

JOSEPH CASSAR PULLICINO

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(PAPER READ AT A MEETING OF THE "MALTA ARCHAEOLOGICAL CIRCLE"
HELD AT THE BRITISH INSTITUTE, VALETTA, ON THE
27th. FEBRUARY, 1956).

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by J. CASSAR PULLICINO

The subject of my lecture this evening is Maltese nicknames — a subject which covers a very wide field of which we can only give a broad outline in the time at our disposal. It is a subject which, taken seriously, leads to interesting results and conclusions that make it all the more fascinating. It is a pity that the evidence of these living documents — for such are nicknames in reality — has not been studied as it has been in other countries by our historians, our lexicographers and our social workers. In the form in which they have come down to us, Maltese nicknames reveal the many responses of the popular mind and bring back to life the world in which our forefathers moved and lived. They become instinct with meaning and charged with social significance once we understand their language and read in them the people's reactions to travel, to population movements, to national events and vicissitudes. For these nicknames may be related to past events and explained in terms of human qualities, defects or frailties — a labour of love digging up, as it were, the psychological archaeology of the people of Malta.

One often hears that in the villages of Malta and Gozo people are much better known by their nicknames than by their Christian names or surnames, which are only used for registration purposes. This at once leads us to consider the motives behind these nicknames. The Christian name originally given to a person is frequently augmented by an epithet derived from some good or bad quality, personal

peculiarity, some deed, or a favourite expression of the person on whom it is bestowed. The employment of the *laqam*, which is the Maltese word for nickname, is in part due to the popularity and frequency of certain Christian names which render the name insufficiently distinctive. Besides, it seems to be a primitive human instinct that *nomina sunt omina* (names are omens) — hence the accepted principle of the significance of names prevailing among Semitic peoples and, to some extent, among all people. A Maltese proverb says *Skond għamlek laqmek*, i.e. “according to your nature your nickname”. So intimate becomes the relation conceived between the individual and his nickname that the latter comes frequently to be used as an equivalent of the former: “to be called” means “to be”, the name being equated with the object, or even identical with it. The fact that some names take the status of surnames does not alter the truth of this principle, as the underlying idea is the same. Thus the Hebrew name *Edòm*, meaning red, the Maltese *l-Aħmar*, still current as a nickname, English surname *Redman*, Latin *Rufus* and Italian *Rossi* are all variations of the same epithet expressing the same characteristic.

To us in the 20th century it seems hard to believe that there ever was a time when people had no Christian names or surnames. Yet that is precisely what we find in early times. Hebrew names, for example, seem to have been suggested by particular circumstances attending the child's birth, e.g. Jacob (the supplanter), or else made up of adjectives denoting personal characteristics, e.g. Esau (Hairy), Agar (Wanderer), Baruch (Blessed), Laban (White), Noemi (Pretty), Ruth (Friend). We also read that both the Hebrews and their neighbours, the Canaanites, assumed the names of animals as proper names, e.g. Caleb (Dog), Jonas (Dove), Zeb (cf. M. Dib) meaning “Wolf”, or, less frequently, of plants, e.g. Susan (Lily). Trades and natural phenomena also gave rise to proper names, e.g. Obed (Servant), Anna (Grace), Barac (Lightning), Samson (Sun). In the first three centuries

of our era the Christians did not distinctly differ in their names from the pagans around them, any more than they did in dress or in language, and they continued to call themselves after colours, e.g. Albanus (White, with which cp. M. nickname *L-Abjad*), *Rufus* (Red — cp. M. *L-Aħmar*), or after numbers — Tertius, Septimus and so on. But by the 4th century Christians sometimes adopted the name of a saint or a spiritual hero who had helped them, and the cult of the saints developed this practice in the Middle Ages. A certain impetus to the use of Biblical names started in the 7th Century throughout the West. The use of nicknames with Christian names was prevalent in the Middle Ages until, between the 13th and 14th century, the legal acceptance of surnames finally incorporated several nicknames into the class of surnames that have survived to this day.

Against this background we can now consider the main elements which make up the nickname material of Malta and Gozo, and attempt a workable classification assessing their social content. The subject has been almost completely neglected by our scholars, for with the exception of Annibale Preca, who devotes a chapter to its study in his *Malta Cananea* (1904), the only writer who turned his attention to the subject was the Italian professor Luigi Bonelli who visited these Islands in 1895 to conduct a linguistic and folkloristic survey of the Maltese Archipelago. These writers could not treat the subject adequately for want of sufficient material, but their pioneering work deserves our gratitude.

The use of nicknames has been prevalent in Malta at all ages, and although very few records have survived prior to the 16th century, one can still trace earlier instances of popular nicknames in these Islands. We read in Abela's *Descrittione di Malta* (1647) that Donna Margherita Aragona, wife of Giacomo Pellegrino di Malta, flourished between 1370 until her death in 1418 and that her riches earned her the nickname of *The Witch* (p. 449). The mention of one Cosmo Bell'Huomo in 1528 (p. 469) is evidently a translation of *Is-*

Sbejjah, still used as a nickname. Giovanni Surdo, who was treasurer of Notabile in 1512, suggests also a translation of *It-Trux* (Deaf, Il sordo) which is a common nickname in Malta and Gozo to this day. We read also of one Matteo, known as *Mazzu*, c. 1440, from whom the Cassar family originated in Malta. Of his sons one, Bernardo, was known as *Muċċu* (p. 475) which is the Maltese baby word for "rabbit". Vincenza Nava was known as *Navuzza* about 1534, while in 1528 we come across Giovannello Vella whose son Nicolo was known as *Sandar*, a nickname inherited by his son Jacob *Nobilis Jacobus Vella dictus Sandar* (p. 541). And, of course, we all know about Mattia Preti, the Calabrian painter who was known in Malta as *Il-Kalabriż*. Also well known is the name of Ċensu Borg, nicknamed *Brared*, a pro-British Maltese patriot who first raised the British flag in Malta. But such nicknames are isolated and it is in the Electoral Registers that one must look for more details to study the whole field of Maltese nicknames. For some reason or other the 1939 List included far more nicknames than any other published before or since, and we have therefore based our survey on that list.

Maltese nicknames are formed by prefixing the definite article *l-* to a noun or an adjective, e.g. *L-Għannej* (The Singer), *Il-Ġerrej* (The Jockey), *L-Aħmar* (The Red-faced). In general it may be said that this type of nickname denotes the first person to be so called; his descendants or relatives retain the same nickname, adding the prefix *tal-* (of the), examples being *Tal-Kutu* (Of the quiet one) and *Tal-Bdot* (Of the Pilot). This form may also indicate a calling or occupation, e.g. *Tal-Ħaxix* (The Greengrocer) and *Tal-Ħut* (The Fishmonger). In some nicknames the simple particle *ta'* denotes family descendants, recalling such Biblical names as Joshua, "the son of Nun", David "the Son of Jesse" and Isaiah "The Son of Amos". To the present day in Malta people describe themselves, and are known by their comrades, by their descent, e.g. *Ganni ta' Pawlu* (John, son of Paul);

Indri ta' Ġakbu (Andrew, son of Jacob). The particle *ta'* here has the same function as the suffix *-son* in English Johnson, Thomson and Harrison, of suffix *-sen* in Scandinavian Petersen, Andersen, and the suffix *-vich* in Slavonic names Mitrovich, Milhailovich, Serafimovich. A few nicknames stand apart without any preformatives, but showing power of multiplication by means of diminutive suffixes. For example, the chauffeur of a busy medical practitioner at Tarxien was known as *Tabibu*. To this type belong also the nicknames *Jannaru* (January), *Hadidu* (Blacksmith), *Mazzitu* (Blood pudding), *Berququ* (Apricot) and *Fažolu* (French Bean).

I shall now deal with the main types of nicknames recorded in the 1939 Electoral List for Malta and Gozo, showing, whenever possible, how they indicate little-known aspects of ancient folk-life or tradition. I must warn you, however, that as there is no limit to the eccentricity of nicknames, their interpretation is often a matter of conjecture. To avoid un-English translations the *ta'* preceding nicknames is left out in the examples given.

PERSONAL NICKNAMES form the first group which we shall consider. These may be either (a) adult names preceded by *ta'* (of), as we have just said, or (b) pet-names, generally shortenings of adult names. Adult names, which are sometimes arbitrarily corrupted in the process, may be male, e.g. *Ta' Lajžar* (Rosario) at Luqa, and *Ta' Najorju* (Onofrio) at Għarb, Gozo; or female, examples being *Ta' Minka* (Dominica) at Mosta and Luqa; *Ta' Kansula* (Consolata) at Qala, Gozo. Clear examples of pet-names or diminutive forms of adult names are the following: *Ta' Slajf* (Salvatore) at Sannat, Gozo; *ta' Ġmajru* (John Mary) at Marsa; *Tal-Wanni* (short for *Ġwanni*, John) at Mosta. A few of these are taken from baby-language, examples being *Tal-Vavu* (Baby) at Attard; *tax-Xejku* (Sic. *sciccu*, donkey) at Mosta and *Tal-Bambu* (Shoes) at Lija.

Metronymics, in which the name of the mother appears

instead of the father's, are more common in Gozo than in Malta. The presence of these metronymics may be due to several factors. They may either indicate survivals from a matriarchal form of society in which the female was considered more important than the male, or they may indicate that the offspring was not legitimate. But although this may be true in some cases, yet it is not invariably so. The mother may have been a widow, and the son born after the father's death; the father may have migrated, or led a seafaring life. A more plausible explanation is that in marriages outside one's native village, the local social group continues to refer to the offspring as belonging to the wife in the case of the female, and vice-versa in the case of the father. I know quite a few cases where the same person is known, for example, as *Ta' Ružanna* in the mother's village and as *Ta' Ġanni* in the father's birthplace.

Professor Weekley says that "every family name is etymologically a nickname" and almost immediately he adds a warning that it is a mistake to account for obvious nicknames as popular perversions of surnames. In Malta there is evidence that quite a number of surnames originated as nicknames. Their permanent adoption as surnames took place either as a result of their inclusion by notaries in legal documents or, following Mgr. Duzina's visit in 1575, because all births, marriages and deaths had to be properly registered in the parishes. The following are examples of surnames which obviously started as nicknames: *Ebejjer* (pl. of *ghabura*, a year-old ram), *Fenech* (rabbit), *Mifsud* (wicked, stale), *Grixti* (timid, reserved), *Psaila* (dim. of *basla*, onion), *Sultana* (queen), *Teuma* (garlick), *Zahra*, (orange blossom). On the other hand some apparent nicknames are but popular perversions of surnames. Such are *Ta' Pajpara* (Barbara) at Tarxien, *Taz-Zuppard*, at Siggiewi, obviously a corruption of Azzopardi, a surname of Jewish origin denoting a Sephardi Jew. To this category belong also others derived from little known or uncommon surnames which stir the people's

imagination, examples being *Kalabardi*, at Rabat, after Garibaldi, the great Italian patriot who spent a few days in Malta in March, 1864 and who was heartily detested by the peasantry for his anti-clericalism; *Il-Makaj*, at Valletta, obviously a perversion of Eng. MacKay, and *Tal-Vandomu*, at B'Kara, which recalls the Grand Prior of France, Vendôme, who in 1716 constructed batteries and other fortifications at M'Xlokk and at St. Paul's Bay.

An interesting group of nicknames is of GEOGRAPHICAL origin. These nicknames may be either Maltese place-names or names of foreign localities, examples being *Tal-Pwales*, at St. Paul's Bay; *ta' Barbarija* (Barbary States) at Siggiewi; *Tal-Marokk* (Morocco) at Zejtun; *Ta' Malvi* (Amalfi), at Qala, Gozo; and *ta' Hortona* (Cortona) at Nadur, Gozo. A subdivision of this group is made up of nicknames referring to the inhabitants rather than to the localities, e.g. *Tal-Koppija* (woman from Kirkop) at Lija; *Tal-Gudjett* (man from Gudja) at St. Julian's; *tal-Ghawdx*i (The Gozitan) at Mellieha; *tal-Malti* (The Maltese) at Munxar, Gozo; *Il-Germaniż* (The German) at Munxar, Gozo; *Tal-Ingliża* (English woman) at Victoria, Gozo; *Tal-Isqalli* (The Sicilian) at Attard; *Tal-Masri* (The Egyptian) at Sannat, Gozo; *Tal-Milikan* (The American) at Gharghur; *Tal-Gurflott* (The Man from Corfu), at Valletta; *Ta' Brejku* (from *ebrajku*, Jew) and *Ta' Dobra*, given by Stumme as referring to the Russians, at Siggiewi, and many others.

These nicknames originated as a result of population movements in search of work outside the village, or following marriage or migration. It is easy to image how the fact of one's being a native of Gozo becomes significant only when one settles in Malta, and vice-versa. Hence we find that such nicknames appear in villages other than the birthplace of the persons bearing a particular local nickname. Foreign place-names in this group reflect the various contacts which people of the lower classes establish with foreigners, as well as the early migrations of the Maltese to the North African

Coast and other Mediterranean lands during the 19th century.

PHYSICAL NICKNAMES are by far the most expressive, at times exceedingly crude and offensive. They are taken from some aspect of the personality, whether physical or external. They indicate something conspicuous or abnormal in the feature singled out for attention, revealing the habits of observation and the gift for describing conspicuous features which are to be noticed in the rustic and lower classes of all nations. History books teem with examples of such nicknames, that were common among kings and noblemen. We all remember Ethelred "The Unready", Edmund "Ironside", Harold "Harefoot", Henry "Beauclerk", Richard "the Lion-Heart", John "Lackland", Edward "Longshanks", Richard "Crookback", William "the Conqueror" and William "the Sailor". From Roman History we learn that Caius Caesar was known to his dying day as *Caligula* (little boots), the name given to him by his soldiers at Cologne; other Latin examples being *Caracalla* (Gallic Cloak), *Scipio* (Staff), *Scapula* (Shoulder-blade), *Agricola* (Husbandman), *Fabius* (Bean), *Lentulus* (The Slow), *Cicero* (A Vetch), *Plautus* (The Flat-footed) and Ovidius *Naso* (The Long-nosed). Small wonder, therefore, that we find a wide range of this type of nickname in these islands, referring sometimes to parts of the human body, such as *Ta' Gedduma* (The long-chinned) at Birżebbuġa, *Tax-Xuxi* (The bareheaded) at Marsa and at Victoria, Gozo; *Tax-Xoffa* (The heavy lipped) at Żebbuġ and Ghasri, in Gozo. Subdivisions of this category of nicknames denote:

(a) beauty and loveliness, e.g. *Tal-Ħelwa* (The Lovely) at Qala; *Ta' Bedda* (The Beautiful) at Sannat, Gozo, *bedda* being Sic. for It. *bella*; and *Tal-Pupa* (The Doll) at Luqa;

(b) complexion, including colour-names, e.g. *Il-Ġinger* (red-haired); *Tas-Sewda*, at Xagħra, Gozo, with its Romance equivalent *Tan-Nigra* at Rabat, meaning "black, dark"; *Tal-Aħmar* (The Red-faced) in various localities;

(c) height and stature, e.g. *Butwila* (The Tall); *Il-Gerbubi* (round and plump) at B'Kara; *tal-Pikkolin* (The Tiny) from It. *piccolino* at B'Kara;

(d) corpulence and obesity, e.g. *Tal-Hoxnija* (The Fat), at Mosta; *Tal-Prim* (The Well-Built) at Rabat, and *Tan-Niexef* (The Lean) at St. Paul's Bay;

(e) health, strength and disease, e.g. *Ta' Sansun* (Samson) at Gudja and Imqabba; *Tal-Ġgant* (The Giant) at Għarb, Żejtun and other localities; *Tal-Pesta* (The Plague-stricken) at Rabat; *Tal-Bullar* (Leprosy) at B'Kara, and *Tat-Tondu* (The feeble-minded) at Lija and St. Julian's, from Sp. *tonto* or Sic. *tontu*;

(f) physical and other defects, e.g. *Tan-Nan*, (The Dwarf) at Kirkop and Siggiewi; *Tal-Fartàs* (The Bald) at Lija; *Tal-Iskwinter* (Squint-eyed) at Marsa; *In-Nemxi* (The Freckled) at Mellieħa; *Tat-Trux* (The Deaf) at Mellieħa; *Taz-Zopp* (The Lame) at Victoria, Gozo and *L-Aghwar* (The Squint-eyed) at Victoria, Gozo.

An important group of nicknames deals with MORAL qualities, with virtues and defects. The material falling under this heading is so vast that the best way to bring out its salient points is to classify it under various headings. The main subdivisions are:

(a) holiness, religion etc., e.g. *L-Appostlu* (The Apostle) at Cospicua; *Ta' Qdejdes* (Little Saint) at Siggiewi; *Ix-Xellugi* (Leftist, anti-clerical) at Xewkija, Gozo; *Tas-Settier* (Member of the Sect, Freemason) at Għajnsielem, and *Tar-Rumi* (The Christian) at Luqa, with which cp. M. placename *Wied ir-Rum* (Valley of the Christians).

(b) moral behaviour, evil deeds, etc., e.g. *Tal-Kapriċċ* (The Capricious) at Xaghra, Gozo; *Tal-Ingann* (Deceitful) at B'Kara; *Ta' Vergonja* (Disgraced) at Żebbuġ;

(c) Cruelty, quarrelsome disposition, e.g. *Tal-Ħarxa* (The Fierce) at Żejtun; *Ta' Katletti* at Żebbuġ and *Tal-Ġelliedi*, at Naxxar, meaning "quarrelsome"; *Ta' Xewwex* (Troublemaker, subversive) at St. Paul's Bay;

(d) timidity, quiet disposition, e.g. *Tal-Bajju* (The Fool) at Rabat; *Tal-Grixti* (The Timid) at Gharghur; *Tat-Twajjeb* (The Good-natured);

(e) pride, garrulity, e.g. *Il-Minjuha* (The Proud) at Żebbuġ; *Ta' Paċpaċ* (The Talkative) at Siggiewi;

(f) negligence, rashness and foolishness, e.g. *Karnivala* (Foolish), *Tal-Ħafifu* (Feeble minded) at Żabbar; *Tal-lédingat* (The Negligent) at Xewkija, in Gozo.

(g) verbal and other idiosyncracies, e.g. *Tal-Verigott* (from Eng. "very good") at Sannat, Gozo; and *Ta' Porkosu* (from the word *perkasu*, for example) at Nadur, Gozo.

Another class of nicknames derives from PLANTS AND TREES, including bulbs, roots, fruits and seeds. One notices here that nearly all the trees and fruits mentioned are found in these islands. The main subdivisions of this class are:—

(a) trees and plants, examples being *Ta' Harruba* (Carob Tree) at Ghaxaq; *Tas-Simara* (Common Rush) used for a profitable trade in brooms in the past, at Ghajnsielem and Siggiewi;

(b) fruit and vegetables, such as *Tal-Bajtar* (Prickly Pears) at Mellieħa; *Ta' Frawla* (Strawberry) at Mellieħa; *Karfusu* (Celery) at Rabat, and *Tal-Parsott* (a kind of fig popularly derived from Jean Parisot de la Valette) at Sannat and Nadur in Gozo, and at Rabat in Malta;

(c) seeds and crops, for example *Il-Qanbu* (Hemp) at Żebbuġ, Gozo; *Ta' Kemmun* (Cumin) at Xaghra, Gozo; and *Tajjara* (Cotton Wool) at Cospicua — all three associated with ancient Maltese crafts and industries;

(d) flowers, such as *Tal-Bukkett* (Bouquet) at Ghaxaq, and at Munxar, Gozo.

FISH-NAMES form another important group of nicknames. They include the fish most commonly caught in Maltese waters, ranging from *tal-Makku*, which is the name given to sardines, red mullets and other fish when they are almost in their larval stage, at Mosta and at Żebbuġ, Gozo; and *Tal-Burqax* (Rock Fish) with its diminutive *Il-Brejqex* at Luqa

and B'Kara, to the ever popular *Il-Kavall* (Mackerel) at Gharb, Gozo, and *Ta' Lampuk* (Coryphene) at Nadur. The bigger fish appear as *Ta' Denfil* (Dolphin) at Xaghra and *Ta' Gabdoll* (White Shark) at Gharb, in Gozo. The two nicknames *Tal-Mazzun* (Gudgeon) with which cp. Eng. surname Gudgeon and Fr. Goujon, and *Ta' Sargu* (Sargus), both from Mellieha, though obviously connected with fish, are sometimes used in a derived sense to mean a gullible and a sharp-witted person respectively, from the marked traits of character of these fish. The above nicknames show that fishing was and still is an important industry in Malta. Several others are more specifically connected with fishing methods and fishing craft and they will be considered later on under trades and callings.

BIRDS and POULTRY offer on every side easily understood comparisons and we find quite a few nicknames falling under this heading. Pets, domestic poultry and seasonal game-birds all figure here. We have, for example, *Tal-Bilbel* (a kind of lark) at Gharb and Żebbuġ; *Tal-Pespus* (a little bird) at Sannat, Gozo; and *Tal-Gardell* (Goldfinch) at Żejtun; *Summienu* (Quail) very popular during the gaming season, at Mellieha, and *Tal-Bukkaċċ* (Woodcock) at Nadur. Chicken breeding gave rise to *Tal-Flieles* (Chickens) at Xewkija, and a few others, while less common members of the feathered kingdom appear as *Tal-Wiżžu* (Gander) at Xaghra; *Il-Gruna* or *Lagruwa* (Crane) at Xaghra; *Tal-Ghorab* (Crow, Raven) at Gharb, and *Tal-Hawwiewfa* (Swallow) at Mellieha. Of particular interest is the nickname *Garnaġġa*, found at Nadur, Gozo. The word *garnaġġa*, from It. or Sic. *carnaggia*, in Maltese denotes the number of animals in kind that the farmer was bound to give to the lord over and above the rent for the land — a relic of the feudal system in these Islands.

Names of ANIMALS have given rise to numerous nicknames. They are related to ancient and modern folk-life which, in this respect, still preserves several features of the

social life of two or more centuries ago. Apart from a few obsolete words, such as *Ta' Dorbies* (Lion) at Siggiewi, these nicknames provide a rich field for those interested in the social aspect of language. This large group naturally refers to bovines, ovines and equines. The Maltese greatly prize their cattle, their sheep and goats and their horses and mules which, besides providing transport and helping farm work, gave rise to important local industries. The following are a few examples of animal names: *Tal-Faħal* (Stallion) at Gharghur; *Tal-Ksiba* (Stud Bull) at Kerċem, Gozo; *Tal-Ghabajjar* (Year old Rams); *Ta' Gelluxa* (Young Bull); *Tax-Xaqra* (Reddish goat) and *Il-Felwa* (Filly) at Gharb, and *Ta' Dib* (Wolf) at Gharghur. Connected with the meat industry are the two nicknames *Tar-Robb* (Quarter) at Luqa and *Iċ-Ċaneg* (Butcher's Blocks) at Nadur.

Other animal names refer to rodents, e.g. *Ta' Żarmuġ* at Nadur and *Tal-Mučċu*, at Żebbuġ, both meaning young rabbit; *Tal-Fenek*, (Rabbit) at Victoria, Gozo; *Tal-Ġurdien* (Rat) and its diminutive *Il-Ġrejden* (young rat) at Ghajnsielem, with the Romance equivalent *Tas-Sorċi* at Rabat; and *In-Nemes* (Ferret) at Attard. Quite a few insects and parasites have given rise to nicknames, examples being *Dubbinuwa* (Housefly) at Birgu; *Ta' Xidja* (Horsefly) at Kerċem; *Tan-Nemusi* (Mosquito) at Ghasri; *Ta' Hanfusa* (Beetle) at Siggiewi, and *In-Naħli* (Bee) at Gharb. Related to this class are some names of lepidoptera, e.g. *Tal-Farfett* (Butterfly) at Munxar, Gozo, and others such as *Ta' Ghakrex* (Snail) at St. Julian's and Xewkija, Gozo.

FOOD and DRINK have given rise to a good number of nicknames, e.g. *Tas-Soppa* (Soup) at Gharb and Ghajnsielem, Gozo; *Ta' Xappap* (from *xappap*, to dip bread in oil, etc.) at Kirkop; *Tal-Ponċ* (Punch) at Nadur, Gozo and Lija; *Il-Leglieg* (The Drinker; The Quaffer) at Valletta and *Ta' Ġnibru* (Gin) at Siggiewi. A greater variety of nicknames appear to have been derived from drink than from food. Related to these are a few names of kitchen utensils and

others connected with table service, e.g. *Tal-Lida* (Pestle) at Gharb, Gozo; *Tat-Tigan* (earthen stewing-pan) at Qrendi; *Ta' Terrina* (Tureen) at Rabat; *Ta' Qnanet* (Pitchers) at Zebbug, Gozo; and *Kwiener* (hearths, fireplaces) at Cospicua.

Other nicknames show FAMILY RELATIONSHIP, married state etc. Such are *Tal-Parent* (Parent) at Imqabba; *It-Tewmi* (Twin) at Żejtun, Żabbar and Gharb, Gozo; *L-Armel* (Widower) at Gharb; and *Ta' Żajżott* (Youngster) formed of *żajż*, dim, form of the first syllable of *żaghżugh* + suffix *ott*, augmentative, instead of *ett*, from Italian diminutive suffix *etto*, at Siggiewi. Special mention must be made of nicknames referring (a) to sterility, e.g. *Tal-Battala*, (lit. The empty one) at Floriana and *Il-Ħawli* (Sterile, fruitless) at Ghasri, Gozo, and (b) to fertility, such as *Ta' Fakonda* (Prolific), from It. *fecunda*, at Xaghra, Gozo; *Tal-Ghammiel* (The Fertile) at Buskett; and *Il-Buħames* (Father of Five) at Qala, Gozo, possibly suggesting the rare occurrence of quintuplets.

We now pass to the Maltese nicknames of OCCUPATIONS, which are by far the most numerous. They range over a wide field of human activity and recall both old and new trades and callings. There is nothing more natural than that a man should be nicknamed from the object most closely associated with his daily work. Some of them are hereditary nicknames; a few are undoubtedly very old, handed down from generation to generation. Others, however, are of recent formation and with the growing complexity and multiplicity of occupations nowadays, they will probably die out after a generation or two. The sons may not inherit their father's calling; they will get a sobriquet of their own which likewise will be temporary and may again be changed according to the humour of their neighbours and acquaintances. But the majority of nicknames indicating old trades and occupations is hereditary and in some cases there must have been a special significance in the accepted nickname, which either indicates the family's

origin or some important incident in the family history, such as a successful trade venture or enterprise. Before the break-up of the old system of folk-arts and crafts every member of a trade held his particular calling in high esteem. Several trades were to a large extent in the hands of particular families — the sons of the village bakers, and millers, or of the quarrymen and fishermen became in their turn millers, bakers, quarrymen and fishermen, and consequently the name of the trade carried on for some generations by a family adheres to it even though a good many of these trades are now obsolete. Our forefathers were a stay-at-home people, passing uneventful lives at work on their own fields, which frequently remained in the hands of the same family for several generations, or in the towns and villages where their fathers and forefathers had lived before them. They were but little affected by the political factions of their times; nor were they troubled with "high vaulting" ambitions, and few cared to wander from the vicinity of their birthplace. From the stationary condition of their lives and from the nature of their pursuits and surroundings they acquired a solidarity of character reflected in the long persistence of occupational nicknames which sometimes have come down to us in the same locality and in the same social circles.

The main professions are all there — the doctor, the priest, the architect, lawyer, and midwife. Then there is a group showing rank and position such as *Il-Pjantun* (Constable on his beat), *Tal-Kaptan* (Captain) at Victoria, and *L-Ixkavun* (Slave) at Żabbar, with which compare M. surname *Schiavone*. In this connection one notices the tendency to qualify the wife or domestic servant of an officer of high dignity by the feminine gender of the husband's or the master's rank. Thus we have *Il-Presidenta* and *Il-Ministra* at B'Kara. Related to these are a few nicknames of older origin denoting feudal titles, or dignitaries of the Order of St. John of Jerusalem. We have *Tal-Barun* (Baron) at Kerċem;

Tal-Konti (Count) at Imgarr and *Tal-Markiż* (Marquis) at Marsa. At Nadur we have *Ta' Ghaskar* (Soldier) with which cp. the Italian regiment of *Ascari*. There is *Il-Qajd* (Governor) showing Arabic influence, and *Tal-Baxan* (Pasha) at M'forn and Sannat, Gozo, recalling the period of Turkish raids and supremacy. From the period of the Knights and later dominations in Malta we have *Is-Sultan* (Grand Master) at Qala; *Tal-Balliju* (Bali) at Siggiewi and B'Kara; *Tal-Kavaliier* (Knight) at St. Paul's Bay; *Tas-Sindku* (Syndic) at San Lawrenz, Gozo, and *Tal-Kmand* (Commander) at Mosta. Other nicknames with a historical connotation are: *Tal-Fieres* (The Horseman) at Gharghur — cp. M. place-name *Gnien Fieres*; *Tal-Alferan* (The Standard-Bearer), at Żebbuġ, and *Tas-Sangilott* (Fr. sansculottes) at Munxar and Nadur, Gozo.

Farming and dairying figure in such nicknames as *Tal-Gabilloġ* (Landholder) at Kirkop and Sannat and Xewkija, Gozo; *Il-Hawwiel* (Planter) at Xaghra; *Tas-Sienja* (Water Wheel) at Balzan; *Ta' Sikka* (Ploughshare) at Gharghur; *Tal-Qáieb* (Cheese-form used in making fresh cheese) and *Tat-Tâmes* (Rennet), also used in the Gozo cheese industry, at Gharb.

We have already mentioned some nicknames connected with *animals* and the meat industry. Other examples are *Is-Sellieh* (Carcass flayer) at Xewkija; *Ta' Frixax* (Omentum) at Mosta and *Tal-Ghogol* (Heifer) at Victoria, Gozo.

More interesting from a historical point of view are the nicknames referring to *seafaring* and *fishing*. A few recall the private corsairs of the 15th-17th centuries, examples being *Tal-Kursar* (Corsair) at Nadur, and *Tal-Furban* (Pirate) at Żebbuġ. Others designate various kinds of shipping generally used in the old days, such as *Tax-Xini* (Galley) at Xaghra; *Tal-Galljun* (Galleon) at Qala; and *Tal-Feluga* (Felucca) at Żebbuġ in Gozo; more recent ones being *Tal-Vaxxell* (Vessel) at St. Paul's Bay; *Ta' Stiva* (Ship's Hold) at Rabat, and *Tal-Barkun* (lighter) at Mosta. Others

show rank and position on board, such as *Tal-Mozzu* (from *It. mozzo*, cabin boy) at Gharb; *Tal-Patrun* (Owner of boat) at Gharb and Sannat; *Tal-Bdot* (Pilot) at Żebbuġ, Gozo; *Tal-Bahri* (Sailor) at Xewkija and Kerċem in Gozo and at Hamrun in Malta. A few other names are connected with fishing methods, examples being *Tan-Nassi* (Fish Nets); *tat-Tartarun* (a kind of fishing net) at Ghajnsielem, and *Tal-Kawwâr* (circular cloth padding worn on the head to support heavy weights by fishvendors and others) at Ghaxaq. It is worth mentioning that most nicknames connected with seafaring and fishing come from Gozo.

Quarrying and *building*, which are old occupations in these islands, are responsible for a small group of nicknames. The following are a few examples: *Tal-Mingura* (Dressed Stone) at Nadur; *Taž-Zonqor* (Hard Stone) at Qala; *Tas-Saqqafi* (Roof Constructor) at Imġarr; *Il-Bajjâd* (White-washer) at Luqa; *Ta' Kahhallu* (Plasterer) at Xaghra, and *Il-Mannâr* (Stone-axe worker) whence M. surname *Manara*, at Xaghra and Kerċem in Gozo and at Rabat in Malta.

Another old occupation which has inspired several nicknames is that connected with *flour-mills* and *bakeries*. Every town and village in the old days had its millers, and the square one-storied buildings, with a circular tower surmounted with the sails of the windmill, are still seen in many of our villages. The manufacture of bread was a vital domestic occupation. The grinding of the corn at the miller's depended on the wind; bread was kneaded at home and if not baked at home was taken to a public bakehouse. Sufficient quantities were baked to last a whole week, for the exigencies of domestic and farm work were many and left no time for daily preparation of bread. The various stages in the preparation of bread appear in such nicknames as *Tal-Mithna* (Windmill) at Naxxar and various other localities, *Tat-Taħhana* (Corn Grinder) at Kerċem, Gozo; *Tad-Dqiq* (Flour seller) at Attard; *Il-Furnar* (Baker) at Attard and various other localities; *Tal-Hâmi* (another

name for baker); *Ta' Mahluta* (a kind of bread made from wheat mixed with barley) at Imġarr and *Tal-Ħobż* (Bread seller) at Żejtun.

A number of nicknames refer to *small occupations* and callings that rarely, if ever, called for more than a few persons in each village or centre. These are the sort of callings that one would expect to find hereditary in a quiet village community — the blacksmith, the carpenter, the wheelwright, the decorator, the tinsmith, the potter, the saddler, the cotton beater, the undertaker, the basket weaver and the cobbler.

A special class is formed by *street vendors* and other small dealers who play an important part in Maltese economy. Itinerant dealers in salt, for example, still manage to earn a living and the nickname *Tal-Melħ* is found in several villages. It is the same with oil vendors, ice-sellers, tobacconists and the dealer in straw. The owner of an hotel earns for himself and his family the nickname *Tal-Lukanda*, and in like manner the person opening a new bazaar becomes known at Ġhajnsielem in Gozo as *Tal-Bażara*. Even such a limited seasonal occupation as the preparation of Easter cakes appears in the nickname *Tal-Figolli* at Żejtun.

Dress names form a small group of nicknames. They range from the old weaving loom process in *Tan-Newl* at Imqabba, to *Tal-Ġżiewer* (pl. of *geżwira*, a striped gown or kilt formerly in general use) at Luqa and *Il-Ħajjat* (Tailor) at Għarb to the modern sounding *Tal-Modi* (Fashionable) at Siġġiewi. Other examples of costume nicknames include references to neck-wear and head gear, defensive armour, offensive arms and obsolete costume.

An interesting group of nicknames is derived from *transport vehicles* and from *education*. Examples of the former include, besides the recent name *Tax-Xufier* (Chauffeur) at B'Kara, older means of transport such as *Tal-Karrettun* (Horse Cart) at Qala; *Il-Kuččier* (Cab Driver) at

Cospicua and the now extinct *It-Tram* at St. Julian's. Before the spread of education among the masses one could easily rise above the average with a little schooling — I mean rise sufficiently to earn a lasting nickname as a scholar. Only a few such nicknames were recorder in 1939, examples being *Il-Qarrej* (The Reader) at St. Julian's; *L-Awtura* (The Authoress) at Siggiewi; *Tan-Nuna* (Nursery School) at Gharb and *Is-Surmas* (Schoolmaster) at Cospicua.

Hobbies have provided some interesting nicknames. A few refer to folk-singing, such as *Tad-Daqqâq* (The Guitar Player) at Ghasri and at Imsida, and *l-Ghannej* (The Singer) at Imsida and St. Julian's. Others are connected with horse-racing, examples being *Tal-Galopp* (Gallop) at Mosta, and *Tal-Ġerrej* (Jockey) at Kerċem. Others again refer to bird-hunting, such as *Il-Kaċċatur* (The Hunter) at Lija, or to magical practices, examples being *Is-Saħħar* (Wizard) at Mellieħa and Cospicua; *Il-Maxku* at B'Kara and *Tal-Magun* at Nadur and Qala, Gozo, the two latter meaning magician, from *It. magico* and *mago* respectively. Closely related are the games and entertainments recorded in nicknames. A few are children's games, such as *Ta' Gardinaw* (Eng. game "Guard come out" or, possibly, derived from *Gardiman*, a N. African place-name on the Algerian frontier, where a Maltese settlement was formed in the 19th Century) at Rabat, and *Tat-Tula* (Hide and Seek) at Mellieħa, *Tal-Likk* is derived from the adult game of bowls, while dance and musical instruments are evident in such nicknames as *Ta' Ballu* (Ball, Dance) at Gharghur; *Taċ-Ċirimella* (Bagpipe) and *Taċ-Ċimbli* (Cymbals) at Gharb.

Names of *part-time occupations*, often performed after normal work, form our last subdivision of trade nicknames. To this category belong such names as *Fanalu* or *Tal-Fanali* (Street Lamp Lighter) at Żejtun, Lija and Tarsien; *l-Organista* (Organ Player) at Balzan; *Tas-Siġġijiet* (The man in charge of chairs in churches) at Żejtun, and

Tar-Rizzi (The hawker of sea urchins) at Żejtun. Two unusual nicknames *Tal-Kakotta* (Cocotte) and *Tal-Massara* (housewife, from It. *massaia*) survive at Nadur in Gozo and at Marsa respectively.

To complete the section on Trades, here are some nicknames derived from tools and implements: *Ta' Għaribel* (Sieves) at Rabat; *Taċ-Ċik* (a wooden instrument used in cotton beating) at Burmarrad; *Tal-Mingel* (Sickle) at Għarb, Gozo; *Ta' Raddiena* (Spinning wheel) at Kerċem, Gozo; *Ta' Delu* (Millhopper) at Rabat; *Taċ-Ċana* (plane — a carpenter's term) at Ghajnsielem, Gozo; *Tal-Mekkuk* (Weaver's shuttle) at Nadur, Gozo; *Tal-Marden* (Spindle) at Żebbuġ, Gozo; *Ta' Berrina* (Gimlet) at Mosta, and *Mehriesu* (Mortar) at Lija.

A few nicknames are derived from the names of the MONTHS, the SEASONS and from the WEATHER. They show close familiarity with seasonal cycles. We have for example *Tax-Xitwi* (Wintry) at Luqa and Żebbuġ, Gozo; and *Tal-Harif* (Autumn) at Għarb, Gozo; while Summer has given rise to the two variations *Tas-Sajf* at Għarb and *Is-Sajfi* at Siġġiewi. The sultry Scirocco wind figures in the nickname *Tax-Xlokk* at Rabat, and we meet the North Wind in *Tat-Tramuntana* at Imġarr. Picturesque nicknames associated with winds come from Nadur, in Gozo, where we find *Taž-Żiffa* (Breezy) and from St. Julian's where one meets with *Ta' Venven* (Strong blowing wind). The moon, which according to folk belief has great influence over health as well as on the success or failure of human enterprise, appears in the nickname *Tal-Qamar* at Mellieħa, but I have not come across any referring to the equally important planet — the sun. It is surprising to note that only two out of the twelve months are recorded. These are January, which occurs in the forms *Ta' Jannar* at Siġġiewi and Qala, and *Jannaru* at Lija; and March, which we meet at Kalkara and Mellieħa as *Ta' Marzu*. It is difficult to account for the omission of the other months, which all

figure in Maltese Folklore, but perhaps one may here refer to the part played by these two months in Maltese Folk-Tales. In one tale, called *The Gift of the Months*, the twelve months, sitting round a table eating, ask a poor man what people say about January in Malta. He answered: "It is a month of rain and plenty. Vegetables grow and all that your heart can desire". He also repeated three rhymes one of which runs as follows:

Qamar Jannar

Hareġ ix-xebbiet mill-ghar

Hasbuh bi nhar

(The January moon brought the girls out of the cave, for they thought it was daylight). This rhyme recalls the times when Maltese were still living in caves, as described by the Jesuit Father Kircher in 1637 and as one can still see at Ġhajn Żejtuna and Il-Manikata. It also recalls the days of the Moslem corsairs in the xiv-xvi centuries, for in Gozo people will tell you that the girls went out of the caves to do their washing by moonlight and were carried away by the Turks. March figures in many weather sayings, and in a Maltese folk-tale recorded by Fr. Magri is known as *Marzu t-Twil* (Tall March). This is a long way from the two nicknames *Ta' Marzu* and *Jannaru*, but it shows how nicknames can set in motion a train of thought touching on various aspects of ancient folk-life and tradition.

An interesting group of nicknames consists of those relating to MONEY, WEALTH and POVERTY. A few are derived from English coinage, for example *Is-Sold* (The Penny) at Mosta, or *Tax-Xelin* (Shilling) at Qrendi and Ġhajnsielem. Others refer to the old Maltese coinage which was legally supplanted by English currency in the 1830's but which survives in shopping and everyday transactions, especially those connected with the fish and the meat industries. Such are *Tal-Iskud* at Nadur, one *sku.* being equivalent to 1/8d.; *Ta' Patakku* at Siggiewi and Luqa, one

patakka being equivalent to 6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d; *Ta' Ċinkwina* at Żebbuġ, one *ċinkwina* being worth five grains; *taz-Zekkin* at Nadur and Mellieha, from *zecchino*, equivalent to 3 *skudi* and 4 *rbajja*, i.e. 5/6 $\frac{3}{4}$ d.

Related to money nicknames are those indicating wealth and affluence, examples being *Tal-Għani* (Wealthy) at Għasri; *Ta' Karusu* (Money Box) at Rabat and Żurrieq; *Muniċu* or *Tal-Munita* and *Flusu*, both meaning wealthy, rich, at Qrendi, Sannat and Xaghra, in Gozo, with their Romance equivalent *Ta' Danaru* at Għasri; and *Tat-Tajjeb* (Well-to-do) at Żebbuġ. Others indicate a spendthrift disposition, such as *Ta' Harbat* (The Wrecker) at Qrendi; *Ta' Hlielu* (Wasteful) at Valetta; or a tendency to obtain money by evil means such as *Messes* (To embezzle) at B'Kara.

Quite a few nicknames, on the contrary, indicate poverty and stringency, examples being *Ta' Marsusa* (In straitened circumstances) at Hamrun; *Tal-Kastig* (The Miserable One) at Qala; *Ta' Qaxqax Għadma* — a composite form rare in Maltese nicknames, meaning "Bone gnawer" at Naxxar, and *Ta' Karestija* (Scarcity, dearth) at Xaghra. Whilst on this subject we may as well record the names of precious stones such as *Il-Malakit* (Malachite) at Għajnsielem and *Id-Djamant* (Diamond) at Rabat, Żebbuġ and Għarb, in Gozo. Nicknames based on other minerals or precious stones are properly speaking trade-names and are considered under the nicknames of occupations.

So far we have considered personal nicknames. We shall now turn our attention to corporate nicknames — epithets, that is, given to groups of individuals, such as clubs or villages or even whole societies.

Maltese towns and villages figure in traditional nicknames which often contain uncomplimentary references. Some of these names, which ridicule certain villages, originated at a time when villagers hardly, if ever, left

their birthplace and knew very little about neighbouring towns or villages. The general attitude was one of narrow patriotism for their own birthplace and decidedly hostile towards the foreigners beyond the parish boundaries. It is well known that to this day the lack of cordial relations between one village and another sometimes develops into free fights at annual feasts where these old nicknames provide the leaven of village animosity.

A few VILLAGE NICKNAMES originated from trades and callings associated with particular localities. Up to the 18th century arts and crafts in Malta were distributed among the various villages according to a traditional pattern. Goat rearing was, and still is, the main occupation of many Tarxien villagers; the best master masons came from Luqa and quarrymen from Imqabba, which is a quarrying area. Plasterers and white-washers generally hailed from Ghaxaq and Gudja, and stevedores from Żejtun. Sailmakers were mostly confined to Kalkara since the days of the Knights, and pottery and broom making was a Birkirkara speciality. Żebbuġ was renowned for its weaving looms, but the beating of cotton before weaving was carried out at Żurrieq. Qormi was so famed for its bakehouses that it was officially known as Casal Fornaro. Within the capital, Valetta, the same specialisation of trades in particular districts was evident. Cotton dealers were grouped in the upper part of St. Paul's Street while blacksmiths were confined to a part of the bastion overlooking the Grand Harbour. These various occupations are reflected in such nicknames as *Tal-Fuhħar* and *Tal-Gummar*, both applied to Birkirkara residents; *Tal-Mazzit*, recalling the famed blood puddings of Luqa, and *Tar-Reħus*, connected with goat and sheep rearing at Tarxien. Incidentally, this latter nickname was the cause of a minor commotion at Pawla in 1947. Normally the goatherds of Tarxien accept the nickname in good humour. But in 1947 they were so provoked that they retaliated with violence.

The occasion was the feast celebrated at Pawla, the neighbouring town with which they engage in keen rivalry as regards outdoor festivities. The Pawla band club, like so many others in Malta and Gozo, have a special march which they play for the feast. A certain part of the march, however, was compared to the bleating of goats, and the Tarxien people who were present took exception to the playing of this piece, especially when a certain section of the Pawla Club partisans followed the tune of the march by repeating in a loud voice the word *Baa!* whenever this particular piece was heard. Feeling ran high on both sides and the Police had to intervene to prevent a public disturbance.

Some village nicknames have a historical origin. The people of Pawla are known as *Il-Midjunin* (The Indebted). When Grand Master De Paule (1623-1635) decided to encourage the formation of a new village round his country residence overlooking the Marsa, he granted the inhabitants the right to exemption from the payment of debts for a period of time — a sort of moratorium. Hence the nickname *Il-Midjunin*, which has survived to this day.

Other nicknames are derived from physical or moral characteristics peculiar to some localities. The people of Żurrieq are credited with blue eyes, and they are known as *T'Għajnejhom Żoroq*. The villagers of Żejtun are referred to as *Ta' Sieqhom Ċatta* (The Flat Footed) and it is believed that when St. Paul preached to them during his three months' stay in Malta they were the only villagers who would not embrace the new Faith. To emphasize their attachment to the old gods they stamped their foot firmly and even threw stones at the Apostle. Seeing this St. Paul laid a curse on the inhabitants whereby they are now born with flat feet. The people of Rabat and of Żebbuġ are reputed to be extremely sharp-witted and they are rather difficult customers. Hence the saying that *Rabti u Żebbuġi jagħmlu Lhudi*, i.e. a man from Rabat and a

man from Zebbug are worth a Jew. Qormi villagers are known as *Is-Sakranazzi* in an old folk-song. Most of them are bakers by trade: they work at night, drink heavily during the midday meal and then sleep all the afternoon. A Gozitan is not to be trusted; hence the saying that *Għawdxi tajjeb aħarqu aħseb u ara ħażin!* i.e. A good Gozitan, burn him; let alone a bad one". But beware also of a Maltese, for *Il-Malti u l-far turihx il-bieb tad-dar*, i.e. A Maltese and a rat let them not enter your house. During the War the Italians were ironically referred to as *Tal-Makaroni* (Macaroni eaters). Sicilians are known as *Tal-Gobon*, after a kind of Sicilian cheese which is widely used in Malta. And I have heard *Tal-Goxun* (Fr. Couchon "pig") applied to Frenchmen. Far Eastern people, especially Chinese and Japanese, are known as *Ta' Wicc Wiehed* (People with one face) because they all resemble one another.

The last century or so has seen the emergence of the BAND CLUB as a force in Maltese social life. By 1880 band clubs were springing up like mushrooms and this process has continued until now there is hardly a village that does not have two, or a least one band club on which centre all social activities in the town or village. Village factions are grouped round these clubs, especially where there are two rival clubs standing for the two main religious feasts celebrated there. These clubs have their official names, more often than not connected with some saint or important dignitary. But to the masses these official names might as well not have existed at all, for it is the sobriquet, the unofficial or popular name that prevails in discussions, in café conversations, on buses and elsewhere. The keen rivalry between the two main clubs of Valetta repeats itself with as much heat in the villages, where several clubs take the nickname from one or other of the Valetta ones. Here the La Valette Club is popularly known as *Tal-Ajkla*, from the arms of Gr. Master La Valette

which included a silver eagle, while the King's Own Band Club is known as *Tal-Istilla*, the star symbolising their patron saint St. Dominic, in whose parish the club originated. But there is also a psychological motive for these nicknames. Both the star and the eagle stand for the high level of excellence of the band's performances: the eagle soars high up over and above everything else, but however high it soars it can never reach as high as the star. This interpretation is contained in the last two lines of folk-song which I heard some years ago, i.e.

U tassew li l-Ajkla toghla:

'Ma hdejn l-Istilla qatt ma tasal.

(It is true that the eagle soars high up; but it can never reach anywhere near the star).

These two names, *Tal-Ajkla* and *Tal-Istilla* occur also in several villages, such as Zebbug, Ghaxaq and Luqa. At Luqa these nicknames took the place of the earlier ones *Tal-Faham* (The Coal Heavers) and *Tas-Surtun* (Morning Dress) which brought out the social distinction between the early supporters of the two clubs. Equally expressive and socially significant are the following nicknames: *Tal-Laqx* (Chips) applied to the Beland Band Club, Żejtun; *Tad-Dar tal-Haddiema* (Labour Club) by which name the Żejtun Band Club originally a Labour Party Club, is known; *Tat-Tamal* (Of the Dates) which is the name given to St. Gaetano Band Club whose first premises at Sda. Reale Hamrun had been vacated by one Gabriel — a dealer in dates. A few band clubs inherited the nicknames of their founders or of their first conductors. At Vittoriosa the Prince of Wales Band is known as *Ta' Lanzitu* (The one with the Bristles) after its first conductor Lorenzo Grima (c. 1891). The Mater Mariae Gratiae Club at Żabbar is known as *Tal-Baqra* (Of the Cow) after its first conductor Giuseppe Micallef (1883) whose nickname was *Il-Baqrambù*. At Rabat one finds the L'Isle Adam Band

Club referred to as *Ta' Ndri*, after its first conductor Andrea Borg (1870).

Other nicknames refer directly or indirectly to the patron saint of the village concerned. At Naxxar the Peace Band Club is known as *Tal-Vitorja*, after the feast of Our Lady of Victory which is celebrated there on the 8th September; the St. Gabriel Band Club at Balzan is known as *Tal-Arkanġlu*, after St. Gabriel, who figures in the feast of the Annunciation, which is celebrated there. At Zurrieq the St. Catherine Musical Club is better known as *Tal-Palma* — an obvious allusion to the patron saint St. Catherine, as the palm is the symbol of martyrdom. In the same village, one of the band clubs was formerly known as *Tal-Kavalier*, after the Noble Carlo Zimmermann Barbaro, its first President, who was a Cavaliere del Papa. At Birkirkara the Duke of Connaught Club is known as *Tal-Għama*, after its founder, who was blind. At Qormi the rival clubs are the St. George's and the Pinto Band Clubs. These are known by two romantic names — the first as *Tal-Werqa* (Of the Leaf) and the second as *Tal-Qalba* (Of the Sprout). These nicknames contain in a nutshell the story of the respective origins. Up to 1893 there was only the Pinto Band Club at Qormi, founded, it is claimed, in 1862. Some of its members left the club in 1893 and formed a rival organisation. To emphasize seniority the supporters of the Pinto Club said "Well, the leaf shoots forth from the sprout", and this gave rise to the two nicknames. At Żabbar the St. Michael Musical Club is known as *Tal-Bajda* (Of the White Flag) because when it was formed they hoisted a white flag to show their independence of the rival village club. The Count Roger Club at Rabat is known as *Tal-Lifġha* (Of the Viper). The epithet is well chosen considering that the club's supporters have St. Paul for their patron Saint and the nickname links up with the incident of the viper leaping out of the flames and fastening itself to the

Apostle's hand as described by St. Luke in the Acts. At Victoria, in Gozo, the Stella Band Club was formed in 1881 a few weeks before the rival club Il Leone Band Club. Originally the former club's official name was *La Stella Vincitrice* (The Winning Star) and Il Leone Club was so named not, as some people think, after Pope Leo XIII, but to show that they were not afraid of the Winning Star and that no one can stand up before the lion's might. Incidentally, the Leone Club is also known as *Ta' Albinu*, after Albino Lanzon who was one of its first conductors, or as some say, *Ta' Binu*, after Giorgio Tabone the leader of a small group of musicians who later formed the Leone Band.

FOOTBALL TEAMS and POLITICAL PARTIES have added their quota to the nickname material in these islands. Since the early years of soccer in Malta different teams and their supporters have been known by different nicknames. One of the earliest in the field was the Cospicua team, which was known by the obscure and uncomplimentary name of *Il-Hallelin* (The Thieves) an allusion to the unlawful possession of a cup. The "old firm" of Maltese soccer—Sliema and Floriana — have received the sobriquets of *Tax-Xelin* (Of the shilling) and *Tal-Qaghqa* (Of the Ring-Cake) respectively. The former refers to the attempts of the 19th century Protestant missionaries to proselytise the Maltese. They gave a shilling to those who attended their preaching at Sliema. Since the War soccer nicknames have been taken from the storm centres of international politics. Thus the Valletta team have been known for some years as *Tal-Palestina*, or more briefly, as *Tal-Pali*, an allusion to their quarrelsome disposition comparable to the troubled state of Palestine before the creation of the State of Israel. For some months the Valletta partisans retaliated by calling the Sliemites *Tal-Korea* while the war in Korea lasted, but for the past two seasons they have referred to the Sliema team as *Tal-Gapan* a cleverly camouflaged jibe at the number of base-born children of mixed Maltese Service marriages whose

general resemblance is comparable to that of the Japanese, known in Malta as *Ta' Wiċċ Wieħed* (Of the same face).

With the grant of Self-Government in 1921 the main political parties earned distinctive nicknames mostly derived from the badges of the respective parties. The Nationalists became known as *Tal-Maduma* from the square brick-like shape of their badge; the Constitutionals, who had a circular badge, were dubbed *Tal-Buttuna* (Of the Button) and the Labour Party sobriquet was *Tal-Mazza* (Of the mace, mallet). The Constitutionals were also known as *Tal-Lembuba* (Of the Truncheon) — an allusion to the fact that Lord Strickland, their leader, had authorised the Police to use their truncheons. A Labour splinter group earned the nickname *Tal-Gilati* (Of the Ice-Cream) from its colours — red, white and yellow.

One last word before I conclude. Earlier in this paper I mentioned the rich lexical material surviving in Maltese nicknames. In preparing this paper it has struck me that this unsuspected source opens up great possibilities for a study of word-formation from existing roots. Archaic or obsolescent words and unusual composite forms here seem to take a fresh lease of life. The language is seen in a continuous process of expansion and new patterns of word-building swim into our ken as we scan the vast horizon of the popular nicknames we have been speaking about. We have included some of these uncommon words in the examples we have given, but the subject calls for deeper study and I am mentioning this in the hope that someone with the necessary philological experience and qualifications will take up its study in earnest.

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