change the thread that is in it.

16. So if you wish for a good death, / Stop sinning and begin anew: / If you do not repent when you can, / You will not be able to when you want to.

17. For repentance is out of your hands: / God must give it to
14. Trid taf fejn: ara kif tghix,
Hajja tajba u l-mewt ahjar,
Kif hi l-hajja tkun il-mewt,
Hajja hażina, u mewt aghar.

15. B’dak in-newl li bdejt ix-xoqqa,
B’dak in-newl tispediha,
Jekk ma tqaqghixiex barra
U tibdel il-hajt li fiha.

16. Jekk trid immela mewta tajba,
Aqta’ d-dnub u ibda mill-gdid
Jekk ma t'indimx meta tista’
Ma d'kunx tista’ meta trid.

17. Għax l-indiema mhix l'idejk
Ghandu Alla jaghūhielek,
X'hin taghīelek, inti ma ridtix
Meta tkun tridha, jichadhielek.

18. U jekk tmut mingħajr indiema
X'farag jibqa' ghalik,
Jaqbu fid ix-xjaten,
U fl-inferm imorra bik.

19. La ruhek waslet fl-inferm
Min jigi u jnehhīhielek,
Jekk d'kun id-dinja kollha tieghek
Id-dinja xejn ma tihswielek.

20. X'ghoqla kbira tkun f'qalbek
Bi d'nbietek bejn ghajnejk,

you. / When He gave it to you, you did not want it: / When you want it, He will deny you it.

18. If you die without repenting, / What happiness can you look forward to? / The devils will seize you / And take you with them to hell.

19. Once your soul gets to hell, / Who will come and take it out of there for you? / If all the world should be yours / The world will avail you nothing.

20. What great grief will be in your heart / When you see your sins

119
Ghasc mà cherreitghomsc f’Chaitech
Meta chellech i smien fi deich.

21. Thallisc il crar ghal aKar
    Bi tama li colloch i smien
    Ghasc il Meut ghia trasutra17
    Tigi cul uacht, u cul inchien.

22. La tghic ghadni Saghsuch,
    Incosni caui, ù schich,
    Tista tigi il Meut, ghal gharrieda
    Tista tochtloch p’feugia rich.

23. Tista tmut tiechet billeil,
    Tista tmut libghien binghar,
    Fuch l’art, ù fuch il bachar
    Miesci fi trieich, ù chieghet geua i dar.

24. Min challech li tmut f’sottoch
    Min giebhielek din l’achbar
    Min ueghdech ghacal, ù feghma
    Biesc tista tagmel l’aKbar Crar.

25. Bil biza tal Meut li corbot
    Bil fiscla, bil mart ù blugich,
    U bil ghada il Kazina,
    Dach il Crar sci cun sabich.

26. Bdach il cliem l’inti drait f’ghomroch,
    Fil meut ghandu i cun chliemech,
    Bdach il chisiep l’inti drait tachsep
    Jargia fil meut i cun cuddiemech.

before you, / For you did not confess them in your life / When you had ample time to do so.

21. Do not leave confession to the last moment / In the hope that you will have time: / For death is unpredictable — / It comes at any time and any place.

22. Do not say: I am still young, / I feel healthy and strong. / Death can come unexpectedly, / It can kill you with a puff of wind.

23. You can die asleep at night, / You can die alert by day, / On land or at sea, / Walking in the street, or sitting inside at home.

120
24. Who told you that you die in your bed, / Who brought you these tidings, / Who promised you the prudence and judgement / To be able to make the last confession?

25. In the fear of approaching death, / In the confusion of sickness and pain, / And with your bad habit — / How can that confession be a good one?

26. Those words that you got used to during life / Must be your words in death: / Those thoughts that you got used to thinking / Likewise must be before you in death.

121
27. Issa mela li ghu i smien fideich
   Isma milli inghidlech iena,
   Ibi mur indem, ù cher
   U acta il ghueiert^ il Chisiena.

28. Ibda ghisc phal inusrani
   Acta il loghop, ù l'achbiep,
   T'itKailsc l'ilmeur ghecd a bghida
   Iista, i cun li ghia uara il biep.

29. Acta i dagha ù acta il Chfif,
   Mur, rot dach li mà ghusc tighac
   Daca bis li tagnmel fi Kaitech
   Uara il meut i sibu mighac.

30. Cul mà naghma 'l'Kaitma, ò
    Taiep ð Kazin
    Ghandna uara meuittna
    Achna tighù incunu imKalsin.

31. Ghiech l'opri i cunu taiba
    Fil Genna aKna ingaudughom
    Ghiech l'opri i cunu chisiena,
    AKnà bis fl'Infern nipsughom.

32. Min iista i mut cul Kin
    U mà i ghisc chif ghandu i cun
    O il Meut mà iemfisc bigha
    O ghiech iemmen ghu Mignun.

27. Now therefore when you have ample time, / Take my advice:
   / My son, go and repent and confess / And cut out bad habits.

28. Start living like a Christian, / Stop gambling and give up your
   friends. / Do not assume that death is far away: / Perhaps it
   is just behind the door.

29. Cut out swearing and cruelty, / Return that which is not
   yours. / Only that which you do in your life / Will you find
   with you after death.
27. Issa mela li hu ẓ-ẓmien f'idejk
Isma' milli inghidlek jierna,
Ilbi mur indeem u qerr
U aqta' l-eghwied il-hżiena.

28. Ibdaghi bhal nirani,
Aqta' il-loghob u l-ihbieb,
Tithajjilx il-mewt qieghda bghida
Jista' jkun li hija wara l-bieb.

29. Aqta' d-dagha u aqta' il-kfir,
Mur rodd dak li ma hux tieghek
Dak biss li taghmel f'hajtek
Wara l-mewt issibu mieghek.

30. Kull ma naghmli f'hajjimta,
Tajjeb o hażin
Ghandna wara mewwitna
Ahna tieghu nkunu mhallsin.

31. Jekk l-opri jkunu tajba
Fil-genna ahna ngawduhom
Jekk l-opri jkunu hżiena
Ahna biss fl-infers nibkuhom.

32. Min jista' imut kull hin
U ma ighixx kif ġhandu jkun
O il-mewt ma jemminx biha
O jekk jemmen hu mignun.

30. Everything we do in our life, either / Good or bad, / We must after our death / Receive our deserts for it.

31. If our works are good, / We will enjoy them in heaven: / If our works are bad, / We will weep for them alone in hell.

32. He who can die at any moment / And does not live as he should / Either does not believe in death / Or, if he believes, is mad.
Curunell

1. O xhaija ingrata infami iu dinâ
xamilt bideija mort thalt suldat
mixti bil gisem bir-ruh u fcul hin
max il sigha f'gunata iddisprat

2. Fil bart u ix-xita billeil u bin-nar
il assa namel imobbi phal ñmar
mahruk fixxemx u spis nibdel
u curunel curunel curunel

3. Mita tcn franc tarah gei minnufih
il curunel seu fil hin tal mistrih
igip il mara it-tfal u culhatt
u issuldat mistrih ma anu kat

4. Xi bicca dril iordna dan minnufih
u [con]tra kalbec icolloc dobdih
trit isservih ta purcinel
il curunel curunel curunel

5. Chif ibda iordna iddril issigniur
mar rait ul leftr iena nibda indur
bil marc in oder end quic ebaut tern
u hak ixxiaten xi hrige mil infern

6. Dakka fuk mohhi tislima natâh
ech emx bzon iziet sinuier nistaksih
u bla clem xeiñ nihu il cappel
il curunel curunel curunel

1. Oh, what an ungrateful and infamous world this is. / What have
I let myself in for! I went and became a soldier, / Sold body
and soul, and always / Am at the end of my tether twelve hours
a day.

2. In cold and rain, night and day, / I stand guard, laden like an
ass, / Burned in the sun, and often I wilt away. / Oh Colonel,
Colonel, Colonel.

3. When you are off duty, you see him coming immediately, / The
Colonel, right in the time of your rest. / He brings his wife,
children and everyone, / And there is never any rest for the
soldier.
1. O x'hajja ngrata nfami hija dina
   X'ghamilt b'idejja mortar dhalt suldat
   Mixtri bil-gisem bir-ruh u f'kull hin
   Tnaix-il siegha f'gurnata ddisperat
2. Fil-bard u x-xita, bil-lejl u bi nhar
   Il-ghassas naghmel imghobbi bhal bmar
   Mahnuq fix-xemx u spiss nibdel
   Oh Kurunell, Kurunell, Kurunell
3. Meta tkun frank tarah gej minnufih
   Il-Kurunell sew fil-hin tal-mistrieh
   Iqib il-mara, ie-tfal u kulhadd
   U s-suldat mistrieh ma ghandu qatt
4. Xi bičca drill jordna dan minnufih
   U kontra qalbek ikollok tobdih
   Trid isservih ta' purčinell
   Il-Kurunell, Kurunell, Kunell
5. Kif jibda jordna d-drill is-sinjur
   Mar-'right' u l-'left' jiena nibda ndur
   Bil-'march in order and quick about turn'
   U haqq ix-xjaten xi hrig mill-inferm
6. Daqqa fuq moxni tislima naghuq
   Hekk hemmex bzzin iżjed sinjur nistaqsieh
   U bla kliem xejn niehu l-kappell
   Il-Kurunell, Kurunell, Kunell.

4. Immediately he [the Colonel] orders some drill, / And willy-nilly you must obey him: / You must serve as his puppet. / Colonel, Colonel, Colonel.
5. As soon as Sir orders drill / I start spinning left and right / With 'March in order and quick about turn'. / Curse the devils, what have I brought out of hell!
6. I salute him with a blow on my forehead, / And ask him if he needs anything else. / Without a single word I take my hat. / Colonel, Colonel, Colonel.
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2 The references given are those of the progressive catalogue. All the proverbs in Maltese occurring in MSS 243 Aa and 289 D are recorded, either directly or as variants, in J. Aquilina, A Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs, (Malta, 1972).


4 The verses in A are reproduced from MS 222 Aa and those in B are reproduced from MS 305 B1, which is shown in the illustration. The first three verses of A are a draft of verses [I]-III of B. In these sets of verses as they appear here, words in italics show a deletion in the original manuscript, words within brackets show an addition.

5 The words *di vinu* are open to two possible interpretations, either 'divine' or 'of wine', in this latter case regarding the words as a straightforward use of Italian in Maltese. In the rendering into standard Maltese orthography and in the English translation, the former interpretation has been adopted.

6 The exact meaning of this line is uncertain.

7 The exact meaning of these two lines is uncertain. Cf., however, the word *hejna* 'di grazia', (A. E. Caruana, Vocabolario della Lingua Maltese, (Malta, 1903)): it is possible that *hejnun* may be a verbal formation from this noun.


9 This verse is a draft of the first verse in B.

10 The Mandrag was a slum area of Valletta, built on the site of an unfinished project of the Knights of the Order of St. John for an artificial galley port. At one time there were orchards in the area, and it is to these that these lines refer.


13 Ibid., p. 72, no. 367.

14 The word *grop* actually means 'a knot (in wood)'. The exact meaning is uncertain here, but it is assumed to be 'carpentry'.

15 The Form III verb *xiegbel* means, *inter alia*, 'to give work to, to keep busy', but such a causatively transitive meaning would not be fully satisfactory here. The Form I verb *xegbel* means only 'to light, to kindle', but strangely enough has no meaning connected with the idea of 'work'. It is possible that the Form III verb *xiegbel* may originally have had some basic meaning such as might have been expected of a Form I verb, but that this has now become obsolete.

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The exact meaning of this line is uncertain; cf. p. 126 above, note 8.

This poem is reproduced from MS 305 b5.

An informant thought she remembered her grandmother using this expression in a cradle song. It is probably a relic of a now obsolete Form IV verb *akrah*, formed from the adjective *ikrah*, 'ugly, nasty, horrible', preceded by the word ma, with the meaning of 'what', and with the addition of the 3rd person plural pronominal suffix *om*. The combination of *ma* + Form IV verb is used to express what may be called a 'verb of wonder'. So *m'akrah* would literally mean 'what has made nasty ..., what has made horrible ...', and the usual meaning would be 'how nasty is ..., how horrible is ...'. Cf. *m'akkar Alla*, 'how great is God', literally, 'what has made God great'.


The words *namak* and *tamani* are both composed of a pronominal prefix (as subject) and a pronominal suffix (as object) attached to a now obsolete stem *ama*, derived from Italian *amare*, 'to love'. Cf. Aquilina, *Proverbs*, Section XVII, no. 50, *Min thobbu u tamah dawk li jaghmel ma tanaha*.

See p. 126 above, note 13.

The meaning of *days yulxin* is 'of the same age'. In the context of which it is used here, it is more satisfactory to regard it as meaning 'very young'.


This poem is reproduced from MS 242 Aa.

The word *tastura* is not used in current Maltese, nor is it recorded in any of the older Maltese dictionaries. The most likely explanation is that it would seem to be an adaptation of the Sicilian-Italian word *trasgula*, meaning 'cheat, deception'.

The word *eghuied* is recorded in proverbs as a plural of *ghada*, meaning 'custom, habit', although the usual plural in current Maltese usage is *ghadiet*. For *eghuied*, see Aquilina, *Proverbs*, Section XX, no. 5, *Il-ehuiedem jingharaʒ minn eghuiedu*.

This poem is reproduced from MS 305 b2. For similar comic verses, see J. Cassar Pullicino, *ob. cit.*, p. 18, nos. 30, 31.