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Obituary

Ġorġ Mifsud-Chircop (1951–2007)

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Suffering from an illness that had only been detected a few months before, and only a few days after returning home from an unsuccessful treatment in England, Dr. Ġorġ (George) Mifsud-Chircop passed away in his native country of Malta on December 19, 2007.

Mifsud-Chircop was born on June 28, 1951, in the Maltese village of Qormi. He studied Maltese language and literature as well as classical Arabic at the University of Malta and earned his bachelor's degree in 1972 with a 660-page thesis discussing the work of Maltese folklorist Ġużè Cassar-Pullicino. His master's thesis, "The Maltese Folktale within the Mediterranean Tradition Area" (1978a), was awarded the prestigious Dun Karm Prize for the best Maltese thesis of the year. In his extensive Ph.D. thesis, "The Maltese Heroic Folktale" (2001a), he presented a comprehensive survey of the subject in the international context, culminating in a detailed semiotic analysis of nine Maltese fairy tales. From 1972 to 1995, Mifsud-Chircop taught Maltese language and literature at various schools in Malta. From 1995 to 2006, he mainly served as lecturer for Maltese language at the University College in Msida. In 2006, he was hired for the position of senior lecturer for Maltese language, literature, folklore, and anthropology at the University of Malta.

On the national level, one of Mifsud-Chircop's main interests was the preservation and propagation of the specifically Maltese tradition of folk singing known as *għana*. In the international arena, he actively participated in numerous gatherings, presenting papers on various aspects of Maltese folklore at the meetings of the International Society for Folk Narrative

Research (ISFNR; held in Göttingen, Germany, in 1998; Visby, Sweden, in 2003; and Tartu, Estonia, in 2005), the Middle Eastern Popular Culture Society (held in Oxford, United Kingdom, in 2000), the Folklore Society (held in Cardiff, United Kingdom, in 2002; Glasgow, United Kingdom, in 2004; and Oxford, United Kingdom, in 2005), the International Society for Contemporary Legends (held in Sheffield, United Kingdom, in 2002, and Aberystwyth, United Kingdom, in 2004), and the Société Internationale d'Éthnologie et de Folklore (SIEF; held in Marseille, France, in 2004). He was a member of the ISFNR and of the SIEF Committee on the Ritual Year and served as a member of the editorial board of the journal *Archivio Antropologico Mediterraneo*. His last major activity after a long series of national meetings and festivals was the organization of the international conference, "The Wise Fool in the Mediterranean," followed by an international festival of storytelling in Malta.

Mifsud-Chircop's major contributions to comparative folk narrative studies accessible in international languages include his unpublished type index of Maltese folktales (1978a) and the entry on Malta compiled together with Ġużè Cassar-Pullicino for the *Enzyklopädie des Märchens* (1999). In addition, he published studies of the Maltese versions of tale types AT 301 ("The Three Stolen Princesses") (1979) and AT 510B ("The Dress of Gold, Silver, and of Stars") (1981), besides numerous essays dealing with Maltese riddles (1978b), popular sayings (2001d), folksong (2001c, 2005a), narratives (2003, 2004, 2005b), and the history of folk narrative studies in Malta (2000–2001).

In Maltese, he published annotated editions of important historical collections of Maltese folklore, such as the anecdotes collected by Xand Cortis (1991a) and the folktales originally published at the beginning of the twentieth century by Manwel Magri (1991b). Based on Maltese popular tradition, he prepared several collec-

tions of folktales for children, such as those on Ġahan, the Maltese version of the Mediterranean trickster Nasreddin Hodja/Ġuḥā ([1992] 1993, 2001b). He also presented numerous radio and television broadcasts on Maltese folklore, earning him a prize for the propagation of traditional Maltese culture in 1996. Since 1998, he enthusiastically organized the national festival for traditional Maltese folk singing.

Mifsud-Chircop was a passionate propagator of traditional Maltese culture, dedicating his tremendous energy in a highly enthusiastic yet scholarly and careful manner to the study and preservation of Maltese language, literature, and folklore. Against the backdrop of his long experience as an educator, he particularly emphasized the teaching of folklore to high school and university students as the long-term guarantors for the active performance of Maltese folklore. While his teacher, mentor, and personal friend Cassar-Pullicino (1921–2005) is remembered as the pioneer of the study of Maltese folklore, Mifsud-Chircop himself will be greatly missed as Malta's leading specialist of traditional culture, particularly folksong and folk narrative. He devoted his life to the study of his native land's oral tradition in the international context.

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