

# HONOUR AND SHAME IN LATE FIFTEENTH CENTURY MALTA

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Solicitude about the purity and strength of family honour is still one of the characteristics of typical Mediterranean family life — wherever, of course, it is not yet diluted by the cosmopolitan influences engendered by mass tourism and, perhaps, American films. (1) It is especially strong in Sicily and South Italy but relatively weak in the cities of North Italy. In Malta one gets the impression that it has weakened considerably, perhaps as the result of several centuries' service of the island as a military and naval base, but also probably as a result of emigration during the last sixty or seventy years to Anglo-Saxon countries where a freer attitude to sex inside and outside marriage has now long prevailed. It is suggested in this short study that the feeling for family honour was once much stronger than it is now in Malta.

It should not occasion any surprise that historians turn their attention to such matters. The days are long past when kings, popes and statesmen together with generals and admirals and their affairs were almost their sole concern. Not only have some sociologists like Peter Laslett turned to history for their inspiration, (2) but historians themselves have long considered past social aspects of life as certainly very much their business. George Duby has written on *Medieval Marriage*, (3) while Le Roy Ladourie's description of life in the medieval French village of Montaillou has become a classic in its own right, (4) and every country now has its own social historians studying, among other things, family structure and other aspects of social life in the past. Sicily has recently had an important paper written by its veteran historian Carmelo Trasselli on its criminality and morality at the beginning of modern times,

1. For a treatment of its mostly present-day manifestations in various Mediterranean countries see J.G. Peristiany (ed.), *Honour and Shame: the Values of a Mediterranean Society*, London, 1965. I would like to thank Dr. Jeremy Boissevain for drawing my attention to this work.
2. P. Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations* Cambridge, 1977, as well as his earlier *Household and Family in Past Time*, Cambridge, 1972. See also John H. Goldthorpe 'The Relevance of History to Sociology', *Sociological Research Methods: an Introduction*, London, 1977.
3. G. Duby, *Medieval Marriage*, Baltimore, 1978, in which Duby argues in favour of the existence during the Middle Ages of an official lay attitude to marriage habitual in royal and noble families distinct from the normal official church attitude to it.
4. E. Le Roy Ladurie, *Montaillou: Cathars and Catholics in a French Village*, French edition 1978, English edition: Penguin 1978.

finding that there was then no feeling for honour or respect for females, immorality being an every day matter. (5) Though statistical details are not always available, it is still possible to investigate social problems like those of 'Honour and Shame' by an intensive consideration of a relatively small number of key incidents from the past. This study will attempt just that, basing itself mainly on a handful of remarkable documents so 'strange' to the modern Maltese person and those conversant with him that he would with difficulty connect them to the structure of Maltese society and customs as he knew them in his time.

Two most unusual marriage cases surviving in the records of the bishop's court in Malta concerned the alleged entrapment of men into marriage. Thus in 1488 Chancius de Plathamone of Gozo complained that his son Antonellus had been enticed by Angela Fisatini to spend the night with her in the house of Ylafia, the daughter of Leonardus Laczu, then already dead, in accordance with the plan made, according to him, by their kinsmen Johannes de Fisatini, Ylafia's brother-in-law and Angela's own father, the priest Licterius Chaber and the cleric Antonellus Lazu. (6) The last two hid themselves inside the house and were able to catch Antonellus de Plathamone with Angela as they had plotted, though Johannes de Fisatini himself was at the time on guard duty somewhere along the shore of the island. When their persuasions in favour of marriage or alternatively, of the payment by Antonellus de Plathamone of a sum of money in compensation failed, they hauled him off to the island's town mayor or *hakem* for punishment. It was alleged that Johannes Fisatini was the 'capital enemy' of Antonellus de Plathamone owing to the rumour which had cropped up a year previously that Antonellus had been Angela's lover, causing her father to accuse him in the town court and in the Magna Regia Curia of Palermo that he had raped and defiled her violently though he was not able to provide any proof. (7) Evidently Fisatini was still trying to recover his daughter's and his family's honour by arranging the marriage, getting compensation or merely humiliating the Plathamones. Though it is impossible to apportion truth precisely between the two parties, it is

5. C. Trasselli, 'Du fait divers à l'histoire sociale: Criminalité et moralité en Sicile au début de l'époque moderne', *Annales*, XXVIII (Janvier-Juin 1973), 226-46. Trasselli does, however, admit that particularly scandalous cases were not accepted: *ibid.* p. 228. He is also careful to record a number of cases involving *marital or family honour* as distinct from female honour: *ibid.*, p. 236.
6. Cathedral Museum, Mdina, C[uria] E[piscopalis] M[elitensis], A[cta] O[riginalia], vol. 3, fols. 274-81.
7. A[rchivio di] S[tato di] P[alermo], Real Cancelleria, vol. 148, fols 68v-69v (*olim* fols. 352v-353v), dated 1 April 1488, Johannes Fisatini's (i.e. Fsadni's) accusation is remitted to Nicolao de Amato for investigation. It also determines the exact year for the Maltese documentation which is only dated by means of the Indicational Year.

obvious that feelings of honour and shame were the principal factors of the situation. In fifteenth century Gozo, fathers and other relatives, even those in holy orders, were apt to go to all lengths to preserve them.

But the same could happen also in Malta. In 1503 Franciscus de Guevara, a convert from Judaism, then still a mere youth, confessed that he had gone to the house of Johanna and her sister, daughters of the late Paul Maxita of Rabat, Malta, in order to talk to her and others as he habitually did because he had some business with one of their relatives. (8) He suddenly found himself pulled inside from the courtyard by Johanna herself who immediately shut the door after him. At that very moment armed relatives and friends arrived outside, Johanna opened for them, Franciscus was dragged out and told that he had to marry her otherwise they would immediately kill him. He consented 'owing to his great fear for his life' and said that he actually wanted her for his wife, kissing her publicly as he said so. Then several others arrived in the company of the vice parish priest. The latter asked him, in front of the people though the armed men had gone out of sight, whether he wanted her for his wife, and he said he did, 'terrified as he was'. The priest then stretched out his hand to that of Franciscus and heard his solemn affirmation to that effect, doing the same to Johanna. She then kissed Franciscus, but when the latter saw his parents arriving he declared in front of everyone that he did not want her for his wife and he returned to his parents' house, without having had anything further to do with Johanna. He tried to disentangle himself of the marriage by showing that he had had sexual relations with Johanna's sister rendering null and void this particular shot-gun wedding; but he eventually resigned himself to the marriage, which was finally confirmed by the *Maior Cappellanus* of the Cathedral Antonius Cassar. (9)

A couple of contracts of 1487 are even more thought provoking. On 10 April of that year Michael Farruge of Zurrieq declared that owing to his own negligence and the temptations of the devil, his wife Antona had committed adultery with the *magnifico* Perio Johannes de Mazara of Mdina. (10) Warned by divine precepts to follow divine law and forgive both transgressors, because divine forgiveness is obtained in the same way that we ourselves forgive others, especially as it was then the season of Lent he was, of his own free will, forgiving both his wife and the *magnifico* Perio Johannes all the blame and fault for the offence and injury done to him by way of adultery, renouncing that he had already obtained Cola's, but Ortisi refused. Blasius explained

8. Cathedral Museum, Mdina, CEM, AO, vol. 4, fols. 283-315v.

9. *Ibid.*, fol. 310v. In 1525 Franciscus de Guevara received a salary from the island's town authorities as the only master farrier in Malta: the National Library of Malta, Univ. 12, fol. 386, 27 June 1525.

10. Notarial Archives, Valletta, R. 494/1, Notary Jacobus Sabara, contract dated 10 April 1487.

ing all further right to accuse them, and declaring himself to be reconciled to his wife Antona, promising to keep her with the same marital affection as he had shown her before her adultery. For the greater strengthening of the contract he was also willing for its further amending in accordance with the advice of wise men to the benefit of Antona and Peri Johannes, swearing not to contravene any part of it himself. It will be observed that neither shame nor honour are mentioned nor does the document contain a mention of any material compensation for the tort suffered but only appeals to Christian forgiveness. It should however also be remembered that it was drawn up by a notary in accordance with his own sentiments and those of the community at large but need not have reflected the real feelings of Michael Farruge nor those of particular sections of the community, the peasants, the illiterate, etc.

Some eleven weeks later, Stephanus Seykel and Perius Johannes de Mazara drew up a contract between them stating the Laurenza alias Cueyna had once been the concubine of Mazara before her marriage to Seykel. (11) During Seykel's long absence from Malta while he served on the galley belonging to Johannes de Guyvara, Mazara was informed that Laurenza was living a bad life, mixing carnally with sundry men, and he therefore again took her back into his home as his concubine, keeping her henceforth confined in his house to prevent her from living a shameless life almost like that of a prostitute or call-girl. Stephanus acknowledged all and wished to thank Perio Johannes, declaring of his own free will that he was ready to take Laurenza back as his wife, approving of her character and deeds and showing her marital affection as he had shown her before this happened even if she had actually committed adultery: he forgave her and he forgave also Peri Johannes all fault, offence and injury committed by that adultery and concubinage, renouncing all his rights for civil or criminal action. Taken together the two documents seem to indicate that Peri Johannes de Mazara was preparing his spiritual accounts preparatory to meeting his Creator, as he would seem to have died not long after. Michael Farruge could only have been a peasant from Zurrieq, while Stephanus Seykel was certainly only a sailor for a part of his life, neither of them able to stand up normally to the *magnifico* who had dishonoured them. It is in fact remarkable that, as the second contract states, Seykel had been able to marry Peri Johannes's concubine against the latter's own wishes. Inevitably one thinks that Mazara might have had something to do with his enrollment on Guyvara's galley: perhaps he arranged it all; (12) perhaps, as frequently happened, Seykel had been tricked into enrolling to get him out of the way. However that may be, the effect was the same. Maza-

11. *Ibid.*, contract dated 27 June 1487.

12. The Mazara and Guevara families were closely and repeatedly allied by marriage to each other as well as to the Desguanez family.

ra was able to take his former concubine back — to prevent her from leading a dissolute life in the absence of her husband! (13)

Curiously enough, some eleven years before, the nobleman Tristaino de Guevara, a brother or uncle of Johannes de Guevara, and his wife Clara Desguanez, who belonged to one of the very foremost families of the island, were alleged to have actually entered the house of Agnesa, the wife of Chicco Suay who was abroad in the Levant and taken away with them her twelve year old daughter on the excuse that Agnesa was living immorally, an accusation she denied. (14) Here again, therefore, one finds members of the highest families of the island interfering in the family affairs of these socially far inferior to them in order to protect their morals while the father was away! But here the victim did not accept the situation: Agnesa complained to the highest authorities in Palermo and on 19 July 1476 the viceroys directed the town mayor of Malta to return Agnesa's daughter to her or to some other suitable person if she was really living immorally.

That the lower classes did not always accept the uninvited intervention of members of the upper classes into their family's private affairs is further abundantly evidenced by what happened at Siggiewi in 1473 to Cola Caxaru. In fact, though thoughts of impending death might have impelled Peri Johannes de Mazara in 1487 to make his peace with the two husbands he had cuckolded, fears of the peasants' vendetta might also have had something to do with it. Because, no doubt, people at Mdina still remembered what had happened in 1473 to a prominent citizen of that minute town where everyone knew everyone else for two or three generations back; everyone probably still talked about Cola's miserable end one moonlit night as he returned from his fruitless call on a married woman of Siggiewi fourteen years before; for us the incident provides unimpeachable evidence of how strongly peasants then felt questions of family honour.

In 1473 Siggiewi was only a small village of some 500 inhabitants surrounded by several other smaller settlements no larger than hamlets at various short distances in practically every direction: Rahal Qdieri, Rahal Tabuni, Rahal Kbir and Rahal Xluq. (15) Farther away to the east was the village of Mqabba and beyond it that of Zurrieq To the north lay the village of Zebbug. These last two were of roughly the same size as Siggiewi. The town of Mdina lay some four miles to the north, itself with only some 1200 inhabitants, almost one third of them Jews, but its suburb of Rabat just beyond its walls

13. Pier Johannes de Mazara in 1434 married at Palermo a sister of the Sicilian baron of Rachalmuto, the Viceroy himself being one of the witnesses to the marriage agreement: G. F. Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta*, Malta, 1647, p. 497.
14. ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 136, fol. 36 (*olim* fol. 6), 19 July 1476.
15. See G. Wettinger, 'The Lost Villages and Hamlets of Malta', in *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta before the Knights*, ed. A.T. Luttrell, London, 1975.

adding another 1383 in 1483. Siggiewi, like every one of the other sixty or so surviving settlements of Malta, except for Mdina itself and the seaport of Birgu, depended entirely and directly on agriculture for its existence, being surrounded by a multitude of smallish fields enclosed with the rubble walls even then characteristic of the Maltese countryside. The villagers were mostly peasants who never owned more than a very few small fields but who, as owners of such land, were not beholden to anyone else whether the government or the feudal lords. Others held land owned by one or other of the two or three substantial landholders of the same village, or by one of the infinitely richer landowners who resided at Mdina. Possibly they also held land owned by the Church. Contact with Mdina was mainly limited to the arranging of land-leases and the sale of the cash crops of cotton and cumīn and occasional visits to the notary for such matters as marriage contracts — though the occasional existence of a notary at Birmiftuh or Birgu led them in those directions instead. The other villagers (*raħlin*) consisted of a few shepherds (*raħhala*) and a number of down-trodden farm labourers working for a wage on the estates of the larger proprietors mostly those from Mdina. There were tavern keepers and two or three priests and other church attendants.

Nicolaus (ie. Cola) Caxaru was a member of one of Mdina's most prominent but not most wealthy families of the fifteenth century, with representative members active in public and commercial affairs in every generation between ca. 1410 and 1530. (16) His elder brother was none other than Peter Caxaru the lawyer, notary and judge who served continuously in one or other of those occupations between 1438 and the day of his death in 1485, and has the distinction of writing the only surviving specimen of Maltese medieval poetry. Nicolaus himself was given the task by the town council of seeing to the repair of the town walls and he attended meetings of the council with great regularity as did his brother and also a cousin who was his namesake. Less than a year before, consternation had been aroused by reports that the walls of Mdina threatened to collapse everywhere and permission was obtained from the higher authorities at Palermo for their repair either by forced or by paid labour covered by the revenue of the *collecta* or that from a new imposition on the exports of Malta and the sale of meat. (17) Nicolaus Caxaru was responsible for the work actually carried out on the walls. A witness in 1473 testified to his good reputation and conduct: of honourable parentage, he competed for public office, a peaceful, quiet man, unaccustomed to brawling.

16. On the Caxaro Family, see G. Wettinger and M. Fsadni, O.P., *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena: a Poem in Medieval Maltese*, Malta, 1968.

17. NLM, Univ. 11, fols.

zealous for his country and honest, as he had known him for the last twenty years. (18)

However on the evening of the third day of Pentecost 8 June 1473, he was otherwise occupied. (19) Early that evening he called on Petrus Ortisi nicknamed Navarru and on Johannes de Laudatu and asked them to accompany him to Siggiewi to call on a woman. On their arrival at about three o'clock of the night, the woman named Catherina refused to meet him, rejecting his pleas that she had sent for him herself and his assurances that she had nothing to fear if she wanted to bear him company and would treat her as a sister if she now still refused to speak to him. He had entered the courtyard of her house mounted on his donkey and he and his companions could see a woman named Maria standing on top of her country-oven, while a man named Gaddus Chutaye came up and told him 'Misser Cola, what you are doing is not right because Catherina has already taken a husband.' (20)

When Catherina made no sign of replying to Co'a Caxaru, the three Mдина men left the scene, 'without doing any harm', but when still within cross-bow range of the village they heard the roar of an angry crowd after them. The peasants were upon them almost before Cola had time to exchange a further word with his two companions. Diaconus Franciscus Zamit was there with the crowd. Shouting 'Good people, what have I done to you?', (21) Cola Caxaru drew his sword, as did his companions. Witnesses' accounts differ on the precise details of what happened then. The crowd certainly pelted the three intruders with stones and according to one account a boulder struck Cola so hard that he dropped his sword, which was then caught or picked up by Blasius Calleia who asked Cola, 'Why did you come into my sister's house? Didn't you know it was her house?' (22) To which Cola replied, 'Yes, but come here, I want to tell you something.' (23) Blasius, however, according to another account, here insisted that Co'a should hand over his sword, 'Give me the sword first and I shall come, and on Cola's showing some reluctance he asked him whether he 'would promise not to harm' him. The other account states that Blasius wanted the swords also of Co'a's two companions see-

18. Cathedral Museum, Mdina, CEM, AO, vol. 1, fols. 156v-157, evidence of Petrus Dalli, 23 July 1473.
19. The main source for our information on the murder of Nicolaus or Cola Caxaru is to be found in Cathedral Museum, Mdina, CEM, AO, vol. 1, fols. 90 156-163v, 203-210. In the rest of this article, separate footnote references have been kept to a minimum.
20. 'Misser Cola, quisti cosi non su boni ca quista donna senciendo pro Catherina havi prisu maritu.': *ibid.*, fol. 157v.
21. 'O bona genti, ki vi hayu factu?': *ibid.*
22. 'Per kj cosa vinisti in casa de mia soru? Non sapiti ki era de mia soru?': *ibid.*, p. 210.
23. 'Si, ma veni icza ki ti voglu parlari.': *ibid.*

that the village people would make fun of them if they did not deprive them of their arms, and Ortisi then handed over his sword to Stefano Farruge who stood in the crowd. Cola and Blasius made their peace with each other, asking each other's forgiveness. Blasius then shouted to Cola, 'Now up, ride on, God be with you and do not fear me!', and Cola answered, 'God be with you', or something to that effect. And so the three resumed their trek back to Mdina.

Just then four women came on the scene. They were Garita, Blasius's mother, his sisters Granati and Maria, Nicola Pucellu's widow, into whose courtyard Cola and his companions had forced their way, and a fourth unnamed woman. The first three seeing the three men from Mdina departing almost unharmed exclaimed 'How is it, my son, this one entered our house and brought two others with him for the sole purpose of embracing your sister and Catherina?' They came into our house and shamed us! Tomorrow we shall be reviled by the inhabitants of the village.' 'These traitors have come into our house to betray us and to defy us; we should kill them, and you have let them go!', 'Therefore, son, if you have not killed them, go back and kill them!' On'y the fourth woman shouted 'Let them go! Let them go!' (24) Tempers, which had calmed down somewhat before the women's arrival, now rose again. Randinus Ayed, who had already threatened those who had spoken in favour of letting Cola and his companions depart in peace during the original altercation with Blasius, was still in the crowd ready to take up the women's words. The two brothers Gullu and Antoni Cakie were reported to have joined the cry of 'Let's kill them! Let's kill them!', and Gilius Gat himself eventually admitted that 'Angered and emboldened by the words of these women, I also then said 'Let's kill him! Let's kill him!', as the women were saying, and everyone began to fling stones. Cola was almost immediately struck down off his donkey with a couple's of blows from Blasius's lance. The more active members of the crowd pursued Ortisi and Laudatu in vain in the direction of Tabrija and Rabat, while Cola himself was helped to his feet and led off by a youth from Zebbug to a cave in Wied il-Husri where he could conceal himself. However, when the frustrated pursuers returned they were told of the direction he had taken and they soon found his hiding place. His retreat was

24. 'Comu, figlu, quistu trasiu in casa nostra et minau duj cum ipsu solum per fari abrazari a vostra soru,' sua figlia, 'et a Catharina.': *ibid.*, fol. 203; 'Quisti venerunt in case nostri et hannoni factu vergogna; dumani sarrimu injuriati dala gente de lu casali.': *ibid.*, fol. 156v; 'Questi trayturi su vinuti in casi nostri per tradirini hubex isfeduene (*u biex jisfidawna*, the earliest phrase in Maltese ever met with so far); li divissimu amaczari, et havitilu lassatu andari.': *ibid.*, fol. 210; 'Pero, figlu, si non lu haviti amaczatu tornat et amaczatili.': *ibid.*, fol. 204v; 'Macari lu amaczassiru!': *ibid.*, '... ki dichianu 'Auchidimulu, auchidimulu!' oy vero, 'auchiditilu, auchiditilu!': *ibid.*, fol. 208v.



also cut off by the return of a couple of men who had run after the youth from Zebbug. Co'a pleaded in vain, 'For the love of God and St. Mary, let me be! Have compassion and pity on me as Our Lord forgave the Jews. You've already done me in, anyhow! Get me a priest to hear my confession and give me Communion. Let me come out and die among you.' (25)

His persecutors surrounded his refuge, turning it into a trap, and they flung in their stones and plunged in their lances and spears remorselessly. Someone shouted he must already be dead, but others insisted he was only shamming — he was armed and had a cuirass to protect his head. His screams and the shouts of the peasants could be heard resounding over the whole neighbourhood of Tabrija and Il-Qamar (the present Blat il-Qamar). In at the kill were innumerable men as Stefanu Farruge was later to testify: (26)

One called Cataldu Pucellu struck once with his sword... Nicolaus himself lay on the ground and others struck with stones from above and some had arms and some only stones, ie. Lemu Famusta, Ximum Bugeia, Gullu Cakie, Martheu Burg, Stephanu Baldakin, Benedittu Felu, Battista Vella and Marcu Vella, Gighu Gatt, Cola Chiche, Johanni Bigeni, Randina Ayed, Diaconu Franciscu Zammit and Matheu Chantar, all these were above the said cave some with arms others without arms and the witness could not tell which of them threw stones on to the said Cola because he arrived on the scene somewhat from beneath.

Antoni Cakie however said that when Cataldus and Blasius reached the place where Nicolaus was hidden from the fury of the people, Nicolaus saw them coming and he therefore ran downwards to escape but found his way blocked by the arrival on the scene from that direction of Stefanus Farruge and Marcus Vella, and the two parties of pursuers therefore thus (27)

had the late Cola between them and they started to hit and beat him with swords and the said Cataldus with a sword, the said Stephanus with a tavulachina and two spears and the swords and then Marcus another of the accused said and kept saying 'Let him have it! Let him have it!' and several others from above the cave were shouting and inciting the said Blasius and Cataldus, Marcus and Stephanus, the four accused, telling them in the vulgar speech [i.e. the spoken language as distinct from Latin or even Italian] of this island 'Let him have it! Let him have it! Kill him!

25. 'Lassatimi per amuri de Deu et haiati compassioni et misericordia de mi, cussi comu nostru signauri perdunau alj Judei... Oyme ki mi haviti spachatu; chamati alu par-rinu ki mi comunicay.': *ibid.*, fol. 205; 'Oyme! lassatimi nexiri de lu rampanti et auchiditimi.': *ibid.*, fol. 203v; 'Per lu amuri di Deu et Sancta Maria, lassatimi stari ki mi haviti auchisu.': *ibid.*, fol. 158; 'Ja mi haviti guastatu, lassatimi nexiri a muriri in menzu a voi, Minatimi lu priviti ki mi confessa et comunica.': *ibid.*, fol. 161; 'O Sancta Maria, perki mi vuliti guastari? A cui havi factu eu mali a Mauta non su canuxutu.': *ibid.*, fol. 203.

26. *Ibid.*, fol. 203v

27. *Ibid.*, fol. 204v.

Cakie continued to describe how Garita, the mother of Blasius, and Granati, his sister, also threw stones, and that this happened above half a mile from Siggiewi in the direction of Mdina. Marcus Vella eventually admitted under torture that he himself had thrown stones at Cola giving him one blow with a boulder from above, while Blasius, Cataldus and Stephanus hit, beat and struck from below; he also accused Gilius Gat of striking several times at Co'a with his sword before Cola had reached the cave. (28) Diaconus Franciscus Zamit, pretending to separate the contendants, got in several good strokes with his own lance at Cola.

At length, however, they desisted and crept up to where he lay, very dead, in the cleft. They snatched his weapons and returned to the village, informing all who cared to listen that Cola Caxaru 'would not eat bread any more,' *diaconu* Franciscus Zamit adding that 'in his opinion he would never put on his girdle again'. He had retrieved Cola's helmet for himself. When someone commented that it was a bad day for the village of Siggiewi, Blasius said 'Would that it had been a bad Easter for Cola', perhaps punning on the word which means both Easter and 'feast' in Maltese. (29)

The affray had been extremely noisy and it is no surprise to find in the surviving court papers some forty persons summoned either as accused or as witnesses. At least ten members of the militia on watch-duty at the church of St. John at Siggiewi were attracted by the row and impelled to leave their post to see what was happening. Few of them cared to carry any of their arms with them: Stefanu Baldakin had a spear and sword, Bartholomeus Dalli carried a spear and knife, and Ximuni Bugeia brought his spear along with him but Petrus Dalli only had a small knife and Antoni Cakie was accused eventually of having merely thrown stones and having a drawn knife. Most of them seem to have left their arms and other belongings at their place of duty. When it was over Laurencius Calleia testified that he returned for his belongings to the Church of St. John where he and his companions were on guard duty. Most of the arms mentioned seemed to have been carried by those who were not on duty, mostly lances, spears and swords, with stones for the rest.

Among those participants who had not been on guard duty, Diaconus Franciscus Zamit, nicknamed Sac Nayge, that is Sieq Nghajga or 'the little sheep's leg', was alleged to have actually rushed out into the courtyard of Maria Pucellu's house when Cola Caxaru and his two companions entered it. He was in his night-shirt and carried a lance but he refused to answer Ortisi's questions 'Whose are these hovels?' and he left the courtyard. However, he was back in the fray a few minutes later when the crowd first rushed

28. *Ibid.*, fol. 205v.

29. *Ibid.*, fol. 207, 210v, 209v, 156v, 205v.

down on Cola Caxaru and his men: he had gone away apparently only to put on a more respectable attire and no one seemed interested in explaining what he had been doing in his night-shirt in widow Maria Puceilu's courtyard. On the other hand, both Fridericus Dalli and Laurencius Storus had been asleep in their houses, one of them out in his courtyard, at Siggiewi when the tumult started. Antonius Barbara was still collecting *restuchi* out at L-Andar tat-Tabrija as were Andreas, his brother, and someone else, in the same district. These also had a complete view of what happened, since the murder occurred in their immediate neighbourhood and it seems to have needed only two or three days to full moon. They were the first bystanders to have examined the corpse of Coia Caxaru for any lingering signs of life after the villagers had withdrawn from the scene, but were themselves too frightened to stay there for long. One of them described how three men eventually came up to view the body, one moaning aloud, 'Wretched us, what have they done? They have killed him!' (30) Fidericus Dalli seems to have slept through it all back in his Siggiewi house, probably because most of the row occurred some distance away from the village. When, however, he finally heard what had happened, he went to see the corpse himself and was able to describe how it lay flung down with blood streaming from it. Finding no sign of life, he carefully folded Coia's hands on his chest before returning to Siggiewi. By the time investigators arrived from Mdina, Nicolau's bloody corpse had been placed on a wooden door for ease of transport, and it was then ascertained that he had a severe blow at the back of his neck, another on his face and several others elsewhere. Petrus Busayle who had accompanied the nobleman Angelus de Vaccario that same night from Mdina, testified that the sight of the corpse terrified him so much that he could not investigate what injuries it had other than those which he could see at a glance, that is those to his thigh, to his hand which had the fingers almost cut off, and the one to the back of his neck.

Stefanus Farruge alleged that he had been blamed by several members of the crowd for not killing Cola Caxaru's two companions. Blasius Calleia had said, 'I am sorry that Navarru escaped me; we shall be killed for not despatching these companions because they shall report us.' And all with one voice shouted at Farruge, 'It was your fault that we have not killed Navarru and the said Johanni'. Their worst fears were proved correct; Jacobus Bonnichi eventually testified that it was Ortisi alias Navarru who woke him up at his house at Rabat and told him what had happened, making him get out of bed and go to Siggiewi there and then. However, it seems clear also that at least one other report was made by a person from Siggiewi: in fact Battista Butigeg himself went all the way from Tabrija to Mdina, calling out to

30. 'Miskini nui, ki havenu facu? Havenu amaczatu a quistu!': *ibid.*, fol. 161.

Paulus Busayle on sentry duty on the city walls 'You of the watch! Go to the town mayor and tell him that Cola Caxaru has been killed at Siggiewi.' Had none of Cola's party escaped it seems that the men of Siggiewi believed that that the murder or at least its precise details would have been kept secret in spite of the multitude of participants and local spectators. If so, it reveals the strength of the alienation of local feelings vis-a-vis Mdina people.

That the feeling of family honour among the peasants of Siggiewi, buttressed by local popular sanctions, should have been so strong as to outweigh any thought of common prudence is one of the most remarkable aspects of the incident. The long arm of the law administered by the authorities at Mdina was not late in reaching out to Siggiewi, as the principal men responsible for the killing had feared. Within a couple of hours Stefanus Farruge was already making his confession to the court authorities. Within forty eight hours Antonius Cakie did the same, and one by one at least 13 persons were interrogated in court. In most cases a confession was first extracted without the use of torture, but the latter was subsequently resorted to in order to obtain a confirmation of it or emendation. This procedure was followed with the witnesses. The last date of the proceedings in Malta belongs to 6 October 1473 when Diaconus Franciscus Zammit was tried in the bishop's court. References then made to the other four accused, Blasius Calleia dictu Barax, the late Cataldus Pucellu, the late Stephanus Farruge and Marcus Vella, show that two of them were already dead by then but it is impossible to say whether they had been executed or had died under torture as seems more likely. (31) On 18 December 1473 the Sicilian Viceroy acknowledged that those principally responsible for Cola Caxaru's death had been tried; arrangements were being made for fixing the sum of money that was to be paid as a 'composicioni' in compensation for the murder a promise being given that the diligence with which the prosecution had been carried out would be suitably rewarded. (32) On 4 September 1474 Blasius Calleia, who had spent seven months in exile in Sicily, was forgiven by Cola Caxaru's kinsmen and, as he was unable to earn his living there because he was maimed in one arm and could not speak the language, he was permitted to return to Malta. (33) Their trial had been held in the town mayor's court, the papers themselves surviving merely because they had been transferred to the bishop's court for use as evidence in the trial of the deacon Franciscus Zammit. The latter was described by a witness as a poor man of little substance, the son of a poor famished person and a bit of a wanderer. He was present, as has been seen, throughout the incident from its earliest mo-

31. *Ibid.*, fol. 156.

32. ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 131, fol 224v.

33. *Ibid.*, Real Cancelleria, vol. 132, fols. 39v et seq.

ment to its last, most of the time carrying a lance, but several witnesses testified that they did not know whether he was there to separate the two sides or to participate in the murder himself. The co-accused Stefanus Farruge even alleged that Zammit had told him at an early stage of the affair that 'If it were not for me I do not know what these devils will do.', referring to the people around him without naming anyone. (34) He also seems to have survived, and eventually he became a priest. (35)

The murder of Co'la Caxaru obviously was not a mere private revenge but a public crime in which a large proportion of the inhabitants of Siggiewi participated. Its main significance lies in the light which it throws on the strength and character of popular feelings towards family honour and the evidence it provides of different standards of value and much mutual distrust and disrespect between the people of Mdina and those of villages like Siggiewi. His mistake lay not in apparently trying to persuade a peasant woman to be his concubine because concubinage in Malta and Gozo, as in Sicily, was largely acceptable at all levels of society. (36) He blundered in that he offended a married woman, that he went armed to her house in the company of two armed men and, perhaps worst of all, that his own status, though much higher than hers or that of her family, was still far below that of the great fief-holders of the island like the *magnifico* Pier Johannes de Mazara and the Desguanez family.

34. 'Si non per mi non sachu k; vulianu fari quisti demoni.': *ibid.*, fol. 156. Of course, the evidence was recorded in Latin or Sicilian though it was normally given *In vulgari eloquio ipsius Insule: ibid.*, vol. 160v.
35. Cf. *Don Franciscu Zammit*: Notarial Archives, Valletta, R 494/1, deeds of Notary Jacobus Sabara, deed dated 15 September 1487.
36. See G. Wettinger, 'Concubinage among the Clergy of Malta and Gozo ca. 1420-1550', *Journal of the Faculty of Arts, The University of Malta*, VI No. 4 (1977), pp. 165-88.