



There exist few reliable records on which to base a sensible analysis of nutritional habits in Medieval Malta, so that one has to rely mostly on early modern documentation in order to gain a clear picture of the eating habits of the Maltese islanders. However, indirect insights are inferred from sporadic references to the economic activities of the island.

Eating & Fasting

in Medieval & Early Modern Malta

The presence of large areas of karstic table-lands suitable mainly for rough grazing provides evidence that animal husbandry was an important activity. The tenth-century Arab chronicler Ibn Hauqal devoted a few lines to Malta which, he wrote, was inhabited only by savage donkeys, numerous sheep, and bees. Visitors, presumably from Sicily, did come, bringing their own provisions, to collect honey and hunt the sheep, as well as the donkeys. The former were scarcely marketable, but it seems that the donkeys were exported and sold.

It might follow that Malta was largely, or even wholly, depopulated after the upheavals of 871. Later, in the eleventh century, it could have been resettled with Arab-speaking Muslims, slaves and Christian captives (Luttrell, 1987: 158).

Al Idrisi, the Arab geographer of the Norman King Roger II, gives some reliable facts about the economy of Malta in the twelfth century. Admittedly, the conditions relate to Norman times but are still certainly relevant for the proper Islamic

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period of Maltese history (Wettinger, 1986: 97). Al Idrisi explains: "Away from the island of Pantelleria at a distance of one hundred miles towards the east one finds the island of Gozzo with a secure port. From Gozzo one goes to a small isle named Kamuna. From there going eastwards one finds the island of Malta. It is large and has a sheltered port on the east side. Malta has a town and abounds in pasture, sheep, fruit and honey" (Wettinger, 1986: 97).

It would therefore seem that animal husbandry was supplemented mainly by horticulture and bee-keeping. The Arabs appear to have introduced the growth of cotton to Sicily and from there eventually to Malta, together with new types of fruit like oranges. And it seems likely that by this period the growing of olives and the production of oil from the local olive crop - apparently one of the mainstays of Maltese agriculture in classical times - had almost come to a complete end (Wettinger, 1981: 1-48).

The most important account is contained in the letter sent by the Emperor Frederick II in reply to Gilbertus Abate, his agent in Malta, around 1241 (Winkelmann, I, 1880: 713-715; Peri, 1978:154-155; Luttrell, 1975: 36-40; Dessoulavy, 1937: 537-544). Gilbertus points out that there were two castles in Malta - Mdina and the castrum maris - and the Gozo Citadel. The garrison numbered some 220 (twenty-five of whom were sailors) besides seventy wives. The report indicated an economy based on the royal estates, cereal-producing latifundia worked by villani (serf/labourers). Each of these received a ration of around two-and-a-half tumoli of wheat, besides cheese, meat, butter and other foodstuffs. Furthermore, there were eighty-four servi from Djerba working in the massarie; sixty servi and ancille (male and female slaves) in the service of the curia (local government); fifty-five cowherds; ten shepherds; and others who consumed barley bread. These were listed along with a number of beasts of burden (Bresc, 1975: 131).

It is evident that special importance was attached to the consumption of grain. There was a lack of local wine and potable water so that the locals drank large quantities of wine, even the Muslim inhabitants. One may presume that wine was imported from Sicily (Winkelmann, 1880: 713-715; Peri, 1978: 222-224; Luttrell, 1975: 37). There are indications that cheese and honey were produced in relatively large quantities and presumably consumed locally. Thus we are told that bread was often accompanied by cheese (Peri, 1978: 224).

By 1394 a visitor to Malta commented about the prosperous state of the island; he mentioned the production of cotton, cumin, wine and meat (Le Grand, 1895:578-579).

Descriptions of Malta dating from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, starting with the Knights' Commissions' Report of 1524, tend to concur that Malta, was a 'land of hunger', sterile, tree-less and dependent on Sicily for its food supply¹ (Bosio, 1602: 30; Quintin d'Autun, 1536: 35; Falcone, 1933: 28-29; Anonymous, 1915: 49; Semprini, 1933, 106). The sterility of the land was a hazard which worried all Grand Masters right up to the end of the Order's rule in 1798. It is elicited in the official correspondence to other Heads, to Secretaries of State and ambassadors all over Europe.

These usually referred to Malta as a sterilissima isola (most sterile island) owing to the shortage of grain and foodstuff requirements. On one occasion Grand Master Perellos (1697-1720) even refused permission to the Carmelite friars to re-establish a friary in Vittoriosa, on the pretext, that the island could not sustain any extra mouths to feed (AOM, 1466: 10 June, 1705).

Travellers' Reports

Travellers' reports from the 1530s onwards refer to bread as Malta's staple diet. In such circumstances, J. Quintin d'Autun asserts:

"[T]he island is not very productive of corn. Malta is very fortunate for this one reason namely, that Sicily, very fertile in all kinds of grain, lies nearby and is for the inhabitants as good as a granary where otherwise they would die of hunger. And the people... conscious of their country's sterility, live a very frugal life" (Quintin d'Autun, 1536: 35).

Yet Quintin d'Autun does refer to the "plantations of orchards" with olives, vines and fig trees, "besides every other kind of fruit". He also mentions the 'excellent' honey "because the bees produce it from thyme, violets and other flowers" (Quintin d'Autun, 1536: 31, 33). Malta also produces cumin which is "spread over the bread's crust, giving it a very delicious taste" (Quintin d'Autun, 1536: 37).

Quintin d'Autun even refers to the use of herbs and the method used for cooking their food.

"[T]he inhabitants make use of certain kinds of thistles instead of wood, which together with dried cows' dung, is used for the baker's oven... The people also feed on other thistles; not those which we, along with the Italians, now eat with much relish... these are much more sour... Drinking water comes from rain (when there is any) which is preserved in cisterns and more frequently in ditches... there is plenty of pasture for sheep" (Quintin d'Autun, 1536: 39).

The secretary of the Papal envoy, Mgr Visconti, writing in 1582 reports that, "the greater part of the people eat pane misturato [or maslin i.e. bread made of a mixture of barley and wheat] vegetables, and latticini [cheeses]" (Vianello, 1936: 290). During the latter part of the eighteenth century, Malta was still importing the greater part of its food supplies from Sicily (Testa, 1989: 283).

During the 1590s the Università had a difficult time trying to keep grain prices stable (Cassar, 1994(b): 63-93). Efforts to keep constant the price of other essential commodities, like wine, oil and cheese, seems to have been a much easier task. They were important food items but, not vital ones like daily bread² (Aymard & Bresc, 1975: 597; AIM 40A: fol.160). On the other hand, the price of

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meat [mutton and pork seem to have been the most popular red meats then consumed and were relatively expensive commodities] maintained a stable level compared to the prices of basic essentials (Cassar, 1994(b): 63-93).

The Role of Bread

The notion that bread is "that stuff of life which is the symbol of survival" (Porter, 1989:10) is evinced in a number of Maltese idioms which refer to bread as a basic commodity without which it is believed that no one survives. Thus a well-off person is *ħobzu maħbuż* [lit. his bread is baked]; one who lost his job has *tilef ħobzu* [lit. he lost his bread]; when inquiring about someone's character the Maltese often ask, *x'ħobż jiekol dan?* [lit. what type of bread does he consume?]; and when badly in need of something they say, *jeħtieġu bħall-ħobż li jiekol* [lit. he needs it like his daily bread]; a profit-making job is referred to as *ħaġa li fiha biċċa ħobż ġmielha* [lit. something which provides a loadsome of bread], while a profitless task is often *ma fihix ħobż* [lit. it procures no bread] (Fenech, 1970: 39-40; Cassar, 1994(a): 3-5). Here the term *ħobż* [bread] is to be interpreted as much in the symbolic sense as in factual sense. It depicts an inward-looking system, strictly indicating that in Malta bread was a common denominator, consumed daily and well-liked at all social levels.

Bread was graded and its quality sanctioned social distinctions. It represented a status symbol that defined human condition and class according to its particular colour. In short, bread represented a socio-economic condition (Camporesi, 1989: 120). At a time when harvest failure meant famine and death, the poor were above all concerned with a cheap price for bread. Indeed the regulation of prices was one of the most

difficult jobs of any late medieval and early modern government (Thompson, 1971: 76-136; Vassallo, 1975: 71-72.).

Henri Bresc points out that in the early 1400s regular and massive imports of grain were necessary for the island's survival (Bresc, 1975: 132). By 1530 the local yields were so low that Malta imported some 9,000 salme of grain per year from Sicily (Wettinger, 1981:14). Yet, following the advent of the Order of St John, Malta needed between 14,000 to 28,000 salme of grain yearly, or their equivalent in barley or maslin for its own provision (Wettinger, 1969: 83).

In reality, Malta never really managed to produce enough grain to feed its own inhabitants. By 1590, grain production reached a total of a mere 3,879 salme and nine tumoli. Nearly fifty per cent - 1,975 salme and 10 tumoli - largely consisted of barley, which was derived from the countryside, around the villages of Birkirkara, Naxxar, Siggiewi and Żebbuġ (Trasselli, 1966:479).

The situation did not improve much in the seventeenth century, despite serious attempts to put more land under cultivation. The total yearly expenditure on grain during the rule of Grand Master De Paule (1623-1636) is reported to have reached 32,000 scudi per year, second only to the expensive galley squadron (Schermerhorn, 1929: 52).

With great difficulties, the importation of duty-free grain to the Maltese islands continued throughout the rule of the Order of St. John, with the exception of the early 1590s and early 1600s, when bad harvests, famine and plague in Sicily made such exportation impossible. This rule was sustained even in the years of meagre harvests. Thus, although no grain was exported from Sicily after the harvest failures of 1606, 1607 and 1608, an exception for duty-free quotas was made in the case of Malta (Davies, 1985: 200). It seems that this

consistent provisioning was instigated by concern over the problem of food shortages on the island. A further increase in duty-free quotas, in 1622 and 1632, helped to alleviate further the food shortage (NLM Libr.1220:6; NLM AOM 6421: fols.89-91). Meanwhile the Maltese had devised other means of procuring grain to feed themselves.

In 1654, the Inquisitor Borromeo informed the Holy See that Malta had produced enough grain to last for six months of the year, while the rest had been bought duty-free from Sicily. He adds however, that, in case of food shortages, it was customary for the Maltese galley squadron to raid North African vessels, and sometimes even Christian ones, laden with grain. The officers-in-charge were then forced to sell their merchandise to the Maltese authorities (Anon., 1915:49). This is why, he explains, that in the case of extreme food shortages the Maltese had to resort to raiding vessels plying the Maltese waters.

It has been pointed out that toll exemptions were granted in Sicily only to towns belonging to the *regio demanio* (royal demesne), often in return for political support or loyalty. Since such allowances involved some loss of income for the crown, requests for exemptions were sometimes refused. Thus when Malta was still directly under royal control, the Università received its required supplies of grain freely (NLM Libr. 1220: 191-193). The situation changed with the arrival of the Order of St. John, since the crown often found difficulties in maintaining its earlier promises, particularly as the Order continued to strengthen its position on the island.

Early modern Malta depended on agricultural production above all else. It was a society where food, and especially bread, dominated both private and public, official and unofficial cultures all over Europe and the Mediterranean in general (Porter, 1989: 20). An annual estimate of revenue and expenditure for the year 1587 helps us appreciate the value of these new grain concessions. The cost incurred for grain amounted to 10.23 per cent of the total, reaching the sum of 20,500 scudi. The rest was spent on meat, oil, other foodstuffs and clothing (Donna D'Oldenico, 1964:20). Three years later, a *relazione* {account} by Count d'Alva, Viceroy of Sicily to Philip II of Spain, reported that the population, which had by then reached 32,000 inhabitants, was not sufficiently provided for with grain supplies. The Viceroy reminded Philip II of the bad harvests of the preceding years, as well as the incessant entry of many foreign vessels in the Malta harbour, which included galleys of the Imperial fleet, whose number fluctuated from 20 to 25 per year (Donna D'Oldenico, 1964: 20).

The above data provides hard evidence as to the reason why the Maltese government was so often preoccupied with provisioning problems. It was a time when cereals were at



a premium on the international market. Prices fluctuated, but often rose to such high levels that the mass of the population in Malta was left with little money to buy other commodities. Wine, cheese and oil took up most of what was left (Aymard & Bresc, 1975: 597-598), while meat consumption was pegged at a lower level and was only to rise after the First World War. Visitors to Malta from the 1830s onwards agree that both breakfast and dinner were of the most frugal type. Both continued to consist mainly of barley bread, cheese, olives, onions, garlic, dried fruit, salt-fish, oil and similar foods. They also drank a moderate amount of wine and enjoyed cooked vegetables or *minestra*, after a day's work. Until the early part of the twentieth century therefore, bread remained the staple food of the mass of the population (Cassar, 1988:100-101).

Meat Consumption and its Prohibitions

A dramatic drop in the purchasing power of wages helped to lower the standard of living, particularly by the mid-sixteenth century. But movements in prices do not tell us much about changes in the availability of food over the long run. One must therefore take into account changes in wages, which helped to influence households' spending power in relation to the prices charged in the market. Harvest failure and soaring food prices were clearly a prime factor for the serious deterioration of the purchasing power of wages.

The effects of changes in both wages and prices should ideally be combined by calculating a "real wage index", which may represent the amount of food that can be purchased with the current level of wages. The most widely used "real wage index" is the one constructed by E.H. Phelps Brown and S.V. Hopkins which is based on wages of building craftsmen and labourers in the south of England (Phelps Brown & Hopkins, 1962(a): 168-178; Phelps Brown & Hopkins, 1962(b):179-196). In Malta price fluctuations can be observed from the mid-fifteenth century onwards (Fiorini, 1993: 164-170), but



only scanty references are available on wages-rates until the mid-seventeenth century³ (Grima, 1979: 53). Henry Kamen opines that in a less flexible economy, people of all classes subsisted on traditionally fixed incomes, an argument that can safely be applied to Malta (Kamen, 1985:58). Thus we learn that boatswains and shipmates of the Order's galley-squadron were paid 3 scudi a month in 1616, and that wages were only raised to 5 scudi a month by 1650. (Cutajar & Cassar, 1985:133; NLM AOM 663, fol.280v). Similarly, the *buonavoglie* (voluntary galley-rowers), who were paid 22 tari per month in 1614, had a wage increase of 6 tari in 1669 (Cutajar & Cassar, 1985: 133; NLM AOM 261, fol.116). Even builders' wages seem to have remained fairly stable between 1580 and 1630. In 1578 Paolo Ciantar, a building labourer of Luqa, declared that he received 2 tari per day. (Micallef, 1975:42) M. Fsadni points out that in 1592, building craftsmen were paid in the region of 4 tari per day for the construction of the Porto Salvo parish church in Valletta. He calculates labourers' wage-rates at 1.5 to 2 tari daily (Fsadni, 1971: 25). Between 1627-1630, building craftsmen continued to receive a remuneration of 4 tari per day (Fsadni, 1974: 38). Presumably labourers' wage-rates remained stable at 2 tari per day. If this were the case it can be assumed that with 2 tari as a day's wages a building labourer could buy over 5.5 kilos of bread per day in 1578 but only 4 kilos in 1592. The purchasing power of wages only climbs to 5 kilos of bread in 1630.

Food and the urgent need to relieve hunger moved the population of pre-industrial society, including Malta, even more than politics, religion, or sexual urges (Camporesi, 1989). Eating dominated both private and public life, since having enough to eat had an enormous significance. Early modern society was marked by a culture in which all dreamt of eating meat, essentially because diet primarily consisted

of vegetable foods (Braudel, 1981: 104). Meat meant nourishment, taste and status.

The scanty evidence available for the fifteenth century substantiates this point. The accounts books of Santo Spirito Hospital in Rabat states that there were five special feasts which were solemnly celebrated. These included Christmas, Carnival, Easter, Pentecost and the titular feast of the hospital. On these occasions the inmates were given a special meal including meat and wine which was "a welcome interruption from the drab daily fare of bread, oil or suet, and beans" (Fiorini, 1987: 311, cf. ACM 438 No.1). Evidence from the records of the same institution for 1519 provides further details on the food consumed by the inmates of Santo Spirito during carnival time. They had lasagne, pieces of cheese, veal, and wine (Fiorini, 1987: 311 cf. ACM No.2: fol.6v). With the advent of the Order of St John in 1530 the situation changed little at Santo Spirito so that the inmates continued to consume similar foods during carnival time. Fiorini asserts that between 1540-1562, the food differed very slightly from year to year so that the menu always included some form of meat although by 1562 wheat *micaruni* {macaroni} made their appearance (Fiorini, 1987: 311 cf. ACM 438 No.4, fol. 12; ACM 440 fols.11v, 14,17,33 v,48,91,106,135). But meat was especially consumed during carnival time by all sectors of society⁴ (Fiorini, 1987:313, cf. Univ. 13, fol.12v).

Fasting and feasting are part of the same cycle, involving the deferral consumption and then the reaffirmation of human sociability through the sharing of food (Caplan, 1994). Yet in post-Tridentine Malta those who could afford it must have been jealously spied upon by their neighbours, who were only too happy to report them to the Inquisition Tribunal for the least transgression. From a window overlooking his courtyard,



Imperia Tonne of Mqabba spied upon Don Mariano Briffa eating meat on Fridays and Saturdays on several occasions in 1599. Thanks to Imperia, we gain a clear picture of how meat was prepared and consumed, as well as, which kind of meat was normally preferred by the people. On all occasions, Don Mariano was reported to have eaten pork. Once, she said, she saw him eating many mouthfuls of crude meat while it was being cooked, presumably grilled, and drinking wine over it. On another occasion, he ate sausages and salamis prepared in Malta. On a couple of other occasions he had even asked Imperia, his neighbour to cook meat for him. Once, this consisted of pork sausages; and on another occasion, it was a piece of pork known as *di lunga* (AIM 147B, case 10, fol.197v: 7 May, 1599).

The consumption of meat was so highly valued that in March 1637 four men were accused of having stolen a number of goods after having smashed the door of a room belonging to Francesco Gauci, a familiar personage and participator in the Inquisition. In the list of stolen items prominence is given to *mezzo perzuto et alcuni supressati un puoco di cascio cosi di Sicilia come di Malta, un cascavallo* [half a leg of ham and some salami, a little cheese both of the Sicilian and Maltese types, and a hard Sicilian cheese] (AIM 52A, case 179, fol.351: 7 March, 1637).

Religion surrounded food with rules, rituals, and prohibitions. Food itself was eaten partly on the Church's orders. People ate fat or lean according to the dictates of the Catholic Church. In 1582 Inquisitor Federico Cefalotto defined what the Church meant by fasting. "It is illicit to eat prohibited foods, that is meat and dairy products in Lent, the quatuor temporum vigiliis, and other days on which the Holy Church prohibits us" (AIM 6C, case 84, fol.1266). Inquisitor Fabio Chigi (1634-1639) - who was later elected

Pope Alexander VII - described his Lenten meals to a close relative. He declares that he avoided salted meats. His meals consisted mainly of vegetable soups, a little fish, dates, dried figs, olives and other small food items, besides of course his usual sweet orange drink and wine⁵ (BAV, Chigi, A.I.32: 19 March, 1637).

Fasting usually meant a proscription against meat. Eating meat on prohibited days was thus a serious offence, particularly at a time when the Roman Inquisition Tribunal started to implement the more rigorous post-Tridentine principles. Anyone who transgressed was immediately reported to the Holy office. The selling of meat on a Friday was also considered a serious offence. In fact, the French merchant Giuseppe Gaveau was accused of having sold meat and chickens on a Friday (AIM 3A, case 13, fols.261-316: August 1576). The Inquisition kept very strict rules over this issue so that meat, eggs, and poultry could not be sold during the forty days of Lent, Fridays, and other prohibited days. Invalids had to produce two certificates, one from their doctor and one from a priest, in order to be exempted. When anyone pretended a feigned sickness, he or she risked getting into trouble and being reported to the Inquisition.

The Apulian painter Gio Mattheo Stagno, depicted as an exceptionally greedy individual who was *grasso* [fat] and consumed all sorts of food had a particular craving for meat which he ate even during Lent time. On one occasion he scandalised his companions, amongst whom the Florentine painter Filippo Paladini, Mastro Vincentio Azzupard, and the Greek Papas Janni, since he consumed *pezzi di coniglio e pasticci di carne* [pieces of rabbit and meat pastries] (AIM 14A, case 2, fol.24: 28 August, 1595). Stagno explained to the Inquisitor that he ate meat since it was prescribed by his physician as a result of a feigned sickness (AIM 14A case 2,

fol.24; Cassar, 1994 (a): 19). On another occasion Claretta Sguero, together with a group of friends, was accused of having had a meal consisting of meat, ricotta [cheese], and eggs on lean days. Sguero said in her evidence that she was the only one who had had such a meal, and insisted that she ate meat out of necessity, since it was prescribed by the doctor and approved by the Vicar General of the diocese (Cassar, 1994 (a): 19).

The number of days on which meat and dairy products were prohibited led to a large demand for fish, salted or smoked. However, fish in Malta was not always plentiful. Fishermen were few, although they were scattered all over the island (Blouet, 1972: 134). Moreover, the scope of fishing was restricted during the winter, due to weather conditions and rough seas. For these reasons it was common to import fish from abroad, at times even from the North Sea. Arnaldo Bastiano, a sailor from Hamburg, declared that he had come "to Malta aboard a bertone (galleon) laden with a cargo of salted fish" (AIM 17, case 93, fols.95-104: 9 March, 1600).

The Standard Diet

Diet remained pretty much the same over the centuries, particularly for the lower classes. The Maltese ate little meat, cheap fish, and poor-quality cheese. Bread was the staple commodity and remained so at least until the early 20th century (Cassar, 1988: 101).

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The evidence put forward by a notorious witch, Betta Caloiro, is at this point worth mentioning. Betta recalled how previous to the Turkish siege of Malta of 1565, she had made the acquaintance of a woman from the village of Zebbug, called Ginaina, who had become rich since a group of *fati* [fairies] helped her produce large amounts of linen. Indeed Ginaina became so rich that she did not have enough space to keep the money. One morning Betta went to ask her for fire and noticed that Ginaina had already prepared the table. The table was covered with a clean white table-cloth, with bread, salt, honey and a knife. Betta wondered why Ginaina had prepared her lunch so early. On asking her next door neighbour, a woman called Xellusa, Betta was told that Ginaina prepared a meal for the *fati* who helped her produce so much linen⁶ (Cassar, 1996: 21; cf. AIM 19B, case 46, fols.490-491: 15 October, 1600).

On 25 June, 1601, in the course of her second interrogation, Betta Caloiro recalled how she had had an intimate relationship with the devil *farfarello* since the age of twelve. One would notice that Betta changed some details from the deposition of 22 August 1600, regarding the first encounter with *farfarello*:

*"When I was a twelve-year old girl, I was living at Burmola [later renamed Cospicua] near the garden of St Helen. One day I was cooking a cabbage soup and I was hit by a strong wind in my neck... - from which it took me around four months to recover - and I immediately saw six young boys who had frilled clothes of different colours and that evening I prepared bread and left it in a wooden box which I kept at home. At night, while I was sleeping, I heard intense noises coming from the house [kitchen?] and having woken up, I heard the munching of eating in such a way that it seemed as if a large number of people were eating. When I went to check in the morning I found no bread left in the house... When I spoke to my neighbour about the matter, she told me that they were *fati* and suggested that I should prepare the table for them with*

a plate of white honey, salt, knife, bread, wine and water. The following morning I found all the bread they had taken away from me the previous night..." (AIM 19B, case 46, fols. 494v-495)

Society was heavily dependent on agricultural produce. Yet it was rare for a harvest to escape in turn all the dangers that threatened it. Fields were relatively small and there was always the fear of famine. A few changes in temperature and a shortage of rainfall were enough to endanger human existence. Indeed, no major wars were fought during harvest time, while the only detail of everyday life that regularly found its way into

diplomatic correspondence concerned harvest throughout the Mediterranean (Braudel, 1972, I: 244). Malta was no exception to the rule, and the continuous droughts made it "a land of hunger". The island depended so heavily on the importation of grain from Sicily that this business activity provided a strong initiative to entrepreneurs and became the *raison d'être* of the Università di Malta and Gozo (Vassallo, 1975: 56). This in part explains why land continued to be the most coveted of possessions. It was the safest capital, and agriculture the greatest source of revenue (Braudel, 1972, I: 42). W

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fol./s. - folios

v. - verso

salma - measurement of capacity for grain

scudi - early modern currency

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End Notes

1 Malta was so much deprived of vegetation that sailors nicknamed it *l'isola bianca* [white island] since it looked barren from afar.

2 Yet bread with cheese seems to have been the most popular meal in the early seventeenth century. Among the spells Margarita Bertone taught to Maria Gagliarda in 1617, was to throw three pieces of bread and cheese out of the window and say: *Così come la gente non possono stare senza mangiare pane et frumaggio così l'amico non possa stare senza venire dalla tale che l'ama*. [As people cannot live without eating bread and cheese, likewise the loved one cannot live without returning to his beloved].

3 Grima refers to the lack of records of individual wages for the Order's galley employees. These do not seem to be available before circa 1650.

4 There was an increased demand for meat during Carnival time. In 1468 a decree issued by the Mdina Town Council warned that in Carnival time meat prices were to remain under control.

5 *Io per Dio gratia fo la Quaresima con buona salute, magno sempre all'entrare a pranzo un arancio di mezzo sapore con zucchero e bevo le mie solite tre volte vino con ove e stata la pimpiella per sei hore avanti, fuggo ogni salume e la passo con minestre bianche e verdi, poco pesce, dattili, fichi secchi, olive e altre minucie.*

6 According to Betta, Guinaina became so attached to her wealth that during the Turkish siege of 1565 she left beleaguered Birgu (later renamed Vittoriosa) to recover her goods at the village of Zebbug; she was caught by the Turks, and no one heard about her whereabouts since.