

IN MEMORIAM

ĠORĠ (GEORGE) MIFSUD-CHIRCOP (born in Qormi on 28 June 1951, died in Sliema on 19 December 2007)



In May 2007 we were, together with other members of the Ritual Year workgroup, in the Czech Republic, sitting behind the dinner table at a famous local open air museum and Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop gave us an educational lecture on Arabic loans and terminology in major European languages. Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop, the eminent Maltese folklorist and a trained linguist, had taken linguistic detours before, especially to introduce Maltese language and grammar. His papers at the conferences of the International Society for Contemporary Legend Research and the International Society for Folk Narrative Research, the UNESCO confer-

ence in 2006 in Latvia and the SIEF Ritual Year workgroup conferences, introduced the past and present traditions of his homeland. These were insights into an ancient culture, the different aspects of which he was familiar with, being expert and mediator at all international forums. He was the representative of Maltese scholarship, academic professor who had been educated at St Aloysius College and the University of Malta. He started his career in folklore studies as a scholar of folk narratives and completed the type index of Maltese folktales in 1978. Among his role models were Lauri Honko and many German folklorists. One of his last international events was the Wise Fool Conference and Story Telling Festival in Malta in 2006.

As a member of the organising committee of the Ritual Year workgroup, Ġorġ posed issues in general research into calendar, time and rituals, but always remained for us the guide to Maltese culture. He was the organiser of the first workgroup conference and compiler of the collection of articles. For

many, the conference was the first opportunity to experience Easter on the Island of Malta; we listened to fascinating plenary papers and had trouble choosing between interesting papers of parallel sessions. We were eternally grateful for the opportunity to participate in Easter processions in Valetta and villages and the warm humour that Ġorġ brought to his insights into family history, history and folklore. He could speak about anything that we knew to ask about. Our arrivals, breaks and departures were timed with a precision of three minutes, running like clockwork.

This precision was probably the result of his need to juggle a multitude of obligations: teaching (he was president of Malta Teachers' Association, since 1997 lecturer at Malta Junior College), publishing books on folklore, preparing radio and television shows to popularise Maltese folklore, organising folk music festivals, scholarly research and his personal creation. He admired the types of traditional Maltese folk music, especially *ghana* with its witty rhymes, but also folk musicians, and considered it his mission to popularise these to a wider audience. As a virtually only professional folklorist in Malta, he was a collector, teacher and scholar at the same time. Always involved in several major projects, inspired by the incorporation of folklore education in school curricula, he dreamed about the possibility of establishing children's folk dance and folk music groups and through that cherish mother tongue and preserve local customs. For the same purpose he published his books *Il-Praspar miktuba minn Dun Xand Cortis* (1991), the critical edition of Magri's folktales *Manwel Magri: Hrejjef Missijertna* (1994), and *Il-Leġġendi ta' Ġużè Delia* (1996).

While aspiring to expand the field of research, Ġorġ always liked to talk about the welfare of his wife Marlene and children. He was exceedingly happy about them and proud of their achievements, even though the children lived far away.

Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop was highly successful in the area of research and his premature death abruptly ended his admirable work.

Mare Kōiva