

CONFRATERNITIES IN MALTA

Compiled by Dr Mark Agius



GENERAL RULE

The founding of a Confraternity in a location or Parish would have to be authorised both by the local bishop and by the Prior General of the respective Order.

The local confraternity would usually be aggregated to a Confraternity in an important Church of the Order in Rome.

This was also true of the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament, which, in Malta , depended on the Dominican Order, and so were authorised by the Prior General of that order and were affiliated with the Confraternity in Santa Maria Sopra Minerva, a Dominican church in Rome.

The Roman Confraternities to which local Confraternities were aggregated were called Archiconfraternities, as were local confraternities from which other confraternities were founded.

The Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament had been first founded by Mgr. Duzzina in 1575.



The Confraternities of the Rosary were established in all parishes of Malta by Bishop Tommaso Gargallo in 1588.



Our Lady of Sorrows, and others developed in different parishes as needs arose.



In the middle ages, there were two important settlements in Malta. One was the town of Mdina in the centre of the Island , with its suburb of Rabat and The castle of Saint Angelo and its suburb of Birgu in the Grand Harbour area.



The First Confraternities in Malta.

Confraternities of Saint Joseph

- There is another important ancient confraternity, that of Saint Joseph, in Birgu (Vittorios) , which has an altar in the Parish Church of Saint Lawrence as well as an Oratory . Its members were usually wood-workers.
- It is said in the middle ages to have attended the needs of condemned persons.
- Uniquely among confraternities of Saint Joseph, it has a white Gonfalone and a very pale blue muzzetta.
- It is said to have been founded in 1103 , as quoted in a plaque above the Oratory door , thus before that of Rabat, and to be affiliated to that of Rome, founded in 1098 .
- However, it is usual that the one of Rabat is considered as having seniority among the Confraternities of Malta

Confraternities linked with Trades

- Many confraternities which are linked with particular trades are based in Saint Paul's Parish, Valletta.
- Of Saint Omobonus for Drapers, Tailors and seamstresses, founded in 1611.
- Of Saint Agata for Weavers Tailors and seamstresses, founded 1804.
- Of Saint Crispin and Crispinian for Shoemakers, founded 1804.
- Of Saint Eligius for foundry workers, founded 1600.
- Of Saint Helen for gold and silver smiths, founded between 1607 and 1611.
- Of Saint Andrew for fishermen, founded in Cospicua in 1811.

Other confraternities linked with trades.

- The chaulers (qlafat) had a confraternity of Saint Demitrius in Cospicua Parish Church which was founded in 1616,
- As did the pilots have a confraternity of Saint Christopher founded in 1649.
- Boatmen from Cospicua had a confraternity of Saint Elias founded in 1812 in the Discalced Carmelite Church of that town.



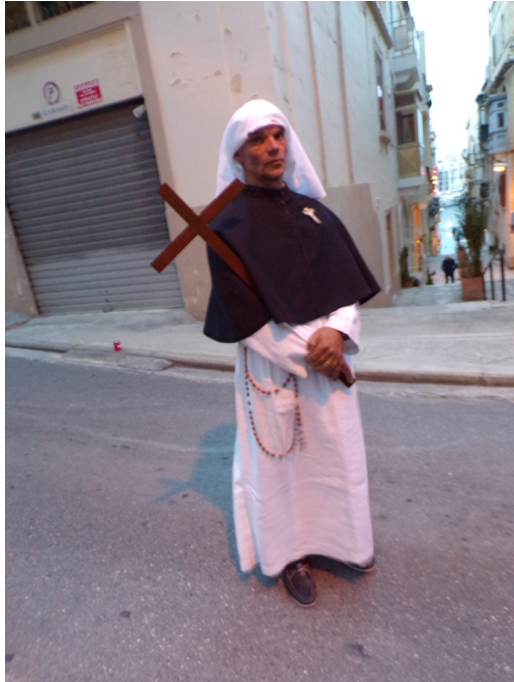
Other trade confraternities included ...

- that of the rope-makers, founded in 1643.
- for barbers founded in 1797,
- for doctors founded in 1635,
- for artists , founded in 1671,
- Saint Ivo for lawyers,
- Saint Barbara for bombardiers,
- And the Sodality of Priests was a confraternity of priests within a parish, which existed so that the priests could help each other.

- The Confraternities of the Agony or of the Holy Souls date from the 16th and 17th century.
- Their main aim was to pray for the souls of their members who were dying; a bell would ring when a member was dying , and special prayers would be said before the Blessed Sacrament.
- They also would make prayers in the month of November for deceased members.
- Confraternities of the Agony might also look after the burial of persons who died in epidemics.

- There are Confraternities of the Crucifix and of Our Lady of Sorrows, often in charge of the Good Friday.
- In Valletta, still in existence, is the Confraternity of the risen Christ.
- After an epidemic of plague, a confraternity of Saint Roque in 16th century.
- In 1625 the Confraternity of the Blessed Trinity was founded, Its aim was the redemption of slaves.

Confraternities wear a habit during functions



The habit worn by Maltese confraternities is similar to that of many Italian Confraternities.

It basically consists of a white sack, known in Malta as a konfratija , with a cord or cinglu around the waist, which might be of different colour according to the confraternity.

From the cord would hang a rosary, especially in the case of the Rosary confraternity.

In the case of confraternities of Our Lady of Mount Carmel or of Consolation, a leather belt would substitute the cord.

The Habit of Confraternities

They would wear a short cape or muzzetta, which would be of different colours,

- red for the blessed sacrament,
- white for Our Lady of the Rosary,
- blue for Saint Joseph,
- green for Saint Michael or Saint Roque,
- violet for Our Lady of Sorrows,
- black for Our Lady of Consolation,
- light blue for The Immaculate Conception.

Their Gonfalones or 'Stendart' are the same colour as the Muzzetta, except for the Our Lady of Consolation Confraternity, which might be Violet or Blue.

Some Confraternities, such as those of the Guardian Angel, Saints Crispin and Crispinian, Saint Agata, would wear a medal instead of a cape.

Confraternities of Our Lady of Mt Carmel, wear a Great Scapular over their Shoulders.



Mons. Duzzina's Pastoral Visit and the Confraternities of the Blessed Sacrament.



TODAY ...

- Many of the newer parishes have no Confraternities at all.
- Some have disappeared with time, but their Gonfalones , crucifixes and some men in the habit still embellish our processions.
- However, many are still very active, and some have hundreds of members.
- Presently 153 confraternities are still alive with about 7000 brothers and few sisters

These confraternities, linked with the religious orders, usually promoted Marian devotions.



Anyone who visits Maltese feasts will be aware of the banners or gonfaloni of the confraternities which are seen.



During Easter, festivities, confraternities are to be seen, leading the Good Friday processions, those of Our Lady of Sorrows and of the Risen Christ.



Other confraternities, of Saint Joseph or Saint Michael, of Our Lady of Mt Carmel, Our Lady of the Cincture, Our Lady of Charity, devoted to Works of Charity.



The Confraternities stand between popular culture and important spirituality within our parishes.



Let us enjoy the colours and sounds of our Festas when we celebrate our saints ...



... but Confraternities must most of all, help us improve and make more fulfilling our lives as good Christians.













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