

Language

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I

Of all the social and cultural institutions created by the inhabitants of the Maltese Islands on their long and eventful path to nationhood, their language, Maltese, is without doubt one of the most striking and original. It is, in fact, not easy for the historical linguist to account for the remarkable survival of this island vernacular in the face of the numerous socio-political upheavals that have characterized the history of this small archipelago, which 'since it was first colonised ... has never been very far from the centre of events and has often played a critical part in the making of history' (Blouet 1981: 11).

Throughout most of their medieval and modern history, these strategically located islands have been administered and culturally dominated by a succession of foreign regimes associated with linguistic power symbols of incomparably greater prestige and utility than the indigenous rural vernacular of Malta, which achieved the status of a literary medium as late as the 19th century.

What kind of language is Maltese? Briefly, the vernacular of the Maltese Islands initially developed from a medieval variety of dialectal Arabic – presumably after the Arab invasion of the archipelago in the late 9th century (870 A.D.). As noted in Thomas (1937: 117),

From the moment the Arabs had established supremacy over the Byzantines at sea, the fate of the islands of the Mediterranean was sealed, and one by one they passed into Moslem hands... They had invaded Malta at about the same time as Sicily, ruled it till 1091, and were resident for another 350 years, when they departed leaving behind them their dialect of Arabic, which is the language of the Maltese to this day.

Apart from Cypriot Arabic (§ III) – now in a terminal state – Maltese is today the only living vestige of dialectal Arabic spoken on European soil, surviving by many centuries the extinction of the medieval Arabic vernaculars of Sicily (12th century), Spain and Pantelleria (16th century).

Geographically detached from the Arabic-speaking mainland and culturally isolated from the sources of native Arabic speech, especially after the Norman invasion of the Islands in 1090 and the expulsion of the local Muslim population in the 13th century (Wettinger 1986: 98), the Arabic vernacular of the Maltese Islands evolved in line with its own internal logic and drifted away from the norms of spoken Arabic with the result that Maltese and Arabic are today not mutually comprehensible.

One important catalyst for independent linguistic development in Maltese has been the factor of language contact, first with Italian and later with English, a process that introduced into the language a considerable number of extraneous (i.e. non-Arabic) elements, mainly in the realms of phonology, syntax, and lexicon. The cumulative impact of autonomous development and language contact on Maltese has altered its structure so profoundly that though Maltese is not infrequently referred to as an 'Arabic dialect' in the linguistic and popular literature, this designation is today more appropriate as a genetic classification than as a synchronic one, since in its present form, Maltese has distanced itself structurally far too profoundly from the norms of spoken Arabic to be regarded as anything but a separate language.

Bertromp
Thomas

From an erstwhile Arabic colloquial spoken by a small rural community, Maltese has gradually and spontaneously expanded as a linguistic system, winning for itself new functional domains beyond those of ordinary speech communication and popular wisdom literature (proverbs, folk-tales, etc.), e.g., those of formal and private prayer, litigation in the law courts, etc. As a literary medium it has become the repository of an interesting literary corpus (including popular novels, plays, and poetry), and of religious texts (the Bible, the Catholic liturgy). Maltese is also the language of most local journalism, and of a large body of didactic works ranging from theology to cookery.

Maltese is today, alongside English, the official language of Malta. It is, in fact, the only dialect of Arabic to have achieved this national status. It is taught at all educational levels from the primary school to university.

II

Maltese is the only national language in Europe belonging to the Semitic family, which also includes Hebrew, Arabic, Aramaic, Phoenician, Ethiopic, etc. One salient typological trait of this language family distinguishing it from other language families, e.g., Indo-European, is the root and scheme structure of most native words. Thus, the Classical Arabic word *rakiba* 'he rode' consists of:

- (i) the consonantal root (*r-k-b*) associated with the notion 'riding';
- (ii) a vocalic scheme (*a-i*) typical of many past tense verbs in Classical Arabic;
- (iii) the final vowel (*-a*) indicating the 3rd person masculine singular.

Arabic and Maltese words displaying this specific root usually have meanings associated with the basic idea of 'riding': Arabic *rika:b* 'stirrup', *raku:ba* 'mount, female riding animal', Maltese *rikeb* 'he rode', *rikba* 'a ride', etc., (where the 'colon' symbol after a vowel indicates phonetic length).

Maltese has extended the derivational scope of this root and scheme process in an autonomous fashion and has continued to generate from native roots inherited from Arabic new words that do not occur in Classical or vernacular Arabic, e.g. Maltese *ndaħal* 'he interfered', *ndhi:l* 'interference' from *daħal* 'to enter'.

In addition to the recycling of its native elements, the expansion of the Maltese lexicon has been achieved, through massive borrowing from foreign languages, especially Italian. These borrowed elements display varying degrees of assimilation into the grammatical norms of Maltese. These different degrees of integration no doubt correlate with such factors as chronology (i.e. when the word was borrowed), and the socio-linguistic context in which the borrowing occurred.

The unusual circumstance that Maltese, a Semitic language, found itself completely isolated from the sources of Semitic speech, and in close interaction with Indo-European (principally Italian), has created a 'Semitic-Romance polarization' in the minds of many Maltese speakers as is witnessed by the movement – active in inter-war period – advocating the use of *Malti safi* 'pure Maltese'. Though no one seriously advocates the systematic elimination of all non-Arabic elements in the language, many Maltese speakers feel that the language is adopting more foreign terms that it can formally integrate. This feeling of being inundated by foreign lexicon is not new; it echoes views first expressed in the 18th century by the Maltese linguist and orientalist Mikiel Anton Vassallo (1764-1829), who earned for himself the title of 'father of the Maltese language' for his efforts at arousing a national linguistic consciousness and a responsible attitude on the part of the Maltese community of his time towards their language (cf. Cremona 1975). In recent times, the most fervent advocate for a more systematic expansion of the Semitic component of Maltese was the Maltese Hebraist and Biblical scholar Peter Paul

Saydon (1895-1971), who single-handedly translated the Old and New Testaments from their Hebrew and Greek originals into Maltese, and in the process, often resorted to innovative lexical and stylistic norms that fully exploited the generative potential of native Maltese derivational morphology as well as a certain amount of conscious borrowing from Arabic.

In practice, when two separate words – a native term and an Italian equivalent – are available in Maltese for a particular concept e.g., native *izza hayr* and the loan term *rriŋgraccya* < It. *ringraziare*, both meaning 'he thanked', the selection process on the part of the individual native speaker or writer tends not to be a random one, but often reflects his cultural aspirations, educational background and, not infrequently, political affiliations. With regard to the latter point, it is generally recognized that the newspapers of the two principal political parties have developed distinct linguistic and rhetorical styles: the Labour organ inclines to the use of Semitic *Sprachgut*, while the Nationalist one is more receptive to Romance loans. The communicative functions attaching to this type of 'lexical colouring' in the context of Maltese political discourse have yet to be studied.

Throughout Malta's colonial period under British rule (1800-1964), knowledge of English was the key to social preferment. Many Maltese today are bilingual in Maltese and English; the average speaker's command of English can range from rudimentary to virtually native competence. Maltese speakers also habitually codeswitch very freely between the two languages so that a Maltese utterance is as likely as not to display embedded English lexical components – sometimes with minimal formal integration of the loaned elements to the native sound pattern. Syntactic and idiomatic calquing on English is also very common. The high status of English in Malta is evident from its diffusion to most social contexts: at home, at school and university. The

tendency for young people to adopt English as a first language – usually as a strategy for enhancing their social status – would seem to present a serious threat to the transmission of unimpaired fluency in Maltese that could in the long run lead to marginalization of the language and to its ultimate demise.

Since there has traditionally been a *laissez-faire* attitude in linguistic matters within the Maltese educational system, the need for an official language policy – to *advocate* rather than to *enforce* linguistic norms in the schools and in the state bureaucracy – is keenly felt at the present time.

III

Previously we stressed the fact that, despite the patently Semitic and Arabic typology of its grammatical system, Maltese cannot in its present form be simply designated as an Arabic dialect. It is worth noting that Maltese is not a unique case in this regard since there exist a considerable number of former Arabic dialects that have survived outside the Arabic countries and are today spoken exclusively by ethnic non-Arabs, such as the Arabic vernaculars of Central Asia, Central Africa, South East Anatolia (Turkey), and Cyprus (see bibliography for sources on these dialects). The last mentioned, i.e. the Arabic dialect spoken by the Maronite Catholics of Kormakiti in the Kyrenia district of N.W. Cyprus, bears particularly close comparison to Maltese, with which it shares a number of socio-historical traits: virtually complete separation from the Arabic-speaking world, linguistic interaction across genetic boundaries (with Italian and English in the case of Maltese, with Greek in that of Cypriot Arabic), the Christian and Catholic affiliation of its speakers, as well as its Mediterranean habitat.

A linguistic analysis of Cypriot Arabic also reveals several analogous tendencies in their evolutionary profiles. It was initially

these socio-historical parallels that led the present writer to undertake extensive fieldwork among the 1200-odd Arabic-speaking Maronites in Cyprus and to devote a lengthy monograph to their unusual vernacular (cf. Borg 1985). More recently, I undertook a fairly detailed comparison of Maltese and Cypriot Arabic (cf. Borg 1990), where I also indicated the significance of these marginal varieties of 'Arabic' to the historical study of mainstream Arabic.

As is often the case with linguistic relic areas, the intrinsic interest and importance of Maltese and Cypriot Arabic as objects of diachronic linguistic research surpasses by far the numerical and socio-political significance of their speaker communities. In this respect, Maltese and Cypriot Arabic invite comparison with other Mediterranean vernaculars surviving in isolation from their language families, e.g. the dialects of the Greek-speaking minorities of Calabria (Rohlf's 1933) and Corsica (Blanken 1951), the Catalan dialect of Alghero, Sardinia (Blasco Ferrer 1984), Albanian in Sicily, etc.

Three principal socio-historical factors in the evolution of Cypriot Arabic and Maltese have contributed to their estrangement from the contemporary Arabic dialect family:

- a) geographical and cultural distance from the Arab countries and absence of direct contact with Classical Arabic and the mainland Arabic vernaculars, hence the complete absence of the diglossia situation typifying linguistic usage in the Arab countries (cf. Ferguson 1959, but also El-Hassan 1977) – literary Maltese does not continue Classical Arabic but is an independent local development deriving from colloquial Maltese;
- b) a long history of language contact that has transformed these vernaculars, rendering them unintelligible to native Arabic speakers; in both cases there has been profound linguistic acculturation predominantly to one specific foreign language, yielding a *Sprachbund* relation-

ship with it (S. Italian in the case of M, Greek in that of Cypriot Arabic).

- c) the religious factor, e.g., the Christian affiliation and European *Weltanschauung* of the Maltese and Cypriot Arabic speakers, which renders them basically unreceptive to cultural and linguistic influences from the Arabic countries. In the case of Maltese, the cultural and confessional aspects of the linguistic *Abstand* from Arabic are both reflected in the longstanding tradition of writing the language by means of the Latin alphabet (cf. the use of the Hebrew alphabet in Judeo-Arabic).

The highly analogous socio-historical and geolinguistic contexts in which these two erstwhile Arabic dialects have evolved present the historian of vernacular Arabic with what would seem to be an ideal opportunity for clarifying a number of important diachronic issues relating to the evolution of Arabic at large. Thus, since both vernaculars have traditionally been spoken by long-established Christian populations and have, as a result, side-stepped the cultural impact of Islam and the concomitant influences of Classical Arabic, they could potentially serve as useful reference points in the task of reconstructing earlier varieties of colloquial Arabic; for instance, by facilitating the identification of adstratal influences exerted by Classical Arabic on the mainstream vernaculars.

The sociolinguistic contexts of Cypriot Arabic and Maltese present a number of interesting parallels and contrasts. First of all, the size and present situation of their speaker communities should be noted. Whereas Cypriot Arabic is the native language of the 1200-odd former residents at Kormakiti village (N.W. Cyprus), Maltese is today spoken by well over 365,000 people (1984) in the Maltese Islands and by several thousand emigrants in Australia, Canada, U.S.A., Great Britain, etc. In the aftermath of the Turkish invasion and occupation of Northern Cyprus in July 1974, the majority

of the Cypriot Arabic speaker community abandoned Kormakiti and have resettled in various parts of the Greek-controlled south. Previous scholars who investigated their vernacular – all of whom were able to carry out their fieldwork in Kormakiti itself – agree that this language is in its terminal stages, and that it can only be a matter of time before its speakers shift entirely to their second language, Greek, which they also speak natively – apparently without notable influence from Cypriot Arabic, though this point still needs to be looked into.

By way of contrast, contemporary Maltese – though in the long term also threatened by functional marginalization in favour of English – is today deeply rooted in the life and cultural heritage of the Maltese Islands, and shows an impressive degree of elaboration and standardization. Thus, while Cypriot Arabic has remained to this day an unwritten language, restricted mainly to the home, Maltese has been written intermittently since the 15th century, and has become – since the 19th century – the medium of a sizeable body of creative and didactic literature (cf. Friggieri 1979, *passim*). As has already been noted, it is also the usual language of religious worship, the press, broadcasting, private correspondence, etc., Maltese is today fully integrated into the school and university curricula, and despite strong competition from spoken English in most formal and informal linguistic domains – especially, but not exclusively, among the better educated – its use as a written medium seems, at least impressionistically, to be on the increase.

Finally, despite their small geographical size, the Maltese Islands constitute a fairly complex dialect area including a standard variety of Maltese, spoken in Valletta and other urban centres, and a number of rural varieties showing different degrees of phonological variation from standard speech. (For more detail on the Maltese dialect situation, see Stumme 1904, Borg 1977, and especially Puech 1994).

It is beyond the scope of the present general introduction to outline the linguistic traits, both typological and diachronic, obtaining between Maltese and the Arabic dialect of Cyprus; the interested reader can consult Borg (1990).

How different is Maltese from native vernacular Arabic? Some idea of the extent and direction of the drift from the Arabic dialect family actualized by Maltese can be obtained by examining its sound system from a historical perspective. Compared with the phonologies of the contemporary Arabic vernaculars, the sound system of Maltese represents the most salient formal factor accountable for the alienness and unintelligibility of the language to native speakers of Arabic. It is also significant in the latter respect, that whereas Maltese settlers in the West – England, Australia and the U.S. – easily shift to the majority language, e.g. English (cf. Jeger 1963 cited in Dench 1975), Maltese communities in Egypt and North Africa, retained their ethno-religious distinctiveness throughout their existence (Nachtigal 1974 [1879]: 13-14; Vadala 1906, *passim*; Price 1954: 55f) and their vernacular, and did not simply shift to the local dialect of Arabic (cf. Saada 1986 on 'Tunisian' Maltese, and Hull 1988 on 'Egyptian' Maltese). As in certain other residual varieties of dialectal Arabic spoken outside the Arab countries – e.g., in Cyprus (Borg 1985), and in Central Asia (Fischer 1961; Sirat and Knudsen 1973), no trace of phonological emphasis has been retained in the Maltese consonant system; Maltese reflexes of the OA emphatic consonants (*ṣ, *ḍ, *ṭ, etc.) have been systematically fused with their plain OA counterparts:

MALTESE		OLD ARABIC
<i>sayf</i>	'summer'	<i>ṣayf</i>
<i>seyf</i>	'dagger'	<i>sayf</i>
<i>ti:n</i>	'figs'	<i>ti:n</i>
<i>tayn</i>	'mud'	<i>ṭi:n</i>

though, as can be inferred from these examples, secondary reflexes have survived in the vowel system. Furthermore, all

Maltese dialectal varieties show far-reaching paradigmatic changes in their consonant system, e.g., reinterpretation of the Old Arabic velar and pharyngeal fricative pairs /ʕ/ and /ħ/, chiefly as vocalic length; fusion of Old Arabic /x/, /h/, and /ħ/ into Maltese /h/, loss of *hamza*, etc. Maltese has also integrated several new consonant phonemes mainly through contact with Italian, e.g., /p/, /v/, /c/, /dʒ/, and /c/.

The cumulative impact of these systematic departures from the phonological norms of spoken Arabic in Maltese no doubt represent an important formal correlate of the linguistic and cultural distance of its speaker community from the Arabic-speaking world, and of the *rapprochement* of Maltese to the Romance *Sprachbund*. Some idea of the estrangement of Maltese from the Arabic *Sprachraum* in the perception of native Arabic speakers can be gathered, for instance, from explicit statements by Arabic language reformers concerning the 'corrupt' state of Maltese. 'Is there an educated person who wants his language to be like that of the people of Malta?' stated the Syrian Anis Sallum (1922) – cited in Chejne (1969: 154). In a less formal vein, the Egyptian novelist Ibrāhīm al-Māzinī (in his *Ṣundūq al-dunyā*, 26-31) attempts to convey to the reader the foreignness of Maltese by 'mimicking' certain phonological traits in Maltese commonly associated with nonnative Arabic speech (e.g., confusion of Arabic, /ħ/, /x/, and /h/).

The consonantal inventory is almost identical throughout the Maltese dialect area. Fairly marked differences, however, obtain between Standard Maltese (StM) and non-standard (i.e. rural) Maltese, as well as between the rural varieties themselves, specifically in the matter of vocalic inventory and morphophonemics. Dialectal diversification in the rural vernaculars of Maltese derives for the most part from differential historical treatment of the Old Arabic vowel system; note, for instance, the following differences between

StM and the dialect of Rabat in Gozo:

StM	RABAT	OA	
<i>omm</i>	<i>umm</i>	<i>umm</i>	mother
<i>da:r</i>	<i>do:r</i>	<i>da:r</i>	house
<i>bi:b</i>	<i>be:b</i>	<i>ba:b</i>	door

Thus, whereas StM has evolved a system of five vowels, all non-standard varieties of Maltese have four (Puech 1994: 17f.). In the realm of vowel morphophonemics (i.e. grammatically conditioned vowel alternation), certain non-standard varieties of Maltese display complex rules of vowel harmony (Puech 1978) and/or a set of vocalic alternations conditioned by syllabic, lexical, and pausal boundaries. Observe, for instance, the prejunctional diphthongization of OA *[i:] and *[u:] in the Rabat (Gozo) dialect:

RABAT	StM	
<i>zarbewn</i>	<i>zardu:n</i>	shoes
<i>zarbu:na</i>	<i>zardu:na</i>	a shoe
<i>trejd</i>	<i>tri:d</i>	you (s.) want
<i>tri:da</i>	<i>tri:da</i>	you (s.) want her

Certain conservative speakers from this dialect area also display pausally conditioned diphthongization of these Old Arabic long high vowels (Borg 1977) – a feature that is unknown in StM but well attested in certain Eastern (e.g., Lebanese) varieties of vernacular Arabic, e.g., the Ši:m dialect (Fleisch 1974 [1962]: 203-220), and the North Palestinian dialects spoken by the Druze (Blanc 1953: 50). The StM sound system includes the following consonant segments (special symbols are defined in the appendix):

<i>p</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>k</i>
<i>b</i>	<i>d</i>	<i>g</i>
	<i>f</i>	<i>s</i>
	<i>v</i>	<i>z</i>
		<i>c</i>
		<i>dz</i>
<i>m</i>		<i>n</i>
		<i>i</i>
		<i>r</i>
<i>w</i>		<i>y</i>

Some consonants are restricted to a few but well integrated loanwords, e.g. /ʒ/ in /televiʒin/ 'television', /be:ʒ/ 'beige', /ru:ʒ/ 'rouge', /dʒ/ in /gadʒdʒetta/ 'newspaper', /landzi:t/ 'bristle', /medʒdʒa/

'kind of basket', etc.

In addition to this consonantal paradigm, the Maltese sound system has an 'abstract phoneme' corresponding only roughly in distribution to the orthographical symbol *għ* (called [a:yn] in the Maltese alphabet) and representing the reflex of the OA fricatives */ħ/ and */ǧ/.

The schematic chart of Maltese consonants displayed above characterizes the consonantal paradigm of StM. Certain nonstandard dialects show some minor differences; as noted in Puech (1994:17), conservative speakers from the Gozitan villages of San Lawrenz, Għarb, and Żebbuġ still retain residual traces of the voiced velar fricative /ǧ/ continuing the same sound in Old Arabic. Archaic consonantal traits have also been retained by speakers on the island of Malta itself, e.g., from the towns of Cospicua and Senglea, who have the uvular stop reflex [q] for old Arabic *qāf* – also noted for Valletta in the early years of the century in Stumme (1904: *passim*). The dialect of the village of Xewkija (šewkiyya) in Gozo, on the other hand, systematically fuses OA /q/ and /k/ into Maltese /k/: [kælb] 'dog', [kalb] 'heart'. Variant realizations also exist for Old Arabic /r/. In contrast with the apical trill [r] that is the normal S M reflex of Old Arabic *r, some nonstandard dialectal varieties of Maltese show the alveolar tap [ɾ] or the alveolar approximant [ɹ] (cf. Puech 1993: 17).

IV

What languages were spoken on the Maltese Islands before the shift to Arabic? There is every reason to believe that Arabic was not the first Semitic language to have taken root in Malta but that it was preceded by Phoenician and Punic. Blouet (1981:32) has observed that:

By the year 1000 BC the Phoenicians were trading in the western basin of the Mediterranean. It is difficult to believe that Malta was not touched at a very early age by Phoenician activity in the area, although the earliest remains of these people found so far in the

islands date only from the ninth century B.C. The Phoenicians established many colonies in the Western Mediterranean and when their homeland in the Levant was overrun, the area round Tunis...became the new heartland of their activities. The Carthaginians colonized the Maltese Islands in the eighth and seventh centuries BC and built several important temples on the islands including the one that has recently been excavated at Tas-Silġ near Marsaxlokk... Malta was strongly controlled by Carthage and Punic culture appears to have put down deep roots.

That Phoenician and Punic were spoken in ancient Malta need not be seriously doubted; what is not clear at this stage is how late Punic survived there. The Romans wrested Malta from the Carthaginians in 218 BC during the Second Punic war (Livy XXI, 50, i) but the Romanization of the local population appears to have proceeded very slowly since Diodorus Siculus (v, 12), writing about 150 years after the Roman invasion, could still refer to the Islands as Phoenician colonies. Equally striking is the fact noted in Bonanno (1992: 15) that

The earliest Latin inscription, one of a public nature, is dated to the beginning of the imperial period, a good two centuries after the Roman conquest.

Mayr (1909: 110-112), which is, as far as I know, the only scholarly attempt at reconstructing the linguistic situation in Malta in the early centuries of our era, i.e. between 60 AD, the date of the Paul's shipwreck, and the beginning of the 4th century AD – when written sources relating to Malta come to a halt – suggested that during this period Punic probably held its ground among the common people, with Greek and Latin being spoken alongside it by the upper class:

During this period the population of Malta lost to a large extent its Phoenician character, which ultimately had to yield to the superiority of the Graeco-Roman culture. It would appear from the admittedly vague indications to hand that the Punic language held its ground for a rather long time. Quite apart from the Neo-Punic inscription mentioned above, which, if it really belongs to Malta, could very easily have been produced during this period, one can conclude from a place in the Acts of the Apostles [Ch.XXVIII, 1-11; A.B.I.], that when Paul suffered shipwreck in Malta

(60 AD), the peasants of Malta were largely Punic-speaking. There the inhabitants of the coast of Malta, who hosted Paul in a friendly manner, are called βαρβαροι, an expression which would hardly have been applied to a Greek- or Latin-speaking population. In support of this view one could cite an inscription in Greek – engraved on an amphora discovered in the ruins of a warehouse-like building... in the Grand Harbour area – the Phoenician name *hlm* attested elsewhere too. The lettering and discovery site relate the amphora to the latter imperial or Byzantine period.

The Greek language which in the preceding period emerged very prominently alongside Phoenician held its ground in the face of competition from Latin. Whether the inscription of L. Castricius Prudens, dating from Tiberius' reign, was put up by himself, his relatives, or the community, it serves to show that Greek still fulfilled an important function in Malta... Particularly noteworthy is the fact that Roman names sometimes occur in Greek script, which also shows that during the imperial age, Greek was widely used in Malta.

During this time Latin was the official language; which naturally became more and more extensively used by the common people. Its position invites comparison with the way English today is spreading on the island. [My translation from German, A.B.]

It is most unlikely that Punic was still spoken in Malta when the Arabs arrived in the 9th century. Bonanno (1989: 11) noted the increasing impact of Greek cultural influences that 'had started to filter in the whole Punic world in the third century B.C.' and that in Malta

"grew stronger as a result of the more intensive intercourse between Sicily and the Maltese Islands". This situation appears to have endured with little change till the beginning of the sixth century A.D. when Malta was absorbed, together with Sicily and its islands within the Eastern Empire (cf. also Bonanno 1981).

Given the fact that the islands eventually passed under the hegemony of Byzantium after the break-up of the Roman Empire in 395 AD, it is more likely that after approximately 370 years under Hellenic rule, the inhabitants of the Maltese islands shifted to Greek, particularly since the 'Byzantine Renaissance had revived Greek as an important language in both Southern Italy and Sicily during the sixth and seventh centuries' (Di Pietro and Selim 1967: 19).

Greek lexical elements in Maltese may never have been quantitatively significant, and what has survived today is difficult to date and to assign to its proper diffusional path, particularly since Malta has since the 16th century had a small Greek community that may have been the immediate source of the Greek loans in Maltese.

The oldest Greek lexical stratum probably harks back to the time of the Byzantine/Arabic cultural cross-fertilization in the 7th and 8th centuries. Note, for instance, the presence in Maltese of Arabized Greek terms in the toponymic domain, e.g. the name *Xlendi* (in Gozo) (šlendi) < χελανδιον (with fronting of palatalized Gk. *x* > *š*), which also appears as a Greek loan in Middle Arabic: *šalanda*: (Fück 1955: XX). Ahrweiler (1966: 91) lists the *chélandia* among the *bateaux légers* of the Byzantine navy, which kept an important base at Malta:

Un archonte et drongaire de Malte (Mélitè) est connu par son sceau, daté du VII^e-VIII^e siècle. Le haut titre de drongaire que porte le commandant de cette île témoigne de l'importance de l'escadre chargée de la garde de ce poste frontalier. A notre connaissance, il n'est question nulle part ailleurs du commandement maritime de Malte. (Ahrweiler 1966: 87)

Other Maltese placenames of likely Greek origin include *Mistra*, and *Birgu*, presumably < πυργος, (showing the expected shift from Greek [p] to Ar. [b]), and *Luqa*, the last-named probably continuing Ar. *lu:q* 'poplar' ultimately < Gr. λευκη. Outside the toponymic realm, Colin (1970) identified the Maltese Grecisms *ğabsa:la* (Soldanis 175v, 18th century) 'beehive' < κυφελη, and *cunnariyya* 'carrot'. The last mentioned term has been integrated into several other Mediterranean languages. Saydon (1954) drew attention to a few Maltese religious terms of Greek origin which he interprets as relics of the Byzantine rite in the church of Malta.

VI

What kind of Arabic did Maltese evolve

from? In other words, which variety of colloquial Arabic was spoken in Malta during the early Middle Ages? Since written documents reflecting the linguistic situation in Malta start much later, i.e., towards the end of the 15th century, e.g. *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena* (Wettinger and Fsadni 1983) – the earliest continuous text in Maltese – it is not possible to determine with accuracy what kind of Arabic was used during the early centuries that witnessed the genesis of the Maltese language. In the absence of early documentary attestations of the vernacular of the Maltese Islands, comparison of the present-day language with the contemporary Arabic dialects can be helpful in reconstructing the past history of Maltese, making due allowance for the obvious fact that the Arabic dialects themselves have no doubt undergone considerable change in the course of the centuries.

Maltese is customarily grouped with the North African Arabic dialect area (Nöldeke 1904) on the basis of a number of grammatical traits shared with vernaculars spoken in the old sedentary centres of North Africa, e.g. Tripoli, Tunis, and Algiers. One highly diagnostic morphological feature – among others – that bears out this areal classification occurs in the morphology of the verb; it is the so-called *nekteb-nektebu* imperfect:

MALTESE	JERUSALEM	TUNIS
<i>n-ikteb</i>	<i>a-ktub</i>	<i>n-ekteb</i>
<i>n-iktb-u</i>	<i>n-uktub</i>	<i>n-ektb-u</i>
OA		
<i>a-ktub</i>	I write	
<i>n-aktub</i>	we write	

where the Maltese prefix [n-] represents the first person marker in the singular quintessentially typical of the Maghrebine dialects (cf. Blanc 1974). There are, however, other formal traits that link Maltese with the Arabic dialects of North Africa, most of which were noted by the linguist and orientalist Nöldeke in his aforementioned 1904 review of Hans

Stumme's *Maltesische Studien* (Leipzig, 1904); the most important include the following: the long stem vowel in the third person (f. and pl.) of finally weak verbs:

MALTESE	JERUSALEM	TUNIS
<i>halli:-t</i>	<i>xalla-t</i>	<i>xalla:-t</i>
<i>bke:-w</i>	<i>biky-u</i>	<i>bka:-w</i>
OA		
<i>xalla-t</i>	she left	
<i>baka-w</i>	they wept	

the verbal pattern *Qtā:l* for verbs relating to physical states and defects (*twa:l* 'he grew tall', *sfa:r* 'he became pale'), the use of *bi:š* 'in order to' and *ali:š* 'why', and of the conjunction *illi*, etc. (for further details, see Borg 1978: 345). Numerous items of lexicon are also of North African (occasionally Berber) provenance: *hallas* 'he paid', *fellu:s* 'chick', *gendu:s* 'ox', *farta:s* 'bald', etc.

Alongside these indisputably North African Arabic features Maltese also displays a set of linguistic traits (comprising chiefly phonological and lexical traits) that are unknown in the Maghreb but well attested in the Levant. Thus like the dialects of Cairo, Jerusalem, Beirut, and Damascus, etc., Maltese retains the accent on the first syllable of words harking back to the Old Arabic word pattern CVCVC:

MALTESE	JERUSALEM	OLD ARABIC
<i>bá'ar</i>	<i>bá'ar</i>	<i>baqar</i> cows
<i>rikeb</i>	<i>riķib</i>	<i>rakib</i> he rode

In the numerals 'three' through 'ten' Maltese retains, like many Eastern dialects, reflexes of *tā' marbūṭa* (a [-t-]) that acts as *liaison* between the numeral and the following noun); thus, the numerical expression 'five thousand' (*xamsatu a:la:fin* in Classical Arabic) is realized as *hames-t-elef* in Maltese, *xams-t-ala:f* in Jerusalem, but *xems a:la:f* in Tunis. In the realm of lexicon, several commonly used terms in Maltese lack cognates with similar meanings in the North African dialects but are well attested in the Levant:

MALTESE	MEANING	LEV.AR.
<i>čamfar</i>	to reprimand	<i>šafar</i> (Cairo)
<i>zarbu:n</i>	shoes	<i>zarbu:l</i> (Aleppo)
<i>zokra</i>	navel	<i>zokra</i> (Galilee)
<i>kaħħal</i>	he plastered (wall)	<i>kaħħal</i> (Aleppo)

A more systematic documentation of Eastern features in Maltese can be found in Borg (forthcoming).

How is one to interpret the multiple areal affiliations of Maltese with the contemporary dialects? Rossi (1936: 213) – echoing Stumme (1904: 83) – noted simply the following, without attempting any historical explanation:

The conclusion must be accepted that Maltese is an Arabic dialect which in some ways shows resemblances to the Eastern Arabic dialects, in many others recalls the Arabic dialects of the Maghrib... A study of the Maltese lexicon, to show how affinities with Arabic dialects, Eastern and Western, may be explained, and how word-fossils have been preserved in Maltese, is still to be undertaken.

One could hypothesize that the Eastern elements in Maltese hark back to former settlement of Eastern (possibly Christian) Arabs in the Maltese Islands; this is an attractive theory but lacks supporting historical evidence. Another possible explanation is that the combination of so-called 'Eastern' and 'Western' features in Maltese was at one time more widespread in mainland Arabic and that Maltese has retained this combination on account of its speaker-community's isolation from mainstream Arabic (for further detail, see Borg, forth.).

Rossi mentions the matter of word fossils in Maltese. These do in fact occur. One finds, for instance, a few lexical Aramaisms that seem to be either unattested or rare in contemporary vernacular Arabic at large:

MALTESE	MEANING	ARAMAIC
<i>šandar, išandar</i>	he broadcast	<i>šaddar</i> he sent

Since Maltese did not come into direct contact with Aramaic, these admittedly rare pre-Arabic Semitic features in Maltese were most likely inherited from some variety of Arabic – presumably Eastern – displaying an Aramaic substratum!

Given the isolation of its speakers from the sources of native Arabic, the vernacular of the Maltese Islands no doubt began to deviate from the mainland varieties well before it became exposed to the external impact of foreign languages. As Renfrew (1987: 122) has noted in a different linguistic context:

It is certainly the case that when groups speaking the same language separate and are no longer in contact, marked differences in vocabulary and in forms of expression gradually emerge. A good example is Polynesia, where, since the islands are very remote from each other, and interactions are few, the consequences of divergence are particularly plain.

Separation from the realia of mainland Arab culture has primarily meant, for Maltese, a notable degree of lexical loss for concepts relating to material culture; the loss has been made good in part by massive borrowing from the geographically closest language area: the Italian-speaking mainland, particularly in the realm of non-basic lexicon: *fyu:ra* 'flower', *annima:l* 'animal', *payyi:z* 'country', *li:gi* 'law', *vapu:r* 'ship', etc. The effects of linguistic isolation on Maltese are perhaps most clearly discernible in the way the language has recycled and restructured native Arabic *Sprachgut* to expand the lexicon. A highly noteworthy example of this particular strategy of relexification occurs in the realm of function words, adverbs, etc., many of which have been locally generated via lexical fusion of discrete Arabic elements, and, in this form, appear to be unique to Maltese:

MALTESE (ORTH.)	LITERAL TRANSLATION	MEANING
<i>madankollu</i>	with all of this	nevertheless
<i>ghalfejn</i>	whereto	why
<i>minħabba</i>	out of love of	because
<i>kemmxejn</i>	how much + nothing	a little
<i>ghadilli</i>	yet + that (conj.)	although

The originality of Maltese in recycling Arabic lexicon also comes into play in the form of semantic shifts:

MALTESE	ARABIC
<i>hafna</i> much	<i>ħafna</i> handful
<i>wisq</i> too much	<i>wasq</i> cargo (Cairo)

The geographically peripheral position of Maltese vis-à-vis the Arabic *Sprachraum*, has yielded another evolutionary characteristic associated with marginal or isolated areas: a tendency towards linguistic conservatism. Thus despite its extraneousness to the Arabic-speaking world, Maltese interestingly retains certain Old Arabic words attested in Classical Arabic but completely lost in the contemporary Arabic dialects:

MALTESE	MEANING	OA
<i>mindu</i>	since	<i>ṁundu/muḍ</i>
<i>qatt</i>	never	<i>qatṭu</i>
<i>seta, yista</i>	to be able	<i>ista:ʿ, yustī:ʿ</i>

The first example is particularly interesting in that Maltese *mindu* harks back directly to proto-Arabic **min* + *ḍū*; in other words, Maltese has retained /i/ in the first syllable and not harmonized it with /u/, as has happened in Classical Arabic. This feature and the actual retention of final /u/ – only optional in Classical Arabic – renders the Maltese forms of this word older even than its Classical counterpart!

At the time of the Norman conquest of Sicily (1061-1091) the dominant language in Sicily was Arabic (Varvaro 1988:1). This author describes the linguistic situation in Norman Sicily in the following terms:

Non c'è dubbio che la lingua prevalente nell'isola fosse l'arabo, ma da un lato bisogna distinguere tra dominanza sociolinguistica (indiscutibile) e diffusione reale (che non è detto fosse generale) e d'altro canto sarebbe indispensabile conoscere quanto ed in che modo l'arabo parlato si differenziasse già da quello scritto e soprattutto letterario, che ci è abbastanza ben noto, grazie alla circostanza che esisteva e ci è in parte giunta una ricca produzione poetica e scientifica.

The issue of the likely nature and extent of the *Abstand* between colloquial and written in Arabic in Sicily at this time is not as open-ended as Varvaro here suggests when seen in the wider context of the socio-linguistic evolution of Arabic as a whole. Thus S. Hopkins' *Studies in the grammar of early Arabic* (Oxford, 1984), which is based on Muslim Arabic papyri datable to between the 7th and early 10th centuries A.D., corroborated the general impression

emerging from previous research carried out on Middle Arabic (i.e. the literary or semi-literary Arabic written by Christians, Jews, and occasionally Muslims) that the dichotomy between vernacular and literary Arabic probably dates back to the earliest historical stages of sedentary Arabic. Hopkins sums up his important findings as follows:

From the data collected in the present work the most important result is undoubtedly the recognition that in almost every case in which the language of the Arabic papyri deviates from Classical Arabic, it deviates unmistakably in the direction of Middle Arabic, typologically akin to most of the modern colloquials. ...A large proportion of the features attested here in mediaeval Jewish, Christian and, to a lesser extent, Muslim Middle Arabic, many of which are familiar today from modern dialects, occur here for the first time. This fact speaks for a very impressive continuity in colloquial Arabic usage, and the roots of the modern vernaculars seem to lie very deep. (Hopkins 1984: xlvi)

It is therefore probably idle to suppose that the colloquial Arabic norms of the Arabs in Sicily were more 'classical' than elsewhere in mainstream spoken Arabic. B. Isserlin's comparative study of phonetic aspects of Sicilian Arabic and Maltese (1977) strongly suggests that the medieval Arabic vernaculars of Sicily, Malta, and, presumably, Pantelleria were very similar. Like contemporary Maltese, Sicilian Arabic has been classified with the North African Arabic vernaculars (Blau 1968) responding to Di Pietro and Selim 1967).

VII

With the re-romanization of urban Sicily initiated under the Normans (Bonfante 1986: 47), Romance linguistic influences from Sicily began to infiltrate the speech of the Maltese islanders. Varvaro (1988: 3-4) is probably right in suggesting that the greater part of the Romance elements in Maltese were acquired during the period 1091-1530, preceding the administration of the Order of Knights Hospitallers of St John of Jerusalem (1530-1798). The administration of the Knights (1530-1798)

ushered in a new era of intense consolidation and expansion especially of urban life in the Maltese Islands, particularly based on Malta's maritime potential. By this time, the vernacular of the Maltese Islands was generally referred to as 'Maltese' rather than 'Arabic'.

(Wettinger 1993: 154)

It has generally been recognized that the period of the Knights witnessed the exposure of Maltese to literary forms of Italian. I suggest that the intense maritime activity of the Maltese during this period also provided the context for systematic exposure to the Mediterranean *Lingua Franca* (see §IX). Until the second half of the nineteenth century, when popular education became available to an increasing number of Maltese, there can be no doubt that knowledge of Italian was a prerogative of the clergy and the upper classes. Camillo Spreti, a Knight from Ravenna, who compiled a description of Malta in 1764 noted that the islanders 'understand little Italian and speak less' (cited in Luke 1960 [1949]: 133).

One area where Maltese has brought to bear a great deal of creativity is that of accommodating foreign (mostly Italian) linguistic elements. Though most Arabic vernaculars spoken along the Mediterranean littoral have come under the impact of Italian (and/or other Romance languages) as the languages of trade or higher culture, it is probably true to say that Maltese has surpassed all the Arabic dialects described so far in its receptivity to Italian *Sprachgut*.

In this connection, it would be valuable to have comparative data from other Arabic vernaculars spoken by non-Arabs e.g., the Jews of Tripoli, who are known to have undergone extensive acculturation in Italian. Though supporting documentation from various historical periods is lacking, it is obvious that Italian components in Maltese have been assimilated at different periods and via different diffusional channels.

From the annexation of the Maltese

Islands by the Normans (1090) until the arrival of the Knights of St John (1530), the vernacular of Malta no doubt came under the influence of S. Italian (Sicilian, Calabrian, etc.). The contact with Sicilian occurred with two linguistic registers, i.e. both ordinary vernacular Sicilian and chancery Sicilian as used by notaries, Church functionaries, etc. Contemporary Maltese has retained many everyday terms of both vernacular and learned character:

MALTESE	MEANING	SICILIAN
<i>flisku:n</i>	bottle	<i>flascuni</i>
<i>buti:r</i>	butter	<i>butiri</i>
<i>beccu:n</i>	pigeon	<i>picciuni</i>
<i>canga</i>	beef	<i>chianca</i>
<i>pastart</i>	cauliflower	<i>bastardu</i>
<i>kabocca</i>	cabbage	<i>cappucciu</i>
<i>inkwi:na</i>	anvil	<i>incunia</i>
<i>gverta</i>	blanket	<i>cuverta</i>
<i>pitacc</i>	exercise book	<i>pitazzu</i>
<i>gri:zma</i>	Confirmation	<i>crisima</i>
<i>li:gi</i>	law	<i>liggi</i>
<i>so:ru</i>	nun	<i>so:ru</i>

As is the case in its Arabic component, the Romance component in Maltese tends to display a conservative character. Observe, for instance, how Maltese retains Old Sicilian [mb] and [nd] clusters which in contemporary Sicilian have undergone levelling to [mm] and [nn] respectively:

MALTESE	MEANING	SICILIAN
<i>lukanda</i>	inn	<i>lucanna</i>
<i>gamblu</i>	shrimp	<i>gammarru</i>

In fact, as was recognized in Wagner (1932), the comparative investigation of Maltese and Southern Italian dialects could benefit not only the historical study of Maltese, but also that of Sicilian itself which has, for instance, retained numerous reflexes of Arabic terms (cf. Pellegrini 1972); cognates of these still occur in contemporary Maltese, e.g. the element *racal-* in placenames deriving from *raḥal*, which in Maltese still means 'village'.

Fifteenth-century documentary material in this literary medium is now becoming available (e.g. Wettinger 1993a); the linguistic description of literary Sicilian as used in medieval Malta will furnish the

historian of the Maltese language with important insights into the sources and chronology of learned Romance lexicon in medieval Maltese.

Under the administration of the Knights of St John, the use of Sicilian in the courts and among the legal profession was replaced by that of literary Italian. The following is an excerpt from a *Transcript of legal proceedings against the Englishmen of the Barks Roe and Rainaldson and the merchant John Lucas*, published in A.P. Vella (1972: 79-160) from the archives of the Inquisition in Malta. In this work, the author attempts to reconstruct the circumstances of an alleged Elizabethan-Ottoman conspiracy in the late 16th century. The document reproduces the Inquisitor's question in Latin and the answer in Italian:

Interrogatus: Quas artes exercuit in Anglia et de quibus sustinuit dictam eius uxorem?

Respondit. In Inghilterra io facevo arte di marinaro et di questo vivea et non avevo intrata nessuna: et moglie mia è ben piovera et sa cucir, et vive di quello. (Vella 1972: 107)

(What was your profession in England and how did you support your aforementioned wife?)

In England I worked as a sailor and made my living from this; I had no other income. My wife is quite poor but can sew and supports herself this way.)

The established character of Italian as the language of culture in Malta is reflected in the fact that Maltese writers during the nineteenth century and later invariably established their reputations as writers of Italian before turning to the use of their native vernacular (cf. Grech 1961: 13). One such writer was the national poet of Malta, Dun Karm, who started writing in Maltese in 1912, having spent the preceding thirteen years experimenting with Italian models (Friggieri 1979: 112). By the turn of the present century the use of Italian was so well established among educated Maltese that Nöldeke (1904) expressed the view that it was only a matter of time before it would replace Maltese. Nöldeke could not have foreseen the events that were to lead up to WWII when Malta, as a British military base, became the target of the

Axis forces. Whereas the cult of Italian among the Maltese had been retained throughout the British colonial administration, often at the cost of much friction with the colonial regime (cf. Frendo 1991 [1979] *passim*), the outcome of WWII had the effect of undermining the former position of Italian and preparing the way for its replacement by English.

IX

One source of Romance lexicon in the evolution of Maltese that has not received systematic attention in the existing literature is the Mediterranean Lingua Franca (in the sense of Kahane and Tietze 1958). The term *lingua franca* is most commonly used to refer to a language of wider communication employed across a fairly extensive geographical area, its function being that of a contact language used between speakers of mutually unintelligible languages. Aramaic, Koiné Greek, and Latin, have all, at different times, fulfilled this role. One such language today is Swahili, a Bantu language originally spoken in Zanzibar and the adjacent coast, the use of which has spread at a commercial language across East Africa and the Congo. Trade languages of this kind are sometimes barely more than pidgins suitable for communication at a fairly rudimentary level, e.g. Melanesian Pidgin English.

The Mediterranean Lingua Franca (henceforth MLF) was another pidgin or highly degrammaticalized contact vernacular (Kahane 1983: 8) which is generally believed to have originated in the Eastern Mediterranean during the Crusades, and was apparently still used in the 19th century along the North African coast, especially in Algiers, where it was called *sabir*. Hall (1966: 6) notes that 'in some parts of North Africa, *sabir* or *petit-nègre* still survives; the most recent information indicates, however, that it is on its way out'.

The first important study on the MLF

was Hugo Schuchardt's classic 'Die Lingua Franca' (1909), a concise work whose insight and originality placed it at the focus of the discussion relating to pidgins and language genesis. In the second paragraph to this work, the author cites an intriguing statement from a work on human geography by F.P.W. von Richthofen (1908:102f.) to the effect that the MLF was 'a kind of Italian originating from Malta and thoroughly intermingled with Arabic elements' (Schuchardt 1909: fn.2). the cryptic nature and informal character of this remark renders its precise bearing vis-à-vis the language situation in Malta – as perceived by von Richthofen – somewhat difficult to determine. It is most unlikely that this scholar was thinking of Maltese itself since the professional linguistic literature in German dealing with the vernacular of the Maltese Islands had already established the origin and character of this language (cf. Gesenius 1811; Sandreczki 1876, 1879; Stumme 1904, etc.). Another difficulty here is the precise meaning to be attached to 'Lingua Franca'. I would here like to suggest that by reason of several historical factors relating specifically to the pre-occupation of the Maltese with the sea, the use of the MLF must have been fairly normal in Malta throughout the administration of the Knights of St John. In their voluminous lexical study, *Lingua Franca in the Levant* (1958), the authors, H. and Renée Kahane and Andreas Tietze, study the MLF impact on Turkish and restrict the term MLF to 'vocabulary alone, and within vocabulary to nautical terms...borrowed by Turkish from the West during the period beginning with Turkish navigation in the Mediterranean in the 13th-15th centuries and continuing through the 18th century, when the Mediterranean nautical terminology was as yet unaffected by the international terminology of modern techniques that permeates it in the 19th century' (p.VIII). Their comparative material from Mediterranean languages other than Turkish embraces several

dialects of Arabic and Maltese.

The impact of nautical vocabulary on general lexical usage, though quite considerable, has not been recognized in diachronic work on Maltese. Italian nautical terms in Maltese are common in metaphorical or idiomatic usage *nna:vika*, *yinna:vika* 'to do housework, to tinker' (Aquilina 1990: 893) < It. *navigare* 'to sail'; *sassla* 'cloth scoop for collection (in Church)' < It. *sassola*, (< Sic. *sassula*) glossed in Petrocchi (1900) as 'specie di pala o cucchiaia per votar l'acqua delle lance'; *sorġa*, *ysorġi* 'to sit down' < It. *sorgere* 'to moor'. Some of these, especially when they entail Romance loans of North Italian provenance are almost certain to have been filtered through the MLF: Maltese *perzu:t* 'ham', *tornavi:t*, *pitra:vi* 'beetroots' (all from Venetian). MLF: Maltese *perzu:t* 'ham', *tornavi:t*, items of general (i.e. non-nautical) vocabulary; e.g., Maltese *sptar* 'hospital' (cf. Ar. *sbiṭa:r*).

The immediate social contexts of such loans are not difficult to visualize. As noted in Mallia-Milanes (1992: 15):

By the time the Hospitaller Order of St John had settled in Malta (in 1530 A.B.), its corsairing activity had already had a chequered history of its own.

Under the Knights (1530-1798)

'privateering...would eventually develop into an important industry, an increasingly vital source of wealth for the island's economy' (*op.cit.* 17-18). Earle (1971: 121) states that in the 1660s, 30 active corsairs operated from Malta; the personnel involved in this activity (comprising crews, soldiers, and slaves) were in the region of 4000, so that 'one-fifth of the adult male population was engaged in the *corso*'. As Mallia-Milanes attempts to show, the privateering exploits of the Maltese corsairs were far from being restricted to the central Mediterranean but frequently ventured into Levantine waters against Muslim shipping. Military engagements against the Barbary states were the order of the day, and the capture, presence and disposal of large numbers of slaves in

Malta must have created ample opportunities for contact with MLF. In his *Corsairs of Malta and Barbary* Peter Earle notes, for instance, that

Malta as a centre of privateering compares very favourably with its much better-known rival, Algiers, from the second half of the seventeenth century onwards. Estimates for the sixteenth century put the Algerian fleet at about 50 or 60 units, and Father Dan estimated the fleet to consist of 80 ships in 1634, of which 70 were sailing-ships. But by the period 1674-6 the Algerian fleet was only between 26 and 35 ships, including those owned by the state, i.e. virtually identical in size to the Maltese fleet plus the Maltese navy. (1970: 122)

Later, when the *corso* lost its *raison d'être*, the Maltese appear to have been among the first Europeans to settle in North Africa. Thus Ettore Rossi (1968: 271-272) speaks of 'la presenza di numerosi Maltesi a Tripoli, come a Tunisi e ad Alger. Già nel 1804 in una lista delle persone che stanno sotto la protezione del console britannico a Tripoli, in tutto un centinaio figurano quasi unicamente cognomi maltesi'. On his visit to Tripoli in 1862, the German traveller and orientalist Gustav Nachtigal (1974 [1879]: 13) noted:

Beside the Hara [i.e. the Jewish Quarter, A.B.] lies that part of the Muslim town where the Maltese have made their home, and impressed their characteristic stamp upon the neighbourhood. This element is abundantly represented in all the coastal towns of Tripolitania, Tunisia and Algeria; it has the most intimate connections with the Muslim population, displays indefatigable activity, admirable business acumen and exceptional thrift, and by its vigour and adaptability has been of the greatest importance for the development of the whole life of these regions.

Price (1954: 60) notes that by 1842 the emigration movement from the Maltese Islands 'had been in existence long enough to produce well-defined Maltese settlements all along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean'. By 1885 there were 15,000 in Algiers and Constantine, 11,000 in Tunis; and 3000 in Tripoli (*op.cit.*: 230). The substantial presence of the Maltese community in Algiers is noteworthy from the linguistic viewpoint, since this city had been the most important centre for the diffusion of *sabir*. The famous

Dictionnaire de la Langue Francque ou petit mauresque, composed specifically for the French forces stationed in N. Africa appeared (in Marseilles) in 1830. The work's anonymous author notes in his preface:

La langue francque ou petit mauresque, très-répandue dans les états Barbaresques, lorsque les corsaires de Tunis et d'Alger rapportaient de leurs courses un grand nombre d'esclaves Chrétiens, est encore employée par les habitans des villes maritimes, dans leurs rapports avec les Européens. (p.5 cited from Cifoletti 1989).

Notwithstanding its Arabic origins, Maltese itself as spoken by *colons* from Malta, not only retained its formal distance from native Arabic but also achieved to some extent the role of an intercommunal linguistic medium between various European groups (Italians, Greeks, Arabs, etc.) reserved for certain sociological situations, and Maltese *Sprachgut* became common coin among Europeans and Arabs alike. The *Trésor de la langue française (dictionnaire de la langue du XIXe et du XXe siècle)* notes that in the Algerian French argot, the term 'maltais' meant 'cabaretier', apparently 'par allusion à de nombreux Maltais qui avaient la profession de cabaretier en Algérie'. The port of Algiers appears also to have employed many Maltese since a special 'language' was developed there which *Arts et littératures* (1936: 38-40) refers to as 'le jargon franco-hispano-maltais du port d'Alger'. We possess a very fine description of the Jewish Arabic dialect of Algiers: Marcel Cohen's classic work, *Le parler arabe des Juifs d'Alger*, published in 1912. It is difficult not to be struck by some of its similarities to Maltese, particularly in the lexical domain:

ALG.AR. (COHEN 1912)	MALTESE
ʃja:ɔŋ orange amère	ʃlaring oranges
ɔɾɔɾ murmur (ruisseau)	cercer shed (liquid)
battia tonneau	bettiyya barrel
ɔɾtımone portemonnaie	portmóni purse
nanna. nanna:ti ma grand'mère	nanniti my grandmother

Highly striking is one particular idiosyncratic semantic treatment of the Italian

KTÿB YL KLÿM MÂLTI

MFYSSER BYL-LATÿN U BYT-TALJÂN

S I V E

LIBER DICTIONUM MELITENSIVM

HOC EST

MICHAELIS ANTONII VASSALLI
LEXICON

MELITENSE-LATINO-ITALVM

CUI POST AUCTARIVM ACCEDVNT

APPENDIX ETYMOLOGICA ET COMPARATIVA
ET DUO INDICES VOCVM LATINARVM AC ITALICARVM

MELITENSIBVS NUMERO RESPONDENTIUM.

VOCABOLARIO MALTESE
RECATO NELLE LINGVE LATINA E ITALIANA

*Al quale viene premesso un ragionato Discorso, e dopo il Supplemento
si aggiungono un' Appendice etimologica e comparativa,
e due Indici Latino l' uno e l' altro Italiano*

QUALI PER VIA DI NUMERAZIONE CORRISPONDONO ALLE VOCI MALTESI.

ROMAE APUD ANTONIVM FVLGONIUM

MDCCXCVI.

SUPERIORVM PERMISSV.

Vassalli's dictionary of the Maltese language published in Rome in 1796

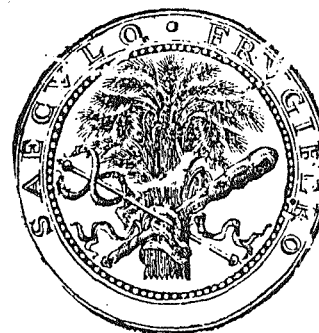
A. CREMONA

TAGHLIM
FUQ IL-KITBA MALTJA

L-EWWEL KTIEB

MALTA
THE EMPIRE PRESS
1935

MICHAELIS ANTONII
VASSALLI
MYLSEN
PHOENICO-PUNICUM
SIVE
GRAMMATICA
MELITENSIS



ROMAE MDCCXCI.
SUMPTIBUS AUCTORIS

APUD ANTONIUM FULGONI
Praesidum Facultate

loanword *capace* to mean ‘perhaps’: Maltese *kapa:či yiġi* ‘he may well come’, Alg. Ar. *kapa:š iġi* ‘peut-être bien qu’il va venir’ (très proche de l’idée: “il viendra probablement”).

It should also not be forgotten that the port of Valletta (*Il-Port il-Kbir*) was itself highly cosmopolitan, e.g., during the 19th century. In 1809, on his way to Nubia, the Swiss traveller and orientalist John Lewis Burckhardt visited Malta and wrote:

The port of Valletta has lately been declared a free port, and this will render it for a long time to come the centre of trade from Gibraltar as far as Odessa. The numerous Greek traders find themselves better protected here than in their own lands... You may well conceive I avoided all intercourse with these persons from Barbary. I often met parties of them in the streets... The trade between Malta and Barbary, especially that with Tripoli and Tunis, acquires daily more vigour and vitality. (Burckhardt 1822: X)

On a visit to Valletta in 1844, the novelist W.M. Thackeray recorded having heard the ‘chatter of all nations’ (*From Cornhill to Cairo*, September 5th).

X

In view of the present lack of a modern systematic description of Maltese in languages other than Maltese itself, it may be useful to conclude this introduction to

the language with some general indications as to how the letters of the Maltese alphabet correlate with the sound system of the spoken language, if only to enable the interested linguist or general reader to avail himself of printed texts in Maltese for the purpose of personal study.

The present Maltese orthography, standardized in 1934, is the product of a long but intermittent literary tradition harking back to the late Middle Ages. It is, however, only from the 18th century onwards that Maltese has been written with any degree of continuity, though descriptive accounts of the language, necessarily entailing attempts at orthographic representation, were compiled before then: for instance, the recently discovered *Regole per la lingua maltese*, which is thought to date back to the late 17th century (cf. Cassola 1988: 63).

The Maltese orthography presents a number of pitfalls for those unfamiliar with the spoken language. Thus except for the digraph *ie*, which is generally (though not always) realised long, Maltese does not ordinarily mark vocalic length. The circumflex is sometimes used to avoid ambiguity: *qartas* ‘to wrap in paper’ as distinct from *qartâs* ‘a paper cornet for wrapping groceries’ (Aquilina 1990: 1134).

The Maltese alphabet

- a, A* – a low central vowel, long or short: *qam* ‘he rose’ [‘a:m]; *wasal* ‘he arrived’ [wásal];
- b, B* – a voiced bilabial stop: *bir* ‘well’ [bi:r]; *aħbar* ‘piece of news’ [aħba:r]; *bieb* ‘door’ [bi:p];
- ċ, Ċ* – a voiceless alveolar affricate: *ċar* ‘clear’ [tʃa:r]; *keċċa* ‘he expelled’ [kétʃa];
- d, D* – a voiced dental stop: *dar* ‘house’ [da:r]; *beda* ‘he began’ [béda];
- e, E* – a mid front vowel, long or short: *erbgha* ‘four’ [é:rba]; *deheb* ‘gold’ [de:p]; *dell* ‘shadow’ [del];
- f, F* – a voiceless labiodental fricative: *fiehem* ‘he explained’ [fiyem]; *siefer* ‘he travelled’ [si:fer]; *ħlief* ‘except’ [ħli:f];
- ġ, Ġ* – a voiced alveopalatal affricate: *gar* ‘neighbour’ [ġa:r]; *riġel* ‘foot’ [riġel];
- g, G* – a voiced velar stop: *gżira* ‘island’ [gzi:ra]; *niggeż* ‘he pricked’ [nigges];
- h, H* – a letter that continues etymologically the OA laryngeal fricative /h/, but is phonetically identical with *ħ*.

- ħ, Ĥ* – a voiceless fricative with a widely variable point of articulation including velar, pharyngeal, and laryngeal realizations: *ħafer* ‘he forgave’ [ħáfer]; *baħar* ‘sea’ [báħar]; *riħ* ‘wind’ [rɪ:h];
- i, I* – a high front vowel, long or short: *iben* ‘son’ [íben]; *irid* ‘he wants’ [iri:t];
- j, J* – a palatal glide: *jiēna* ‘I’ [yɪ:na]; *sejjer* ‘going’ (m.) [séyyer];
- k, K* – a voiceless velar stop: *kelb* ‘dog’ [kelp]; *beka* ‘he wept’ [béka];
- l, L* – an alveolar lateral resonant: *lagħab* ‘he played’ [la:p]; *miēlah* ‘salty’ [mí:lah];
- m, M* – a bilabial nasal resonant: *mera* ‘mirror’ [méra]; *komma* ‘sleeve’ [kómma];
- n, N* – an alveolar nasal resonant: *nehħa* ‘he took away’ [néħħa]; *bnin* ‘beneficial’ [bni:n];
- gh, Gh* – a digraph usually continuing Old Arabic [ʕ] and [g] yielding mostly vocalic length in stressed positions: *ghamel* ‘he made’ [a:mel], and [ħ] when closing word-final stressed syllables: *qiegh* ‘bottom’ [ʔɪ:h];
- o, O* – a mid back rounded vowel, long or short: *omm* ‘mother’ [ómm]; *gholi* ‘high’ [ó:li];
- p, P* – a voiceless bilabial stop: *pastas* ‘rude’ [pastá:s]; *kappar* ‘capers’ [kappá:r];
- q, Q* – a voiceless glottal stop: *qal* ‘he said’ [ʔa:l]; *qorti* ‘lawcourt’ [ʔórti];
- r, R* – an apical trill: *raba* ‘fields’ [rába]; *morr* ‘bitter’ [mor];
- s, S* – a voiceless alveolar fricative: *seraq* ‘he stole’ [séraʔ]; *biss* ‘only’ [bis];
- t, T* – a voiceless dental stop: *tar* ‘he flew’ [ta:r]; *kattar* ‘he increased’ [káttar];
- u, U* – a rounded high back vowel, long or short: *usa* ‘wider’ [ú:sa]; *izur* ‘he visits’ [izú:r]; *gurat* ‘grasshopper’ [gúrá:t];
- x, X* – a voiced or voiceless alveopalatal fricative: *xorob* ‘he drank’ [šórop]; *televixin* ‘television’ [tèlevízin];
- ž, Ž* – a voiced alveolar fricative: *žar* ‘he visited’ [za:r]; *beža* ‘he feared’ [béza];
- z, Z* – a voiced or voiceless alveolar affricative: *gazzetta* ‘newspaper’ [gaddžetta]; *zekzek* ‘he tutted’ [cékcek]; *gezzez* ‘he bundled together’ [gèttsets].

Appendix

Phonetic symbols and abbreviations

- [] : enclose phonetic transcriptions
- [:] : vocalic length, e.g. [a:] long *a*, as opposed to [a], short *a*
- [æ] : a front low vowel, like *a* in Eng. *pan*
- [ɑ] : a more backed *a* like the vowel in Eng. *tar*
- [i:] : the Maltese vowel usually written *ie*, approximating Eng. [i:] in *lid*
- [i:] : the Maltese vowel usually written *i*, approximating *ea* in Eng. *lead*
- [θ] : voiceless interdental fricative, like *th* in Eng. *thick*
- [ð] : voiced interdental fricative, like *th* in Eng. *this*
- [s̥] : voiceless emphatic sibilant
- [d̥] : voiced emphatic dental stop
- [t̥] : voiceless emphatic dental stop
- [ð̥] : voiced interdental emphatic fricative
- [ʃ̥] : voiceless alveopalatal fricative, like *sh* in Eng. *ship*
- [ʒ̥] : voiced alveopalatal fricative, like *g* in Eng. *beige*
- [tʃ̥] : voiceless alveolar affricate, like *ts* in Eng. *cats*
- [dʒ̥] : voiced alveolar affricate, like *ds* in Eng. *lads*
- [ɾ] : alveolar tap
- [ɹ] : alveolar approximant

- [č̣] : voiceless alveopalatal affricate, like *ch* in Eng. *church*
- [ǰ̣] : voiced alveopalatal affricate, like *j* in Eng. *jeep*
- [x] : voiceless velar fricative, like *ch* in German *Buch*
- [ǧ] : voiced uvular fricative: like *r grasseyé* in French
- [q] : voiceless uvular stop
- [ʔ] : voiceless glottal stop, like *t* in Cockney *bottle*
- [h] : a voiceless glottal fricative, like *h* in Eng. *hat*
- (f.) : feminine
- (m.) : masculine
- M : Maltese
- MLF : Mediterranean Lingua Franca
- (n.) : noun
- (pl.) : plural
- StM : Standard Maltese
- ⇐ : derives synchronically from
- ⇨ : yields synchronically
- ∨ : derives historically from
- ∨ : yields historically
- ~ : cognate with

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