

AN ARAB'S VIEW OF XIX C. MALTA*

By Dr. PIERRE CACHIA

IV.

ON THE CUSTOMS OF THE MALTESE, THEIR CONDITIONS, THEIR MORAL CHARACTER, AND THEIR PECULIARITIES

The Maltese who want to show off their wealth dress in the same way as Europeans, except that their women wear a wrap of black silk, and, instead of a hat, a covering of the same material over their heads. There is nothing uglier than the sight of these black clothes in the summer. Some Maltese women imitate Englishwomen in their dress, but when they go to church they wear their traditional costume, the notion being that black is more seemly in church and more consonant with assiduity in prayer; even so do ignorant Syrian Christians fancy that it does not befit him who wears trousers over his clothes to approach the altar of the Church.

Among villagers, the men have their ears pierced and wear gold ear-rings; they also let lengths of twisted hair dangle from the temples to the base of the neck. These are feminine characteristics. They also wear caps of various colours which hang down on their shoulders; these [caps] look like stockings. They walk barefoot and are belted. Some of them wear several gold rings, and have the buttons of their waistcoats made of the same metal or of silver. They then place their coats on their shoulders, and, barefoot, walk in merry and sprightly fashion. On feast-days, a potter or publican of the like will appear with ten gold rings on his fingers, as many on his watch-chain, and numerous gold or silver buttons on his waist-coat.

As for [village] women, such as own a pair of shoes wear it only in the city, and do so proudly. Once out of the city, they carry them under the arm.

The notables of Malta all depart from the custom of the Franks in Europe in that they go out in summer without cloaks to hide their posteriors.¹ The most deceitfully pretentious among them have their trousers made so tight over their thighs and buttocks that they can no longer [stoop to] pick anything off the ground, and when they climb stairs or the like they tread warily to make sure that they do not split at the back. Most of them enlarge their thighs and posteriors by stuffing their trousers, pad every bone that protrudes in their body, and display what ought to be concealed; then when walking they keep peering at their shoulders so that they look like the short man who waddles as he goes about, and they cast glances at their trousers and shoes full of admiration for their own finery.

The vanity and pride of the women as they walk is [even] greater than the vanity of the men. You will see them stepping out like brides being taken in procession to their grooms, holding the edge of the wrap in the left hand and the edge of the head-covering in the right; they are then more encumbered than one who has two churning vessels [to work at the same time].

* Continued from Vol. I, No 2., pp. 110-116.

1. To this day, Arabs who adopt European dress show a marked preference for long jackets.

When they return home, however, they put on the most ragged clothes they have. Rich and poor, men and women are alike in this. This is one of the reasons why the Maltese favour retiredness and unsociability. A woman who wears good clothes at home is often considered a show-off. If you should call on a Maltese, he will not be ashamed to say, "Wait a little; my wife is changing in order to come and meet you."

Among these women there are some who stay barefoot at home, yet when they go out on Sunday they wear silk stockings and silk gloves and adorn themselves as gaudily as can be, for—contrary to the English who, here, always maintain the same appearance—the Maltese deck themselves at least times as splendidly as possible.

On the whole, the entire concern of these people is to show off their finery. This is characteristic of the newly rich.

When a Maltese woman is pregnant, she struts and thrusts up her abdomen that all the passers-by may notice her. When she sees someone afflicted with an infirmity, she makes the sign of the cross over her abdomen to prevent the infirmity from communicating itself to the unborn child. And if, while on her way, she smells some food being cooked and experiences a craving for it, she will send someone to solicit the gift of a portion of it.²

Women's ornaments are usually of gold among the wealthy or of silver among the poor, but seldom does one see a woman without some gold ornament. The various kinds of ornaments are: ear-rings (which they call *msalet* and which in the Maghreb are called *Masalit*); bracelets which they wear over their sleeves; brooches, rings, chains, and watches. Very seldom do they deck themselves with precious stones: only noble ladies wear them, at dances or banquets; sometimes they make do with the onyx.

On the whole, neither Maltese nor Frankish women have as much jewelry as Egyptian or Syrian women. Their admiration is restricted to how clean and fashionable their clothes are, but whereas the clothing of Frankish men is not without offence to modesty, that of their women is more conducive to self-restraint and chastity than that of our women. On the other hand, their practice of changing fashions is profitable to traders but harmful to the public, for it results in unnecessary recurrent expenses. These changes start in Paris; then representations [of the new fashions] are printed on sheets of paper and sent to all countries. Such is the way of humans: when they repudiate one vice, it is only to turn to another. So it is that when the Franks turned away from embroidered and brocaded clothing, deeming them the appanage of young boys, they acquired a fondness for changes of form.

For all that, because the clothing of the Franks is in winter never anything but black (whether it be of broadcloth or other material), and in summer never anything but white, their fairs and feasts have no gaiety. There is nothing there to please the eye except the clothing of soldiers and of some women. There is no doubt that the love of bright colours is natural, for we find it in children; but they say that a taste for them is characteristic of

2. The belief that the unsatisfied craving of an expectant mother marks the child is widespread among Arabs.

primitive people.³ Their own taste for colours is displayed only in the furnishing and equipment of their homes.

In fairness it must be said that the clothes of the Franks are better suited to activity [than ours], and more economic; for apart from their being tight—which in principle is for economy—they are free from encumbrances of variegation and figuring. They may also be more conducive to cleanliness.

The custom of the English here is to have many white garments, but few that are made of broadcloth or the like [i.e. few outer clothes]. Thus a rich Englishman may have no more than three or four coats, but he may have sixty shirts, twenty linen drawers, twenty bed-sheets, and so on. I have seen many notables here with coats the collars of which were encrusted with dirt and perspiration, especially as there are some among them who let their hair grow down the back of their head, so that when they take off their hat you see scurf floating down to their shoulders — and yet they shave off their whiskers on pretence of greater cleanliness. Among the English there are some who put a clean shirt on every day and shave every morning; they may even do so twice in a day, and this regularly whether on land or sea. Some also have shirts with separate fronts or collars or cuffs, which they change every day.

A commendable practice among the Franks is the use of starch when washing white clothes, for they come out [like] new. Maltese washerwomen use only cold water, because dipping one's hand in hot water and then facing the wind is harmful. Their soap is better than French soap, and English soap is inferior to either. In my opinion, the best soap in Europe is the soap of Castile, in Spain. It would seem that it was [originally] of Arab manufacture, for the Tunisians still make some that is of the same colour and shape, although [of] vastly different [quality].

The charge for washing a shirt in Malta is one penny. In Paris it is three, and in London four or five.

As for the eating habits of the Maltese, the wealthy have soup, meat, vegetables and wine for their mid-day meal, and fish and salad in the evening. To them the greatest delicacy is pork, but — unlike the English — neither of this nor of anything else do they eat as much as they do bread. As for the poor, each will eat a Maltese *ratal* of bread together with five olives or a piece of cheese or some salt fish — the Maltese *ratal* being equivalent to about two Egyptian *ritl*, and the price [of a *ratal* of bread] approximately one piastre [c. 2½d.].

This is why all Maltese are much given to mentioning bread. If, for example, one should call on you and you ask about his family, he will say, "All are well and eating bread." It is as though he was saying that he who is well is he who eats bread. Again, if you wish to buy some article from a trader and do not give him the full price, he will say, "I have to provide for a family that eats bread."

If you should see at a distance someone eating, he will offer you what

3. Cf. Clot Bey, *Aperçu Général sur l'Égypte*, Paris, 1840, v. I, pp. 293-294: "In the past, Orientals liked to wear dazzling colours: red, pink, lilac, white, violet, etc. They never wore dark colours, which were reserved for the non-Muslim subjects. To-day, taste and custom have changed on this count. Vivid colours have been abandoned by members of high society, who now make use of beautiful worsteds — black, blue, brown, etc. Only the common people retain them."

he has in his hand saying, "Ekk [sic] joghgbok." That is to say [in Arabic] "In yaku [for yakun] yu' jibuka" [if it please thee], even though he knows that it is impossible for you to go near him⁴.

It is of course not unknown that the bread of the Franks is large and tough, and that they cut it with a knife⁵. The reason for this is economy, for if at a meal someone should cut a piece [off a loaf] and leave a piece, it is not considered shameful to keep the remainder. Indeed the remaining portion may be brought to the table several times. This is different from the Oriental custom according to which a loaf, having had a piece cut off it, may not be brought back to the table incomplete, for the action would be considered vile and mean.

At the same time, the fact that the loaf is big means that the inside is not [properly] baked. In Maltese bread, in fact, the crumb—which is the greater part of the loaf—is almost wringing wet and cannot be eaten until it is a day old. It is [also] the worst bread to be found in Frankish countries, for apart from the fact that it is kneaded with the feet, it is sour and indigestible. On the other hand it contains, I think, fewer chemicals than English bread.

The Maltese do have a kind of bread which is round like ours and which they call *fatayir* [pl. of *fatirah*, a pancake; Maltese *tajjar*]. They eat it as a delicacy. I have enquired why it is scarce and is not sold in all shops, and have been told that [if more generally available] it would result in increased expenditure because it is so good. When hungry, the Maltese eat of it only enough to still their hunger.

The majority of the Maltese cook blood and eat it with avidity⁶. Whenever we wanted a chicken killed, the man who killed it used to take away its blood and thank us for it. They and all Franks also eat turtles and other animals which disgust us. I have even heard that some Maltese, if startled by something distressing, will eat a mouse or a frog to counter the shock.

At all events, the meanest Maltese peasant is familiar with dishes unknown to the greatest merchants in England, for they cook meat dishes which combine all kinds of vegetables.

On the whole, Franks are unhygienic in their cooking [in the first place], because their maids always have their head uncovered so that their hair dangles in what is being cooked, and [in the second place] because they seldom have their cooking utensils tinned — indeed the trade [of tinning utensils]

4. Precisely the same is true among Arabs. Even boatmen sailing in mid-stream issue such invitations to other boatmen or to persons on shore; courtesies offered in this spirit are jocularly called "boatmen's invitations."

5. Cf. Lane, *Modern Egyptians*, London, 1846, v. I, p. 183: "The bread is always made in the form of a round flat cake, generally about a span in width, and a finger's breadth in thickness."

6. Cf. Qur'ān, V, 4: "That which dieth of itself, and blood, and swine's flesh, and all that hath been sacrificed under the invocation of any other name than that of God, and the strangled, and the killed by a blow, or by a fall, or by goring, and that which hath been eaten by beasts of prey, unless ye make it clean by giving the death-stroke yourselves, and that which hath been sacrificed on the blocks of stone, is forbidden you."

is almost a forgotten one in Malta. Most of the utensils used by the English, however, are of iron, so that the consequences are not so harmful⁷.

The Maltese are like other Franks in that they eat animals which have been suffocated; they also go beyond [other Franks] in that they eat chickens and like animals which have died a natural death . . . ⁸

All of them eat raw garlic and onions so that there is always a pervasive smell from their mouth.

With regard to sleeping arrangements, the Maltese usually sleep on iron beds; those of them who are Anglicised, however, use such beds [only] in summer, and wooden ones in winter. They use several soft mattresses. I have heard that those who are not rich, though they have [such] high mattresses, do not sleep on them but pile them up only for show and vaunting. Doctors here say that sleeping on a cotton mattress weakens the body, and that fibre or straw if fluffed up are better; the mattresses of the rich are of wool . . . ⁹

A man invariably sleeps with his wife, even if they are long-married and have grown decrepit and languid together¹⁰. As for the rabble and riff-raff, you will see them at midday lying face downward by the roadside; there is in this connection a tradition [of the Prophet Muhammad] which says: "Devils lie prone in their sleep"¹¹. If you visit a wealthy Maltese, he is quick to show you what furnishings and hangings he has, and the first thing that he will show you is his bed. The Maltese are not in the habit of providing beds for visitors as we do in our country.

Among the refinements and creature comforts of which the Maltese are deprived is reclining on soft sofas and pillows, for they sit only on chairs. They do have wooden couches, but these have no upholstery or stuffing. Just imagine how a man may sit for the whole day on a chair outside his house,

7. It is, of course, absolutely necessary, to prevent poisoning by verdigris, that copper utensils — which used to be the commonest in the Near East — be lined with tin, and that this lining be renewed periodically. The tinner's trade is still common in Arab countries.

8. See n. 6 above.

9. Cf. Clot Bey, *Op. Cit.*, v. I, pp. 313-4: "In general, they [i.e. Turks and Arabs] are not accustomed to beds. Over the past few years, it is true, some beds have been introduced, but they remain far from common. Egyptians spread one mattress or more over their rug, and sleep on them clothed. They claim that such a couch, made up anew every evening on the floor of their habitation, is more comfortable in that it is level throughout; they also say that it is less cumbersome than our beds. They have no special rooms to sleep in, and the rolled up mattresses are easily removed to adapt the room in which one has rested during the night to whatever use it is required for during the day.

Oriental mattresses are stuffed with cotton. They are thin, for the Egyptians would rather multiply their number than increase their volume. The dimensions in which they make them are suitable to their purposes, in the first place because they make them easy to fold and move, in the second place because in a hot country a couch made up of thick mattresses would allow less refreshing air circulation and would increase the concentration of heat." Cf. also Lane, v. I, pp. 209-210.

10. Cf. Lane, *Op. Cit.*, I, p. 209: "It is the general custom in Egypt for the husband and wife to sleep in the same bed, excepting among the wealthy classes, who mostly prefer separate beds."

11. A tradition to this effect, but not in the words used by Shidyaaq, is found in most authoritative collections — e.g. that of Muslim, Chapter on TAIARAH (Purification) No. 23.

or else remain standing as shopkeepers do, then come home only to sit on a chair

The Maltese custom with regard to marriage is that the man should frequent the woman for a long time before marrying her; he may do so for three years or more. My own view is that to marry without having seen a girl or knowing anything about her is as harmful as can be, especially among Christians since to them divorce is not permissible. Yet long association [before marriage] is of no benefit either, for the girl will be of the best possible character with her fiancé until she is married and knows that no separation is possible, when she will assume whatever character suits her.

It is not unknown that in Frankish countries it is the women who pay a dowry to the men. Thus the wealthy Maltese give the husband about 200 pounds; those of moderate wealth equip his house with beds, chairs, tables, and kitchen utensils, and give him some money as well; peasants give him chickens and eggs or the like. [In return], the husband gives his father-in-law shoes. My own view is that there is justification both for the Occidentals who give a dowry to the husband, and for the Orientals who give a dowry for the wife. For the Orientals are avid for marriage even before they have experience or substance; the girl's father therefore needs to receive a dowry from the husband as a surety that he is able to meet the demands that will be made upon him; another reason is that "men are superior to women" [on account of the qualities with which God hath gifted the one above the other, and on account of the outlay they made from their substance for them. Qur'an, 4:38]. Among the Franks, on the other hand [the justification of their practice is that] the men generally try to avoid marriage partly because their provisioning is so expensive that marriage results in grievous expense, partly because their women imitate the men in their behaviour, and partly because they [i.e. the men] can manage without it by virtue of the ready availability of paid services. It is therefore necessary, under such conditions, that the woman give the man some assistance.

The Maltese are, of all God's creatures, the most avid for marriage: a man will marry when his earnings are a mere two piastres (5d.) a day; this cannot buy him his fill of bread and of something tasty to go with it, but he is confident that his wife will help him in his work and will bring in an income even as he does.

The worst of the Maltese women is that they are handsome in looks but not in character: a woman will run after an attractive man without thought of the consequences; it does not concern her that the man be poor or ignorant or evil. At the same time, the women here do not respect their husbands. A woman will often disagree with her husband, contradict him or show him up as a fool in the presence of others.¹² The women all raise their voices so much that they leave the stranger stunned.

The custom in the past was that the women should not display themselves before young men, nor strut about the streets, nor learn to read or write. Once engaged to be married, they used to seclude themselves from their

12. Cf. Clot Bey, I, p. 265: "In her relationship with her husband the woman displays much respect. She indulges none of the familiar easy-going manners which, in the West, are indications of the prevailing equality of the sexes. Often, she remains standing in her husband's presence, always she calls him her master..."

fiances. Often it was through his mother or his sister that a man asked for a girl in marriage without having seen his bride-to-be. Now, however, they imitate Englishwomen in mingling with the men, walking out with them, and going to dances and places of entertainment with them.

Often, a girl will elope from her parents' home and live with anyone she wishes. Rich old women often marry idle young men who are then kept by their wives in food and clothing.

The brand of wisdom these women possess has it that they should give precedence to their blood-relations over their husbands, for, they say, if a husband dies he can be replaced, but a blood-relation cannot. They are like Englishwomen in that they marry only men of their own age, but they differ from them in that they marry young.

When a man walks with his wife, the two walk side by side, not arm-in-arm like the Franks because the woman must - as I have said above - [use both hands to] hold her clothing. Men often go out alone, leaving their women at home.

Most publicans in Malta are married, and they are [deemed] wise if they marry a beautiful woman that she might serve drinks and be a boon companion to the customers, thus attracting legions of sailors and soldiers.

The more dissolute of the Maltese men, whose concern was the acquisition of money by any means, used to pretend to want an honourable marriage until they laid hands on the dowry, and then they escaped to distant countries

The courtesans in this island are, with rare exceptions, neither wealthy nor very beautiful. You will find that they do not [usually] have a house or servant of their own. Yet they are mostly neither foul-mouthed nor importunate with men. Indeed they are, I should say, more restrained in speech and less shameless than married women, for they do not stare at men as the latter do, they are not so critical of one's appearance and clothing, nor so addicted to slander. They go to church often, and none of them wants to "die in sin" as they say. When they commit an abomination, they cover the face of the saints' images in their rooms, or else turn them to the wall, in a show of respect and piety

Their customs in connection with funerals are those of the Franks, in that they do not hold funeral meetings, so that you get to know of a citizen's death only from the newspapers. This is a praiseworthy custom, for wailing and weeping not only do not revive the dead or turn back what has passed away—in the words of the poet: "Keening at funerals never brought back the dead"—they also cast despondency and terror into the hearts of those who hear them.

The Maltese wear mourning over the dead for a long time. They bury them after twenty-four hours. Often, the neighbours will send to the bereaved family a funereal repast, as is done in Syria. High-class English people here follow the custom of their country in that they do not bury their dead until at least a week has passed.

Among the Maltese, when a small child dies, friends come to the father to wish him joy saying, "We congratulate you on [your share of] Paradise." And when a child is born, they place straw under it that its first bed might be of it, as was the Messiah's.

When an officer dies, his bier is carried in procession, music is played

behind it and soldiers accompany it; then, when he has been buried, the rifles are fired all together as an indication that he died in the fullness of his power and authority.

Physically, the Maltese are mostly of dark complexion and medium stature; they have black hair and eyes, thick eye-brows, and powerful frames. In general, the men are more handsome than the women. Many of the women here have hair on the upper lip or on the cheeks or between the lower lip and the chin, and some of them shave it. Yet among the Franks there are those who prize this feature of theirs. Their vanity and pride in the clothes and ornaments with which they adorn themselves I have already condemned.

As for their manners, their notables are mostly mild and affable: when you enquire of one of them about anything he will answer you cheerfully and amiably. All of them are characterised by hard work, careful management, and thrift. Thus they will not reduce themselves to straits in order to keep up ancient and harmful customs.¹³ None of them will burden himself with a multitude of servants in order to exalt his position and prestige, neither will they incur excessive expenses on the occasion of some celebration or wedding. The wives of the rich do not wear necklaces of diamonds or the like. Noblemen go visiting their friends without a large attendance. Rich men go to the shops in the morning to buy the day's provisions. A noblewoman may go visiting a friend without either of them being distracted from work, for she will take something with her to work on. She it is who will run her household for she does not delegate its concerns to a maidservant. Those deemed greatest among them have a manservant and a maidservant as well. More than once have I seen the chief doctor of the hospital putting up ropes on the roof of his house then hanging out the washing piece by piece. Once the washing is dry they take down the ropes and put them in a protected place. I have also seen some Consuls putting up their flags with their own hands. The poor among them abstain from lighting a lamp on moonlit nights.

Most of the men hand their earnings over to their wives, so that they then have to ask them for money for tobacco and the like; but then all their women are thrifty and hard-working, although few trade or keep shop.

Each and all are characterised by inquisitiveness and concern with trivialities of speech and action. Thus if anyone stoops to pick something off the ground a crowd gathers round him, and people keep running in from this direction or that until the street is blocked. When something happens, they keep talking about it for days, until something else happens [to divert their interest]. And of any occurrence, you will get to hear the origin, the beginning and the end from all who come or go. Before he goes to bed, every one of the low-born must relate everything that has happened to him during the day. Often he will repeat it many times, distorting and falsifying until he comes to imagine that he is being truthful. Everyone of them must also peer at all who pass him as he walks along the street, so that he appears to be greeting everybody right and left. Many of them make a practice of attending the courts to hear cases being tried; they then come out and talk about these cases everywhere. Nor can they report anything without exaggerating it; thus if a smut gets into somebody's eye, they will say that he has gone blind. They

13. It has been one of the tasks of Arab modernists to combat extravagant displays on the occasion of births, marriages, deaths, etc.

accost a man to tell him, "We have seen your wife looking out of the window, or speaking to such-and-such a man, or such-and-such a woman." They say the same sort of thing to a woman regarding her husband. If you buy anything from one of them, he will tell your relatives of it. When they see a stranger they look searchingly at him and cock their ears to hear what he says that they might know what language he speaks; they also describe him to his face, one of them saying to another, "This man comes from such-and-such a country. He has been here a long time, but he is not likely to stay much longer for he was well at first, but he looks ill now." The other will then say, "And where might he go? Is he likely to find a better country than ours, which has become the goal of all who come and go?" Often, even, a woman will call to her friends to come and look at him, digging them in the ribs and pointing at him. You no sooner address anybody in the street than you find yourself surrounded by a crowd; and any action that anyone performs is immediately seized upon by gossips. They think the worst of any married man who befriends a bachelor, or of a bachelor who enters the house of a married man.

All this is not surprising, for such is the way of anyone who finds nothing of importance to occupy his mind in his country, who is restricted to a bald rock deposited in the middle of the sea. For the limitation of intelligence follows from the limitation of the fatherland.

Another characteristic of theirs is openness; they reveal their own circumstances and ply anyone they speak to with questions about his own. Thus when you befriend one of them he soon tells you of the amount of his income and his expenditure, and gives you details of his occupation. He may say, "I wish I had money that I might live in comfort. If I was wealthy I should eat the choicest food and wear the most splendid clothes. How lucky are those who live in luxury! Now tell me: What is your income? How do you live? Where do you buy your clothes and [other] needs? Who comes to visit you? . . ." and so on!

As for their eagerness to earn money, it is such that it leaves no value to anything else. Some travel to distant lands and expose themselves to humiliation and contempt¹⁴ until, having acquired money, they return to their homeland proud and boastful of their riches, desporting themselves in the market places with the demeanour of those in whom well-being has nurtured conceit, and good fortune insolence.

Nothing in the whole world is as pleasing in their eyes as their own country. You always hear them boasting of it and of its conditions, and if you approach any one of them with an inquiry about it, he will speak to you with a plausible tongue of the happiness and prosperity that were its lot, and of all the ill fortune to which it has been reduced. They love it as the Jews love Zion.

Strange to say, in spite of all this boasting if you name to a Maltese individual compatriots of his you will never find him pleased with any of

14. Cf. Lane, I, p. 401: "In general, they (i.e. Egyptians) have a great dread of quitting their native land. I have heard of several determining to visit a foreign country, for the sake of considerable advantages in prospect; but when the time of their intended departure drew near, their resolution failed them. Severe oppression has lately lessened this feeling; which is doubtless owing, in a great degree, to ignorance of foreign lands and their inhabitants."

them. The first epithet he will apply to each will be, "He is a fool!" or "He is mean!" It is as if when he says, "The Maltese are like this or that," he means the praise for himself alone.

As for their pride in titles, it enwraps them more completely than clothing! You will seldom see any of them, if he can read and write, who does not carry the title of physician, or master, or baron, or marquess, or doctor; but for all this he scarcely has a competence to live by.

It is in their nature to be critical, ungracious, and backbiting. Thus they criticize other people's gait, dress, diction, and appearance, and are scarcely ever pleased with anything. There is no good quality which they do not make out to be bad; of a generous man they say that he is a spendthrift, of a thrifty one that he is mean.

They never cease to mutter against, and complain about, the English. They claim that since the latter came to their island means of livelihood have reduced and prices have gone up, so that they are forced to emigrate from their country, which they describe as "*ħazin*" [beloved]. Yet the English government of this island has several warships each of which results in disbursements of £200 a day, and their sailors are never seen out of one pub but on their way to another until they have spent their last penny, so that everyone knows that prices rise only because of the presence of these ships, and as soon as they leave port those who have come to rely on their trade begin to murmur and complain about the lack of merchandise — for the whole of the population does not spend as much as one of these ships does. The English have also created there a number of services and utilities of which the Maltese had no notion before. Thus a friend of mine from Alexandria once asked me to approach the Keeper of Records on his behalf and enquire about the estate left by his father who had died in Malta, and whether or not he was under British protection. When I did ask [the Keeper of Records] he told me after he had made a search that before the English came the Maltese administration had no controlled books to refer to, but only Journal papers kept in no particular order.

The Maltese themselves admit that their past rulers used to outrage their honour, because they had denied themselves marriage and as a result about one thousand children suspected of being fathered by them had been brought together in a home for bastards. The Maltese used to say of these that they were "*ghall-qassisin*" [literally: for the priests], implying thereby either that the rulers who made themselves out to be priests were responsible for their upkeep since they had fathered them or else that the children were destined to become priests.

But it is ever the wont of the ignorant to prefer the past to the present and to ambition that the future should be better than either.

It is in line with this that they hate strangers, especially Arabs. One cannot make a close confidant of any of them, nor can one have a friend amongst them — unless one raise a puppy! For by my life should a Maltese malign a stranger or quarrel with him, they would turn against the stranger from every side without knowing the cause [of the quarrel]. They are by nature inclined to violence and to treacherous assaults; many of them do not go out without a knife concealed in their clothing.

There is no gradation in the exchange of remonstrances among them, for the first imprecation they utter is "*ħahraq din il-qaddis tiegħek*" [To blazes

with your saint's religion!]. They are so ignorant that they do not understand what is meant by *din* here, for the word they use for "religion" when they are not cursing is taken from Italian. It would seem that when the Muslims were in authority over them they used to address this greeting to them, and they retained it in currency thereafter.

Some of them make a point of listening to anything that may pass between a man and his friend or his wife; then if it appears to them that there is some advantage to be gained thereby they seize the opportunity without delay and make up a lie [based on what they have heard].

The Maltese all share the same manner of speaking and the same gestures. Thus when the men stand, they shake their thighs all the way from the hip-bone to the foot [sic]. To indicate that someone is emaciated, they raise the index finger and incline it to the right and to the left. When referring to a matter as fair and straightforward, they raise the right hand and make it quiver. To signify abundance, they bring their fingers together over the thumb and move them against it. To signify negation, they pass their finger-tips under the chin. To indicate that a woman is beautiful, they bunch the palm of the hand and pass it over the temple, suggesting that the hair that grows on her temple is curly. To signify that something is good, they let the right hand go limp and shake it repeatedly.

When enquiring of a man about his wife, they say, "*Kif il-mara?*" [How is the wife?]. When one of them visits a friend, he greets the man of the house first, and the lady last. Whenever they speak the name of a small child, they invoke God's name upon him. When they light the lamp in the evening, they utter the appropriate greeting for the evening. The peasants avoid saying explicitly how many years old they are but may say, "Forty and ten"; this may have passed on to them from the Jews, for among these so far as I know numerals are shunned. It is strange that people here like abundance in everything, even in vices and abominations, but not in length of life!

When a Maltese visits you, he follows Arab custom in that he does not refrain from bringing in one or two more with him.

The Maltese are quick to congratulate a confined woman as soon as she has given birth; neighbours, even virgins among them, crowd in on her. Musicians come and play in front of the house even while she is in labour, and they make as much noise as at a wedding.

Their rigour in religious matters is even greater than that of the Irish. I have already spoken of the multiplicity of churches and of priests, of their wealth and sacerdotal vestments. [Now let me add that] even as the Irish get drunk and commit abominations on St. Patrick's day, so do the Maltese get drunk and commit abominations on St. Paul's day, and indeed on all feast days. When a Maltese rents a house previously occupied by a Jew, he does not enter it until the priest has sprinkled holy water on it. Similarly, if the ownership of a boat or anything like it passes from a Muslim or an Englishman to one of them, he must have it baptized [sic].

They also baptize all church bells as well as the little bells which are rung before the Eucharist, and they appoint godfathers and godmothers to them; these are known as the *ashabin* [Xbin: godfather]. A bell in the church of

St. Paul was once thus baptized, and its godparents were the Governor and his wife, for he was a Catholic.

The Maltese say that the invocation of a bell is always answered, so as soon as there is thunder and lightning they hasten to strike [the bells].

They also baptize babies the very day they are born, even in the coldest weather; and this must take place in a church, not at home.

To look upon the Eucharist while it is being carried in procession without kneeling before it is to expose oneself to danger. Thus it is said that the Maltese once killed an English sailor who passed by [such a procession] and did not kneel: they so belaboured him with blows and stabs that he was carried away dead

The Maltese hold that the shape of the Cross is to be found in every man's body, this being so when he extends his arms and holds up his head; also that the name of the Virgin Mary is traced in every hand, in that the main lines of the palm resemble the letter M in the Latin alphabet. Similar to this is something that I have come across in an Arabic book: that the name of the Prophet (God bless and preserve him) [i.e. *muhammad*] is written in everyone's body, for the [first] *mim* resembles the head, the *ba* resembles the breast, the [second] *mim* resembles the navel, and the *dal* resembles the leg.

During Lent and on Wednesdays and Saturdays, milk vendors do not openly name what they are selling but say: "*Hawn ta' l-abjad*" [Here is what pertains to white] — the word *ta'* being a corruption of *mata'* [possession], used by the Maltese as also by Tunisians and Tripolitarians to mean *sahib* [possessor, associate]. On other days, they call out "*halib*" [milk].

For all this rigour of theirs [in religious matters], they go on buying and selling on Sundays and feast-days as on any other day; those who would appear to be pious keep their shops open until noon only.

I have seen many Italian cities, but in none of them have I seen as many street statues as there are in Valletta. In former times, these statues were a refuge to which criminals resorted; thus if a murderer escaped and stationed himself beneath one of these statues, he was safe from the vengeance of the law. This custom has now been discontinued.

It must be mentioned here that the Maltese refuse to apply the term *Nsara* [in Maltese, Catholics; in Arabic, Christians] to the English and that if an Englishman is married to a Maltese woman by English [i.e. Anglican] parson, his marriage is void in law.