SUPERSTITIONS IN MALTA
Towards the Middle of the Seventeenth Century
In the light of the Inquisition Trials

by

Fr. ALEXANDER BONNICI, O.F.M.Conv., S.Th.L., H.E.L., Ph.B.

1. The nature of a Superstition.

For many centuries Ecclesiastics and cultured laymen have examined and discussed the nature of a superstition. Some say it is an outgrowth of a common sense interpretation of life-experience, while others maintain that it is the result of corruption and change of religious creeds. As yet, no satisfactory definition has been given. The Catholic Church defines a superstition as any deviation of religious sentiment, based on fear or on ignorance, which attributes divine power to vain beliefs and worthless practices. At the same time, the opponents of the Catholic Church consider that many of the beliefs and practices of the faithful are superstitious; to cite an example, the veneration of relics is a case in point. We must admit that this cult may appear superstitious until the teaching of the Church, in this regard, is fully understood (1). The definition of a superstition thus presents no little problem. For the purposes of this study, we shall consider as superstitious "those beliefs, habits and fancies, both tribal and individual, which are regarded as not being founded on reasonable conceptions of the world and of human life because they attribute divine power to a creature or assign to God an unworthy cult" (2).

Perhaps, because of the lack of stability in the new ideas, the common people often cling to familiar superstitions. These superstitions, though they may seem shocking to the enlightened members of the community, survive because they are still in harmony with the thoughts and feelings of those who,

---

(1) Regarding the cult of relics, it is worthwhile noticing that we attribute to them just a relative worship: only for the relation that they bear to the saints. On the other hand, the saints themselves are honoured for their intimate union with God. The Christians for over 1,000 years have always revered and honoured the relics because it is according to the teaching of the Catholic Church whose universal guidance furnishes us with a sound reason for our actions. Nevertheless, the Church admits that some religious customs intermixed with sound doctrines crept out of ignorance; such usages are just tolerated to avoid major scandal among the simple folk.

(2) S. THOMAS AQUIN., Summa Theol., II-IIae, q. 92, a.1.
J. MELLOTH, La superstizione sorgita dalla fede, Catania, ed. Paoline, 1900, pp. 18-19.
2. A slow but steady struggle for civilization in Malta.

Although our study is limited to the seventeenth century, and, in particular, to the period when Mgr. Anthony Fignatelli (6) who was Inquisitor in Malta (1616-1649), it is important to keep in mind the following: "In 1490, at the height of the Renaissance, they (the Maltese) were scrapping together 30,000 gold florins to redeem the islands from Don Consalvo Monroy, to whom they had mortgaged the 'Magnanissimo' and, barely four years later, they were desperately resisting an attack by a horde of Barbary corsairs. Some respite was gained in 1565 when, on the initiative of Pope Clement VII, the Islands were granted in fief to the Order of St. John of Jerusalem; but the latter had hardly settled down when, in 1665, they were subjected to a terrible onslaught and were almost overcome by the whole armed might of Suleiman the Magnificent!" (7).

3. Superstitious practices as remedies against physical disturbances.

In ancient times, in Babylon, there was a custom for those suffering from illness to be exposed in front of the temple where they could demand counsel from each passer-by concerning remedies to be used in their particular illness. The passers-by being obliged by law to respond to the sufferer's inquiry (8).

At that time, however, medical art was in its infancy. Since then, thousands of years have elapsed, and with the passing of time, man has been able to improve and extend his knowledge to unbelievable proportions.

Looking back on Malta of the seventeenth century, we find that here too medicine had made a discrete progress (9). Nevertheless, it did not oust the 'Babylonian custom' which has prevailed through the centuries, and will continue to do so in one form or another so long as man exists. Simple people, at those times, rather than seek to cure themselves through accepted medical practices, sought the home remedies of their ancestors which they regarded as "sacred heritage". When they themselves could not procure the medicine, then, and only then, they accepted it from the medical practitioner. At the same time, however, they still designed to fetch some slave or woman versed in special practices of healing.

Bearing this in mind, it is no wonder that towards the middle of the
seventeenth century, we find many Moslem slaves in Malta who were accredited with special powers against disease. Let us not, however, form the impression that the remedies prescribed by these sorcerers, whether of Moslem or of other origin, were based on mere phantasy. Generally speaking, these persons are not the source of such "wisdom". They do not create, but merely convey what they themselves have received. These practices might have had their origin, at one time or another, in legitimate medical art, but due to individual addition or diminution, they have become corrupted beyond recognition (10).

One of the most serious maladies, against which a special power was required was the "evil-eye". It is a belief which attributes to some persons the power of inflicting harm on others by merely looking at them. It is also believed that the evil-eye can be used on animals in order that they, in turn, will inflict harm on others.

"It was one of the most wide-spread and venerable of human beliefs, accepted by medieval authors and Fathers of the Church and primitive races everywhere" (11). "It is not limited to any one race or to one stage of culture, for in all countries certain people, especially persons with some facial peculiarity such as very penetrating eyes, are credited with the power of casting spells or curses on objects upon which the evil eye may rest" (12).

Here, we ought to put in an ulterior explanation. Many still discuss whether the evil-eye should be considered among the superstitions. Serious persons, on whom we can rely, point out of positive facts: the existence of these evil-eyed persons. We do not mean to open a new discussion; it remains sure, however, that even if the belief in the evil-eye is not a superstition, the exorcism used by the Maltese throughout the centuries to ward off its harmful influence are undoubtedly superstitious. Consequently our study will be limited to the superstitions of the evil-eye (13).

When the Maltese of the seventeenth century felt themselves overlooked by the evil-eye, they employed slaves or other experienced persons in order to hear their counsels and to learn their remedies. Let us consider the following passage that concerns the denunciation of a certain Narda: "Some days before Christmas I went to visit Narda the Sicilian, the wife of a sailor that worked on the galleys... and, in my presence, she asked for some blessed olive leaves and a palm branch; then, after that she had wafted over herself the fumes of the burning leaves, she placed a plate full of water over her head, and, afterwards, threw away all the things she had burned in that plate. Following

(10) "Many of the remedies have no rational basis but some of them are the residua of the medical thought of earlier generations of physicians and surgeons such as, for instance, the use of fumigations with rosemary to check the spread of infectious illnesses — a practice that still receives official sanction in Malta up to the seventeenth century". CASSAR, o.c., pp. 230-231.


(13) For interesting references to the evil-eye and to the remedies applied by the Maltese to ward off its malicious effects throughout the centuries cf. CASSAR, o.c., pp. 426-428.

FR. ALEXANDER BONNICI, O.F.M. CONV. 149

to that series of actions along with frequent invocations of the Blessed Trinity, she ordered her daughter to throw out in the street all the ashes of the burned leaves. On asking her why she had acted so strangely, Narda explained that she had done so because she was doubtful whether she was or was not influenced by an evil-eye" (14).

The intervention of slaves was quite frequent also in these cases. For example, Theresa Mallia's aunt called for a female slave when she was suffering from a head-ache not only to seek a remedy for her infirmity, but also to determine whether she had been bewitched (15).

According to these beliefs, it is also possible to be bewitched by our relatives and friends who also unwillingly can put a spell on us or on our possessions. It is enough for an evil-eyed person to admire your strength to cause you to feel ill. In 1647, Maruzza Aigua stated that she was waiting for a moslem to cure Dominica, who had been bewitched either by her friend Pauline Calleja or by her friend's mother (16).

Again, about two years later, a certain John Francois Gaezi from Valletta fetched similar illiot remedies. He knew a slave who pretended to have the power of recognizing whether a spell was cast on his wife (17); then to his discomfit, doubted whether the slave was acting feignly. In the hope of warding off the evil-eye from his wife, he consulted several other persons; each of them asked for something worn by his wife (18); but all his care was to no avail. In his vehement grief, he continued to hope that queer remedies still belonged to the natural order (19).

Despite the fact that the Maltese belonged to the Catholic Religion, there were many who were not well grounded in its tenets and were ignorant of the illicit nature of these practices. We do find a number of them, who in spite of knowing that these practices were forbidden, made use of them when all other effects had proved fruitless. Sometimes, they even went to the extent of invoking the aid of the devil.

The point can be better illustrated by the following narration: Pauline Haguie from Siggiewi was worried about the health of her daughter; she had tried all sorts of remedies, both natural and supernatural, namely medicine and prayer, but to no avail. In despair, she then sought out among the slaves a cure for the suspected evil-eye. In the slaves' prison of Valletta, a dark
4. Superstitions for the sake of love and hatred.

The contagious fear of the unknown greatly helped for the perpetuation of superstitions. Superstitious practices became the property of the ordinary people. Instruments which formerly were barely a medium of healing, through their gradual mixing with mysterious words and actions, became means of magic applicable not only as a remedy against infirmities, but also as means against any physical danger.

Charms, mysterious formulas and exercises very often form a part of the magical art. Some witchcraft, however, consists uniquely of words; words which at times are completely senseless, as, for instance those that the Maltese Francis de Mattheolo whispered to achieve his purpose: “Oriens, anvar, caron, canan” (21). In the same vein, a Calabrian priest living in Malta taught a Maltese how to obtain whatever he desired by saying: “Ara dei, sacra cana” (22).

Generally, these words were transmitted from generation to generation in set formulas, and, to obtain their effect, they had to be repeated without the vibration of the vocal cords, word by word, and secretly. It is commonly held that the magic words lose their occult power if uttered in a loud voice or in the presence of others who are strange to the affair.

Most frequently in Malta, witchcraft consisted in words of love or hatred, for good or evil omens; such words, though insignificant in themselves, acquired their meaning and effects when accompanied by certain acts.

Glancing at the superstitions of which women were victims, we immediately notice that very frequently these refer to love. Considering that we are dealing with three hundred years ago, this is easily explained.

By their very nature, women feel an ardent desire to donate themselves to others in order that they might be loved in return. Generally, however, there are to be wooed but not woo. Husbands normally choose their own wives but not vice-versa. The fact was especially prevalent in the past when women were not even allowed to stroll along in the streets with an uncovered face. In spite, however, of that pseudo modesty, some girls, under the pretense of taking a pinch of snuff (which among the Maltese was frequently used), adjust their veil, picking up the handkerchief or any other object, which magically had been left on the ground, did not miss an opportunity to make themselves stealthily observed when and by whom they liked (23).

When attempts to get a lover failed, or when some troubles broke up an already initiated love, they had recourse to superstitious practices. For instance, Magdalen de Stephani of Valletta called upon Antona the Sicilian to make her bring back her lover. On her insistence, Antona took the woven stuff around her temples “to fasten the repose of her lover”, so that he might return to her, while reciting these words: “At two in the morning, I found myself out of doors; I found myself in the stench of death; there I found my beloved” (24).

A DENUNCIATION (dated 1648) against Minica of Valletta by Antonetta Calleja who practised some superstitious actions in the hopes of being reconciled with her beloved.

(20) “Io giudico che quell'infele che ricevova dal demonio il quale gli mostrava come carcere”. Ib., n. 94, 13 Nov. 1647, f. 437v-v.
(21) “... in Levante, i Turchi, per far corrompere una donna, in vederli dicevano queste parole, cioè: 'Oriens, anvar, Caron, Canar', per non s'era veduta a quel camminare, Et io due volte l'ho detto vedendo certe donne”. Ib., n. 79, 8 July 1647, f. 564r.
(22) “... è megarò un segreto per far corrompere qualsivoglia donna che lui vedesse e volessa con dire 'Ara dei, sacra cana', il che io non ho provato”. Ib., n. 69, 23 Apr. 1647, f. 260v.
The preceding cases refer to women who were not married. Sorcery, however, was quite frequent also with married couples who, through illicit words and actions, tried to constrain the faithful consort to return to his duties. Jacobina de Lango of Valletta learned from a christian sorceress how to keep her husband away from fidelity. "The mentioned Grace taught me and murmuru two words that I do not remember; I had to say then in seeing my husband that he might not go to his prostitute friend. I uttered these words ten times in the hope of having my desire granted" (27). In this case the intention was perfectly lawful but the means to achieve it were to be condemned.

Sometimes it was through the fault of the wife that agreement and harmony in the family broke down, as in the case of Augustine Vial of Valletta, who noticed that his wife had very little affection towards him; she was still exceedingly attached to her relatives. For this reason, he tried to change and transform her heart through the help of a moslem slave (28). Again in this case, we condemn only the means to regain the wife's affection.

At times the husbands were not to be blamed for being suspicious of their wives. Especially when they sailed away from Malta on the galleys of the Order, they could not be certain of their wives' behaviour. "Sometimes, it happened that when the Order's galleys returned unexpectedly during the night, the poor husband found his bed occupied by some other mate. On account of the many disorder that followed, in the hope of finding a remedy, he ordered that a galley pulled down the anchor in the harbour by two at a time, whose crew could not disembark before the following morning (29)."

5. Amulets and superstitious words as a precaution against any physical danger.

In ancient times, in countries outside Europe, like China, Japan, India, and Africa, fragments of human or animal bones, nails, hair, etc. were frequently used as amulets or talismans. In Europe, on the contrary, amulets consisting of magic formulas or blessings were used.

The island of Malta, under the heavy influence of the Muslems was grieved also in this respect. During the period that we are considering, towards the middle of the seventeenth century, most of the amulets found on the island were like those scattered in the European countries. They were worn as a protection against evil spirits and to preserve one's life from accidents or death" (30).

It happened sometimes that some amulets dearly kept by the simple folk had been given them by priests who did not have the least intention of giving away amulets. Some Ecclesiastics distributed some religious relics of

(27) "Mi insegnò dire due parole delle quali mi ricordo". Ib., n. 14, 23 Febr. 1647, f. 240r.
(28) "Gli era stato mostrato un infedele che s'intendeva avanti e questo lo facesse di farmi la scorta coi cavalli senza me desiderata con la paga di sei scudi". Ib., n. 109, 9 Jan. 1648, f. 540v.
(30) CASSAR PULIFICO, An introduction . . . . p. 18.
saints and recommended to the people to carry them on their person; but through their ignorance, in the midst of so many illegitimate amulets, the ordinary Maltese were unable to recognize the permitted and approved devotions from the prohibited ones. For instance, Thomas Korkop kept a saint's prayer hung to his neck, but, being assaulted by doubts, to unburden his conscience, he denounced himself to the Inquisitor.

The use of forbidden amulets procured a special power against the evil spirits because the written characters were considered to have the power of exorcising the devil. The word had to be of the shortest possible pronunciation, and could not be interchanged with another.

It was quite common for the Maltese of those times to attribute their preservation from diverse physical evils to the innate power of such words. For instance, Sperantia of Vittoriosa recalled that "while sighing after hearing that Emanuel, the nephew of Marcel Xeberras, was designing to murder me, an infidel slave passed by me... and, while pitying my affliction, on the day after, he brought me a slip of paper written with a rugged instrument, and enjoined me to carry it on my person" (33).

According to the mentality of the superstitious Maltese, the power of a slip of paper inscribed with magical and mysterious words did not reside in the paper itself, but in the characters that it contained. Generally, the Maltese received such magical papers for the first time from an infidel; then, they used to pass them on to their friends in the hope of having them transcribed (34). Whenever the Maltese denounced themselves to the Inquisitor, they were bound to consign also the instruments of their superstitions. In one case only, however, during the Inquisitorship of Mgr. Anthony Pigmattel, such a slip of paper is found enclosed together with the documents of the proceedings, but it is not easy to decipher its characters (35).

Unluckily, it is very hard to trace these magical scripts. Such cases were very frequent, but, normally, these instruments of superstitions were not kept together with the proceedings of the Tribunal. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, some forty years before the period that we are examining, the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office instructed the Inquisitor Leonardo della Corbora (36) about his behaviour in similar affairs. When the proceedings were still pending, those magical scripts had to be cautiously kept in a safe, not to be seen and read, if not by those who were in charge of the case; then, after the final decision of the Inquisitor, those instruments had to be burnt up (37).

It is amusing to observe the simplicity of some persons who were ready to believe whatever they heard from others about the power of such scripts. For example, Thomas Corcop seemed to think that such a magical script really had extraordinary powers against fire and arms. He gave credit to a certain Centomo who had referred to him that "he had tied the magical charm to the neck of a dog, at which he fired a gun, and while the gunshot fully hit the animal, nothing happened to it" (38).

6. The Religion of the Maltese under the unhealthy influence of infidel slaves.

If one examines the strange beliefs (sometimes called "Taboo") of some tribes who never had any sound culture, he will conclude they had no religion in the strict sense of the word: their beliefs are based on fear. Their ancient customs, viewed as authoritative and frequently in a negative form (Thou shalt not) become like precepts when accepted by the existing society. For this reason, such religious fear binds the individuals to traditions of unknown origin. These customs, however, help in giving a moral character to the people and to open the way to a common welfare in as much as such customs shape the minds of the people in a way to form a religious sect that guides to a certain real progress (39).

If sorcery and magic completely dominate a society and are approved by the religious beliefs of the nation we cannot speak of superstition. In such a case, magic is a primitive mystical culture.

Our considerations, however, should be given to Christian countries which in some way or another always abounded in superstitious practices. In these countries "superstitious practices go back to the pre-Christian era, although as we know them today they contain unmistakable traces of the influence of Christianity in the many references to saints and to religion which the people, in their ignorant piety, have blended with their superstitious beliefs" (40).

In the island of Malta, since the shipwreck of St. Paul on our shores, superstitious practices of which we do not possess clear records, permeated themselves little by little in our Religion. After the settlement of the Order of St. John in 1530, the cultured society which was gradually taking shape did its best to do away with these superstitions. Magic in Malta was only hindering our constant struggle for a realistic world because through the ignorance of the plebeians magic dimmed the beauty of our nation wide true Religion.

---

(31) "Havendogli in dimandato che ricetta era quella, mi rispose ch'era d'un Santo, e perche per se stesso di mia consenza non veniva a far detta denotizia senza passione alcuna". A.I.M., lib. v, no. 16 March 1647, p. 257.

(32) C. ZUCKER, Psychologie de la superstition, pp. 22-30.

(33) ... il primogenito mi portò un pezzo di carta scritto con una rossa inchiostro... che la persona adottava". A.I.M., lib. iv, no. 144, 28 July 1648, p. 729.

(34) "Gregorio Manueli del Gatto m'ha detto che la detta ricetta fu copiata dal clerico Gian Cimamino". Ibid., no. 18 March 1647, p. 257.

(35) Ibid., p. 296, 1044.

(36) Mgr. Leonardo della Corbora came as Inquisitor for the islands of Malta in the year 1607. He maintained his office only for a very short period because he did not satisfy the Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office in Rome; just after about a year he was already called back to Rome. Cf. R.I.M., Ms. 8, Notizie dell'origine del tribunale del S. Uffizio, L. 1980.

(37) "Eli facci abbrugirsi detri scritti sortigli e magici, e annotare in processo tal'atto, e mentre pendono le cause, provveda che tali scritti siano custoditi eletamente, in maniera che non possano esser visti e letti, se non da quelli a quell'occa di fare la causa e formar i processi contro i delinquenti con dare in ciò gli ordini necessari". A.I.M., Lettere del S. Ufficio all'Inquisitor di Malta, Argonne all'Inquis., Della Corbora, 23 Aug., 1608, no. 1, f. 232v.

(38) "L'aveva posta legata in un collo d'un cane, e che poi gli tirò un archibugiatto con palla, e io coi senza fargli danno alcuno". A.I.M., Processi, Ms. 61, no. 30, 18 March 1647, p. 257.

(39) H. WEBSTER, Taboo, a sociological study, California, Stanford Univ., 1934, p. 270.

(40) CASSAR PULLICINO, An introduction ... p. 18.
The main harm to our Religion came from the fact that a great number of slaves was populating the Island. "Safety also suggested the building of the slaves' prison. There was a large number of them in Valletta in the service of the Order or of private families and they were naturally the cause of great worry to the Government. Verdala constructed a large prison for them in Strada Cristofero where he obliged them to spend the night. He also laid down a number of restrictions amongst which the wearing of a chain of six ounces or more around the ankle, the shaving of the head with the exception of a tail — like twist at the back of the head — and the prohibition of leaving the city, approaching the coast or entering a boat unless in the company of their master." (41).

The great number of slaves was the effect of the Maltese privatizing during those centuries. "The Maltese were amongst the finest sailors of the Mediterranean, a fact attested by many sources, and, though estimates are difficult, between roughly 1650 and 1750 about half the adult male population was at sea during the greater part of the year. Raiding raiders was the concern of the galleys; the Maltese corsairs turned their attentions to civilian shipping in the Levant and the Aegean with such success that the sight of the Maltese flag in the waters of Rhodes and Cyprus and Alexander's was enough to put all shipping back into port until some sort of escort had been summoned by the local Pasha from Smyrna or Sidon." (42).

The material gain resulting from that privatizing increased not only by the booty plundered from the Turkish galleys, but also by the capturing of the Moslems themselves. While the capture of slaves somewhat helped to mitigate the extreme poverty of the island, it became harmful to the people's spiritual welfare because the slaves communicated to the Maltese their magic beliefs and practices. Consequently, Malta overflowed with superstitious scripts, mixtures, and filters (43).

It should be observed that whenever the Moslems had a part in these magical practices there was not even the slightest relation to Religion: they invoked neither the name of God nor of the devil (44). In the majority of cases, the Maltese themselves went in search of the Moslem slaves. Sometimes they were perplexed what to do or where to go, but knowing that some slaves surely had these powers, they visited the slaves' prison during the night (45). For instance, a certain Alyosetta called on a female slave to be relieved from a head-ache (46). Other slaves were invited to see the clerics Mariano Caruana of Casai Luqa, and also Natale Barbosa of Casai Grendi, who was in fear of

AN EDICT of the Holy Office in Malta issued during the year 1648, by which all the inhabitants of the Maltese Islands were forbidden to take into the churches, as their retinue, any Moslem or Hebrew slaves during divine services. It reads in the original Latin and Italian:

---

Footnotes:

(41) LAFLERLA, The story of man in Malta, pp. 78-79.
(45) Our deductions are based on the attestations of the trials in front of Mgr. Anthony Pignatelli (1646-1649); undoubtedly, these three years reflect the mentality of the Maltese in the middle of the seventeenth century. We do not mean, however, to extend our judgement to other periods. Cf. A.L.M., Processa, ms. 81.
(46) "Sono andate alla preghiera di schiavi della Valletta, havendo dimandato se vi era qualche schiavo che sapesse levare la mascher. mi mostrano uno chiamato Chag Chante": Ib., n. 94, 18 Nov. 1647, f. 428v.
(47) "Passò una certa schiava...: la quale detta mia zia, sentendola con un mal di testa, chiamò ed alto in casa": Ib., n. 40, 13 Feb. 1647, f. 229v.
For instance, a Jewish witch predicted the future by examining the hands of a girl and by throwing oil in water, but she was mocked at (31). A Neapolitan fellow offered to others a written amulet, just the same as the Muslims did (32). A Neapolitan sorceress placed on fire a triangle formed of three nails, while she fixed a black-handled knife at the outside part of the window and another one under the bed in order to call back the lover of a certain Maltese woman (33). A Greek person expected to restore to health even a Brownian priest through magic acts and words (34). The only person among foreigners who resembled the Maltese Christians in using superstitious means was a Sicilian woman who mixed together charms and filters with the invocation of God and his saints (35).

7. Charms and filters in the hands of the Maltese.

Under the heavy influence of inidel slaves and wicked Christians, magic-religious practices became very common in Malta, especially among those of the weaker sex. It is not surprising therefore, that the inhabitants of the island, in their simplicity obtained a thorough knowledge of many superstitions and overvalued them. The magic-religious practices "usually represent a mixture of pagan and Christian beliefs and rites. They comprise the use of charms, such as carrying a dried fig in one's pocket against piles or a dried fish for the cure of rheumatism: the uttering of magic words with occult healing powers; and the use of invocations, incantations, and exorcisms either by themselves or in conjunction with the administration of supposedly curative substances such as fumigations with laurel and olive leaves and the drinking of potions, etc. In this combined method, however, more stress is laid upon the magic-religious element than upon the herbs or drug itself" (36).

Undoubtedly, some Maltese women gained their living by procuring charms and filters, but this was not very common. Generally, the Maltese did not

(31) "Vedendo la pianta della mano mi disse che mio marito tre mesi dovera arrivare... senza dargli credito", ib., n. 101, 25 Dec. 1647, f. 50trv.
(32) "Mi mostrò una scritta con certi caratteri, quali mi disse che gli l'aveva dato un certo Napoliotano", ib., n. 50, 18 March 1647, f. 257r.
(33) "Una donna Napolitana chiamata Catarina... si ritirò in casa mia per 8 giorni, e poi andò in salici, e questa un giorno mese un rettangolo sul torace con tre chiodi, e piantò un coltello alla porta della finestra con manico nero, e un altro accesi un cartellino di carta, e disse l'avessero fatti per lei e per me per venire da me il mio amico lasciavo", ib., n. 9, 3 Jan. 1647, f. 38v.
(34) "Un Grego quale vanava la meisa... mi ha fatto mettere il mio piede mano sopra un foglio di fico d'India, e poi in puro del mio piede andò tagliando il detto foglio mentre la sua moglie diceva: 'Che cosa fate?' e lui rispondeva: 'Taglio la meisa di Fra Paolo', quali parole loro replicoam per tre volte", ib., n. 299, 29 May 1640, f. 1068v-r.
(35) "La quondam Antonia, detta la Siciliana, quale sei mesi sono venuta da Malta e andata in Sicilia... prese novi para di fave e segno una di esse per maschio, l'altra per femmina, un'altra ha partorito per mezzo seguendo una parte del pap airline, l'altra per parte del cuore dell'amico, mezzolando con essi un piccolo, un pezzetto di pane, un altro di carboncino, un cocchiere, e un pezzetto di carta con orecio d'Ave Maria' e un 'Pater Noster' in honore di Maria, ib., n. 4, 19 Dec. 1646, f. 135v-r.
(36) "Il detto infedele dava il medesimo rimedio al clero Mariano Carna"., ib., n. 15, 16 Jan. 1647, f. 77v.
(37) "Mi rispose che in la curava per un inidile, il quale gli'aveva data una pignata con no so che dentro, impenodigli di mettermela sotto l'inferna, et che poi spezzasse in una vis creata, et un'altra volta gli'aveva dato infedele di portarli la tessoria de testa de detta inferna, al quale doveva attaccargli la detta inferna tarsi coi deh man de sinistra, si come ha fatto"., ib., n. 70, 14 Jan. 1647, f. 336v.
(38) "Trovandomi in molto maltrattata da miei parenti nella mia casa, hebbe pensiero di fuggirme, et in tal modo trovare la mia sorte, io che havendo conferito con un amico, mi diede una polizza scrittà in turchese, dicono che con quella haveria potuto fuggire senza poter haver male miei"., ib., n. 64, 21 May 1647, f. 959v.
(39) "Mi rispose che in la curava per un inidile, il quale gl'aveva data una pignata, con no so che dentro, impenodigli di metterla sotto l'inferna, et che spezzasse in una vis creata, et un'altra volta gl'aveva dato infedele di por- tergli la tessoria de testa de detta inferna, al quale doveva attaccargli la detta inferna tarsi con la mano sinistra, si come ha fatto"., ib., n. 15, 18 Jan. 1647, f. 77v-r; n. 44, 29 Feb. 1647, f. 249v-249v; n. 56, 16 Apr. 1647, f. 273v-273v; n. 71, 19 June 1647, f. 540v-541v; n. 108, 9 Jan. 1648, f. 548v-551v; n. 183, 10 June 1648, f. 603v-603v; n. 194, 15 May 1649, f. 950r-950v.
make use of the services of their fellow country-men once many foreigners dwelt on the Island. Quite frequently, they communicated their experience to others, but only out of friendship or neighbourliness, without any personal interest or gain. For instance, this is the denunciation of Antonello Calleva: "About seven years ago, having gone to live in the city Valletta, in the street Mr. V. d'Albino, I was as my neighbour a courtly woman named Minica. Finding me disgusted with my beloved, this Minica once told me to take three pots of salt... and to throw everything in the street" (57).

In the above mentioned cases there is no sign of Religion, but it is worthwhile noticing that some of those who indulged in such superstitious practices did not imagine that they were acting against the faith. Most of them never thought to associate themselves with the devil whenever their intentions were honest (58). Besides, it was not uncommon for persons who were expected to be better than the ordinary folk to adopt superstitious methods to exercise the devil himself.

There is a case in which a priest, two Carmelite friars and a layman were involved. Entering a cave with the intention to free it from the devil, they lighted a candle, recited devoutly the Symbol, called St. Athanasius, 'Quiescere', and dug into a side of the cave, but Fr. Philip Cagliola, a Franciscan Convivial of the Holy Office (60), warned them of the obligation to denounce themselves to the Inquisitor by saying: "I imagined that by lighting the candle 'of darkness' and in doing the other mentioned things, we could drive away the devils that might have dwelt in that place" (61).

If some priests who lacked a sound formation in theology indulged themselves in such superstitious practices, it is not surprising to find such idle acts

(57) "... e si stava una donna corteggiata chiamata Minica, Maltese d'anni 40 in circa. Questa, avendo trovato in diserto col mio amico lasciato mi ha detto che per recenderele meco avessi presi tre cocci di sale, tre cocci di clima-agro, e tre altri pezzi di armomac, e l'avessi buttato nel foco, e poi l'avessi estinti con acqua di mare e gettati poi in strada, si come ho fatto per ottenere". A.I.M., ib. n. 128, 24 March 1648, f. 628v.

(58) It is interesting to read the following case: "La detta quadrum Barbarica... m'accomodò il sale, e m'ha buttato le fave all'effetto da me sopra detti. Di più la medesima di Barbarica nel detto tempo mi insegnò che io che ho fatto insieme per due volte a 9 volte la volta". Ib., n. 14, 19 Dec. 1646, f. 103v.


(61) "... per darlo in questo modo al detto San Giuseppe dalle tenebre, da me portato solamente, io e i detti frati per devotazione dissemo il Simbolo di S. Athanasio 'Quiescere', e poi non havendo trovato altro se non scavato un poco in un lato della grotta, siamo usciti fuori". Ib., f. 650v.

far more common among ordinary Christians who were unable to make a distinction between Religion and superstition. A certain Ann was accustomed to use love-liters, but she also firmly believed that on certain days they could not be effective. She was denounced by Angelo Gregh of Valletta: "I have seen this Ann lighting a candle in front of the image of St. Anthony of Padua, and from him a reconciliation with her lover; she also added that since that day was Saturday, votaries were of no avail; on that day it was necessary to recite an 'Our Father' and a 'Hail Mary' in honour of St. Anthony" (62).

Likewise, Magdalene de Stephani was not satisfied with the superstitious practices; she added also some fervent prayers and other invocations in honour of St. Helen (63).

That good faith, which can be easily ascribed to ignorance, cannot be found in other cases when the devil was invoked for evil purposes. At times, during superstitious act itself, they did not even think of the evil spirit, but, then, they themselves declared that as Christians they should keep themselves aloof from these extraordinary means. Here is the sincere self-accusation of one of these poor women: "At that time, I was oppressed by love; so I considered neither this nor any other thing; but now I understand that the effect had to be expected from the devil, because God does not want evil things" (64).

Others, however, were to be condemned from the very beginning. Theirs was not an act of inconsideration because they went directly in search of the devil's aid. For instance, Joseph Deguemara, oppressed by the vehemence of uncorresponded love, invoked the devil for four times to inflame the heart of his beloved so that she might hear how much his heart was beating for her (65). Similar is also the case of Margarita Covor of Zabbar who spoke to the devil saying: "O Satan, go and inflame the heart of N. as I am burning this salt" (66).

A suspicion of a possible interference of the devil may have some ground in the case of Rauda Torrento of Valletta, who, some time after her unpleasant experience, decided to serve God in the monastic life. "Josephine, called the pimp, a Maltese, that I may be loved in return by my lover... told me to make my bed because she would call in the devil so that anyone that might have grown out of reach of her..." She gave me also a sign: after making the bed, I would find it spoiled and disrupted. (62)

(60) "Haverso acceso una candela innante la figura di S. Antonio per recenderele l'amico, dicendomi che per essere quel giorno di sabato, non servivano il sortilegio, e che bognava dire l' Ave Maria e il Pater Noster in onore di S. Antonio".

(61) "Beata Santa Lena, che fosti madre di re Costantino, per la sante nave che monasti, per la santa farola che trovi, e la sante Croce che tu hai, per la Santa Croce che trovi, mostrami la verità in queste fave, se l'amico mio mi vuol bene". Ib., n. 4, 17 Dec. 1646, f. 15v.

(62) "Beata Santa Lena, che fosti madre di re Costantino, per la sante nave che monasti, per la sante farola che trovi, e la sante Croce che tu hai, per la Santa Croce che trovi, mostrami la verità in queste fave, se l'amico mio mi vuol bene". Ib., n. 4, 17 Dec. 1646, f. 15v.

(63) "Accesi il fuoco, e in esso buttai del sale, invocando il demonio per 10 volte che avesse abbrigliato la cuora della detta mia amica in amartimi conforme lo amavo". Ib., n. 131, 8 May 1648, f. 606v.

(64) "Santosso va abbrigliare il cuore di N, come io abbriglio questo sale". Ib., n. 131, 8 May 1648, f. 606v.
8. The contempt of superstitions in Malta.

As we have noticed, the Maltese quite often used filters and mixtures, procured love and lucky charms for themselves and for others, and wore on written amulets: but were they really convinced of the infallible effects of that magic? Not at all.

At first, those who were not thoroughly confident had at least some trust to achieve what they aimed at. Very often, however, it was through illusion that they thought they had regained health through their practices; the fever or headache ran its proper natural course and the person consequently returned to normal.

If those methods enjoyed a real power in themselves, there would be no need to repeat them over and over again (69). Besides, those repetitions meant for them a lot of money extorted especially by the Moslem slaves. One must not forget, however, that certain ointments admitted possessed medicinal properties in themselves, but they added to them the magic words, just as if the effects could not be produced in a natural way. Sometimes, other persons counselled these practices to show off their ability in front of others.

Those who were strongly attached to superstitions very often lost all their faith in them because they soon experienced their inefficacy. For instance, Matheola Mentun, after carrying on her person a written amulet for about a month, in the hope of her husband's return, threw it away when she saw that it had no effect (70). Likewise, Antoinette Calleya prepared some mixtures, but she was completely disappointed (71). Sperrant's of Vittoriosa wanted to safeguard herself from any danger of being murdered, but she soon got rid of the amulet used (72).

Others who were not so credulous wondered how anybody could have ever believed such nonsense. These persons either tried to convince their fellow-countrymen not to over-value the superstitions filters and amulets or, as we do to-day, heartily laughed at them. John Dominic Muscat showed a small stone to Fr. Saviour, telling him that there were some who were attributing a special power to that stone; but he himself considered it nothing but scandal (73). John Francis Gauci happened to be persuaded to call in a slave to help him have his wife recovered, but seriously doubted whether the slave's words and actions were honest and threw him out (74). Others were convinced that they should not believe to what those rogues said (75), and if any credit was ever given to them, it was generally out of human weakness or ignorance (76). Some persons acted as fortune-tellers without being requested, but they were soon exposed as fakes because they showed lack of intelligence; and owing to the inconsiderate manner of presenting themselves to the public, they soon lost all credit. Let us examine the denunciation of Andrea Amis Martin, a married girl of just 14 years old: "About a month ago, a Jewess who used to go selling along the streets, came to me. In examining my hands, she began to say that my husband would be back to Malta without any trouble in three months' time, but I laughed at what she said, because my husband was here in Malta. Then, she took a vessel containing water and poured it in some oil while murmuring certain words; then, she went on to say that the husband of my sister Giovannella had to return to Malta within a month. The month already elapsed and he did not appear. She continued also to say that the three galleys that had sailed to Messina would be back within five days; but in all that she said we made fun of her and we did not give any credence to her words" (77).

In those times, some manuscripts purporting to teach magic secretly passed from hand to hand; but even these manuscripts were far from enjoying credibility. Most persons, at least after their first or second experience, lost all faith in them. For instance, two young priests, Fr. Philip Bonnei and Fr. Vincent Mangion, narrated their experience of past years. The case had happened sixteen years before when they were still schoolmates. They had found a manuscript of recipes how to avoid physical evils and how to find a lover; out of their juvenile curiosity, they determined to try the love-pre-

(67) "M'ha detto che io havesi accomodato il mio letto, perché haverrebe fatto venire i demoni in esso perché che m'hasse conosciuta lasciamente in esso, m'havesse trovato bene, e per controsemme mi disse che io l'avesi trovato da accomodato e senza la camera a chiave, poi aperita, ho trovato detto letto guasto e irribiogliato". Ib., n. 194, 12 Aprile 1669, f. 550r.

(68) For clear examples of the confusion between Religion and superstition in Malta up to our century, cf. L. Bonelli, Saggi del folklore dell'isola di Malta, Palermo, Giornale di Sicilia, pp. 29-31.

(69) "Quelli parole io allora dissi all'effetto circa 10 volte". A.I.M., ib., n. 44, 28 Febbraio 1665, f. 240r.

(70) "Il che ho fatto per altre tre volte in circol". Ib., n. 83, 2 Aprile 1667, f. 568r.

(71) "Quaile al mesimo sudetto effetto buttati da cinque volte". Ib., n. 166, 29 Settembre 1666, f. 678r.

(72) "Però non ho visto effetto alcuno". Ib., n. 129, 24 Marzo 1668, f. 624r.

(73) "Io e per tre giorni l'ho portata e doppio l'ho buttata via". Ib., n. 144, 28 Julj 1668, f. 728r.

(74) "L'ho preso dalla detta Giancolinolo solo per mostrarlo, e perché me sono maravigliato del sudetto dire di detta Giancolinolo, avendo giustamente detta Pietra esser cosa di scandalo". Ib., n. 141, 11 July 1666, f. 719r.

(75) "Io e per tre giorni e secoli l'ho buttato via e l'ho buttato". Ib., n. 144, 28 Julj 1668, f. 728r.

(76) "Non si doveva credere a quelli canaglia". Ib., n. 73, 7 Aprile 1667, f. 364r.

(77) "Non si doveva credere a quelli canaglia". Ib., n. 73, 7 Aprile 1667, f. 364r.

(78) "Però il tutto non abbiamo fatto buridando della detta Giudice, senza dargli credito alcuno". Ib., n. 101, 28 Decemibe 1667, f. 501r.
SUPERSTITIONS IN MALTA

irruptions. "Then, jointly with my schoolmate, I began to boil the finger-nails in oil over a fire, but failing to see any effect, as predicted in the script, we threw everything in the fire and did not try any other prescription" (78). When one of the two priests was questioned whether the human free will could be moved by witchcraft, he answered: "At that time, I knew nothing about it; but now, since I am a Christian, I do not believe in it at all" (79). That was the common mentality, but in some instances certain individuals asserted that they had obtained their petitions. When others felt that they had been frustrated and deceived, the sorcerers accused them of their little faith in their practices. On some occasions they had serious troubles with the infidels. For example, Catharinuma Napuli applied every remedy prescribed by a slave, but to no avail, except that she began to suffer from a head-ache; when she informed the slave of her present situation, he accused her of the lack of faith, with a consequence that a quarrel ensued among them by insulting each other (80). Joseph Scarsio of Valletta had the same degree of credulity: at first he believed in them because he was told that faith was necessary, but immediately perceived that also with his trust in them he could not obtain anything; so he ceased to give them any more credit (81).

Perhaps the real perpetual victims of superstitions were those who imagined that they were obtaining recoveries or something else through these extraordinary actions. Some persons admitted that they had seen surprising phenomena; perhaps they were in the presence of a juggler. For instance, Antonio Oliveri demonstrated to Antonio Randazzo of Lentini how he could draw a triangle on his wrist and thrust a thorn in its centre without any flowing of blood (82). Here, however, the case is quite different: no predictions, no recoveries, no amulets, but only an action which cannot be performed by ordinary people, but can be realized without any superstition by a man of ability after study, observation, and practice.

Perhaps, in rare cases, a true intervention of the devil has to be admitted. "While princes and warriors were toying with the dangerous mysteries of the occult sciences, influencing the destinies of states", also in Malta, there had been "a gradual increasing develop of sorcery in different direction among the

(78) "Mesmo a bullire le nostre uova nell’olio, et scrivemmo col proprio sangue le parole che nelle fogliette di noce, però essendo abbruggito l’olio su li foco e non avendo visto effetto alcuno delle foglie scritte: abbracciammo il libro, e non ci siamo serviti ne dell’una ne dell’altra ricetta". Ib., n. 45, 11 March 1647, f. 219v.
(79) "In quei tempi io non sapevo niente di questo; però adesso come Cristiano credo che no". Ib.
(80) "E quando detto infedele ritornò da me, havendogli detto che in haver messo in testa il polisseno mento d’oro,我又 the que in haver messo in testa il polisseno mento d’oro, and lo guardo, e lo giustifico che era lui Luterano, e lo coacciò via, e li mi disse che m’averfa fatta una cosa che m’averfa straziata". Ib., n. 135, 10 June 1646, f. 65r.
(81) "In quei sorteggi ch’io ho fatti io ho creduto perché chi mi l’ingegno disse dovefser credere, ma è ben vero che quando poi non ho veduto l’effetti, io li perso ogni dolo". Ib., n. 125, 7 Apr. 1664, f. 650r.
(82) "All’ora mi disse il segreto, et è che con una spinuglia si segna nel luogo del polso a modo di triangolo e poi fara la detta spinuglia in mezzo del triangolo con dire: ‘seacappi, rutumello’, et altre parole, et infine: ‘entra disvolo’". Ib., n. 197, 28 Apr. 1649, f. 98v.

despised peasantry, which before it ran its course, worked far greater evils than any which has thus far sprung from the same source, and left an ineffaceable stain upon the civilization and intelligence" (88). Its practitioners were never learned persons, but ignorant peasants, generally women. They were credited to have frequent relations with the devil, and for this reason they were feared or hated. The above mentioned case referring to a girl who found herself in disorder after making it and locking the door contains something which is beyond the natural order (84). The possibility of the devil’s interference is well grounded if one examines the perversity intentions of immorality in the girl who is involved.

9. Superstitions at the Inquisition Tribunal.

The inquisitor Frederick Borromeo (85) in his report about the Holy Office in Malta referred to the cases of superstition on the island of Malta in the middle of the seventeenth century. When he drew a list of the denunciations which were quite frequent, those that refer to superstitions were put in the first place.

The Maltese Inquisition judged the infidels, who, after falling into slavery strolled along the city of Valletta, and under the pretext of selling merchandise, they were communicating their miserable creeds. They used to spread among women and simple persons any kind of superstitions, charms, love-formulas, and other similar antics (80). In Malta, during that period, one of the main worries of the Inquisitor was that of not permitting particularly the Moslem slaves to spread their evils. The Inquisitor had to defend the faith strenuously in order to avoid all dangers of apostasy and heresy, but after a century from the foundation of the Holy Tribunal in Malta (1561), numerous superstitions were still wide spread throughout the island. After examining the 209 denunciations, during the period of Anthony Pignatelli as Inquisitor

(84) A.I.M., ib. n. 104, 18 Apr. 1648, f. 960r. U. here note 67.
(85) Frederic Borromeo, the nephew of the famous Frederick Borromeo mentioned by Alessandro Manzioni in the "Promessi Sposi", came to Malta in the year 1650. He was the successor of Charles Cavalletti who had died in Malta. Although most of the Inquisitors did not like to stay in Malta, Borromeo was quite glad to be in this office. He would have stayed for longer period if his mother did not ask the Pope incessantly to take him back to Rome. He continued to repress the Power of the Holy Office in Vittoriosa. During the first year, he kept quite good relations with Grand Master Lascaris and the Order of the Knights: in fact he is the last Inquisitor who regularly kept his seat in the Conventual Church of St. John. Later on, on account of his intrigues in the internal affairs of the Order, he began to have some trouble with the Knights. He left the Island in the year 1654.

For the essential documents about Borromeo see:
A.S.V., Malta, ms. 82A, Registro di lettere della Segretaria all’Inquisitore dal 17 gen. al 22 Agosto 1654, ff. 2-5.
R.M.L., ms. 8, Note di Borromeo dall’origine del Tribunale del S. Uffizio, ff. 217v-218r.
ON THE ISLAND, WE CAN SAFELY CONCLUDE THAT THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND, WITHOUT ANY DISTINCTION BETWEEN CITIES AND VILLAGES, ONE COULD SCARCELY SUCCESSFULLY HOPE TO UPROOT THE EVIL RESULTING FROM SUPERSTITIONS. A CLOSER EXAMINATION OF PIGNATTI’S PERIOD CONCLUSIVELY PROVES THAT THE MAJORITY OF CASES CAME FROM THE CITIES OF VALLETTA, VITTORIA, AND SENGLEA: THAT IS FROM THOSE PLACES WHICH WERE FEELING THE GREATEST INFLUENCE OF MUSLIM SLAVES.


IN THEIR REPORTS TOWARDS THE END OF THE TRIBUNAL’S EXISTENCE IN MALTA (1777), WE NOTICE THAT SUPERSTITIONS UP TO THAT TIME REMAINED ONE OF THE INQUISTOR’S WORRIES (91).

THE INQUISITION, ESTABLISHED TO SUGAR THE CRIMINALS AND MURDERS ON THE ISLAND COULD NOT BEHOLD UNDIFFERENTIATE THE FAULDS OF THOSE WHOSE FUTURE IN THE TRUE PRESERVATION OF THEIR BELIEFS. THE CRITICISMS OF THAT AGE DEMANDED A SEVERE JUDGEMENT FROM THE INQUISITION TRIBUNAL. IF THE NORMS IN PRACTICE IN THOSE TIMES ARE EXAMINED, SIMILAR PREScriptions ARE TO BE FOUNDED: “IF A JEW OR ANY OTHER INFIDEL IS FOUND GUILTY, THE MENTIONED POINT (GREGORY XIII IN A BRIEF OF 1381) DEMANDS THE INQUISITOR TO PUNISH HIM ACCORDING TO THE QUALITY, FREQUENCY, AND MANNER OF THE CRIME. THEY ARE TO BE CONDEMNED EITHER TO SUFFER WHIPPING, OR TO ROW ON THE GALLEYS, EVEN FOR LIFE, OR TO THE FORFEITURE OF THEIR PROPERTY, OR TO BE SENT TO EXILE, OR TO BE SUBJECTED TO SOME OTHER ATROCEOUS PENALTY. THEIR PUNISHMENT SHOULD STAND AS AN EXAMPLE TO PREVENT OTHERS FROM REPEATING SIMILAR ERRORS, CRIMES, AND WICKEDNESS” (92).

THE INSTRUCTIONS GIVEN TO EACH INQUISITOR ON HIS DEPARTURES FOR MALTA GAVE A CLEAR IDEA OF HIS DUTIES IN RESPECT OF ANYTHING RELATED IN SOME WAY OR OTHER TO SUPERSTITIONS. THROUGHOUT THE SEVENTEENTH CENTURY, EACH INQUISTOR WAS REMINDED TO EXAMINE THE FREQUENCY OF SUPERSTITIONS IN MALTA (93). THE SUPREME CONGREGATION OF THE INQUISITION, WITH A HOLIDAY REMINDING EACH NEW INQUISITOR THAT HE SHOULD NOT BELIEVE THAT THE PERSONS CONDEMNED WERE REALLY WORKING EXTRADINARY THINGS THROUGH THE DEVIL (94). NOTWITHSTANDING THIS, THEY WERE TO BE PUNISHED. THEIR PRACTICES, THOUGH VAIN, WERE RECEIVING THE SIMPLE AND INNOCENT FOOLS, IN THIS WAY, MANY PERSONS WERE WASTING MONEY IN THE ILLICIT QUEST OF LOVE, HATRED, OR IN ANY OTHER PERSONAL INTEREST (95). THE INQUISITION TRIBUNAL, ITSELF BELIEVED, HOWEVER, THAT THE DEVIL MIGHT HAVE INTERFERED WHEN INCORPORATED; MOREOVER, SOMETHING WHICH COULD NOT BE DONE BY HUMANS COULD HAVE BEEN PROCURED BY THE EVIL SPIRIT. FOR THIS REASON, THE INQUISITOR WAS BOUND TO EXAMINE DILIGENTLY EVERY DENUNCIATION SO AS TO SEE WHETHER THE DEVIL REALLY SHARED IN AND USED ALL HIS FALCITIES (96).

THE EVIL OF SUPERSTITIONS IN MALTA WAS EXTREMELY CONTAGIOUS. AS WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN, THE SUPERSTITIONS WERE EASILY PASSED ON FROM PERSON TO PERSON. IN FACT, BORROMEO, IN HIS REPORT GOES ON TO SAY THAT MANY OTHER CASES THAT CAME UP BEFORE THE INQUISITION TRIBUNAL REFERRED TO THOSE WHO, HAVING FALLEN INTO THE TRAP OF THESE DEPRAVED PEOPLE, CO-OPERATED WITH THEM IN GIVING THEM CREDIBILITY, IN EXPERIENCING THE MAGIC PRACTICES FOR THEMSELVES, AND ALSO IN TEACHING THEM TO OTHERS (97).

IN MOST CASES OF SUPERSTITIONS, THE MALTESE Sought THE INQUISITION TO CONDEMN THEMSELVES AND TO ASK FOR THE ECLISICAL ABSOLUTION IN THE EXTERNAL FORUM. NOTWITHSTANDING THIS, SOME OF THEM, FOR YEARS, DID NOT CARE TO MAKE THE DENUNCIATION, OTHERS DID NOT KNOW ABOUT THEIR OBLIGATION; SOMETIMES THEY PRESENTED THEMSELVES AFTER MANY YEARS: AFTER TEN OR FIFTEEN YEARS, OR EVEN MORE.

IN ANOTHER REPORT OF THAT PERIOD WE FIND THAT AN ITALIAN, WHO DISLIKED THE MALTESE, OPENLY MANIFESTED THE ESTEEM ENJOYED BY THE INQUISITION ON THE ISLAND: “THEY HOLD IN A VERY HIGH ESTEEM THE PROTECTION OF THE INQUISITION TRIBUNAL TO WHICH THEY FREQUENTLY HAVE RESOURCE” (98). IN SPITE OF THIS, THE

---

(88) CASSAR, Medical History of Malta, p. 426.
(89) CASSAR, ibid.
(90) CASSAR PULLICINO, An introduction . . . . pp. 19-34.
(92) A.I.M., Pratica per procedere nelle cause del Sant’Uffizio, f. 61.
A.S.V., Malta, ms. 186, Instr. a Mona. Marescotti (1664).
A.S.V., Malta, ms. 191, Instr. a Mona. Spinola (1709).
M.R. Stephen Bronocci was earmarked as successor of Frederick Borromeo for the Inquisition of Malta. The Holy Office had already prepared his instructions which we were able to examine in the Biblioteca dei Lincei in Rome. However, Borromeo’s successor was Giulio Dodi Oddi who is remembered for his unsuccessful attempts against De Renc, who, in spite of the Inquisitor’s antagonism, succeeded in obtaining the highest dignity in the Order of St. John of Jerusalem.
(94) "... noli passare operare per meco in maleficii quela cose che naturalmente sono impossibili!", A.S.V., Malta, ms. 151, f. 37v.
(95) "Sotto i pretensi malefici e stregare si racchiudono illusioni e inganni rivolti a deludere le persone semplici e innocenti e a cauzion darvi dalle mani de’ prodieli a gli amorosi, a gli odio, e all’intresso! Ib.
(96) "Sara parte della prudente di Vostra Signoria il non credere che tutto quello che si puoi fare dal demonio, sia fatto, e in non disperare, che in qualche parte non si sia posto in esecuzione", ib., ms. 186, f. 91v.
(97) BORROMEO, ibid., p. 99.
one liked to be charged before the Inquisitor, When a person was summoned to present himself, anyone that knew the fact presumed that he was guilty of offences against faith or morals (99). For this reason, some priests, while hearing confessions came across serious problems. Many persons were afraid to come to the Tribunal. The inquisitor Distallevi (100), at the request of many confessors, wrote to the Holy Office in Rome to ask for a special faculty of absolving 'in foro conscientiae' those persons guilty of superstitious practices who refused to appear before the Inquisitor (101). The Supreme Congregation of the Holy Office examined the petition but the answer was a negative one: the Inquisitor should not grant such faculties. The confessors had to perform their duties and oblige the penitents to present themselves to the Holy Tribunal, but at the same time they should also predisse their business in order that the moral fatigue might be in some way alleviated (102).

Towards the middle of the seventeenth century, during the inquisitorship of Anthony Pignatelli, the use of corporal punishments was very rare, but, as regards Moslems, the Inquisitor was left with no other alternative. Since they were not Christians, spiritual Penances could not be meted out on them effectively. For this reason, the only penalties which could serve as a medicine for them were the corporal ones. For instance, Chag Chut of Damatis had been first admonished during the period of Mgr. Gori; Pannellini (103) in order to visit not to hold conversation with Christian women; some years before, he had been treated with severe penalties. During the period of Anthony Pignatelli, however, he was again caught prescribing magic medicines and filters. This event was recorded in the Report of Mgr. Marascioli, who was Inquisitor in Malta between the years 1694 and 1696.

(99) "Il Tribunale del S. Officio (et in conseguenza la persona dell'Inquisitore) è odiosissimo universalmente in Malta perché 'irreggiam iniuriam' a quelle famiglie e persone che vengono da lui molestate per materia di fede, quale ha avuto somma adunan- sìe persone non informate in uno che si sappia caricato da ufficiali del S. Officio", Bibl. Vat., Off. Leg., ms. 2206, p. 2. S. 80-r-v.

These words are worthy of a special consideration because they are taken from the Report of Mgr. Marascioli, who was Inquisitor in Malta between the years 1694 and 1696.

(100) Mgr. Etterio Distallevi was sent as Inquisitor in Malta in 1665 by Pope Paul V. He remained in his office for about two years. Soon after his arrival, he chose Fr. Sebastian Sabina, S.J. as a Consultant of the Holy Office; this Jesuit became one of the most famous of all the Consultants of the Holy Tribunal. Distallevi left Malta in 1671. Cfr. R.M.L., Ms. 8, f. 505-506; A.S.V., Malta, Ms. 166, f. 379r.

(101) "La lettera di Vostra Signoria ricevuta a' 5 del presente, è stata letta in questa Sacra Congregazione a' 7, e considerato quanto Ella serve circa la faccenda che le è richiesta dalla giovanità e i confessori di potere assolvere il penitente nel foro della consapevolezza, li quali recavano di denunziare al Santo Office i sortegli e bestemme detestatili...", A.I.M., Lettere dal Sant'Office all'Inquisitore di Malta, ms. 1, f. 201v.

(102) "Questi miei illustrissimi hanno risoluto ch'il cia acerba che Elin non conceda simili facoltà, ma ordini ai confessori che faciano il debito dell'office loro in disporre et stragere li penitenti e deportare nel Santo Office, nè i casi che sono tenuti conforme a' Sacri Canoni et Editi!". Ib.

(103) Mgr. John Baptista Gori Pannellini was sent as Inquisitor to Malta in 1698 by Pope Urban VIII. He maintained his office for seven years, but he was never liked by the Maltese. He was in continual disensions with the Knights (who at one time attempted also to murder him) and with the Bishop. Many Maltese were also against him for his extremely severe decisions. During his period, the ministers of the Holy Tribunal abused of their office and many were unjustly imprisoned.

obstinate insistance in tempting others led to his being condemned to public whipping in Vittoriosa (104).

Mgr. Pignatelli followed the spirit of the law, rather than the plain rigid words. When persons were found guilty in Malta, there was no need to adduce profound theological discussions because, as a rule, the culprit's faults did not amount to heresy or aposterity, although they went astray only through physical sufferings and as a result of vehement human passions.

Cases of superstitions were examined by the Inquisitor because, in some way or another, they involved heretical assertions and beliefs. The sentences, however, during that period were not very severe. For instance, Pauline Hugues was not formally condemned of heresy, even though she believed that a slave could procure some effects through the devil's aid; this happened because she formally meant to obtain the effect and not to adhere to a heretical doctrine (105). The same thing can be said of Philip Bonnici and Vincent Mangion whose fault lay only in their juvenile inc consideration (106). There are numerous other cases which illustrate, beyond any reasonable doubt, the full comprehension of the penitent sinners by the Inquisitor.

The consideration of human frailty was not alien from the norms which had to serve as a guide to the Inquisitor. "When sortileges are exerted, the persons who practice them are to be particularly asked whether they believe, or have believed that the devil can constrain the free will. Though some of them, especially women, either through ignorance or through vehement passionate love (which blinds and dims the intellect), confess their belief in those superstitions (which in itself is heretical because the devil possesses no power to constrain the human will), the Holy Office should not oblige them to...

He had, however, also the good side of his character: he interceded in favour of the Maltese so that the Holy See might not give to foreigners the benefits of the Island; he left no occasion to escape him whenever he had the possibility of favouring the Jesuits, who had quite recently suffered a short ignominious expulsion from the Island. When an Archbishop had been captured by the French corsairs at sea and taken to the island of Malta, the Inquisitor seized his possessions, invested and finally obtained his freedom, and, moreover, he also offered him clothes, linen, provisions, money, and anything desired. Mgr. Gori left the Island in 1648.


A.S.V., Malta, ms. 82, Reg. di lettere della Segre. a Mons. Inquis. dal 14 gen. al 28 nov. 1651.

Bibl. Vat., Barb. Lat., ms. 6684, 6686, 6687, 6688.


R.M.L., Ms. 8, f. 215v-r.

(104) "Attenta bona conversione precepi facit superaddit superior Chag Hall, dico Chag Chut, de Damatis, ne conversans cum mulieribus Christianis nec usurum domum ingrediens sub poenis arbitrio infra scripturs: cumque denso plura sortilgia conferett prout in acta presenta processus, mandamus ipsum Chag Hall fugitari per bona publica solida et consuetus huius civitatis Victorianae. Datum in Palatio Sancti Officii, die 29 Februarii 1648. A. Pignatelli". A.I.M., Processi, ms. 61, n. 94, f. 400v-r.

(105) "Io giudicavo che quell'infedele ricoverato dal demonio il quale gli mostrava come curante", Ib., n. 94, 13 Nov. 1647, f. 407v.

(106) "In quodem non sapero niente di questo", Ib., n. 45, 11 March 1647, f. 219v.

A.I.M., Pratica per procedere, f. 84-85.
to do a formal abjuration, but only 'de verheementi' or 'de levii' according to the quality of the persons and the impulsive causes. Considering the fact in its concrete terms, they indeed believe only in the material effect they are expecting and do not go further in" (107).

The sole intention of the Maltese Inquisitor, at least during that period, was to regain the sinners back to their faith. Pignatelli strove to show the menace of the Church in the pronouncement of his sentences. On many occasions, he just gave warning for the future. Moreover, all those who humbly sought the Inquisitor to obtain absolution from their fault were given only medicinal penances. For example, Joseph Degua, in his sensual passion, had four times invoked the devil to help him; the Inquisitor, however, absolved him from any excommunication or censure that he might have incurred and pronounced this decisive sentence which is the model of so many others: "In order that you might more easily receive the mercy of the Lord and the remission from your sin, we bind you for the next two years to go to sacramental confessions four times a year, and upon the advice of your confessor to receive the Holy Communion on the four solemnities of the Church, namely, at the commemoration of the Lord's Resurrection, on Whitsunday, on the feast of the Assumption of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, and on Christmas day; and during this period you are bound to recite the Rosary every Saturday" (108).

For those who were suspected of heresy because of superstitions the sentence was even milder. For example, the sentence passed on Barberina Grach, who had used some magic words out of hatred, was the following: "in order that you may more easily receive the mercy of the Lord and the remission for your sin, as salutary penances, we bind you for the coming two years, to fast once a month, and, during this period, recite the Rosary beads every Saturday" (109).

In superstitions concerning love and in those concerning remedies for illnesses and against the evil-eye, the Holy Tribunal of that period never inflicted any physical penalty upon a Christian. Mercy and compassion were exerted even towards those of higher dignities, who were expected to be the leaders of the Christian community.

Sentences continued to vary from simple admonitions to four years of prayers and penance; their penalty, however, was always spread over intervals, as seen from the typical sentences quoted above.

For the preservation of personal honour and safety, the names of the accused and of the witnesses were always kept secret. A suspected person was sued in front of the Inquisitor without telling him why he had been summoned (110). In the meantime, anyone who knew the faults which directly or indirectly concerned apostasy or heresy was obliged to refer everything to the Inquisitor; but at the same time, the witnesses were prohibited to divulge among others the defects of the persons denounced. Each denunciation or self-accusation concluded with the following words: "He was obliged under oath to keep silence, and to sign his name" (111).

18. EPILOGUE: Superstitions in Malta and the mentality of the twentieth century.

As we have examined, in Malta we had only ordinary superstitions. The cases of grave witchcraft and sorcery are very rare. Superstitions in the past had a very great influence on our Religion, but to-day most of them left no trace. It is interesting to study about them solely for their historical importance in that we might trace the evolution of our modern beliefs.

Nevertheless, some others are still quite common. For instance, with the passing of some three hundred years, one might think that strange occurrences and beliefs concerning the evil-eye, so common at that time, would be extinct to-day; but there are signs and survivals that point out to the contrary.

Some facts common in the seventeenth century were very similar to processes in vogue also in the twentieth century. Some decades ago, Fr. Magri describes in all its particularities a lot of superstitious fumigations which were commonly used in Malta: "The person carrying out the fumigations must walk three times round the person believed to be suffering the effects of the evil-eye, if the burning olive-leaves turn black, it is an 'evil-eye' (daqqa q'ilha), but if the leaves turn white, there is nothing to worry about (112).

Today, as well, we can still observe women who, having burned on coal-fire some olive-leaves distributed in the church on Palm Sunday, scurry about the house with the smouldering leaves, praying God to free their dwelling from the evil-eye. There are some others who, imagining themselves passed by a wicked person, signs themselves hurriedly and quenches their footsteps. Then, there are those, among whom many may be included who, while conversing with a suspected person, stealthily and unnoticed, hold their fingers in a forked position to disarm the malavento influence of an evil-eye!

What can we say today about amulets and magic words which were so frequent in the past? If we look around us, don't we still observe the existence of some amulets? "It is still very common to see the horns of a bull on the outside of farmhouses or meatshops and in the decorations of other buildings. Ivory horns are also used as pendants in watch-chains to protect the wearer from an evil-eye" (113). We would like to add, however, that the horns of a bull or a horse-shoe, so often found nailed to doors, carts, and buses, are used not only to ward off the malevolent influence of an evil-eye, but also as a lucky charm.

Besides, the abuse of certain devotional practices in our Religion may also amount to superstitions. If we cling to a saint or to relics in an inordinate

(110) A.I.M., Processi, ins. 61, n. 13, 15 Jan. 1647, f. 60v.
See also the typical sentence in the appendix.
(111) "Per dio anni proponi per ogni mese digiunare una volta et per detto tempo ogni sabato recitare la corona". Ib., n. 9, 3 Jan. 1647, f. 38v.
(112) "Inferroxitus ad ead vel suscipiet causam suae carcerationis et presentis examinis. respondit: ita, Io non so in causa, ne mi in posso immagine". Ib., n. 9, 36 Jan. 1648, f. 64r.
manner, such devotion for our generation would take place of the amulets and magic formulas of the past. It is an inordinate devotion when some people cling to a Saint more than to God himself; but rather than superstition such cult should be considered as an effect of ignorance. The practices, however, of some country women in Malta, though they might seem ridiculous to others, are not superstitious. Some country women dearly carry on them holy objects to be preserved from any sort of evil. Nevertheless, they do not expect the good effect from the things themselves; regularly, they consider them barely as a protection for the intimate relation that they bear to God. The following is a typical fact: “Country women usually hang a small bag round the waist, containing a small cross, a piece of candle used in the Church on Maundy Thursday (sekmebha tat-tawḥib) and some olive-leaves blessed on Palm Sunday (Hadd il-Palm or Ghid iz-Zebbug) which they believe, will ward off evil” (114). With the lapse of time, the stronger we grow in our conviction in the Christian Faith, the more we realize the nonsense of superstitions. Today, besides, the world is becoming more and more critical. Everything is based on reason. Consequently, the only danger is that we go to another extreme: the despise of all things that are not according to the course of nature.

Finally, superstitions are the product of fear and the correlative expectation of luck; but in Christians fear is to be combined with hope. Hope in fear, tuck in spiritual and physical misery cannot be sought in those objects which in themselves are endowed with no power. Security must be fetched in God and in the natural means with which we are provided.

APPENDIX

I

An act of devotion mixed with superstitious practices.
From the self-denunciation of Fr. Philip Farrugia.

Die XXII Mensis Aprilis 1648
Coram Illustriissimo Domino Antonio Pignatello, Inquisitore et Assistente Domino Assessor.
Comparuist sponte personaliter R.D.na Don Philippus Farrugia Presbyteri Melitensis eui delatio Juramento de veritate dicenda, tacto pectore more sacerdotali, pro exonerazione suae conscientiae denunziavit infrascripta:

Tre mesi sono Michele Biabili mi mostrò un quaternetto di carta scritto di 19 fogli in ottavo, qual incomincia ‘vattimi in saragoza’ e finisce ‘un puoco di sango d’un gatto nero’, quale esichisco, et alli 20 del presente in, il detto Michele, Fra Michele Carmelitano, Fra Carlo Carmelitano, et un giovane Maltese, figlio d’un barbiero francese sopra la galere, secondo l’avventimento dato nell’ultimo foglio, et è il penultimo avventimento, entrassero nella presupposta grotta del detto avventimento, et secssa la candela delle tenebre, da me portata solamente, io e li detti Frati per devotione dissero il simbolo di S. Atanasio ‘Quirunque’ e poi non havendo fatto altro, se non scavato un poco in un lato della grotta, siamo usciti fuori.

(A.I.M., Processi, ms. 61, n. 129, f. 656)

II

The contempt of superstitions from the denunciation of Areiana Martin.

Die XXIII mensis Decembris 1647
Coram Illustriissimo Domino Antonio Pignatello, Inquisitore, assistente Domino Assessor.
Comparuist sponte personaliter Areiana uxor Pauli Martini galli super navigio Domini Aguzzini, de Burmula, etatis annorum 14, cui delatio Juramento de veritate dicenda, pro exonerazione suae conscientiae denunziavit infrascripta:

Un mese fa in circa, venne una Giudice nell’entrata di mia casa, donna giovane di giusta statura, ne grassa ne magra, argentina, quale va vendendo per le strade e vedendomi la pianta della mano, mi disse che mio marito fra tre mesi doveva arrivare in Malta con molta comodità, del che io non mi risi,
esendo mio marito qui in Malta. E poi prese un vaso con acqua, dentro
del quale mise un po' d'olio surrizzando, e ci disse che il marito de Giovannella
mia sorella doveva venire in Malta fra un meite, il quale già è passato; e ci
disse che le tre galere che eran andate in Mesina fra cinque giorni dovevano
ritornare, però il tutto noi habbiammo fatto burlando della detta Giudea senza
dargli credito alcuno; e per scarsoi di mia conoscenza sono venuta a far detta
denuncia senza passione alcuna.

Quibus habitatis, fuit ei inunetum iuramentum silentii et ut
faciat signum Sanctae Crucis loco subscriptionis.

A.I.M., Processi, ms. 61, n. 101, f. 501 r.

III
An abjuration from light suspicions of hereesy on account of
superstitious practices.

Io Caterinuzza Napuli, vedova retila del quondam Giovanni Napuli, malessa
habitante in questa città Vittoria, dell’età mia di anni 28 in circa, constituita
personalmente in giudizio, et inginocchiata avanti di Vostra Signoria Illustris-
sima e Reverendissima Monignor Antonio Pignatello, Inquisitore Generale in
quest’Isola di Malta, et Apostolico Delegato, havendo avanti g’occhi miei; i
Sacrosanti Evangeli, quali toccò con le proprie mani, giuro che sempre ho
creduto, adesso credo, et con l’aggiunto di Dio crederò sempre per l’avere
tratto quello miene, credo, predica, et insegna la Santa Cattolica et Apostolica
Romana Chiesa; ma perchè da questo Santo Office, per le cose conesse dette
me nella mia comparra fatta sotto il 30 giugno passato, sono stata
dechiarata lievemente sospetta d’heresia, e d’have creduto che la libra volontà
dell’uomo si possi sforzare per mezzo di sortilegi; per tanto dovendo io levare
dalla mente de fedeli questa lieve isposizione contro di me concezza, abjuro,
maledico, e detesto le dette heresia et errore che contradice alla Santa Cattolica et Apostolica Romana
Chiesa; prometto et giuro di non incorrere mai più in questi o simil errori et di
non haver famigliarità o prattica con heretic’, et che sieno sospetti d’heresia,
et me conoscerò allun tale de denunciarlo a questo Santo Office, o vero all’In-
quistore o Vescovo del luogo dove mi troverò; giuro anco e prometto d’adem-
pire tutte le penitenze impostemi da questo Santo Office, et se per j’avvenire
io contravvenessi alle dette mie promesse et giuramenti: (del che Nostro Signore mi
guardi) m’obligo, et sottometto a tutte le pene da Sacri Canoni et Constituzioni
Generali, et particolari contro simili delinquenti imposte, et promolgate. Cod
Iddio m’aggiungi et questi suoi sacrosanti Evangeli quali tocco con le proprie
mani.

Io Caterinuzza Napuliis suddetta ho abjurato, giurato, promesso, e mi sono

FR. ALEXANDER BONNICI, O.F.M. Conv. 175

obligata come di sopra, et in fede del vero, per non saper Io scrivere, ho fatto
un segno della Santa Croce nella presente credola di mia abjurazione di propria
mia mano.

In Malta, nella camera secreta del Santo Office il di 14 Ottobre 1648.

A.I.M., Processi, ms. 61, n. 135, f. 688 r-v.

IV
The questioning of a slave who had been accused of spreading
superstitious remedies among Christian women.

Die XVI mensis Januarii 1648.
Coram praefato Illustrissimo Domino Inquisitore et assistentibus
Domino Assessore et Domino fici Promotore.

Constitutus personaliter supra dictus Chag Chut infidelis cu delato iuramento
de veritate dicenda per Deum vivum,

Interrogatus de nomine, cognomine, parentibus, patria, etate, et conditione,

Respondit: Io mi chiamo Chag Haili, detto Chag Chut, figlio del quondam
Chatset da Damia; sono d’anni 81, mahomettano sciavo della Religione e
travaglio nelle nuove fortificazioni.

Interrogatus: un sciat vel suspicet causam suae carcerationis et praesentis
examini,

Respondit: Io non so la causa, ne mi la posso immaginare.

Interrogatus: an ipse constitutus feecerit aliquid spectans ad hoc Sanetum
Officeum,

Respondit: Non ho fatto cosa alcuna.

Interrogatur: an aliter fuerit carceratus in hoc Sancto Office, et quanto.

Respondit: Sono stato due altre volte carcerato in questo S. Office, e
la prima volta in questo cortile mi foro dati molti colpi di nervo, e l’altra volta
fui frustato per questa città Vittoria, con ordine che non dovessi entrare in
casa di donne, si come ho eseguito.

Efti dieto quod Sanctum Officium scirem inquirit contra sollicitantes a Christiani
apostatent a fide Christi, contra impeditentes ne infeles baptizentur, et
contra sortilegos, ido dicat an ipse cognolet aliquid alianum tales personas.


A definite sentence against superstition

Invocando dovunque il nome di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo, della sua Gloriosissima Madre sempre Vergine Maria, e di S. Pietro martire, nostro Protettore, nella causa e cause suddette: (1) tra il Dottor Gio. Battista Farrugia, Promotor Fiscale di questo S. Ufficio da una parte, e me Giuseppe Scaro sudetto reo, sponte comparsante et confeso per l'altra, per questa nostra difinitiva sentenza, quale, sedendo pro tribunali, proferiam pro questi scritti, diciamo, pronuntiamo, e dechiariamo che tu Giuseppe Scaro sudetto per le cose suddette da te confessate ti sei reso a questo S. Ufficio vehementemente sospetto d'eresia d'aver creduto che la libera volontà dell'uomo possa essere sconfitta con soverchie, e che il sacrificio della Messa, l'Evangeli, ed il nominare la Santa Trinità possano derivare a pravo fine, e conseguentemente può essere incorso in tutte le censure e pene da Sacri Canoni, Constituzioni generali e particolari contro simili delinquenti imputi e promulgati, e per tanto sei obbligato ad abiarure le dette herezie, e generalmente ogni altra herezia et errore, che contraddica alla Santa Cattolica et Apostolica Romana Chiesa nel modo e forma che da noi ti sarà data, doppo la qual abiarura, siamo contenti d'assolverti a cattitha dalla scomunica, nella quale per le cose suddette e da te confessate può esser incorato, et acciò che da Nostro Signore Iddio ottenghi più facilmente mercedaria e perdono di questi tuoi peccati, per penitenza salutar ti imponiamo che per quatro anni prossimi ti debbi confessare sacramentalmente quattro volte l'anno, e di conseglio di tuo confessore comunicarti nelle quattro solennità di Santa Chiesa, cioè per la Pasqua di Resurrezione, per la Pentecoste, per l'Assunzione della Beatissima Vergine, e per il Natale del Signore; e per detto tempo debbi ogni sabato recitare la corona, e digiunare quattro volte in pane et acqua.

FR. ALEXANDER BONVICI, O.F.M.Conv.

Die XXVIIIIS mensis Maii 1649.

Coram Perillustrissimo et Reverendissimo Domino Don Pietro Francisco Portemolo, Sanecte Inquisitionis Officis Vice-Inquisitore.

Comparuit sponte in hoc loco examinis Jacobus Tonna, filius Ambrosii de insula Senglea, etatis annorum 25, qui detelato iuramento de vereitate dicenda prope juravit, sanctis Sacramentis Scripturis, et pro exonerazione sua conscientiae denuntiavit infracripta:

Giovanni che fori il 27 del corrente mese verso le 4 ore doppo mezzogiorno, essendo io andato in casa di Vittoria, figliola di Isabella detta "ta S' men" matrera, sita nella città Valletta, vicina la polveriera, mettendo la mia mano dentro la bussa d'un faldetta di detta Vittoria, quale stava su il letto, io ho trovato questa carta scritta, quale incomincia... et finisce... segnata A; piegata; et essendosi accorta la detta Vittoria della detta carta che avevo in mano, mi la volse prendere con dirmi se io l'avessi preso dai Crocifisi, e che era bullettino della sua confessione; però io non gli la volsi dare, e essendo uscito fuori et aperto detta carta, l'ho trovato scritta del modo che le Signorie Vostre vedono; onde ho pensato che fosse cosa cattiva e perciò non venuto a esibirla come l'esibisce a questo Santo Ufficio, per scarrico di mia consciencia, senza passione alcuna; anzi l'ultimo giorno, io ritornai dalla medesima Vittoria, et gli ho detto che per scarrico di mia conscienza l'avevo portato in questo Santo Ufficio, e lei mi rispose che non haeva timore di questo, perché l'aveva trovata in piazza nella Vasseil lattea, et che non saeva che cosa fosse. Quibus habitibus, insinuato sibi iuramento silenti. (3)
Die XIII mensis Septembris 1649: Congregatio censuit quod dieta Vittorica corripiatur.

The magic script handed by the infidel slave Haissa to Vittorica nicknamed "Ta' Sinen" from Valletta, who with its occult power expected to be reconciled to her beloved.

(A.I.M., Processi, ms. 61, f. 1044 r.)

FR. ALEXANDER BONNICI, O.F.M. Conv.

B.

Die secunda mensis Juni 1649

Coram II'ustrissimo et Reverendissimo Domino Carolo Cavalieretta, Inquisitore Generali; Meitensi, assistente Admodum Iliustrissimo Domino Don Petro Francisco Pontremolo, Sanctae Inquisitionis Officis huius Sancti Officis Assessore.

Comparuit sponte in hoc loco examinatis Vittorica bona fide filia quondam Bernardi, habitatrix civitatis Valletiae proprie Povertarum, et alia annorum decem et octo circiter, cui delato iuramento de veritate dicenda, prout iuravit tacitae Sacrosancti Scripturis, et pro exoratione suae conscientiae denuntiavit in trascripta:

Otto mesi sono in circa, essendosi disgustato meco il mio amico lassevo et essendomi trovata di questo disgustato, Haissa, schiava infedele vecchia, quale è partita per il suo paese tre mesi sono, venne in casa mia, e provandomi in quel modo, me disse di volermi portare una tal cosa che il mio amico fosse riconciliato meco; et essendomi io contentata, di la tre giorni mi portò una carta piegata, e m'impose che l'avessi portata adorno per l'effetto sudetto, sì come io ho fatto; però po', essendomi risoluta a presentarla a questo Santo Officio, poiché dal principio che mi fu data, l'ho presa per scandalo, e perció la mesi nella sacoccia per detto effetto, quale poi non l'h'ho trovata, ne so se l'ho persa, o mi è stata tolta; e volendomi ritirar per vivere da Christiana, non venuta a far questa denunzia per scaricco di mia conscientia, senza passione alcuna.

Interrogata an credat vel crediderit liberam hominim voluntatem sortilegiss cogi posse...

Respondit: Io non credo, ne ho creduto mai tal cosa.

Interrogata an sciat vel suspicetur se esse praeventam...

Respondit: Io non so ne ho sospetto alcuno; però son venuta a far questa denunzia per scaricco di mia conscientia,

Quibus habitus, fuit sibi iniunctum iuramentum silentii.

Die XIIIa mensis Septembris 1649, Congregatio censuit quod dieta Vittorica corripiatur.

Die 14 eiusdem mensis; suprascripta Vittorica fuit vocata et corrupa.

A.I.M., Processi, ms. 61, n. 208, ff. 1043r-1054r.
A Summary of the denunciations that refer to superstitions.

1. All the facts very briefly mentioned here are taken from the trials during the period of Mgr. Anthony Pignatelli (Dec. 1646—May 1649). The original manuscript (Processi n. 61) is kept in the Inquisition Archives at Mdina (Malta). The number refers to the progressive one of the trials; the folios refer to numeration of the whole manuscript.

2. We do not mean to include all the persons who were in some way or another accused of superstitious practices. We limit ourselves only to the Maltese persons against whom the Tribunal proceeded. Many other persons could be recorded, but they are of minor importance because they are connected to the others mentioned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Quality of Denunciation</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Angela Grech of Valletta</td>
<td>She administered love potions to gain her beloved</td>
<td>Counseled by a Sicilian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Magdalena De Stephani of Valletta</td>
<td>She practised exorcisms to regain her beloved</td>
<td>Counseled by a Sicilian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Barbecia Grech of Vittoriosa</td>
<td>She practised exorcism to regain her beloved</td>
<td>Counseled by a Maltese.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Joseph Degueriora of Valletta</td>
<td>He invoked the devil together with other superstitious actions for the sake of dishonest relations with a married woman.</td>
<td>On his own initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Natalie Barbara of Grendi</td>
<td>He leaves his cap on the bed while he goes to another woman so that his wife may not awake while he is away.</td>
<td>Counseled by a Sicilian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Don Angelo Malia of Musabba obtains whatever he wants.</td>
<td>On his own initiative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>John Paul Caruana of Grendi</td>
<td>He fetches illicit practices to ward off the evil influence of an evil-eye.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Martin Pace Maltese</td>
<td>He uses a magical magnet to befriend himself to others.</td>
<td>On his own initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>Alyosetta 'Is Cal. She throws on her bed diverse objects 'zettara' of Valletta for the return of her beloved, letta</td>
<td>On her own initiative.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Jacobina De La ...</td>
<td>She uses a magnet, various ointments, and exorcisms for the sake of love.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Quality of Denunciation</th>
<th>Remarks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Philip Bonnici of Vittoriosa</td>
<td>Both of them experiment the recipes found in a manuscript for the sake of love.</td>
<td>On their own initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Thomas Coreop of Zebbug (Goz)</td>
<td>He tries to experiment the value of a magical script.</td>
<td>On his own initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Clare Delia of Vittoriosa</td>
<td>She administered potions to restore to health another person.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53</td>
<td>Angelinna Vella of Burmula</td>
<td>With a mouthful of water and the recitation of some prayers she experimentally determined whether her husband was about to return.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Catharinus Sac ... of Valletta</td>
<td>She burns diverse objects as experiments for love.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>John Mary Zammit of Birgu-kara</td>
<td>He gives away clothes worn by his wife to experiment whether she has been bewitched.</td>
<td>Counseled by a Maltese, and by Sicilians and by Slaves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>He hands to a sorcerer a paper on which he has written his name and the name of the woman that he desires. He uses illicit practices for the sake of dishonest relations.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>Laurence Fenech of Attard</td>
<td>He is in possession of an object used for the sake of love, and to ward off the influence of an evil-eye.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Fr. Paul O.F.M. of Valletta</td>
<td>He used a magical magnet to obtain the friendship of an important person.</td>
<td>Counseled by one of his conferees.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>Grace Caruana of Sengies</td>
<td>She receives a magical script through which she may escape from home.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Pauline Hagger of Siġiewi</td>
<td>She cleans her face with some mixtures to ward off the evil-eye.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Matheola Menj</td>
<td>She keeps on a magical script to bring back her lover.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>72</td>
<td>Domenica Darrius of Valletta</td>
<td>She administered a potion with a mixture of wine and menstrual blood for the sake of love.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>73</td>
<td>Leo de Mura of Sengies</td>
<td>He says strange magical words in front of women that he desires.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74</td>
<td>Mary de Marri of Sengies</td>
<td>She concludes (after an experiment) that an individual can bring harm on Maltese through his evil-eye: she burned a paper on fire, and observed some clear black spots on the paper burned.</td>
<td>Counseled by a slave.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SUPERSTITIONS IN MALTA

No. Names Quality of Denunciation Remarks

79 Pauline Vella ff.358r-357v of Attard She tries to cure her daughter from an evil-eye through superstitious practices. Counseled by a slave.

91 Flaminian Zammit ff.394r-393v of Senglea He pronounces illicit words together with superstitious practices for illicit love. Among other actions, he writes on a Christian paper the name of four demons and swallows the paper.

94 Pauline Hagnus ff.407r-454v of Siggiewi She murmurs some words together with a superstitious actions to ward off the slave, evil-eye.

95 Jerome Zarb ff.455r-452v of Gadir (?) He practices superstitions to begin again to offer his services to a Knight. Counseled by a slave.

100 Salvus de Nicroff ff.497r-500v of Valletta He practices ointments and incantations for the recovery of his wife. Counseled by a slave.

108 Augustine Vial ff.548r-551v of Mdina He administers potions to his wife to regain her affection. Counseled by a slave.

123 Antonetta Calisff ff.624r-627v of Valletta She uses diverse mixtures that she throws in the street for the sake of love. Counseled by a Maltese.

124 Magdelena ff.628r-631v of Valletta Superstitious practices without any determined intention. On her own initiative.

125 Joseph Sciarossff ff.648r-650v of Valletta He writes on his hand the name of four demons together with that of a woman Sicilian for the sake of love. Counseled by a slave.

129 Fr. Philip ff.656r-653v of Parrain Fr. Michael O.C. They light a candle, recite some prayers. On their own and dig in a cave to free it from the devil.

131 Margaret Cosborff ff.690r-670v of Ggura She puts salt on fire and invokes the devil for the sake of love. Counseled by a Gozitan.

134 Antonia Lati ff.692r-689v of Vittoriosa She puts salt on fire and whispers some magic words to regain her lover. Counseled by a Sicilian.

135 Catarinaazzu fffdf.694r-690v of Vittoriosa She writes the name of her lover on a bone and burns it on fire together with three magical scripts to make him come back to her.

146 Spilantia Rugff.728r-724v of Vittoriosa She wears on a magical script as a precaution against the danger of being slave. Counseled by a slave.

FR. ALEXANDER BONNICI, O.F.M. CONV.

No. Names Quality of Denunciation Remarks

145 Salvo Pulis ff.725r-726v of Senglea He wears a magical script for illicit love and as a precaution against physical danger. On his own initiative.

165 Grace Greg ff.857r-877v of Burmula She practices exorcisms to regain her beloved. Counseled by a Sicilian.

188 Mariuzzza Spiteriff ff.898r-941v of Vittoriosa She throws salt on fire for the return of her beloved. Counseled by a Maltese.

194 Rinalda Torrentiff ff.930r-935v of Valletta She murmurs words and practices some superstitious actions. It is a singular case in which the intervention of the devil seems to be manifest. She makes her bed in which a successor calls the devil; then she keeps the room closed under lock and key, and, strange to say, the bed is found spoilt and disordered. All those who were to know her last visitors in that bed would become fond of her.

208 ff.1048r-1047v Vittoriosa Tav. Sinc of Valletta She uses a magic script to regain her lover. Counseled by a slave.

209 ff.1048r-1055v Fr. Paul from Malta O.F.M. He procures for himself illicit remedies to cure his leg. Counseled by a Greek.

ABBREVIATIONS

A.I.M. Archivium Inquisitionis Melitensis.
A.S.V. Archivum Secretum Vaticanum.
Arch. Stor. Malta Archivio Storico di Malta.
Barb. Lat. Fondo Barberino Latino.
Borg. Lat. Fondo Borgia Latino.
E.B. Encyclopaedia Britannica.
E.M.K. Encyclopaedia of Modern Knowledge.
E.RE. Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics. Istruzioni.
Ottob. Lat. Fondo Ottobonian Latino.