

NEW CUSTOMS IN HOLY WEEK

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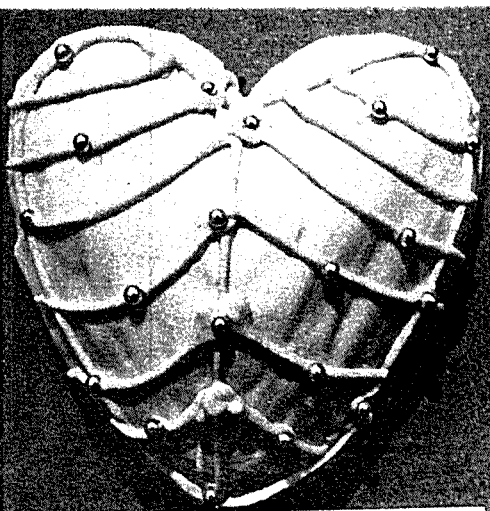
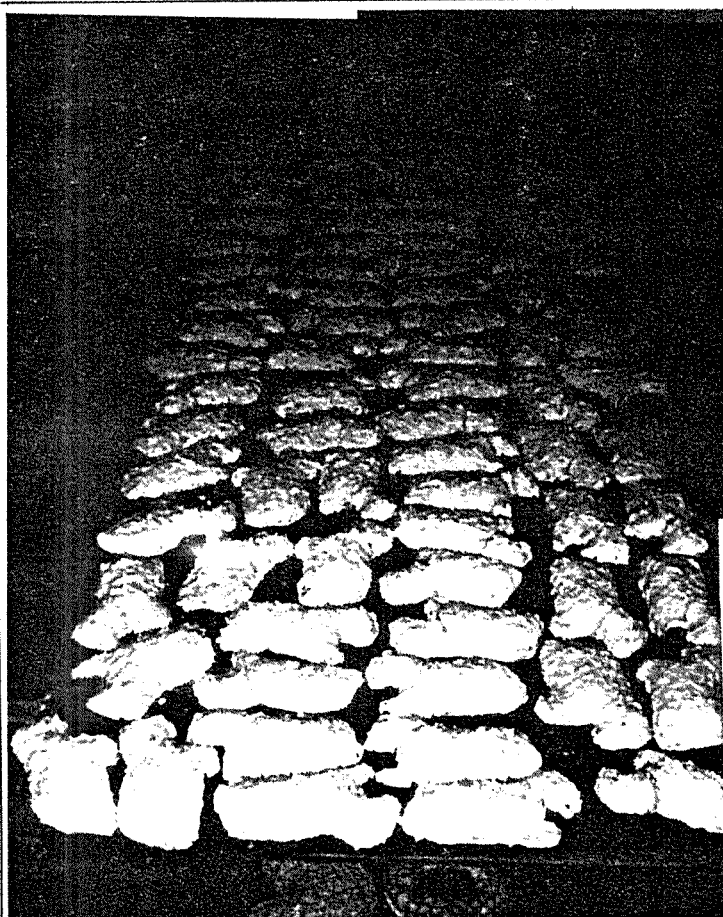
The Second Vatican Ecumenical Council of the sixties brought about many liturgical changes in the Holy Week functions. Many of us, I am sure, may feel nostalgic about some of the lost ceremonies we used to attend to, and to which we had grown accustomed. Today's youngsters are growing up in new surroundings and ideas, and the Church had to update its activities to make the parishioners participate actively in its functions. Some new ideas have slowly crept in, and may well become firmly established and widespread in the islands.

In this short note, I will restrict myself to a hasty reference to some Holy Week points of interest.

One of the most obvious change is the Good Friday Procession which has now developed into pageant proportions in most towns and villages. These processions were formerly the basic statues representing the mysteries of the Passion of Christ, with the seven last words and other symbols. The processions are now livened by numerous characters associated with the Passion, in many cases involving expensive costumes and weapons, symbols, etc., and some also dress up for a modern passion play before the procession, follow the procession, and finish the play in front of the church.(Gharghur).

The Passion processional statues, in some towns, are being progressively changed, replaced, increased in number of subject and figures.(Qormi, Rabat, etc.)

Perhaps less obvious is the re-introduction of the symbolic Lamb which, up to the 20's and 30's, used to be more commonly seen, made from ingredients normally used for the traditional Figolli. The sale of easter eggs and figollu became more commercialised after the last war, but efforts are being made to



IL-HARUF TA' L-GHID

JUM ID-DAWL

JUM IL-HAJJA

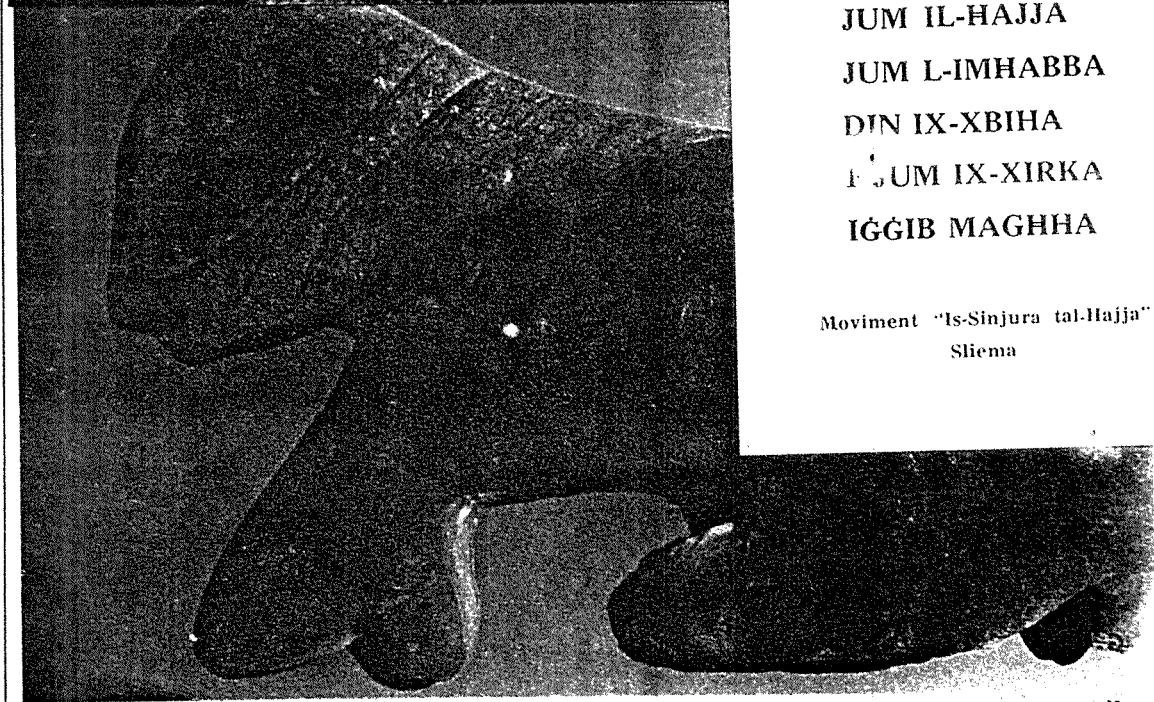
JUM L-IMHABBA

DIN IX-XBIHA

F JUM IX-XIRKA

IGGIB MAGHHA

Moviment "Is-Sinjura tal-Hajja"
Sliema



bring to the fore the real import of Easter, and to bring Christ into it. Just as efforts are being made, mostly successful, to keep Christ in the Christmas Crib rather than the Christmas Tree, so also present church efforts, with the help of the community are re-introducing the Pascal Lamb to boost the Easter spirit. It is not generally seen in shops, although a few have offered some for sale, but MUSEUM Societies (propagators of Christian Doctrine), prepare lamb shapes for distribution to their members and friends. In most cases, these are kept until Easter morning when there is the procession of Christ Risen, and children raise the lamb, together with any other 'figolly' at their disposal, towards the statue of Christ Risen, as it passes along the street, presumably for His blessing.

This Pascal Lamb is now also being distributed in some churches during Holy Week liturgical functions. These Lambs are not elaborately made, simply because they are to be given free to participants at the functions. At the Sacro Cuor Church Sliema, the 1984 Lamb was made of simple bun mix. In some other places they had icing laid on. This icing, however and the Lambs were prepared by volunteers, and therefore the expense was kept reasonably low; examples of these were distributed at Lija and ta' L-Ibragg. In some cases, the Lamb was replaced by a Heart shaped 'figolla'. Together with the lamb, a simple, souvenir card was distributed last year.

On Palm Sunday, nowadays many parishes have some palm and olive leaves blessed in some small church or centre, and the congregation or part of it go in procession to the parish church for the usual liturgy. Olive sprays and leaves are more in evidence than palm leaves. The latter were formerly woven into artistic shapes to be held by the clergy, but palm leaves have become scarce due to exploitation in large numbers by fishermen preparing for their 'kannizzati' rafts for Lampuki season.

Olive leaves are still distributed to the congregation, since these are more easy to obtain, but in some cases one leaf is detached, and stuck in a small folding card with appropriate date and wording and given away in church, suitable to keep in a book.

The former candles (xemgha tal-kandlora) which used to be distributed to parishioners, used to have the figure of Our Lady or some other appropriate symbol impressed on a 'gold' background at the base of the candle. This has now disappeared, and has become shorter, with no symbolic impression, and similar to an ordinary candle.

Pastry and confection connected with the traditions of Carnival, Holy Week and Easter can still be seen in shops, including marzpan fish and bowls of marzpan nuts, olives and other foods symbolic of the days of fasting. Karamelli (squares of heated sugar, cooling into solid, brown sheets) are also sold on days of fasting, even though the latter sacrifice is no longer rigidly observed, and even totally ignored by the younger generation.

After the special confections of penance and Easter, the cycle is resumed in the shopwindows, in November, with the 'bones' and 'skull and bones' for All Souls Day and November commemoration of the Dead, and the marzpan fruits round about St. Martin, all to be followed later by Christmas Cakes.

PLATE 1 Examples of Easter Lamb distributed in local churches, including a heart-shaped 'figolla' and souvenir card.

Plate 2 Confection 'bones' and 'skull & bones' obtainable in November 1983 for ALL SOULS DAY, and commemoration of the dead.

Also: an old, wax Bambina, donated by Miss Maria Pisani to the Folklore Museum, through the Committee of the Folklore Society. Restored by Raf. Bonnici Cali'.

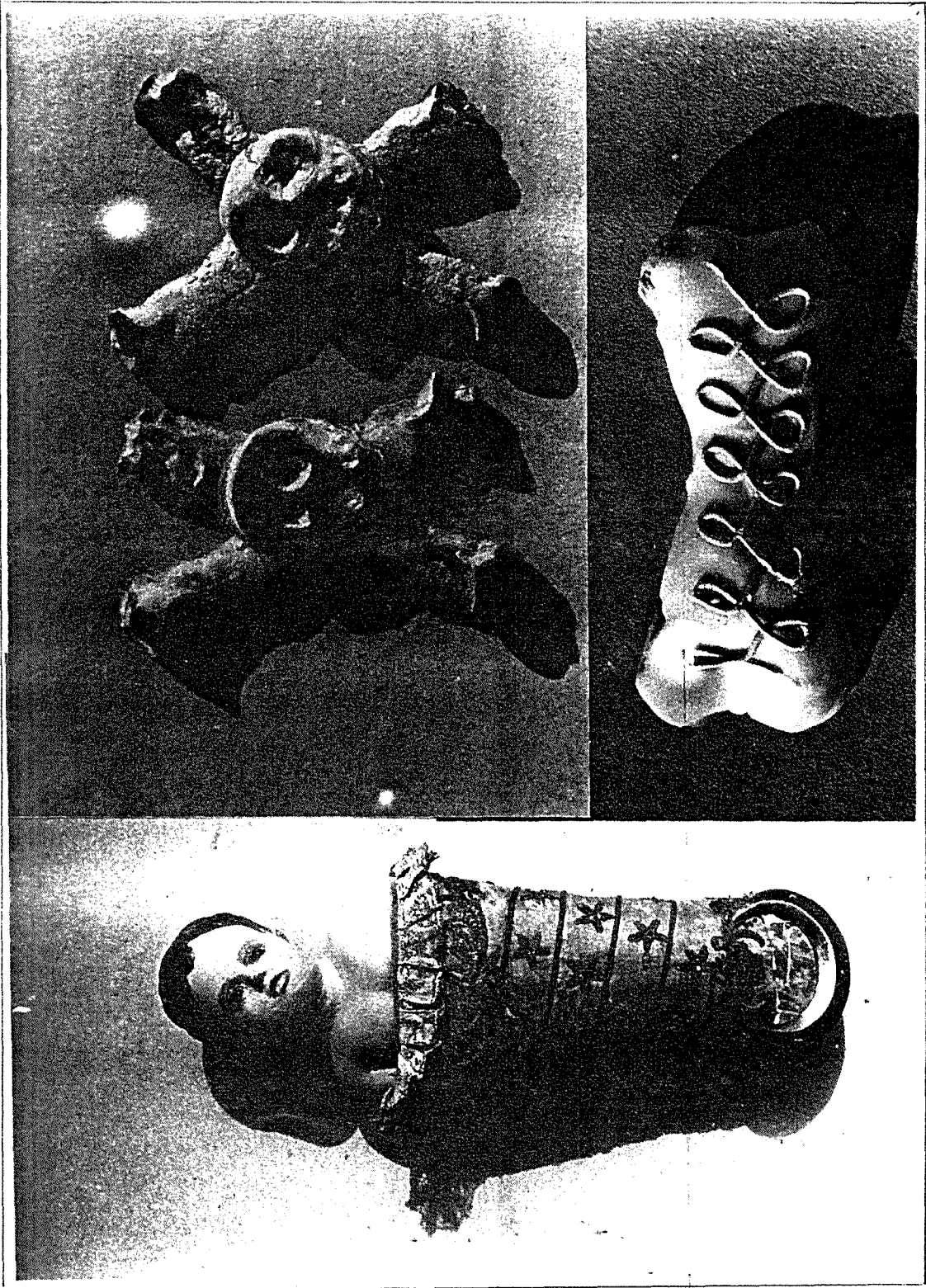


PLATE TWO