would have a special interest in that they would be the first such poems originating in Sicily to have been discovered so far, and would give added urgency to the search and study of examples of Judaeo-Arabic from that island. To the Maltese linguist, always interested in the 'missing links' of his language, their importance is obvious. In addition, whatever their origin, the poems have an interest for the Maltese general reader all their own. With no further effort than would be required of him to read the oldest surviving poem in Maltese, he has here a set of poems on subjects as various and of as universal appeal as (a) a visit to heaven in the footsteps of the prophet Elias, (b) a lass greets her lover at home from the sea, (c) a lark's song, (d) a skit on marriage, (e) a humorous dialogue between water and wine similar to those which frequently appear on Maltese humorous or satirical periodicals, (f) a lover to his lass, (g) 'It is my intention to make a garden ...', and (h) a moral song on the transitoriness of human affairs.

\[ \begin{align*}
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THE MEDITERRANEAN ISLANDS AS PLACES OF SYNTHESIS BETWEEN ARAB CULTURE AND EUROPEAN CULTURES

by J. Cassar Pullicino

(Working Paper, with particular reference to Malta, discussed at the Conference on the same theme held at the Grand Hotel Verdala (11-14 September, 1978) on the joint initiative of the Tunisian and Maltese National Commissions for UNESCO)

Since the earliest times the Mediterranean has been the meeting place of different, often diverse and rival cultures. S. Moscati has shown that recent archaeological research in the central Mediterranean area bounded by Tunisia to the South and Italy to the North revealed that certain islands, such as Malta, Sicily (Motya) and Sardinia, played an important role in a process of cultural interaction in ancient Mediterranean history. These islands served as crossroads where ancient cultures met or followed one another in time. Sometimes, as in the case of Malta, a succession of civilizations imposed themselves on previous ones over a period of some three thousand years, the component elements being prehistoric, Phoenician-Punic, Hellenistic-Roman and Christian. It is evident, therefore, that these islands have been the scene of cultural synthesis well before the emergence of the Arabs as a power in the Mediterranean.

The theme of our meeting concerns the interplay and fusion, in the Mediterranean islands, of the Arab culture and the European cultures. Historically, the period of the Arab expansion westwards (7th to 9th C.) may, therefore, be taken as the point of departure for our approach. The subject, however, has to be studied from various aspects with some considerations of a general culture.

**Some General Considerations**

The islands of the Mediterranean are so numerous that for prac-

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90 S. Stern, 'Un circolo di poeti Siciliani ebrei nel secolo XII', Bollettino del Centro di Studi Filologici e Linguistici Siciliani, 4 (Palermo, 1956), 39-59, is concerned with a group of Jewish poets in Sicily writing solely in Hebrew very much before the fifteenth century.

tical purposes it is perhaps advisable to limit the connotation of
the term 'Mediterranean islands' to those of the central and west-
ern areas. Even so, we will be faced with an assortment of is-
lands of varying sizes and importance, some of the larger ones
being Sardinia, Corsica and Sicily, while others are very small
like Malta, Gozo, Pantelleria, Lampedusa, Djerba and the Ker-
kenna Islands near the Tunisian coast. Other islands form groups
or families, such as the volcanic Lipari Islands, and the Balearic
group off the East coast of Spain, the principal ones being Major-
ca, Minorca and Iviza.

In attempting to identify the various components of these island
cultures, one has to keep in mind that, as F. Braudel says, 'whether
large or small, these islands of all sizes and shapes make up
a coherent human environment in so far as similar pressures are
exerted upon them, making them both far ahead and far behind
the general history of the sea: pressures that may divide them, often
brutally, between the two opposite poles of archaism and innova-
tion'.

Insularity may itself be one of the causes for retaining evidence
of an island's cultural identity. But isolation is a relative term,
and, generally speaking, it exerts this influence most where the
islands concerned are situated well outside the normal sea-routes.
Other psychological factors play an equally important part: where,
for example, either for commercial, political or military reasons an
island has frequent or long and sustained contact with a higher or
dominant civilisation, this is bound to impinge on the conscious-
ness of the native community and to affect the inhabitants' tastes
and habits, luring them away from the essentially conservative
elements of the indigenous tradition. By and large, this gravita-
tional pull tends to operate in the direction of the European cul-
ture existing in a neighbouring bigger country, such as Italy and
Sicily in the case of Malta. But to this there are exceptions, as in
the case of Pantelleria which, for historic reasons, has a dialect
that is predominantly Sicilian though it is situated much closer to
the Tunisian coast.

An extreme reaction to such a process of cultural criss-crossing
would be to regard the new culture as having been obtained by
trading away the native one, and that the

Bartered birthrite
Like the chaste membrane
Is lost for good
So we can never arrive
At the beginning
To couch in the blue light
Of the primaeval hive ...

However, in spite of the gradual assimilation of a new way of
life and thought, with innovations in dress and food, customs,
education and, maybe, language, it is still possible, by patient
study and research, to trace the different layers of cultural bor-
rowings and additions, and to identify the strands of the various
civilizations that were merged or fused in the islands over the
centuries.

Prejudice, often the effect of inferiority complex, is another fac-
tor to consider in assessing the cultural identity of an island. I
can speak from personal knowledge only about the Maltese expe-
nience in this regard, but I am sure that other island communities
suffer from the same psychological weakness. Thanks mostly to
Prof. Aquilina's scientific analysis of the language over a period
of about forty years, the Arabic origin of the Maltese language has
now come to be generally accepted, but up to the last War one of
the arguments of the opponents of the Maltese language move-
ment was that to uphold such an origin was a retrograde step as Arabic
was the language of Islam, whereas an Italian origin, or even a
Sicilian one was preferable as it denoted a link with Rome, the
centre of the Catholic world. This ran very close to the argument
adduced in regard to race. In 1912 R.N. Bradely wrote: 'The Maltese
race question has in the past been discussed with more regard to
sentiment and popular pride than to exact truth. When one writer
who upheld a Hebrew origin of the Maltese was asked why he fa-
voured this rather than an Arabic derivation, he replied that the
Hebrews were the people of Christ, whereas the 'Arabs were the
people of Mahom ...; the tendency of the learned has been to seek
a proud origin for the Maltese in a Phoenician ancestry, and

2 F. Braudel, The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age

1 L. Peters, Satellites, London, 1967, p.45. Quoted by John Povey, Bar-
tered Birthrite: A Comment on the Attitudes to the Past in West African
Poetry (in 'National Identity: Papers delivered at the Commonwealth
Literature Conference', University of Queensland, Brisbane, 9th-15th
much research has proved of little value owing to the prevalence of this fixed idea ... Unfortunately the idea is still too prevalent that language is an indication of race ..." G. Wettinger refers to a recent fallacy that some people fear that admission of Arabic links might endanger the social and political acceptance of Maltese emigrants in countries like Australia. The same writer points out that while the general Arabic origin of most Maltese medieval place-names is commonly admitted, 'family pride still interferes with the acceptance of a similar origin for most of Malta's medieval surnames'.

The linguistic heritage may indeed be a good pointer to the cultural forces at work in a particular place. In so far as Malta is concerned, the language is an excellent example of synthesis resulting in a flexible speech-medium made up of a Semitic (Arabic) foundation and a Romance superstructure drawn mainly from Sicilian and Italian, to which numerous accretions from English are now being continually added. 'There is no doubt', writes Prof. Aquilina, 'that the Arabs laid the foundations of the language ... the vocabulary had to be supplemented later from outside sources ... but the principal features of the Semitic group remained intact ... When the Normans conquered the island, they found a Semitic language which had already become an integral part of the speech-habits of the people, and it seems that, in spite of the common bond of Christianity, the Normans and the Maltese kept linguistically apart. Then with the feudal system they introduced gradually a number of their own native words into the language. In this historically very interesting period began the large-scale admixture of Maltese, which ceased to be completely Arabic till it gradually became a unique language mixed from Norman sources and in time from the linguistic stocks of the foreign rulers that followed the Normans'.

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A COMMON ELEMENT

There is one common element affecting life on the islands of the Mediterranean during the 16th-18th centuries that must have been a constant source of contact and of a great traffic in giving-and-taking between the Arabic and European cultures. I refer to the constant harassment of the Christian inhabitants and shipping by the Barbary corsairs in most islands of the Mediterranean, and the equally regular raids and incursions on North African coasts and islands such as Djerba by the Christian fleets of Spain and Genoa, by the galleys of the Knights of St. John operating from Malta or of other Christian privateers bent on adventure and with an eye on the booty resulting from the 'corso'. The concentration of large numbers of Christian, or Muslim, slaves among peoples of a different faith was a unique occasion for a direct influence on island folk-life, as I have tried to illustrate in respect of Malta at the first Congress on Mediterranean Studies of Arabo-Berber Influence. Ransomed or fugitive slaves were returning home all the time, too. This worked in both directions, giving rise to the transfer of skills and techniques, assimilation, transformation and modification of ideas, beliefs and customs that went to enrich tradition, adding a new dimension to the local culture.

A related influence was that of renegades, whether these were leaders of the Barbary corsairs such as the brothers Barbarossa, the redoubtable Dragut and Uluq Ali, rank-and-file Christian slaves who went over to Islam or people who, for example, left Corsica not only for Genoa, Venice and Rome but also emigrated in large numbers to Algiers. This phenomenon has been underlined by the eminent historian F. Braudel, who stressed that 'on coming into contact with Islamic countries, Christians were often seized with the urge to turn Muslim ... From Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, Calabria, Genoa, Venice, Spain, from every point of the Mediterranean world, renegades converged on Islam. There was no comparable flow in the other direction'. Recent research in Malta has shown


8 F. Braudel, *op. cit.*, pp. 158-9: 'In about 1568, a Spanish report estimates there were 6,000 Corsican renegades out of a total renegade population of 10,000 in Algiers. The town was swarming with Corsican middlemen, effective agents for the ransoming of captives, according to Ge-
that some Christian Maltese, unable to stand their sufferings and in order to ease their condition of life, in their years of captivity, did, in fact, abjure their faith and turned Muslim. As for Turkish slaves turned Christian, this was not uncommon either in Malta during the 16th-18th centuries. Baptized slaves married Maltese girls, raised families and became integrated into Maltese society and life. As many as 60 or 70 could turn Christian in one year from among slaves belonging to the Order alone, while other slaves belonging to private families are known to have been baptized in the parish churches. The same thing was no doubt taking place among the slaves of Palermo and other important centers. The subject, however, has not been properly studied so far.

Emigration has been a formative influence in cultural action and interaction bearing on some Mediterranean islands. Such flow to the countries of North Africa in the 19th century provided opportunities for continued exposure of Maltese emigrants to the beliefs, customs, food, dress and ways of life of the inhabitants there, and the frequent comings and goings of the Maltese in the 19th C. must have facilitated the assimilation of at least some folklore material from North Africa that still needs to be identified. In the 20th century, thousands of emigrants from Malta, as well as from Sicily and other islands of the middle sea, left their homes and added to the number of ethnic groups existing in the U.S.A., Canada and Australia. Some of them now have had their roots in the land of adoption for more than one generation. How far do they actually integrate in a cultural sense with their new society? To what extent do they succeed in preserving some of their native cultural values? The acculturation of island groups among foreign societies along the Mediterranean and beyond is a matter primarily for the social anthropologist. Corsicans settled in France and Sicily.

noeose documents, but also unofficial agents of foreign powers. See also Vol. II, 1973, pp. 799-800.

9 For the 17th Century see A. Bonnici, Vita Christiana nell’isola di Malta verso la metà del seicento (in Maltese Folklore Review No. 4 [1973], pp. 305-335).


11 J. Cassar Pullicino, op. cit., p. 375.

formative contacts with Arab culture that started in the period of Islamic expansion were interrupted, and not only were they not resumed but they were so thoroughly obliterated by the superimposition of various layers of European elements that nowadays hardly any outward trace has been left of the preceding Arab heritage. The identification of these Arabic or rather Semitic elements is vitally important for a better appreciation of the resulting synthesis with the European culture/s. My colleagues will pardon me if, rather than indulge in generic statements, I am keeping the situation in Malta primarily in mind. If anything, this will enable us to grasp the potential range of a programme of studies covering the main aspects of cultural symbiosis that has occurred and is still taking place in one of the centrally placed islands of the Mediterranean.

If one were to make a rapid assessment of the cultural climate of Malta today, one would likely conclude that the island is thoroughly soaked in the European tradition, reinforced by a centuries-old attachment to the Christian faith and its outward manifestations that contribute to the colourful spectacle of recurring feasts and calendar festivals every year. Intellectual and educational life is impregnated with European ideas, and so is it in the field of visual and dramatic art. Baroque and other European influences are imprinted on its churches and public buildings, while sporting life and activities are modelled closely on Western patterns, mostly Italian and British.

This is one aspect of the 'strangely mixed inheritance' resulting from the historical vicissitudes that go back to the 9th century, covering more than 200 years of Aghlabid domination followed by 268 years under the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem and more than 160 years of British rule. In an interesting study 'Cultural Cross-Currents in Maltese Idioms' P. Cachia offers some very cogent and pertinent remarks: '... almost every manifestation of Maltese cultural life other than the language places it clearly in the stream of European, more specifically Italian, civilization. This European affiliation is not merely a veneer taken on by the educated classes; nor is it entirely the result of that penetration of the Near East by the West which began in the 19th century and has coloured the life of the 'Arabs themselves ... Significant also is the testimony of Pâris ash-Shidyâq who lived and worked in Malta from 1834 to 1848 and reported at length on the customs, the superstitions, the social demeanour, the mannerisms, even the conventional gestures, of the Maltese. Biased and inaccurate as his observations were, it is clear that he was reacting to a way of life that, on the whole, seemed foreign to him, and his final verdict on it was that 'the island of Malta pleases but few Europeans. The reason is that they find nothing novel when they come to it, nothing that cannot be found in their own country - for everything in it is but the refuse of what they possess ... Of the Arabs it would please no one. This is because the Maltese all hate the entire race of Arabs and Muslims.'

While consciousness of the cultural ties with Europe, especially with Italy and the United Kingdom, remains alive and strong, there is now also a slowly growing awareness of the Arab affinity, fostered in recent years by officially sponsored cultural activities and exchanges, by visits of dancing troupes from Libya and Tunisia, exchange of teachers, the introduction of Arabic teaching in the schools and as a subject in public examinations, the setting up of a Libyan Cultural Institute with membership open to the Maltese, and by closer cooperation in the field of economic and agricultural development.

**EUROPEANIZATION PROCESS**

The process of Europeanization in Malta has now been going on for more than seven centuries; it began more than three centuries before the coming of the Order of St. John in 1530. Muslim contacts very likely lasted just over 250 years, covering a period of 120 years of direct Arab rule (870-1090) followed by 134 years of Muslim influence. By 1241 Aba Aba Ghiberti could still report that the customs and constitutions of Malta and Gozo were different from those of Sicily, and the Emperor, Frederic II, was prepared to accept this, as long as it did not affect his Curia financially.

Historians nowadays tend towards the view, strongly upheld and advocated by A. Luttrell, that during the Arab period (870-1090) in all likelihood the native Christianity of the island was more or less completely extinguished'. In 1090 Count Roger the Norman reduced Malta temporarily to a distant tributary status. The Normans (Latinos) were welcomed by a great multitude of 'Christian captives' whom they actually transported back from Malta towards their homes in the various kingdoms and 'there must have been

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fewer Christians in Malta after Roger's invasion than before it.' There is no evidence that any kind of colonisation was attempted. "Norman domination was indirect and discontinuous, but it must have brought occasional Christians to Malta, and from 1168 at the latest there was a Bishop of Malta who apparently held his office in partibus while residing in Sicily." There is no hint that Roger found any indigenous Christians to welcome him in 1090. Burchard, Bishop of Strassburg, who may have touched at Malta on his way to Egypt in 1175, referred to Malta as a Saracenis inhabitata, est sub domino regis Siculi. Malta's integration into the Sicilian realm probably started with Frederick's reorganisation of the kingdom after about 1220. In 1224 he expelled many Muslims from Malta and colonized the islands from Italy, the population of Cercano, in the Abruzzi, being sent to Malta in May of that year possibly to offset the diminution in the number of Muslims there. 'Some lost their lands and others perhaps even left the island, but many must have changed their religion while continuing to speak their Semitic language. These converts, together with the Latin colonists from Sicily, Italy and elsewhere, obviously required religious instruction and organization. The enduring Christianisation of Malta and Gozo took place at this point ..." In 1282 Malta followed Sicily in passing into a new Western Mediterranean sphere of interest, that of the Confederation of the Aragonese Crown, within which it remained until long after 1530.'

We have already mentioned how Italian influence came to pervade practically the whole gamut of the cultural scene up to comparatively recent times. Side by side with this, and to a certain extent in thinly disguised opposition to it, English culture was seeping through, gathering momentum mostly since 1900. This is how an English historian, B. Blouet, assessed this process of cultural infiltration and assimilation. "There were, of course, the usual problems associated with English aloofness and the ill manners of British forces stationed overseas but as time went by these difficulties became less troublesome. The Maltese soci-

14 A. LUTTRELL, Approaches to Medieval Malta (in 'Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights', published by the British School at Rome, 1975, p. 30).
16 ibid., p. 415; also Approaches to Medieval Malta, p. 37.
17 A. LUTTRELL, Approaches to Medieval Malta, p. 41.

— have shared in the historical events enacted therein.\textsuperscript{19} My own partiality for this area, however, should not blind me to the claims of other island groups, and I am sure my colleagues will be suggesting other fruitful areas for attention, the Balearic islands, for instance, and others.

Whichever area is decided upon, any intensive study proposed will no doubt call for a multi-disciplinary approach. It should be an occasion for the participation of North African scholars side by side with European specialists, with the involvement of universities on both sides of the Mediterranean as well as of individual researchers in this cooperative venture. In respect of certain human activities, such as house-building, fishing, folk-music, weaving and pottery, it may be useful if arrangements were to be made to associate indigenous practitioners with the experts at special meetings, with practical demonstrations and discussions, convened from time to time in selected islands.

\textit{Oral Tradition} in the Mediterranean islands may be considered as deserving priority before it dies out as it continues to disappear before the disintegrating forces of modern life, education, economic development, mass tourism, etc. The field is a vast one, ranging from children’s rhymes, sometimes accompanying traditional games, riddles, proverbs, songs, folktales and legends. After collection, the texts from the island groups have to be analysed and the component parts studied on a comparative basis with similar material from the European and North African littorals as well as from neighbouring islands to establish degrees of similarities, possible paths of entry, stage of assimilation, extent of modification and changes in the social milieu to which they have been subjected in the course of oral transmission.

To illustrate the potential of a comparative study in this field I may quote here an example drawn from Maltese folklore material. Some Maltese songs, composed in the traditional form of the four-line (monostrophic) stanza, are philosophical in mood and content. One of them, which is still often quoted to underline the vanity of human wishes and the futility of ‘high-vaulting ambition’, runs as follows:

\begin{quote}
Fejn hu žmienek, ja ġherba!
Kont imdawra bil-lellux!
\end{quote}

Where is the time of your pride ye ruins!
Once surrounded with marigolds;

\begin{quote}
Hitanek kollha waqghu,
\end{quote}

\begin{quote}
Čejt imdawra bil-bebbux.
\end{quote}

All your walls now have crumbled down,
And snails surround you everywhere.

Almost identical in wording and ideas are the following three lines used in Libya, which were quoted to my friend Dr. V. Depasquale by Mr. M.A. Annemri, of the National Historical Library, Tripoli, who visited Malta as member of a Cultural Delegation in January, 1974:

\begin{quote}
Wen hu ġmâlek, ja ġebja?
Kunti mdawra bil-lellux
Eljom imdawra bil-belbux!
\end{quote}

Where is your beauty, o sister?
Once surrounded with marigolds
Snails now surround you everywhere.

The proverb-lore still current in Mediterranean islands also reflects the reactions of cultural action and interaction on the popular mind. When subjected to a comparative analysis, the collected material should yield interesting results probably varying from one island to another in the degree of Arab or European influences apparent in the contemporary form of the etymology expression. The difficulty of identifying the Arabic substratum in the substantial corpus of Maltese proverbs was fully realised by Prof. Aquilina in his monumental work \textit{Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs} (1972). In his communication ‘Comparative Maltese and Arabic Proverbs’ (1967) he referred to his collection, which was then already in the press, and wrote: ‘Of the whole collection of proverbs, comparatively very few are of Arabic origin, but the total list of correspondences in all the work is fairly impressive. Some of these proverbs are mixed in the sense that they may be Arab and European at the same time, sometimes literally and sometimes approximately. Here arises the question as to the criteria that must be adopted to establish which is the original version. Comparatively only a small number of Maltese proverbs correspond to Arabic ones because since 1090, when the Normans conquered Malta, the social context of our country moved in the direction of Sicily …’.\textsuperscript{20} As a result, he explained, the social impact of the longer post-Arabic period of European cultural influences from the 13th to the 20th century has been much more profound than that of the Arab domination. And if this is true of proverbs, one can im-


\textsuperscript{20} J. Aquilina, \textit{Maltese Linguistic Surveys}. Malta, 1976, p. 142.
agene to what an extent the Arabic culture manifested in other forms and expressions has submerged and thrown out of recogni-
tion by Romance substitutes or encrustations.

Although the practice of story telling in Maltese nowadays has declined considerably, folk-stories offer a fertile field for comparative study with other material from the Mediterranean islands.

The close similarity with Sicilian and Italian parallels is unmistakable and has been underlined and illustrated at a scholarly level, by the late A. Cremona.21 Long and close sustained commercial relations with Sicily, intermittent additions of immigrant groups from Italy and Sicily since the 13th century, the presence of Sicilian maids in the service of some well-to-do families and in more recent times, rather prolonged sojourns of political exiles during the ups and downs of the Risorgimento, intermarriages with Sicilian and other foreign workers during the construction of the breakwater at the Grand Harbour – all these may have been factors in the transmission or absorption of folklore types and motifs from Sicily and Italy that give a European character to the contemporary narrative tradition in Malta. Yet there is still room for a systematic comparative analysis of Maltese folktales versions to identify their relationship with those of the Maghreb countries as well. In this respect Dr. M. Galley has already established paral-
el or counterpart links between some Maltese tales, i.e. Dak il-fjobb 'I Ommu jew Is-Sansun Malti 'The Hero who loves his Mother or the Maltese Samson' and the Algerian tale Ali and his Mother (T. 590 and 300), Tifla tegmed Ġganta 'A girl destroys a Giantess' with the Algerian Mgideș and the Blind Ogress (T. 327 and 328), the story of Bidibekk with that of the North African hero Mgideș or Sater (or diminutive Świter), not to mention the humorous character Ġaban as a local version of Guha, a Mediterranean hero.22

emplacement actuel."23

One could perhaps argue that such correspondences between folk-beliefs in two Mediterranean islands with a long tradition of Christianity should cause no surprise, but there are also close parallels from Morocco and Algeria. In Morocco, Westermarck recounts that 'on the top of a mountain south of Tangier is the goba of Sida Hbib. This saint, who is said to have been the barber of the Prophet, came to Morocco riding on a mule. He told his servants that if he died while riding they should let the mule go as it pleased and bury him where it stopped. It went to the top of the said mountain, which in consequence became the saint's grave. Among the fair-haired Shawia hill-folk of Menoa, in Algeria, we read that 'some centuries ago the people now inhabiting Menoa had been driven from their former village higher up in the hills, and were searching for a suitable site upon which to erect a new settlement. While undecided which site to choose they met, near the confluence of the two streams, a holy man riding up from Djemara upon an ass, and they decided to seek his advice. Dismounting, the stranger said: 'Follow my ass, and where she rolls there build your village'. The ass roamed around the valley and, ascending the rocky mound upon which the village now stands, she lay down and rolled. 'Here build your village', said the saint, 'and call it your Menoa (Saviou), for its situation will save you from attacks to come'. Thus Menoa was founded and to this day, in token of their gratitude to the holy man who chose for them so good a site, the people of Menoa pay a nominal tribute of garden produce every year to his descendants, who dwell in the plains near Berika to the West'.24

Stories such as these lead us to consider the possibility of tracing, through survivals in contemporary folk-culture, vestiges of a simultaneous dual cult, Christian and Islamic, among some Mediterranean islands. Such fusion of cults might have been originated in part by those renegades we have been speaking about, who may have retained a sneaking attachment to their old faith in their heart of hearts. At least one such 'sanctuary between two peoples' existing in Lampedusa has been competently studied by Amilcare Fantoli, who traced the development of this dual cult of the Virgin Mary/Maryam by both Christians and Moslems in the past. He quotes, inter alia, from a 1558 description by Giovanni Lorenzio D'Annia who refers to Lampedusa 'where a lamp burns continuously before the image of Our Lady, and, as many people affirm, it has never run short of oil as the pilots calling there always replenish it, whether they are Christian or Moslem'.25 Now something similar is recorded in Maltese tradition. In the Mellieha sanctuary there is a rural painting of Our Lady, attributed by tradition to St. Luke, which apparently also enjoyed the same respect from members of the two faiths as that registered in Lampedusa. In 1866 the local historian Achille Ferris wrote that 'this sacred image was held in the greatest veneration not only by the Christians, but also by the Turks who sent her candles, oils and other things from their countries. And it is noteworthy that when the Turks during the siege of 1565 wrecked the statues of some saints that adorned the cave, they did not dare to damage the sacred painting'.26 This is just a suggestion that I am throwing out in case some colleagues consider it worth while to promote the search for evidence of such fusions of religious cults in the Mediterranean islands. The fact that the figure of Mary, as testified by some verses, enjoys an honourable place in the Koran, is significant and need not be elaborated further.

**SONG, DANCE AND SPECTACLE**

There is a clear need to study and compare the contemporary native musical traditions in the Mediterranean islands. The traditional instruments in use, the materials employed, the method of playing, the place of folk-music in the social scene, its role in calendar customs, home and family life, the standing of the singer in the community, his poise and/or movements while singing—these and many other points could be noted and later compared, together with the musical recordings, the metrical form and literary content of the songs transcribed by specialists in the field.

23 Ch. de la Morandiere, *Au coeur de la Corse: Le Niolo*. Paris, 1933, pp. 134-135. I am indebted to Dr. Georges Ravas-Giordani, of the University of Provence, for calling my attention to this Corsican legend.


In 1972 Charles Camilleri drew attention to The Growing Awareness by Mediterranean Countries of their Musical Homogeneity and pointed out that the countries of Southern Europe found themselves culturally midway between Northern Europe and North Africa. He explained that 'each country which was influenced (such as Spain, Sicily, Malta, Sardinia and others) had to find a happy fusion of the two forces and at the same time staying faithful to their own culture. The problem lay in the difficult task of amalgamating a basically free melodic line (coming from the South) enclosed by a harmonic structure (coming from the North) which did not allow for a free melodic line to express itself horizontally'. The effect of this on Maltese folk-music (għana), for example, was that 'accompaniment (based on Triadic chords and Western) accompanies and imposes itself upon a melody that is crying out to be free in its pursuit. The result is of course that both the melody and the rhythm are restricted, for the complex rhythms and melodic lines of a freely (not based on harmony) conceived music can only be got unharmonically'. The Maltese experience can find a place for more elaborate treatment in any study programme that may be agreed as a result of this meeting.

Closely related is the dancing tradition as manifested in various islands. In particular, surviving dances with a historical connotation are bound to be a sure indication of the effects of cultural cross-currents. Of great interest for our purpose, to mention one example, is the so-called Moresca, or Moorish Dance, which has been studied in its manifestations in the Italian peninsula. In essence, this sword-dance – wooden sticks or swords are used here – re-enacts the long-drawn-out conflict between Christians and Saracens or Moors, from whom it takes its name. In a monograph on the subject Bianca Maria Galanti (1942) pays particular attention to the Moresca, traces its origin in Italy to the 9th century and documents its flourishing existence in Genoa, Venice, Naples, Milan, Tuscany and Romagna between the 14th and the 17th centuries. She points out that the Moresca has survived longest and most tenaciously in the islands: the spectacle was held in grand style in Elba and Corsica up to the 19th century, and although the dance as such has gone out of use in Sicily the tradition there has assumed the form of a medieval mystery or drama known as the Madonna delle Milizie performed at Scicli. It survives in the Adriatic islands of Curzola and Lagosta. To these one may add that Malta preserves the tradition to this day in the form of the Parata dance which ushers in the Carnival celebrations every year. In Corsica the spectacle has recently been revived at the Theatre Equestre de Foja.

The possibility of tracing other versions of this spectacle on the islands near the North African littoral and in the Balearic islands could lead to a fuller study of the manifestation in dance form of the people's reaction on opposite sides of the Mediterranean to the same historical events in the drama staged between Cross and Crescent. Its inclusion for study under Unesco sponsorship might throw significant light on the question of the path of transmission of the dance, for it has been suggested that the Moresca has been so called not only because Moors figure in the performance, but also because they practised a typical form of the dance which was then assimilated by the Aragonese Court in Naples and thence diffused all over Italy.

Whilst on the subject of dances, one notices that to a certain extent tourism may help the people of an island to re-discover their cultural heritage. With sustained growth in tourism in the Mediterranean islands comes a demand by visitors for folk-music and dance served with the food in hotels and restaurants on the European (e.g. Italian) pattern. This often helps a local tradition to survive; it may also induce organizers of 'folklore' groups to create variations of traditional local dances. This certainly is true of Malta where, as Boissevain has pointed out, tourism 'has


Gisèle Poli, La 'Moresca' ressuscitée (in 'Kyn – le magazine de la Corse', Août-Septembre, 1978, pp. 59-61). Inter alia, this writer says of La Moresca: '... elle raconte le choc de deux civilisations, avec une émotion assez rare pour ces temps reculés et même pour aujourd'hui. Point de haine, point d'acharnement borné à détruire l’autre, mais le sentiment de participer à un grand mouvement de l’histoire, d’intervenir directement pour le maintien de la pensée occidentale et chrétienne.' I owe this information to Dr. G. Ravis-Giordani, of the University of Provence, who kindly supplied me with a copy of this article and of Abbé Gaudin's detailed description of the 'Moresca' spectacle witnessed by him at Ucivaturo in 1785.

B.M. Galanti, op. cit., p. 30.
created a modest folk-music industry which provides after hours work for a few authentic singers and guitarists and numbers of young dancers who perform 'traditional' folk-dances, most of which are only a year or two old. The tourists’ demand for folk music has unquestionably helped to preserve the limited traditional instrumental and vocal music that existed. It has also helped to make this music acceptable to some young educated Maltese who might otherwise have copied the middle-class disdain with which their parents looked down upon this 'peasant' music. Patriotism doubtless has also played a role, for the music has provided an authentic item of local culture to a newly independent country in search of its identity after four centuries of heavy-handed foreign rule.\(^{32}\)

One may add here that over the past few years local folk-dancing groups (e.g. the \textit{Viva Malta} group) have shown a remarkable readiness to assimilate and adapt movements and choreographic motifs from performances by visiting Tunisian and Libyan dancers.

As for other popular spectacles, the Carnival in Malta has been evolving over the past four centuries or so on the pattern and under the inspiring influence of the European Carnival tradition notably of Italy. The same may be said of the \textit{festa}, with its apparent religious motivation to honour the town or village patron saint, which offers close parallels and many points of comparison with the patronal feasts of Sicily studied by G. Pitre and others.\(^{33}\)

\textit{Agricultural practice} offers yet another opportunity for cooperative study. Different problems inherent in the size of some islands, fragmentation of land, farm tenancy agreements, land management, soil conservation, horticulture, cash crops and animal husbandry are some of the aspects that figure prominently in present-day cultivation techniques and problems. European influences have, no doubt exerted varying effects on most of the islands since the 19th century through colonization and related policies.

Apart from these comparatively recent cultural injections, agriculture may provide examples of much older methods as well as of rites that unconsciously link it up with a possible Arab context. A case in point is the preservation up to our own times of the Semitic (Arabic) terminology of practically all parts of the primitive plough (\textit{M. mobriet}) still used in Maltese fields. Delving deeper into local tradition, one finds that among the fertility rites surviving in these islands is the practice of leaving a column of manure — evidently a phallic symbol — standing in the fields until it is carried away by the first rains. The popular name given to this column is \textit{l-ghaaru}, i.e. the Bridegroom of the field, which immediately suggests the underlying idea of a symbolic marriage with Mother Earth for the production of richer harvests. The Maltese custom may be related to the agricultural rite practised in many parts of Morocco where 'it is the custom for the reapers to leave a small patch of the field untouched, which is sometimes called 'the bride of the field' — \textit{l-arusa de l-feddah} ...'\(^{34}\)

We now turn our attention to \textit{l-ghaguzza}, the oldest woman in the village who, Maltese children were led to believe, was thrown down from the church steeple by the sexton or some friar at noon on Thursday, in the middle of Lent.\(^{33}\) The older 18th century version of this belief centred in the proverb \textit{l-ghaguzza f’nos f’Randa tinsassam} 'the old woman is broken in two in the middle of Lent'. According to Agius de Soldanis grown-ups impressed children that the oldest woman in the village, or the oldest friar in the following year, was thrown down from a high tower on that day.\(^{35}\)

Comparative data tend to indicate that the Maltese belief forms part of a widespread calendar rite or custom. At Fez, in Morocco, the New Year's Day and the following day are together named \textit{baguzza}, but elsewhere this name is given to the last day of the old year or New Year's Eve. 'Baguzza is represented as a female spirit of an old and hideous appearance, and her name is now derived from the word 'aguzza which means an old woman'.\(^{36}\) But perhaps the Malta survival is also related to the period from the 25th February to the 4th March, (old style), lasting for eight days and seven nights, called \textit{tamgart} (the old woman), by the Ait Wurain, presumably because the winter is then coming to an end.\(^{37}\)

\(^{32}\) J. Boissevain, \textit{Tourism and Development in Malta}. Paper read at the Seminar on Tourism and Development organised by the Extension Studies Board of the University of Malta – March 21st-26th, 1977.


\(^{35}\) G.F. Agius De Soldanis, \textit{Domna tal-Kliem Kartazjnis mscornil f’em jom tal Maltin u Ghausin} ... (National Library Ms 143A, 1890).


Catching fish as a food for man seems to have been carried on from very early times. Fishing methods practised in the Mediterranean islands offer good grounds for inquiry. In so far as language is concerned, much useful work in this direction has already been carried out through the Questionnaire of the Atlante Linguistico Mediterraneo organised by the 'Istituto per la Collaborazione Culturale, Venezia-Roma'. The linguistic material ranges over a wide field - the sea, geomorphology, meteorology, the stars, navigation and manoeuvres, embarcations (types, parts, construction and maintenance), the rigging, the oar, mast and sails, cordage, life on board, commerce, fishing (kind of fish, species, fishing gear, nets), marine fauna and sea flora. The Maltese part of the investigation was carried out in 1961-62 by Prof. Aquilina whose monograph Maltese Names of Fishes, Molluscs and Crustaceans in the Mediterranean (1969), together with the extensive coverage given to local fishing methods in two official reports, one dated 1931 and entitled The Fishing Industry in Malta with suggestions for its further development, by James Hornell, and another recent one by T.W. Burdon published in 1956, entitled A Report on the Fishing Industry of Malta, provide basic material for further comparative study.

The whole field of fishing is extremely vast, and it would appear that Unesco could undertake to supplement the work of the Atlante Linguistico Mediterraneo by sponsoring a programme of meetings for the exchange of information and experience between specialists and fishermen from the Mediterranean islands, together with a series of documentary films covering both fishing methods (e.g. tunny fishing) and boat construction. Tunny fishing has been suggested here because it is practised in many parts of the Mediterranean, and F. Braudel has warned that although historians have thought of tunny fishing perhaps as a specific activity of Genoese seamen, of the fishermen of Naples, Marseille or Cape Corse, in fact it was already practised by the Arabs who passed on the skill in the 10th Century.39

The time seems to be opportune because the adoption of modern fishing techniques is bound to affect older methods and scnearia in some way or another. To quote the case of Malta: present projects envisage the introduction of trawling beyond and outside the fishing grounds that have been used for centuries in or near the territorial waters of Malta. Fishermen will continue, however, for many years to come to use inherited methods hallowed by time and experience in areas reached by the traditional luzzu and kajjik, small fishing craft that have since the War completely abandoned oar and sails as means of propulsion in favour of fuel oil motors.

Here the suggested programme of studies would cover as many islands as possible, register differences in methods, record the ones that are nowadays peculiar to particular islands (e.g. kanizzati fishing in Malta) and, maybe, trace the origin and development of specific fishing techniques in the Mediterranean. In boat construction, a close study of methods in use may either clinch the result of linguistic research or alter somewhat such conclusions on the basis of similar techniques currently used in a different cultural environment that may antedate the present-day terminology.

In the case of Malta, both lexically and historically there is a heavy European influence, mainly Sicilian and Italian. In the 15th century the island experienced a growth in population, and this was reflected in the emigration of some skilled workers to Sicily. Thus, in 1454 Angelu Debonu and Jorgius Alfelu de casali Bilicala, Alloysus Balza de casali Chalcutin and Palmeri Precopu de casali Sarrici found skilled jobs as fishermen at Palermo on Gaspur de Sasso's chabica or fishing-boat with a large net (M. xibka).40 Historically, the introduction of tunny fishing can be traced back to the year preceding the Great Siege, when Grand Master La Vallette on the 14th May, 1564 granted a monopoly for this activity in Maltese coastal waters and in the bays of these islands to the Genoese Noble Ambrogio Tiradsano, citizen of Trapani, in Sicily. Tunny fishing was re-introduced in Grand Master Pinto's time (1741-73) and since then it has had a fitful existence with periods of inactivity down to our times. Relations with Sicilians in the same line of fishing remained close, right up to the present century when we read, for example, that one Patrun Peppi, a Gozitan, on more than one occasion led a party of Maltese fishermen to visit the Sicilian tunny grounds, especially those at Capo Passero and Marsamxett, to gain further experience in tunny catching with the tunnara.41


40 H. Bresc. The 'Secrezia' and the Royal Patrimony in Malta (in 'Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights', 1975, p. 133, footnote).

41 G.P.B. Kif dabbelt 'Malta t Tunnara' (in 'Lehens is-Sewwa' - 7.10.1950). I am indebted to Dr. G. Weitinger for indication of services on tunny fishing.
On the other hand, Maltese tradition points to the possibility of direct contact through fishing with the Kerkenna islands off the Tunisian coast in the 19th century. Fr. E. Magri (Hrejjej Missjoni, Part I, M.Z. No. 15 (1903) p. 12) states that Maltese fishermen used to fish in the waters around Kerkenna (M. Qerqna) and adds: 'There are people who still remember the last fishing craft which brought the fish that was caught there'.

Another matter for specialists—architects, town planners and builders—is an investigation of the impact of cross-cultural elements in the architecture of the Mediterranean islands. Here again it is important to establish in the first instance which elements have survived from Islamic culture as without them it is hardly possible to speak of synthesis of the two cultures. In Malta the subject is only now beginning to attract attention. It has been suggested that Maltese building techniques were influenced from Syria and Anatolia, and it has been equally argued that Maltese building styles could have come from Tunisia or Sicily rather than the Levant, and in any case they were determined by the materials locally available.42

A Symposium on the theme 'Images of Islam' took place at the University of Malta on the 14th May, 1976 and Jo Tonna, Acting Head of the Department of Architecture at the University, spoke about Islamic Aspects of Maltese Built Form, trying to identify an Arab contribution. One area which, he suggests, betrays a strong affinity with the Arab world concerns flat roofs—such use is no doubt facilitated by the climate—that is a common feature of Maltese buildings. His general conclusion is that one can identify 'a base which was enriched, even transformed, by influence from other cultures, but never quite submerged... There is indeed a 'grammar' of building methods, house form and urban texture, underlying Maltese built form. It has strong affinities with the Islamic habitat, many of them developed long after the period of direct Arab rule'.43

Adolfo Florence's two communications read at the XV Congress of the History of Architecture held in Malta in 1967 on the theme L'Architettura a Malta dalla Preistoria all'Ottocento also offer food for thought. In one of them, he concludes that one can speak of a Maltese architecture sharing with that of Spain the oriental influences and contacts with the islands of Sicily and Sardinia that for centuries had been linked first with Aragon and later with the great Spanish monarchy. In the other paper, he underlines the similarities and differences, in the vernacular architecture, produced by climatic conditions, materials available and ecological conditions that are still visible in the rural buildings of Ibiza and Malta, with similarities found in other small islands such as the Lipari and Aegean islands.44 Here lies a possible theme for a widely-based programme of comparative study under the auspices of Unesco in the islands of the Mediterranean, before the rural habitations are unfeelingly altered, modified or converted for tourist purposes. The Italian casa rurale has been systematically covered to far by 30 separate monographs in the series Ricerche sulle dimore rurali in Italia (Olschki, Florence), of which three volumes are devoted to Sardinia, Western Sicily and Eastern Sicily respectively.45

The Maltese experience of mass tourism and architecture was discussed and its effect assessed by a panel of Maltese and foreign experts at a Seminar organised by the Extension Studies Board of the University of Malta between March 21-26, 1977. One particular paper dealt with Turismo in Malta: Il Tegno del Paesaggio. The facts examined and the conclusions drawn may be compared with those of other islands similarly affected by modern town-planning and tourist projects.

The suggested field of study could be extended also to so-called 'typical' food dishes, 'characteristic' dress and regional costume and to the handicraft skills that abound among the artisan classes everywhere throughout the Mediterranean and elsewhere. We could go on enumerating possible topics and themes, for life is much more complex than could be covered in the short time assigned in a session.

42. A. LUTTRELL, Approaches to Medieval Malta, pp. 23, 55 n. 290.
43. J. TONNA, Islamic Aspects of Maltese Built Form. Paper read before 'Images of Islam: Symposium on Islamic Culture' held at the University of Malta in 1976.
SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

(i) To do justice to the subject, the investigation should not be limited to an examination of the 'contemporary' island cultures but needs to be sustained by a search covering oral traditions, archive material and other sources;

(ii) The proper identification of the constituent Arabic and European cultural elements in the heritage of the Mediterranean islands is essential for a proper appreciation of the synthesis that has occurred over the centuries;

(iii) Any programme of studies undertaken should be carried out on a multi-disciplinary basis and preferably in association with Universities, research institutions and individual researchers;

(iv) If a time limit of, say, six years is set for such studies, one has to decide whether to opt for the widest possible coverage of islands throughout the Western and Central Mediterranean or to concentrate, in greater depth, on a particular area in this sea. A combination of both methods, depending on the nature of the subject to be investigated, is another possibility;

(v) Whatever final shape the Unesco project may take, a practical selective programme covering the following essential points may be proposed for implementation out of a reasonable and realistic budget:

(a) oral tradition in its various manifestations;

(b) detailed documentation of island fishing life and methods;

(c) meetings of specialists and practitioners in the field of building construction;

(d) publication of a series of comparative monographs on rural habitats in the Mediterranean islands;

(e) publication of representative selections of folktales, songs and legends from the Mediterranean islands, and possibly, in the long term, of a Type-Index of Mediterranean Folk-Tales.

MOMENTI FONDAMENTALI DELL'ITINERARIO LEOPARDIANO DI KARMENU VASSALLO

di OLIVER FRIGGIERI

LA RINUNZIA ALL'ESISTENZA

Il poeta stesso delinea le cause fondamentali che lo condussero verso il suo 'nero pessimismo': 'Morta che fu mia madre, io mi trovai al Siggiewi ove nacqui, coi miei nonni paterini. Dopo qualche tempo mi ammalai, e dovevano passare dei mesi prima che io guarissi. Poi cominciai ad andare a scuola; e, superata ch'ebbi la seconda classe elementare, i miei nonni morirono, e io rimasi così colta zia, che visse e morì vergine. Alla zia poco o nulla piaceva il mio studio, ossia la mia educazione.'1 La madre morì nel 1920, quando il poeta aveva appena sette anni e il padre si sposò di nuovo nel 1922. Nel 1932 il poeta cominciò gli studi superiori che poi abbandonò nel 1935. Nel 1937 morì la zia e nel 1939 si sposò. Nel 1941 perse la sua prima neonata, che portava lo stesso nome della zia, Rosanna, e nello stesso anno doveva disperdersi come soldato della leva. Nel 1947 morì un altro figlio, Tonino, e nel 1956 ancora un terzo, Joe Silverius.2 Questa serie di sfortune stabilisce che la sua sofferenza maggiore è localizzabile entro l'arco di tempo che va dall'infanzia fino all'ultima morte familiare nel 1956. Ma l'avvenimento più importante che lo aiutò a guarire la vita da un punto di vista diverso è il matrimonio del 1939, cosi che si può includere il periodo prettamente leopardiano dentro il periodo 1932-1944, documentato poeticamente in Nirien e in Kwiekeb ta' qalbi. Già nel secondo volume la spietata rinunzia all'esistenza diminuisce e si può assistere ad un graduale procedimento di ricostruzione personale della distruzione anteriore.

Almeno nel 1944, sembra già acquisito il compromesso tra la propria sofferenza e la rassegnazione evangelica. Rimane il rimpianto ma si fa vedere il sentimento nuovo dell'accettazione paci-