

Quċċija, Convivium, Żerda

Maltese Customs originating from Religious Greek Tradition

Quċċija

The Modern Maltese definition of the noun *quċċija*, according to Aquilina's Dictionary, is:

A ceremony consisting in the presentation of a basket containing grain, toys and other miscellaneous articles, to a child on the completion of its first year, in order to be able to foretell its future inclinations by the choice it may make.

Although the lexicographer's inclusion of "grain" among the "miscellaneous articles" may have been only a convenient, apposite insertion to justify his etymology of the term from Sicilian *cuccia* – *zuppa fatta di frumento bollito nell'acqua o nel latte con zucchero ed altri savori* – citing Mortillaro's *Dizionario*, it betrays the historical basis for the anachronistic "grain" ingredient. This "modern" meaning of the term can be traced to De Soldanis' mid-XVIII-century *Damma*, datable to 1750-1767, that contrasts the Greek funeral rite of distributing blessed grain (as described in Magri's *Hierolexicon*) with the first-anniversary rite

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practised by *gente contadina* of his time *poiche usa di distribuirlo non benedetto ad alcuni amici di casa da' genitori di qualche bambino o bambina nel solo giorno che sarà anniversario della loro nascita*.¹ One notes that De Soldanis' description is shorn of all hints of the child's choices prognosticating its future; this was only a much later accretion.²

De Soldanis' description is confirmed in Cassola's *Mezzo Vocabolario* wherein the harking back to the Greek rite and the writings of Magri are again in evidence:³

Coccia, parola greca, un mangiare composto di frumento cotto con diversi ingredienti, qual coccia oggi da noi si usa farsi, e darsi, compito il primo anno dalla nascita delle creature. V[ide] Hierolexicon Macri, verbo, Agape.

It may not be irrelevant to note that of all Domenico Magri's editions of his *Vocaboli Ecclesiastici*, the one cited here is not one of the earlier versions, in Italian, published in 1644, 1650, 1669, but an adaptation of one of the later Latin versions – the *Hierolexicon* series – starting in 1677. Before pressing on with the earlier occurrences of the term *quiccija*, one can note that, the term does not figure at all in Thezan's Dictionary (c. 1670-1730)⁴ and that, somehow, this “modern” meaning of the term appears to have eluded M.A. Vassalli, writing at the end of the century, who, in his *Lexicon*, gives a terse:

*Φοϥϥια] pulmentum triticeum, olim a nostris usatissimum.*⁵

The Greek Funereal Rite

The contribution of Magri's work, in the first half of the XVIII century, to this topic has already been hinted at. Olvin Vella's comments in this connexion are very apt in order to preclude falsification of data.⁶ Vella notes that there was more

¹ Rosabelle Carabott, ed., *Damma tal Kliem Kartaginis mscerred fel Fom tal Maltin u Ghaucin maghmula mel Kanoniku Gianfrangesku Agius Sultana Ghauci* (Firenze: Baroni & Gori, 2016), 477 [f. 311].

² Joseph Cassar-Pullicino, “Malta in 1575: Social Aspects of an Apostolic Visit,” *Melita Historica* 2, no.1 (1956): 40.

³ Arnold Cassola, ed., *Il Mezzo Vocabolario Maltese-Italiano del '700* (Malta: Said, 1996), 90 [# 529].

⁴ Arnold Cassola, ed., *The Biblioteca Vallicelliana Regole per la Lingua Maltese* (Malta: Said, 1992).

⁵ Frans Sammut, ed., *Lexicon ta' Mikiel Anton Vassalli* (Malta: SKS, 2002), 423.

⁶ Olvin Vella, *L-Ghejun ta' l-Istorja ta' l-Ilsien Malti: Ġabra ta' dokumenti bil-Malti mill-bidu sa Vassalli, unpublished M.A. thesis*, University of Malta, 2006, 94 et seq.

than one Magri involved; he mentions Domenico and Carlo Magri. Actually, there were three brothers in the same Valletta family, all highly-educated priests, Gio. Domenico [1604-1672], Matteo Carlo STD [1628-1693] and Ignatio STD [1654-1728].⁷ The encyclopaedic work on liturgical terms is basically the conception of the eldest Magri, but was expanded and became widely diffused by the exertions of his brother Carlo.⁸ The editions from their hands of the work are as follows:

Notitia de' Vocaboli Ecclesiastici con le Dichiarazioni delle Cerimonie ed Origini de' Riti Sacri Raccolta da Domenico Magri Maltese ... (Messina: Piero Brea 1644; 2nd edition Roma: Vitale Mascardi 1650).⁹

Notitia de' Vocaboli Ecclesiastici con le Dichiarazioni delle Cerimonie ed Origini de' Riti Sacri, Voci Barbare e frasi usati de Santi Padri, Concilii et Scrittori Ecclesiastici Raccolta da Domenico Magri Maltese ... (Roma: Giovanni Casoni 1669).¹⁰

Hierolexicon, sive Sacrum Dictionarium, in quo ecclesiasticae voces, earumque etymologiae, origines, symbola, caeremoniae, dubia, vocabula barbara, atque Sacrae Scripturae et SS. Patruum phrases obscurae elucidantur. Opus figuris ornatum, et a Carlo Macro authoris fratre ... maxime locupletatum ... (Roma: Pontius Bernardon 1677).¹¹

Further to these editions by the Magri brothers, there were several other later ones by foreigners, which for the purposes of the present study are ignored.¹² In all of these early editions the meaning of *coccia* is clearly that of a funeral rite inherited from the Greek Church:¹³

Sogliono li Greci nell'essequie distribuire al popolo nella chiesa grano cotto e benedetto quale ornano con altre galantarie chiamato coliva (κόλιβα), cioè confetture ò cose dolci, con le quali si va ornando ... fù poi da Greci quest' opera di charità usata anco nell'essequie, qual costume dalli medesimi Greci fù introdotto in Malta ove il grano così condito vien chiamato coccia.

⁷ Vincent Borg, *Melita Sacra* (Malta: PEG / Gutenberg, 2008-2015), 3: 426-431.

⁸ Giovanni Bonello, "The Earliest Maltese Encyclopaedia," in *Treasures of Malta, 1: Histories of Malta* (Malta: Patrimonju, 2000): 57-78.

⁹ Copies in National Library, Malta (NLM) respectively catalogued BQ.A.4 / BD.3.14 / BD.3.38 and BD.B.30.

¹⁰ Copy in NLM catalogued BR.3.48.

¹¹ Copy in NLM catalogued B.19.17.

¹² Details in Vella 2006, 94 *et seq.*

¹³ *Notitia* 1650 *s.v. Agapae.*

This interpretation is in full accordance with the testimony given by the Greek *papas* in Birgu in front of the Apostolic Visitor, Mgr Pietro Dusina, in 1575. Papa Joannes de Jasorino, Parish Priest of S. Maria Damaschini, so describes the ceremony in his church on All Souls' Day:

Quando è la commemorazione delli defunti si fanno certi cibi chiamati la Coccia che si metteno dentro li bacili, si fanno de passoli, de amendole, nuci, nocelle, confetti e grano cotto, con farli in Croce, et si pongono sopra la sepultura delli defunti, et cossi stanno fino ditto le vespere de morti, et anchora delli pani, et poi queste cose si sparteno per l'anima del defonto à quelli che se trovano presenti ultra che per i morti infra anno se fanno dire delle messe, et si danno elemosine.

Essentially the same description is given by Papa Angelinus Metaxì, Parish Priest of S. Nicola, and by Papa Manoli Metaxì, Parish Priest of S. Giorgio.¹⁴

One is tempted to hypothesize that this Greek practice was introduced into these islands by these Rhodiot *papas* and their congregations in 1530. However, a good century before their arrival the *coccia* was already very popular with the Maltese and Gozitans. The following is a chronological listing of a random collection of evidence covering one and a half centuries:

TABLE I

- a 1427 *Item, voluit et mandat testatrix quod in die octavo sui obitus dispensatur **cuchia** sicut consuetum est. Item, in die quatragesimali dispensandi in pane caritativo pro anima ejus frumenti salmata //...//.*¹⁵
- b 1436 *Volo fieri facere anno quolibet in primis vesperis thuminos duos de **cuchia** secundum morem Maltensium pauperibus et egenis dispensandum in eadem ecclesia [S. Andree Casalis Cuderi] ... et [similiter] ... in Ecclesia S. Georgii in loco appellato Gebel Chantar, ... et in Ecclesia S. Luciae in terris appellatis Barrani, ... quemadmodum supra dispositum est fieri in Ecclesia S. Andree.*¹⁶

¹⁴ George Aquilina and Stanley Fiorini, eds., *Documentary Sources of Maltese History, Part IV: Documents at the Vatican, No. 1: Archivio Segreto Vaticano Congregazione Vescovi e Regolari, Malta: Visita Apostolica no. 51 Mgr Petrus Dusina, 1575* (Malta: University Press, 2005), 247, 250, 252. A reference, such as this, to volumes in this series will, hereafter, be denoted by *DSMH* IV/2. This particular volume is cited as *Dusina*.

¹⁵ Will of Dyanora de Pellegrino of Gozo: *DSMHI*/3: doc. 208.

¹⁶ XVII-century copy of will of Paulus Peregrino dated ix.1436: NLM Lib. MS. 360, pp. 904, 905.

- c 1482 *Item, legavit quod in **cuchia** si faczanu tumenata octo frumenti. Item, in quadragesimali legavit ki si facza una salmata dicti frumenti de **cocia** et dispensatur more solito.*¹⁷
- d 1486 *Pro **cuchia** cum frumento et aliis leguminibus confectibus, tarenis II frumenti, salmas XV.*¹⁸
- e 1532 *Legavit Joanni Zirafe nepoti clausuram in contrata S. Agathe dilo Zurricco cum hoc quod teneatur fare la **cuccia** in la vigilia di S. Leonardo et quilla spendiri more solito et fari diri la missa in Ecclesia Visitationis S. Marie in Casali Bubacra et fari dire li vesperi.*¹⁹
- f 1537 *Ipse Magnificus Antonius emit a dicto testi speczi, passuli, juljulena, menduli ac eciam nuchilli et altri cosi per quilli mittiri a la **cuchia**.*²⁰
- g 1544 *Item, voluit fieri salmam tritici unam die quatragesimo sui obitus de **cuchia** cum suis municionibus juxta usum Gaudisii; Item, salmam unam frumenti in anniversario de pane pauperibus Christi distribuendo pro remissione suorum peccaminum.*²¹
- h 1569 *Voluit fieri die XV^o sui obitus tuminos quatuor di frumento pauperibus Christi distribuendo ut vulgo dicitur **cuchia** cum suis munitioibus juxta usum Gaudisii ... pro remissione suorum peccaminum.*²²

One can conclude from the above that the practice of *qućcija* was well ingrained in Maltese and Gozitan society where it had evolved its own local form – *secundum morem Maltensium* [1436]; *juxta usum Gaudisii* [1544, 1569] – deviating somewhat from the Greek practice (as described by the Rhodiot *papas* to Dusina) from which it had originally emerged.

The wording of the 1427 gobbet is revealing. It refers to an ancient consuetudinary practice of the rite – *sicut consuetum est* – which would, therefore, take it back in Gozo, at least, well into the XIV century. It is recalled that, in view of the documented presence of a *Protopapas Maltes* – Nicolaos and his wife Milas – in 1230, it has now been firmly established that in the mid-XIII century it was the Greek Church that represented Christianity in these islands, at a time

¹⁷ Will of Rev. Antoni Machanuc dated 20.xii.1482: Notarial Archives, Valetta (NAV) Not. Guglielmo de Sansone 104/0316/MDV/AAI, fol. 1^v.

¹⁸ Will of Maria //...//: *DSMHI*/3: doc. 210.

¹⁹ Will of Catherina Callus of 8.x.1532: NAV Not. Antonio Rapa MS. 1033A, fol. 118.

²⁰ Witness in court; cf. Godfrey Wettinger, *Kliem Malti Qadim* (Malta: Outlook Coop, 2006), 72, citing Mdina Cathedral Archives, Malta (MCM) Curia Episcopalis Melitae (CEM) Acta Originalia (AO) 15, fol. 119 (17.ii.1537).

²¹ Will of Margarita Saliva of 20.iii.1544: *DSMHV*/1: doc. 97.

²² Will of Marchisia Bonnici of 17.xii.1569: NAV Not. Lorenzo de Apapis R203, fol. 126.

when there was not yet any hint of the presence of a Latin clergy, except for the absent bishop.²³ This makes the connexion of *quċċija* with the Greek Christian community entirely plausible.

The characteristics of the Maltese/Gozitan rite of *quċċija* can be analysed under the following headings:

- (i) Timing: *die octavo obitus* (1427); *die quatragesimali* (1482); *in anniversario* (1544); *anno quolibet in primis vespere / in vigilia festivitatis* (1436, 1532); *in die XV^o obitus* (1569).
- (ii) Quantity: *thumina II* (1436); *thumina VIII* (1482); *salma I* (1482, 1544); *salmata XV* (1486); *thumina IV* (1569).
- (iii) Quality: *pani* (1427, 1544); *in frumento et aliis leguminibus confectis* (1486); *speczi, passuli, juljulena, menduli ac eciam nuchilli et altri cosi* (1537); *tritici / frumento cum municionibus* (1544, 1569).

The Rhodiots may not have been responsible for the introduction of *quċċija* in these islands, but it appears that they may have had some influence in shaping its development, as can be deduced from an exemplar of 1550 cited by Wettinger:²⁴ *cuchia ... in die mortuorum proximo venturo post decessum testatoris*. The timing of this *quċċija* on All Souls' Day (immediately following the testator's decease) is in keeping with Papa Diassorino's description but at variance with all the other local descriptions. The common element in all descriptions, without exception, is that of suffrage for the soul of the departed in the form of a charitable offering for the poor. This aspect of offering is best galvanized in the description that Bishop Gargallo gives this rite during his Synod of 1591 when he refers to it in biblical terms (Mk 7: 11), calling it *qorbien*:²⁵

Collationes vero nuncupatas vulgo corben et alia id genus quae septimo, trigesimo, et anniversario offeruntur in ecclesia pro animabus mortuorum ab eorum heredibus ...

Transition from Funerals to Birthdays

Viewed from our present-day perspective, it is intriguing to find a connexion that links the "old" funereal rite with the "modern" concept of a festive celebration on the occasion of a child's first birthday. In searching for an answer to this 'death-to-life' poser, one is struck by the anomalous timing of the two gobbets of 1436 and of 1532 that associate *quċċija* not with any date related to

²³ Stanley Fiorini, "The Triple Strand of the Liturgical Tradition of the Church in Malta: Byzantine, Roman, Gallican Rites," *Melita Theologica* 63, no.2 (2013): 5-18, esp. 5-7.

²⁴ Wettinger, *Kliem Qadim*, 71.

²⁵ NLM Lib. MS. 6, fol. 36'.

the testator's decease but with a date in the liturgical calendar, namely the festive occurrence of vespers on the vigil of a saint's celebration. Furthermore, unlike all the other instances, it is tied to a particular locality, namely, the countryside chapel dedicated to the same saint: St Andrew's Church at *Hal Qdieri*, St George's (troglodytic) Church at *Il-Fawwara*, St Lucia's Church at *Tal-Barrani* and St Leonard's Church at *Bubaqra*. This opens a window on the real meaning of the term *quccija*, not as an event when certain rites are performed (as we tend to think of it today), but what was actually eaten on such occasions, namely, essentially boiled grain garnished, or otherwise, with some condiments. The etymology of the Sicilian term *coccia* from the Greek Homeric recipe *κυκεών, -ώνος*, meaning 'a potion made of barley-meal, grated cheese and wine', fully justifies this interpretation.²⁶ It would then make more sense to view the modern festive celebration on the child's first birthday as a development from the festive liturgical event, rather than from the funereal context. After all, the earliest form of the "modern" *quccija* was restricted solely to boiled wheat, as in *De Soldanis (supra)*.

Before leaving the two sporadic festive mentions of *quccija* one significant remark needs to be made, highlighted in the 1532-gobbet. Here the testatrix Catherina Callus, wanting the celebration to be performed on an annual basis and in order to make this possible, bequeathed her nephew Joanni Zirafe a field in the district of St Agatha of *Žurrieq* from the proceeds of which the *quccija* could be financed. This explains certain micro-toponyms in these islands related to *quccija*, namely, fields bequeathed by testators to their heirs to ensure the continuation of the rite over the years. This is typified by the following occurrences: (i) *Lentia in contrata tal Mirehil appellata Ta Cochie*,²⁷ and (ii) *Terreno in contrata Casalis Curmi appellato Il Ginen tal Cuccie*.²⁸

This leads us to investigate further the liturgical context of the vespers where such charitable manifestations took place, even if only a few instances survive that link them with the term *coccia*. In particular, we shall be looking at the terminology used for this celebration, namely, *convivium* or *jentaculum* or *collatio* or *žerda*.

²⁶ From the verb *κυκάω*, to stir or mix (Liddell and Scott). Magri (*supra*, fn. 13) uses *κόλιβα* to describe the meal. Modern Greek retains *κόλλυβα* with the meaning of "boiled wheat (offered at memorial services)," clearly, derived from Classical Greek *κόλλυβα* (neuter plural), for "small round cakes."

²⁷ NAV Not. Giuseppe de Guevara R224/3(I), fol. 356 (29.vii.1545).

²⁸ MCM ACM Prebende 7 (Decanali 1601), fol. 58^v.

Convivia

Domenico Magri²⁹ ties up nicely the two rites – the funereal and the festive – which he views as complementary aspects of the same religious phenomenon against the historical, patristic background of the notion of *ἀγάπη* in the Greek Church. Citing St Gregory Nazianzen, he classifies “*conviti sagri che solevano fare li Christiani antichi dalla voce ἀγάπη*” under three headings: (i) *di nozze*, (ii) *di feste di martiri*, and (iii) *nelle esequie*, supporting his statement with references to St Clement (Lib. 8 Const. Apost. c.44) and to Origen (Lib. I in Iob). Other evidence is given for the celebration of *ἀγάπη* after Holy Communion (Zonar., In Can. 74 Trull) and Pope St Gregory the Great’s writing on *solenni agapi* (Lib. I, ep. 14).

Coming nearer to his time, and especially drawing on his own personal experience during his recent travels in the Lebanon,³⁰ he can authoritatively state:

Dura persino al presente l'uso degli Agapi in tutto l'Oriente à quali spesso mi sono trovato presente con occasione di feste ò funerali, se bene non si fanno dentro le chiese ma vicino ad esse in qualche campagna aperta ... Tra li conviti che io vidi nel Monte Libano nel 1625, sontuosissime fù nella festività dell'Assunta ...

... and relating this to his home country:

Nell'isola di Malta, massime nelle chiese rurali sogliono nella medesima chiesa ove si celebrava la festa, distribuire al popolo dopo il vespro, alcune ciambelle con frutti, e li Greci similmente benedicono certe foggie quali, divise in pezzi, distribuiscono al popolo. ... Sogliono li Greci nell'essequie distribuire al popolo nella chiesa grano cotto e benedetto quale ornano con altre galantarie chiamato coliva (κόλιβα), cioè confetture ò cose dolci, con le quali si va ornando ... fù poi da Greci quest' opera di charità usata anco nell'essequie, qual costume dalli medesimi Greci fù introdotto in Malta ove il grano così condito vien chiamato coccia.

Witness to the Greeks’ celebration of a liturgical event with food-offerings is not restricted to what Magri experienced in Lebanon in the XVII century. Already in the XII century, Theodore Balsamon records a charming local custom in a village in Thrace where the peasants brought their priests various offerings in gratitude for the communion they had just received.³¹

²⁹ *Notitia* 1650 [NLM BQ.B.30].

³⁰ Domenico Magri, *Breve racconto del viaggio al Monte Libano* (Viterbo: Diotallevi, 2da impressione 1664), 41 [copy in NLM catalogued BQ.2.44].

³¹ Michael Angold, *Church and Society in Byzantium under the Comneni: 1081-1261* (Cambridge: University Press, 2000), 156.

What local evidence has survived in the Maltese Islands for these practices? As the *convivium* is associated with particular chapels (mostly small countryside churches) we are fortunate to be able to tap into the monumental work of Mgr Vincent Borg, *Melita Sacra*, that has looked with a fine-toothed comb into every aspect of the diocese. Another useful source is the 4-volume manuscript collection *Giuliana de' Benefici di Malta* (2 vols) and another two for Gozo.³² Very often, evidence for the practice of *jentaculum* only appears in later *reveli* by the clergy who mention it as a burthen on the benefice of which they are rectors. The original document of the foundation is often lost or does not go into such details, so that in order to organize the data in some chronological schema, we list the evidence according to the estimated foundation date of the benefice. We then have:

TABLE II

- a** 1300 *ca.* *San Pawl tal-Bindiġi (Milġi)*. The present church dates from 1618. Excavations of the 1960s by the *Missione Italiana* in its interior revealed the foundations of two other churches, the earlier one dating from the post-Norman period.³³ Referring to the later church, in 1575, Mgr Dusina records: *in die festivitatis ejusdem, scilicet Conversionis, et etiam Commemorationis Sancti Pauli, tenentur portare panem et vinum et alere pauperes in dicta ecclesia, in dictis diebus festivis, confluentes.*³⁴
- b** 1350 *ca.* *Annunzjata tas-Saqqajja [G]*. A *juspatronatus regium* was founded in this church by Sibilla d'Aragona in the mid-XIV century.³⁵ In 1575 Dusina describes the burthen on this benefice as *celebrandi missam unam quolibet die Sabbati, et in festo Annunciationis, ac in eadem festivitate cantandi vespervas, et alendi illos, qui huiusmodi vespervas canunt.*³⁶

³² Archivum Provinciae O.F.M., *Giuliana de' Benefici di Malta e Gozo*, MSS. I-IV, cited as *Giuliana*.

³³ Michelangelo Cagiano de Azevedo, "Medieval Buildings Excavated in Malta," in *Medieval Malta: Studies on Malta Before the Knights*, ed. Anthony T. Luttrell (London: British School at Rome, 1975), 93-95.

³⁴ *Dusina*, fol. 181^v-2.

³⁵ Stanley Fiorini, "Sibilla d'Aragona and the Foundation of the Saqqajja Benefice on Gozo," *Melita Historica* 12, no.4 (1999): 367-372.

³⁶ *Dusina*, fol. 183.

- c < 1400 *Qtuġġ ir-Ras ta' San Ġwann, tal-Mazzari, Bir Ghattar*. This *juspatronatus* was founded by Francia Peregrino, the daughter of Giacomo Peregrino and Margarita d'Aragona, wife of Ludovico de Plosasco, originally in a church dedicated to St Paul in Mдина's *platea*; later transferred to an altar inside the Cathedral. The property funding it was located at *Bir Ghattar*, in the district of *Benwarrad* (today called *Erba' Mwieżeb*). In his visitation of 1594, Bishop Gargallo had declared to him by the beneficiary: *ho aggravio tanto di celebrare ... e nei primi vesperi di dar collatione a quilli che si trovano*.³⁷
- d ? < 1400 *San Pietru tat-Tarġa, Naxxar*. This troglodytic church, piercing the cliff-face of the Great Fault, is recorded by Dusina, in 1575, to have hosted a unique *convivium*, of ancient foundation, on the feast of its dedication: *Visitavit aliam Ecclesiam sub vocabulo Sancti Petri constructam in dicto casale Nasciari, quæ habet altare, et portas ligneas, quæ est sita in gripta in loco nuncupato Sotto la Targia, caret rectore, introytibus, oneribus, et omnibus necessarijs. Verum quod heredes Petri Schembri, Michaelis Schembri, Dominicus Mefsuto, Damianus Schembri, Mattheus Mefsuto, Joannes Portelli, Blasius Michalef, Hieronimus Besine, tenentur in die festivitatis Sancti Petri portare in eadem Ecclesia thumulum unum panis per quemlibet ex prenominatis, scilicet unusquisque thumulum suum panis, et duo barilia vini in totum comuniter, et ibi celebrari facere duas missas in festivitate, et post celebrationem missarum dictum panem, et vinum pauperibus erogare, et hoc antiquitus fuit factum ab eorum antecessoribus et anno quolibet huiusmodi onus a predictis nominatis satisfi*.³⁸ Bishop Gargallo's pastoral visitation of 1594 slightly corrects Dusina's statement, stating that in the church *est unum altare in qua est dipinta imago SS. Petri et Pauli*, and referring the event to the feast of Saints Peter and Paul (*l-Imnarja*).³⁹ Gargallo later stopped this rite.⁴⁰

³⁷ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 1:299-300. Archbishop's Archives, Floriana (AAF), *Visitatio Pastoralis* (VP) VI (Royas, Libertano, Gargallo, 1579-1608), fol. 111^v.

³⁸ *Dusina*, fol. 38. To this day, this festive character of the feast of Sts Peter and Paul remains a highlight in the calendar of the Eastern Church: Personal communication by Archimandrite George Mifsud Montanaro, whom I should like to thank for the information.

³⁹ AAF VP VII (Gargallo, 1588-1602), fol. 59.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, fol. 120-1.

- e ca. 1400 *Sant'Antnin ta' Ghajn Xeġba* [G]. In his will of November 1431, drawn up by Notary Angelo de Manuele, Nucius Chamire of Gozo constituted his wife Isolda as his universal heiress whom he burthened with the onus *quod teneatur quolibet anno providere de necessariis Ecclesie Sancti Antonii, edificata per dictum testatorem in contrata Ayn Xeibe, et in ea facere convivium sive serdam quemadmodum solebat facere dictus testator*.⁴¹ A century later, in 1524, the Kinzi family, descendants of Nucius Chamire, elect Don Joannes Dallo as rector of this benefice, specifying the chantry land as consisting of three fields, one of which is called *Tal-Berberi* in the *Tewnit* district of Gozo, and another, *Is-Sined ta' San Teodoru*, declaring that the beneficiary has the burthen *faciendi quolibet festo Sancti Antonii de pane cotto unam salmatam frumenti et unum cadum vini, videlicet, ad spendendum in dicto festo Sancti Antonii et celebrare et dicere divina officia pro animabus dictorum suorum defunctorum et antecessorum prout fuit et erat solitum*.⁴² In 1575, Dusina describes the burthen as *cum onere distribuendi salmam unam frumenti in pane et unam quartariam vini*.⁴³
- f 1419 *L-Annunzjata tal-Vagnoli*. By their joint will of 30 November 1419, as in the acts of Notary Nicola de Insula, the Vagnolo couple Antonio and Ismiralda, founded the chapel of the Annunciation in the Cathedral of Malta, attaching to it a number of benefices.⁴⁴ The wills of Ismiralda, of 23 August 1432, and of her widower, Antonio of 23 July 1452, both confirm these decisions.⁴⁵ Rev. Luca Xara, in 1594 before Bishop Gargallo declared that among the burthens carried by his part of the benefice he had *l'aggravio di fare nelli primi vesperi de la Nunciata certa colatione alli sacerdoti et alli clerici che se trovano in ditti vesperi*.⁴⁶
- g 1431 *Sant'Agata ta' Ġawhar*. In 1417, Francesco Gatto and his wife Paola Castelli had built the church, dedicated to St Agatha, that still survives at the entrance to Mdina. In their will of 1431, in the acts

⁴¹ NAV: 21/1015/Chamire1431/AAI.

⁴² Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 1:352. *DSMH* V/1, Doc. 69. Hereafter, this volume will be cited as *Registrum Foundationum Beneficiorum Insulae Gaudisii*, (*RFBIG*).

⁴³ *Dusina*, fol. 183^v.

⁴⁴ XVIII-century copy in MCM *Registrum Deliberationum Capitularium*, i, fol. 1-3.

⁴⁵ *RFBIG*, docs 38, 93.

⁴⁶ AAF VP VI (Royas, Libertano, Gargallo 1579-1608), fol. 109^v. Borg, *Melita Sacra*, i, 320.

of Notary Luca Sillato, they established a very generous patrimony of lands which, according to Dusina, in 1575, *habet onus celebrandi missas singulis diebus, nec non in die festivitatis Sanctæ Agathæ, nec non etiam dare jentaculum presbiteris convenientibus, quod fit in eademmet cappellania post vespas*.⁴⁷

- h** < 1436 *San Gwann taċ-Ċimiterju, Rabat, Malta*. In the context of more than a score of other chapels in the Cemetery of St Paul at Rabat, the Church of St John the Evangelist, associated with the *Beneficio di Rabal Attard* in De Mello's Rollo (1436),⁴⁸ carried the burthen, *inter alia, decantationis primam vesperam in festo Sancti Joannis Evangelistæ et in distribuendo colationem, et in die festo, celebrandi missam*.⁴⁹
- i** < 1436 *Santa Marija ta' Donna Manna. Lo animagio di Donna Manna*, mentioned in De Mello's Rollo, is also referred to, in 1540, as *Ta' Cilia in contrata Gued il Coleya*.⁵⁰ Rev. Aloysio Bonnici, rector of this benefice in 1594, declared before Bishop Gargallo: [*Sono*] *obligato celebrare una messa ogni settimana et dire li primi vesperi della festività dila Assumptione \di S. Maria/ et nel giorno sequente celebrare la messa cantata et far colatione a quilli che intervengono alli primi vesperi*.⁵¹
- j** 1435 *San Nikola ta' Dbiegi. San Pawl taċ-Ċimiterju, Ghawdex* [G]. In his will dated 18 October 1435, Nucius de Episcopo bequeathed his family a vineyard and adjoining fields at *Ta' Dbiegi* burthened with the following obligation: *quod ... de dicta galca quamdiu fuerit vitibus plantata anno quolibet debeat et debeant dispensare vinum quartariarum duarum et de fructibus dictarum terrarum panem tomenarum quattuor frumenti in Ecclesia Sancti Nicolai existenti iuxta galcam predictam, videlicet, in die festivitatis ecclesie predicte et tantumdem vini et tantumdem frumenti in dicta Sancti Pauli de Cimiterio, videlicet, quartarias duas vini et tomenos duos*

⁴⁷ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 1:316. Dusina, fol. 21.

⁴⁸ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 1:220-221, 287.

⁴⁹ Giuliana, ii, 236^v.

⁵⁰ Godfrey Wettinger, *Placenames of the Maltese Islands: ca. 1300 – 1800* (Malta: PEG, 2000), 513.

⁵¹ AAF VP VII (Gargallo 1588-1602), fol. 87^v.

*frumenti in festo Ianuarii et alias quartarias duas et tomenos duos in festo Iunii //...//.*⁵²

k 1436 *Sant'Andrija ta' Xamita. San Ġorġ ta' Ġebel Ciantar. Santa Lućija tal-Barrani.* These are the churches referred to, *supra* Table I.b, bequeathed by Paulus Peregrino to the Benedictines of San Nicola de Arenis of Catania with the obligations already described. In 1575, Dusina declared that the monks were not satisfying these obligations: *Visitavit etiam aliam Ecclesiam ruralem sub vocabulo Sancti Andree in contrata de Sciamita casalis Sebbuci, quę est penitus diruta, in qua fratres Ordinis Sancti Benedicti existentes in Civitate Catania, quorum est Ecclesia ruralis Sancti Nicolai de Alchabir, ratione terrarum dictę Ecclesię Sancti Nicolai tenentur celebrare vespas, et missam in die festivitatis et ibi portare tumulos duos avellarum, vel frumenti cocti, et quartam unam vini, et inter populum ibi concurrentem dividuntur, et predictis dicti fratres non satisfaciunt.*⁵³

l 1441 *San Mikiel Arkanglu ta' Ċimiterju, Ġhawdex* [G]. In his will of 15 December 1441, Antonius de Raspullo of Gozo founded an *animagium* with land called *Ta' Ilarju*, in Ġharb, burthening it with the celebration of a weekly mass in this Chapel of St Michael Archangel. Mgr Borg also cites reference to *nonnulla cibaria* attached to this onus.⁵⁴

m 1446 *San Mikiel tal-Ġharb* [G]. In his will of 19 May 1446, Michael Cadumi of Gozo enjoined his heirs: *in perpetuum teneantur et debeant qualibet die sabbati accendere lampadem Ecclesię Sancti Michaelis contrate Garabi et facere convivium in festivitate ipsius Ecclesię Sancti Michaelis de mense Septembris.* In the same will, Cadumi established another *animagium* with land called *De Contagnia*. This toponym is nowhere else recorded and is possibly a misreading of *Montagna*. The *Giuliana* [# 34] identifies this benefice with *Giuspatronato detto Ta Montagna ta Hammar, alias ta Lampa, seu S. Nicolao ta Dibegi et ta Hammar.* In 1575, Mgr Dusina recorded: *Ecclesia sub vocabulo Sancti Nicolai Amburi sita in contrata tal Garbo, que beneficium simplex est cuius Rector est donnus Leonardus de Agacijs qui tenetur ratione tumulorum sex*

⁵² RFBIG, Doc. 33 [fol. 35].

⁵³ Dusina, fol. 173.

⁵⁴ RFBIG, doc. 52. Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 1:356.

*terreni ad dictam Ecclesiam pertinentia celebrare missam unam in festo Sancti Nicolai et eadem die distribuere tumulos duos frumenti in pane pauperibus et reficere ecclesiam cui oneri satisfacere dixit dictus donnus Leonardus.*⁵⁵

- n** < 1453 *San Nikola tal-Gudja; Santa Marija ta' Birmifituh. Ad beneficium Ecclesie Sancti Nicolai Casalis Gudie nec non et Sancte Marie matricis ecclesie de Birmifituch... [fiat] convivium quolibet festivitate ut vulgariter dicitur lingua Maltensi la zerda.*⁵⁶
- o** 1455 *Santa Marija ta' Dbiegi* [G]. In his last will, dated 22 February 1455, Francesco Bonnici bequeathed land at *Wied Sara* with which to found an *animagium* in the Church of *Santa Marija ta' Dbiegi*. In his will of 9 November 1474, Francesco's relative, Rev. Pino Bonnici, imposed various burthens on this benefice.⁵⁷ Borg claims that, from Gargallo's visitation report of 1592, it transpires that a *jentaculum* was offered after first vespers.⁵⁸
- p** 1467 *Santa Marija ta' Hal Ghaxaq*. In her will in the acts of Notary Paulo Bonello, dated 9 September 1467, Ricca, the widow of Michael sive Cataldus Muchumud enjoined her universal heirs *quod de fructibus unius galce vocate Landar ta il Geuenie debeant facere zerdam in Ecclesia Sancte Marie Casalis Axac et celebrare facere missam die festi ecclesie predictae.*⁵⁹
- q** 1479 *Santa Marija ta' Bin Xibla* [G]. On 26 January 1479, the couple Friderico and Francia Pontremoli of Gozo made an irrevocable *donatio inter vivos* in favour of their grandchildren. The donation, consisting of lands called *Ta' Bin Xibla*, including *Is-Saqwi*, where cotton and vines grow, was made under various conditions, including the maintenance of the Church of the Virgin, close to the donated land *et in sua festivitate dispensare de pane et de aliis rebus comestibilibus iuxta discretionem dicti donatarii et sui successorum.*⁶⁰
- r** < 1489 *Santa Marija ta' Ghodlien* [G]. This *juspatronatus regium* is described as *Sancta Maria Bita Adelem* in a chancery document of 27 July 1489, appointing a successor to the last incumbent of

⁵⁵ *RFBIG*, doc. 35. Giuliana iii, # 34. *Dusina*, fol. 184^v.

⁵⁶ MCM CEM AO 3, f. 87. *Dusina*, f. 91.

⁵⁷ *RFBIG*, docs 39, 46.

⁵⁸ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 1:359.

⁵⁹ *DSMHI/3*, doc. 18.

⁶⁰ *RFBIG*, doc. 58.

its rectorship, Rev. Petro Tillirixi [fl. 1452-1489].⁶¹ On 25 August 1545, Rev. Giovanni Rapa, its rector in that year, declared before Bishop Cubelles that the benefice carried the burthen of the celebration of masses in the Church of *San Ġwann ta' Ċimiterju* of Rabat, Gozo, and *nelle prime vespere della Natività della Madonna di ciascun anno in perpetuum dare collatione di nucelle e vino agli astanti*.⁶²

- s 1492 *Santa Marija ta' Ġhajn Xejba* [G]. The leper Garita Xejba, daughter of Nardu, bequeathed half her field called *In-Nigred* at *Ġhajn Xejba* for the purpose of having a mass celebrated in the Church of Santa Marija near that land on the festivity of the church, for the maintenance of the sanctuary lamp on Saturday evenings of Christmas and Easter *et in conficiendo pane duorum thumenorum frumenti distribuendo, more Gaudisii, personis qui in festivitate dicte ecclesie interfuerint*.

In his will of 28 January 1505, Angelo de Amarino, executor of the will of Garita Xejba, further bequeathed 24 *tareni* of Sicilian money to this church *ut de fructibus debent allumare dictam ecclesiam, facere collationem in vesperis dicte ecclesie et facere celebrare in dicta ecclesia pro remedio anime dicte quondam Margarite [filie Nardi Xeybe]*.

Furthermore, in their joint will of 21 May 1519, the couple Paulo and Jacoba de Girardo bequeathed a yearly *quartara* of must from their vineyard at *Ġhajn Xejba* with the obligation, *inter alia*, that every year, mass is celebrated in the Church of *Santa Marija at Ġhajn Xejba* on the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin *per unum sacerdotem et dari sibi collationem ex fructibus pecie terre in contrata Nigrid*.⁶³

- t 1510 *San Nikola tal-Bindiqli*, recorded in 1544 as *animagium in contrata Casalis Percop*, is identified with the *animagium tal Midic in contrata Sancti Jacobi Casalis Percop*,⁶⁴ alias *Ta' Ħal Manin*.⁶⁵ In

⁶¹ DSMH II/4, doc. 146.

⁶² Giuliana, iii, fol. 188.

⁶³ RFBIG, docs 57, 62, 28, respectively. *Dusina*, f. 185^v.

⁶⁴ Wettinger, *Placenames*, 379, 499.

⁶⁵ Giuliana, ii, #48, f. 194. The relationship between the two names emerges clearly from the 1598 visitation that locates the Church of St Nicolas at *Rahal [Ar]manin*, whereas the landed property is further away at *Rahal Perkop*: AAF VP VII, fol. 141. Although the benefice may only

his will of 29 June 1510 in the acts of Notary Antonio Rapa, the founder bequeathed seven fields covering 24 *tumoli* of land to found this living.⁶⁶ In his *revelo* before Bishop Cagliares, on 26 February 1616, the incumbent in that year, Rev. Lucas Camilleri, declared that, on the feast of St Nicolas, he had the onus of saying *vesperi cum jentaculo et accendere lampadam diebus consuetis*.⁶⁷

- u 1515 *Santa Marija ta' Sieq Targa* [G]. In a codicil, dated 19 October 1515, to her will, Paula de Manuele, widow of Paulo of Gozo, bequeathed ploughing oxen and a warehouse to her sons and heirs on condition that they should keep up the family tradition established by their parents *quod ... cunctis temporibus teneantur quolibet die festo Ecclesie Sancte Marie olim fundate per ipsum quondam Paulum olim maritum dicte codicillatricis in contrata Xac Targe teneantur erogare solitum convivium cunctis confluentibus die festivitatis predictae pro ut hactenus per ipsam codicillatricem et dictum quondam eius maritum solitum fieri et erogari extitit*.⁶⁸
- v 1516 *Santa Marija tal-Idrja (Hodigitria), Rabat Ghawdex* [G]. On 7 March 1516, Antona de Manuele, wife of Angelo, established her field called *Ta' Godla* on the outskirts of *Rabat, Gozo*, as an *animagium*. Various obligations burthen this benefice, including *quod cappellanus dicte Ecclesie Sancte Marie de Hydria quolibet festo dicte ecclesie possit capere de frondibus dicti viridarii quicquid opus erit circa ornamentum dicte ecclesie, tam de frondibus foliis[que], quam de fructibus pro collatione in primis vesperis imperpetuum et hoc quo ad vinum et valorem mellis ubarrarum duarum et totidem ipse ... eiusque heredes et successores teneantur facere in vesperis Sancte Marie Nunciate anno quolibet, ut vulgo dicitur, in confecti sive cubayta sive aliis sumtibus, commercii, comestibilibus, ita quod pro primis vesperis dicte ecclesie de redditibus et fructibus dicti viridarii dispendantur dui ubarri de melli et dui quartuchi di vino et altro*

have been founded in 1510, the church must antedate the foundation by at least a century, as Bindiqli (Arabic for Venetian) was a Maltese surname that was last heard of in 1417; cp. *San Paul Milqi, tal-Bindiqli*.

⁶⁶ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 2:521.

⁶⁷ AAF VP X (Cagliares 1615-16), fol. 93/102. This was also recorded in *Dusina*, f. 100^v.

⁶⁸ *RFBIG*, doc. 20.

*tanto alli vesperi de la Nunciata quolibet anno in perpetuum sine aliqua contradictione alicuiusvis persone.*⁶⁹

- w 1533 *Santa Marija ta' Ghajn Hosna* [G]. In his will of 16 April 1533, Friderico Navarra made various foundations in favour of Churches of the Blessed Virgin in Gozo, including, the *Matrice*, *Santa Marija tal-Qala*, and *Santa Marija ta' Ghajn Hosna*. With respect to this last mentioned, he ordered his universal heir *quod anno quolibet in festo Sancte Marie vocate di Hos[n]e facza diri li vespri in la dicta ecclesia et lindumani fari celebrari in quilla et spendiri in pani octo tumina di frumento et uno barrili di vino di tri quartari et omni sabato committa alo xirico sive jardinaro di lo jardino di Hayn Xible di allumari ogni sabato la dicta ecclesia et scomputarili dila dicta gabella di Hain Xible ... et quod dictus heres debuit et debet in dicta die festivitatis dicte ecclesie dar a maniari a quilli priviti ke sarranno in la dicta ecclesia secondo la forma et modo ke fachia lo dicto testaturi.*⁷⁰
- x 1540 *L-Annunzjata tax-Xewkija* [G]. In his will of 11 September 1540, Matteo Rapa bequeathed land in the district of *Xac Targe* (*Sieq Tarġa*) in Gozo from the proceeds of which he enjoined his heirs *quolibet die Sabbati celebrare in Ecclesia Sancte Marie sub vocabulo La Nunciata, fundata per ipsum nobilem testatorem in via que ducit ad contratam Xeuchie, et dare collationem in vesperibus et die festi dicte ecclesie.*⁷¹
- y 1587 *San Mikiel ta' Tabrija*. Don Giacomo Calleja, Parish Priest of *Siggiewi*, in his will of 22 June 1587 in the acts of Notary Antonio Angelo Falzon left his field called *Ta' San Mikiel ta' Wied it-Tabrija* to establish a *juspatronatus* for members of his family, surnamed Calleja.⁷² On 29 November 1615, its rector in that year, Rev. Andrea Galea, declared before Bishop Cagliares that the benefice carried the burthen *celebrandi primas vespervas et distribuendi jentacula interessentibus et celebrare missam in die sequenti.*⁷³
- z 1595 *Ta' San Franġisk, Ta' Xbiex*. The couple Gio. Maria Cassia and Laurica Rosso established this *animagium* as per acts of Notary

⁶⁹ RFBIG, doc. 22.

⁷⁰ RFBIG, doc. 66.

⁷¹ RFBIG, doc. 87.

⁷² Giuliana, i, fol. 244.

⁷³ AAF VP X (Cagliares 1615-16), fol. 63/72.

Mario Mallia of 6 March 1595 with lands at *Ta' Xbiex*. Later, on 28 March 1607, they exchanged this property with two fields called *Tal-Qassis*, covering two *salme* of land at *Bieb il-Gżira*, irrigated by rain water that flowed down *Wied Gholluqa*.⁷⁴ In his *revelo* of 23 September 1615, Rev. Leonardo Bonavia, the beneficiary in that year, declared before Bishop Cagliares that he held the *animagium sub onere decantandi primas vespas in festivitate S. Francisci et in eadem ecclesia distribuendi jentaculum interessentibus prout est de more*.⁷⁵

These examples have been chosen as being among the more descriptive representations of the earlier occurrences of the rite. This list is by no means exhaustive. Motivated more, perhaps, by pastoral, charitable considerations, Dusina (1575) lists two score of other wayside chapels at which the rite was performed, specifically giving the reason for the occasion as *pro alendis pauperibus*. In most cases the person responsible for the organization of the celebration is given and mention is made of landed property in his ownership or procuratorship intended to finance the celebration. In a few cases, it transpires that the event is held *ex devotione* of this procurator, or in order to perpetuate a custom established by his ancestors. Table III lists those which have not been already mentioned *supra*.⁷⁶

TABLE III

Jentaculum pro alendis pauperibus: Dusina 1575

| Fol. | Locality | Church | Field | Owner | Founder |
|-----------------|------------|---------------|-----------------------|------------------|------------------------|
| 42 ^v | Birkirkara | Altare majus | | Joannes Borg | Simon Borg (pater) |
| 51 | Lija | S. Salvator | | Franciscus Haius | Franc. Haius (avus) |
| 55 ^v | Siggiewi | Nativitas BMV | Ta' Mallia + Ramla | | |

⁷⁴ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, ii, 532. Giuliana, i, #122, fol. 262.

⁷⁵ AAF VP X (Cagliares 1615-16), fol. 35^{rv}/43-4.

⁷⁶ For a full list, cf. Dusina, Index by Subject, *s.v. jentaculum*.

| | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------------|--|-----------------------|
| 56 | Sigġiewi | Assumptio BMV | Ta' Licata | Petrus Pace | Lucas Pace (avus) |
| 58 ^v | Sigġiewi | Assumptio BMV | Taloseri | Nardus Zoppardus + Joanna Pace | |
| 60 | Sigġiewi | S. Salvator | Ta' Qarn is-Sajd | Andreas Mamo | |
| 66 ^v | Źebbuġ | Assumptio BMV | Torbet Carfagna | Paulus Haius | Jacobus Haius |
| 71 ^v | Qormi | Assumptio BMV | Ta' Gharram | Nicolaus Camilleri | |
| 75 ^v | Źejtun | Visitatio BMV | Hal Ghaxaq | Aloysius Cassar | Pater Aloysii |
| 76 ^v | Xluq | Assumptio BMV | | Anellus Mangion | Idem, ex devotione |
| 77 | Źabbar | S. Jacobus | Ta' Mwiegen | Nardus Axac | |
| 78 | Źabbar | Annuntiatio BMV | | Antonius Barbara | |
| 79 ^v | Qormi | S. Leonardus | S. Nikola, contr. | Dionysius Cassar | |
| 83 ^v | Birmiftuh | [capella] | | Andreas, Vester + Vincentius Bonnici | |
| 85 | Luqa | Assumptio BMV | | Eleonora Farrugia | |
| 85 ^v | Luqa | Nativitas BMV | Hal Xluq | Nicolaus Learef | |
| 85 ^v | Luqa | Assumptio BMV | Hal Xluq | Rev. Simon Bonnici | |
| 86 ^v | Farruġ | Nativitas BMV | Hal Farruġ | Rev. Mattheus Burlò | |
| 90 | Kirkop | S. Leonardus | Il-Baqqari | Andreas Mangion | |
| 93 | Tarxien | S. Lucas | Tarxien | Heredes Philippi Muscat | |
| 93 ^v | Tarxien | S. Paulus | Saura | Lanza [Busuttil] | |

| | | | | | |
|-------------------|----------------|-----------------|--|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 93 ^v | Tarxien | S. Catherina | Tarxien | Paulus Barbara | |
| 94 | Tarxien | Annuntiatio BMV | Marqad il-Mogħoż | Procurator ecclesie | |
| 104 ^v | Bubaqra | Assumptio BMV | Tal- Merhubi, Tan- Nadur + Tal-Ħaġar | Georgius Dalli + Nella Azzopardi | |
| 127 | Birgu | Assumptio BMV | | Paulus + Joseph Bellia | Antecessores, ex devotione |
| 127 ^v | Birgu | Assumptio BMV | Ta' Vilent, contr. Tal-Fwieli | Pasqualis Burlò | Matheus Burlò (pater) |
| 163 | Wied ir-Rum | S. Nicolaus | | | Joseph Callus(?) |
| 174 | Żebbuġ | Visitatio BMV | Tal-Gandar | Nardus Vassallo | |
| 179 ^v | Birmiftuħ | S. Nicolaus | Ta' Bajana | Matheus Falzon | |
| 183 ^{rv} | Gozo | S. Antonius | Saqqajja | Matheus Pericon | |
| 186 | Gozo | S. Margarita | [Xewkija] | Michael Damfasino | |
| 188 | Gozo | Annuntiatio BMV | Wied Sara | Guarinus Platamone | Guillelmus deBisconis |

Nor does this exhaust the material. Thus Bezzina, using other sources comes up with other first vespers celebrations with *convivia* in Gozo, including at the countryside chapels of Santa Marija at *Mġarr ix-Xini*, *Wied il-Għasri*, *Il-Qala*, and at *Wied il-Mielab*.⁷⁷ Likewise, Borg lists others in late-XVI-century Malta like *Tad-Demnija* at *Qormi*, the Annunciation church of *Tarxien*, the Assumption altar in St Leonard's Church of *Kirkop*, the Assumption at *Valletta* (subsequently the Monastery of St Mary Magdalen), and St Nicholas *ta' Bardan* at *Ta' Xagħret Micallef* among others.⁷⁸

⁷⁷ Joseph Bezzina, "The Veneration of Our Lady in Gozo: 1600-1800," in *Marian Devotions in the Islands of St Paul: 1600-1800*, ed., Vincent Borg (Malta: Lux, 1983), 216-248, esp. 224.

⁷⁸ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 2:256, 509, 512, 528, 531-532.

Furthermore, if we restrict our attention to the Parish of *St Catherine* at *Żurrieq*, at the end of the XVI century, it becomes apparent from Gargallo's visitation how diffused this practice had become. No less than four different churches in *Żurrieq* itself – San Pietru Apostlu (whose altar icon represented Sts Peter and Paul), *L-Annunzjata* (with land called *Habel ta' Sala*), *Santa Marija tal-Ghaqba* and *San Bartilmew* – and no less than another five at *Bubagra*: *San Leonard*, *It-Twelid tal-Madonna*, *San Mikiel Arkanġlu*, *Il-Qtugh ir-Ras ta' San Ġwann Battista* and *L-Assunta* (noted *supra*), all offering a *jentaculum* to those present at the feast's vespers and/or to the officiating priest. In most cases the onus of payment lay with some lay person who owned some land associated with that particular chapel.⁷⁹

Analysis

From the data presented one can distil a spectrum of popularity of dedications associated with the practice: By far the most popular was the Dormition of the Virgin with 24 mentions (15 in Malta and 9 in Gozo). This is very much in keeping with the Greek tradition witnessed by Magri in the east (noted *supra*) when he commented “*Tra li conviti che io vidi, sontuosissime fù nella festività dell'Assunta*”. Other Marian titles are the Annunciation (5 in Malta and 4 in Gozo), the Nativity (5 in Malta and 1 in Gozo), the Visitation (2 in Malta) and the Hodegitria Madonna (in Gozo). These are followed by St Michael the Archangel (2 in Malta and 2 in Gozo), St Nicholas (4 in Malta), St Leonard (4 in Malta), St Paul (3 in Malta) and St Saviour, Sts Peter and Paul, St Anthony the Abbot, and St John the Baptist, all occurring twice, and the following with one mention each: St Agatha, St Andrew, St Bartholomew, St Catherine, St Francis, St George, St James, St John the Evangelist, St Lucia, St Luke and St Margaret. This spread follows the general pattern of saints venerated in these islands, best viewed from Dusina's report. In that year, out of the 419 dedications of churches he visited (and he did miss some), no less than 400 (or 95%) belonged to saints of the first millennium, that is, from before 869. The present data supports this as only St Leonard and St Francis belong to the second millennium.

Viewed against the demographic backdrop of some 20,000 people in these islands in 1530, some comment is elicited. The fact that most of these churches

⁷⁹ AAF VP VII (Gargallo 1588-1602), fol. 178^v-9, 180^v-1^v, 182^v-4. Some noted in Dusina, ff. 96^v, 97^v. Other examples yet can be cited as, for instance, the will of Cesarea, widow of Matteo de Cantore, who, in her will of 5.vii.1463 in the lost acts of Not. Lucas Sillato, established a legacy *pro convivio in honorem B.M.V. de Augusto*: MCM ACM Misc. 368, f. 179.

were countryside chapels which, as seen, were opened on just one occasion, namely, the dedication of the chapel with the celebration of Mass on the day and First Vespers on the eve, has led Luttrell to question the reason behind this proliferation of churches – one per *ca.* 50 persons – which could not be attributed to the facilitation of cult and ease of access to church services. What then? Luttrell proposes to view this in the whole historical context of the XIV/XV centuries when these chapels were being built, noting that Islam had only been wiped out of the *regno* and these islands by Frederick II, between 1240 and 1250. This means that there was the lapse of a mere century. Furthermore, the language and nomenclature of these islands – personal names, nicknames, surnames, placenames – present solid evidence for ethnic continuity with the Islamic period, which can only be explained by mass conversions to Christianity of an essentially agricultural community that had everything to lose by following the diehards to Lucera. It was a time when one needed to show oneself to be Christian (even if at heart one may have remained Muslim) as is evident from (documented) attempts to change one's unpopular Semitic surname, say, from Dejff to Magro, from Bsajla to Cipolla and, more importantly, from Muchumud to a euphemistic Mamo. What better way for a convert land-owner to brandish his newly acquired Christian identity than building a chapel, in the middle of nowhere, but at the core of his property?⁸⁰

It is recalled that it was the Greek brand of Christianity that was prevalent in these islands during the Hohenstaufen years and that took years to succumb to the Latin, with obstinate vestiges of it surviving even to the present.⁸¹ Moreover, Angold shows how the Greek tradition centred on the concept of *paroikia* or small groups in which the laity took the lead in the organization of church activities.⁸² On the other hand in parallel, analysing the phenomenon of *jentaculum*, Mgr Borg views this and other activities as the laymen's contribution to church life.⁸³ Coupled with the clear antiquity of these rites – two instances associated with troglodytic churches, and half of all of them dating to the first half of the XV century – this supports Magri's assertion that the *convivia* found their roots in the Greek phase of our church history.

⁸⁰ Anthony T. Luttrell, "Church Patronage and Burial Practice in Malta," in *Excavations at Hal Millieri, Malta*, eds., T.F.C. Blagg et al. (Malta: Gutenberg, 1990), 114.

⁸¹ Fiorini, *Triple strand*.

⁸² Angold 2000, 2, 7, 16, 247 *et passim*.

⁸³ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 1:271.

The *żerda*

Fifteenth-century documentation provides evidence for an interesting term related to the *jentaculum*. In three of the instances cited – cf. examples 2.e (c. 1400), 2.n (1453), and 2.p (1467) – the celebration on the vigil of the feast is referred to by the Arabic term *żerda* / *serda*. Ferchiou explains that a basic characteristic of Islam in the Maghrib is *Maraboutism* or the cult of *santons*.⁸⁴ Annually, at the end of summer, the descendants and followers of the *santon* gather at his sanctuary and organize a festival in his honour. This is called *Ziyāra* or *Zarda*.⁸⁵ The Islamic *zarda* and the Christian *convivium* held on the vigil of a saint's feast are so close in concept that it was only natural for the early Christian community, that expressed itself in Arabic (note the Maltese terms *Magħmudija*, *qrar*, *tqarbin*, *qassis* etc.), should adopt an Arabic term also for their festival, even if the Arabic in this case is of Islamic inspiration, in the same way that, for example, the Maltese Christian term for lent, *Randan*, is derived from Islamic *Ramadan*.

One cannot overemphasize the historical context in which this was happening. In the mid-XIII century a breakdown by religious allegiance of the population in these islands exhibited the following ratios for the two islands: In Malta, Christian : Moslem :: 2 : 3 and, in Gozo, a differently skewed ratio of 11 : 9.⁸⁶ This is proof enough of the robust interface between the two religious communities. Furthermore, as has been noted earlier,⁸⁷ at this time it was the Greek Church that was prominent in these islands, giving solid evidence for the mutual interpenetration of religious practices.

⁸⁴ The term *murābbutu* survives as an arabism in Sicilian with the meaning of *santone*, *eremita*, *persona solitaria* (Piccitto). Cf. also Girolamo Caracausi, *Arabismi Medievali di Sicilia* (Palermo: 1983), 297.

⁸⁵ Sophie Ferchiou, "Les fêtes Maraboutiques en Tunisie – 'Zarda,'" *Proceedings of the First Congress on Mediterranean Studies of Arabo-Berber Influence* (Malta: University Press, 1973): 532-537.

⁸⁶ Stanley Fiorini, "Giliberto Abbate's Report and Serfdom in the Maltese Islands," *Melita Historica*, xvii/1 (2016): 31-56, esp. 55. The data being presented emphasizes this skewed relation between Malta and Gozo. In Table II there are as many entries for Gozo as for Malta; 13 in each. This is in spite of the population for Malta being four times that for Gozo.

⁸⁷ Cf. fn. 23, *supra*.

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Over the years practices develop and change. In later years, more information of how the rite was propagated becomes available. In particular, the role of the notary in perpetuating and promoting this tradition is seen as not being negligible. When a notary is called in to a weak dying person's bedside wanting to draw up his/her last will and testament, this notary can be a determining factor in what gets recorded and what is not, especially when it comes to standard clauses in the will. Thus, one can imagine a notary suggesting to the testator stereotyped clauses that appear regularly in wills related to (i) how much money to leave the Bishop, ..., the Parish Priest, ... the clergy accompanying the burial service; (ii) what Masses should be celebrated and when for the repose of the testator's soul and so on. Likewise, other prompts could relate to (i) what amount of wheat can be assigned for *cucia*, ..., or (ii) for a *jentaculum* following vespers celebrating some particular saint. One cannot help thinking, for example, that the *qućija* was uppermost in the Gozitan Notary Lorenzo de Apapis' mind, judging by the several occurrences of the relative clause in the wills drawn up by him in his *testamentarium*, register R203 (1540-1580). By contrast, one can consider De Apapis' near-contemporary, another cleric, the Maltese Notary Giacomo Bondin, and the wills recorded in his register R69 (1515-1531). Of the 17 wills in this register there are exactly two fleeting references to a *jentaculum – distribui aliquid in vespis* – whereas all of them, with exactly one exception by a foreign testator, include a mention of *cera laborata* and/or *blanduni*.⁸⁸

The two cases just cited are of interest. The latter relates to a *jentaculum* in the Cathedral, whereas the former, the *jentaculum* in St Agatha's Church, Rabat, is interesting on two counts. Firstly, unlike most other examples quoted, here it was the intention of the testatrix to set a time limit for the event, and secondly, this time limit does not appear to have been respected. From Dusina's report it appears that the St Agatha event was not only very popular but had actually gotten out of hand with excessive manifestations that lasted all night

⁸⁸ (i) In her will of 23.iii.1525, the Carmelite tertiary, Toria Cassar, *voluit quod die sui obitus usque ad annos decem continuos et completos quolibet die lune celebretur missa pro remissione peccatorum ipsius testatrix in templo Dive Agathe sito in Rabato, ubi ipsa testatrix sanitatem recepit et quolibet die sue festivitatis etiam celebrari missa una et in vigiliis distribui aliquid in vespis juxta morem nostrum* (Not. G. Bondin R69, ff. 70^v-71.). (ii) In his will of 9.xii.1530, Antonius Goffridi Inguanes *voluit celebrari anno quolibet in vigilia Virginis Marie de Monserrat, in cappella in qua sibi elegit sepulturam, vespas et in die festo missam et distribuere aliquid in dictis vespis more ipsius Magnificis testatoris* (*Ibid.*, f. 147).

long. *Dominus posthac fieri prohibuit, sed mandavit hora prima noctis fores ecclesie claudi omnibus expulsis.*⁸⁹

The Demise of the *jentaculum*

By the turn of the XVII century these practices no longer figure in official church documentation, such as pastoral visitations.⁹⁰ This does not mean that the centuries-old customs had died, as witnessed by Magri. By the middle of the following century the rite had shifted its emphasis and metamorphosed into a ceremony associated with the birth of a child. This in turn developed further to the form we know today, a rite which is still productive and does not show signs of abating.

Conclusion

The modern sense of *qućija*, as a ritual performed on a child's first birthday is first encountered in De Soldanis' dictionary – his *Ġamma* – a four-volume *magnum opus* on which he had continued to work till 1767. This paper has attempted to trace the semantic and chronological development of the term from its earliest Maltese documentation. It is shown how the original meaning was completely different from its modern sense, the Greek etymology of the word betraying its true meaning: not the ritual itself but the material of the ritual, a cooked meal of wheat, distributed on two quite different occasions, namely at funerals and on the vigil of certain saints' feast, mostly in rural chapels. Essentially, the rite was an act of charity, especially with the poor. The existence of the Byzantine Greek Church at its roots is confirmed by Domenico Magri's reflections on his visit to the Levant in 1625, where he witnessed its diffused use, leading him to seek its Christian roots in patristic sources for the *ἀγάπη* meal: weddings, funerals and holy celebrations. Of these, in the Maltese Islands, only the last two survived, (i) a testamentary bequest of basic food – bread and some condiments – for the poor after the demise of a testator, and (ii) a reception – *convivium* / *jentaculum* – offered to celebrant and congregation after the commemorated saint's vigil service. This last celebration acquired an Arabic / Islamist connotation in Semitic / Maltese jargon which, at times, termed it *żerda*. The development into a nativity rite in the late XVIII century knows its

⁸⁹ *Dusina*, f. 28.

⁹⁰ Borg, *Melita Sacra*, 3:737.

roots to this celebration which continued to survive decades after the funerary practice had ceased to exist.

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