GHILM 3 Conference on Maltese Linguistics
Malta
The Sfaxi (Tunisian) Lexical Element in Maltese

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Erin Serracino-Inglott

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Vol. 1. 1975 – Vol. 9. 1989,
Vol 10. (Addenda) 2003

Joseph Aquilina

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Etymological Samples:

A. Old Arabic
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A. Old Arabic

1. SĞR:
Mal. <siğra> ‘tree’

Sf. sažra ‘tree’

Mor. (Fes) sžār ‘trees’

Aq. < OA šağara ‘tree’ (Hava)
2. SLĞ:
Mal. 〈silğ〉 ‘ice’

Sf. silž ‘coldness, chilliness’;

sliž ‘to become cold’

Mor. təlž ‘snow; artificial ice’

Aq. Etym. < OA ʔalğ ‘snow’ (Hava)
3. ŠMŠ:
Mal. 〈xemx〉 ‘sun’

Sf. šamšiyya (variant of šamsiyya and samsiyya)
‘a small circular window in the upper sections of houses or mosques, made of white plaster and decorated with geometric or floral shapes, for ventilation and for the penetration of sun rays.’

Mor. šǝmš / šǝms (pl. šmūš / šmūs) ‘sun’

Aq. Etym. < OA šams ‘sun’ (Hava)
4. ‘FY:

M. 〈għafja (tal-mewt)〉 ‘the lucid intervals before death (said of the temporary return of good health of a dying man); good fortune, prosperity; safety, welfare’

Sf. ‘āfya ‘full health’; cp. ẓihrit ‘alīh l-‘āfya lit. ‘health appeared to him’, said about a sick person showing signs of recovery

Aq. < Ar. عافى ‘āfā ‘to preserve s.o., to restore to health; عفية [sic] ‘good health’ (Hava)
5. FTT:
M. <ftit> ‘small amount of, few, not many, not much’

Sf. ftayta ‘a little of something’;
   one says: stannā ftayta ‘wait a bit’

Mor. ftīyta ‘a little bit, a bit, a touch, or drop of’

Aq. cf. Ar. غتبت [sic] ‘pain en miettes’ (Kaz.) –
   for semantics, cp. use of It. bricciolo; ftejta loc. dim. form.
6. KṢḤ:
M. 〈kiesaḥ〉 ‘full of affectation, one who tries to be smart; impudent’

Sf. kāsaḥ ‘hard (land); obstinate; bold’, hence rāṣū kāsaḥ lit. ‘his head is hard’ and rāṣū ’aksaḥ min zrūṣū lit. ‘his head is harder than his molars’, i.e. ‘hard-headed, stubborn’;

Mor. qāṣaḥ ‘hard, harsh, cruel, honest and hard (in words); ṛāṣo qāṣaḥ ‘he is stubborn, he will not listen’; qəlbu qāṣaḥ ‘he has a hard heart’; klāmu qāṣaḥ ‘he utters hurtful words’; cp. Alg. qāṣiḥ ‘id’ < OA qāsiḥ

Aq. قساحة ‘hardness’ (Dess.)
7. LQM:

M. 〈tilqim〉 ‘nicknaming’ – the entry 〈laqqam〉 is missing in Aquilina

Sf. laqqam ‘to call someone by the surname’, hence talqīma

Mor. Not attested

Aq. < Ar. لقب ِ iaqab ‘nickname’; laqqaba ‘to nickname s.o.’
8. NDY:
M. 〈niedi〉 ‘moist, damp, wet, dewy’;

Sf. nādi ‘something which has not dried up completely, damp’

Mor. nādi ‘humid (land, house)’

Aq. < Ar. ندى nadīj (Wehr)
9. ŠRF:
M. ūxieref ‘tough (meat) as opposed to tari (tender)’

Sf. šārif ‘old (of animals, including birds, and their meat)’

Mor. šārəf ‘very old (living creatures)’

Aq. šārif ‘old she-camel’ (Hava)
10. ŠFQ:
M. <xefaq> ‘horizon’

Sf. šfaq ‘the redness on the horizon at sunset’

Mor. šfaq ‘the horizon which reddens, in the east, before dawn, and in the west, after sunset’

Aq. < Ar. شفق ‘evening twilight; shore’ (Hava); ‘dusk’ (Wehr)
11. ṢNDQ:
M. 〈senduq〉 ‘a chest’

Sf. ṣandūq (pl. ṣnādaq) ‘a decorated trunk containing the dowry of a bride’

Mor. ṣǝndōq ‘a chest with flat lid; a big rectangular wooden chest where one keeps clothing, precious objects, documents, money, jewellery’

Aq. < Ar. صندوق ‘box, chest, safe’ (Hava)
B. Beaussier

12. BŠQ:

M. 〈bexxaq〉 ‘to keep (door, window, etc.) ajar, to open half or slightly’

Sf. ɓeššaq ‘to open the door ajar’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. cp. Ar. ܒܫق baxaqi [sic] ‘écarter, ouvrir les jambes, la porte’ (Beaus)
13. TFTF:

M. teftef ‘to peck at one's food, to eat sparingly and in small quantities’

Sf. taftaf ‘said of someone who is not in the mood of eating, but just eats a little of whatever is presented to him’

Mor. taftaf ‘to pick at one’s food, to nibble’

Aq. < Ar. تفتيف... chercher sans y voir à tâtons. Tâtonner, palper’; teftif تفتيف ‘petit profit’ .... (Beaus.)
14. ŠLF:
M. xlief ‘fishing, angling-line’

Sf. Šlīf ‘the thread of the hook; the thread, the hook, and the lead weights (of a fishing line)’

Mor. šlīf (rural) ‘a bale of fleece packed in a net’

Aq. شليف > ‘balle de laine arabe, Nombre de cent toissons de laine’ (Tun. Beaus.)
C. Incomplete Etymologies

15. DĠS:

M. 〈dgħajsa〉 ‘boat’

Sf. dġīsa ‘a kind of sailing boat used in Sfax for commercial purposes, and which linked this city with Eastern Mediterranean ports’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. “The only dictionary that records this word is Dozy who gives the Sp. Ar. دغيّس (دغيّص) duģajjas (duģajjaṣ) ‘barque, barca, carina ....”
16. KSKS:

M. 〈kusksu〉 ‘North African dish of granulated flour steamed over broth, frequently with meat added’ – Aq. also gives *kuskus*

Sf. *kisksū* ‘couscous, better known as *kisksī* across most of Tunisia. The word *kisksū* is still used by some Sfaxi families.

Mor. *kǝskso* ‘couscous; food made of semolina mixed with flour and cooked on vapour’

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Aq. < Ar.  كسكسى *kuskusī*
17. NNY:
M. 〈ninni〉 impv. of 〈ninna〉 ‘to sleep’ (baby lg.)

Sf. ninni ‘sleep!’ (baby lg.)

Mor. nīnni! nīnna! ‘sleep’ (baby lg.)

Aq. < It./Sic. ninna [no meaning]; It. ninnare ‘to lull, to sleep’
18. ŠŠY:

M. 〈ćići〉 ‘sit down (baby word)’

Sf. šišši ‘sit down’ (baby lg.)

Mor. šišši ‘meat’ (baby lg.)

Aq. cp. Sic. cicci voce fanciullesca, per dire dolci, confetti
D. Semitic Etymology

19. BWQ:
M. 〈bewwaq〉 ‘to make hollow; to pull two adjacent things apart in order to leave a hollow space in between’

Sf. 〈bawwaq〉 ‘to swell, puff up (paper, paint, wood, plaster)’

Mor. 〈buwwǝq〉 ‘to crinkle, to warp, make blisters (lime or plaster on wall)’

Aq. “Derived from the primary M. meaning of hollowness ..., which is unknown in other Ar. dialects but occurs in the Heb. fem. n. 〈būqā〉 ‘emptiness, devastation’”
E. Semantically Skewed Etymologies

20. SRĞ:
M. 〈sireg〉 ‘to shine strongly (sun in summer); 〈deni jisreg〉 ‘a very high fever’

Sf. srijž ‘to have a fever (a baby); to be hot (a house); to fume with rage’; srāža ‘rising flame; high fever; very hot air’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. < Ar. sariğa ‘to be beautiful (face)’ (Hava)
21. ‘NKBT:

M. ⟨ghanqbut⟩ ‘cobweb’ (brimba)

Sf. ‘ankabūt ‘cobweb’ (rifla, rəffīla)

Mor. ‘ankabūt ‘cobweb’ (rtīla)

Aq. < Ar. عنكبوت ‘ankabūt ‘spider’,

the Ar. phrase for ‘cobweb’ being

نسج العنكبوت nasğ al-‘ankabūt (Hava)
22. ‘WD:

Mal. *⟨għad⟩ ‘to say’

Sf. ‘ād ‘he said’

Mor. ‘ād ‘to tell, recount, narrate’ (poetic), thus:

‘īd-li ‘tell me!’

Aq. Etym. < OA ‘ād [sic] ‘to repeat’ (Hava)
F. Local Formations

23. BNN:

M. <bennen> ‘to rock (a baby) in a cradle; to dandle, dance (a baby) in one's arms.’

Sf. bannan ‘to pat, caress, stroke (a child) so as to sleep’ (but benniena is not attested)

Mor. Not attested.

Aq. Bennen and benniena are two very interesting words, both local. < ? Daṭīna (Yemen) bannana ‘élever un enfant’
24. BWR:

M. ⟨buri⟩ ‘mood (good or bad, but usu. bad)’,
   ⟨bil-buri⟩ ‘in a bad mood’

Sf. būri ‘violent anger’; hence:
   ‘andu l-būri ‘he is very angry’ and
   ṭala‘lu l-būri ‘he got very angry’

Mor. būri ‘sudden fit of madness that sometimes
   takes hold of negroes’

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   borioso/Sic. buriusu.
25. ḤRṢ:

M. 〈ḥares - iḥares〉 ‘to look (at), watch’

Sf. yḥāras š < yiḥris ‘to look at something and follow it; said also of eyes which have not been overtaken by drowsiness, notwithstanding the late hour’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. loc. III form.
26. NQR:

M. 〈naqra〉 ‘a small quantity of something’

Sf. nagra ‘a small amount’; qadd ən-nagra ‘the size of a nagra’

Mor. əŋqra, əŋgra ‘a light blow’

Aq. Naqra in the sense of a little of s.th. is a loc. form.
G. Dubious Etymologies

27. LḤLḤ:
M. 〈laḥlaḥ〉 ‘to rinse’; 〈mlaḥlaḥ〉 ‘tipsy, drunk’

Sf. laḥlaḥ ‘to wash oneself; to wash utensils, or clothes, with a little water’;
mlaḥlaḥ ‘in the initial state of drunkenness’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. < Ar. لخلخ ‘agiter, branler, ébranler, brandiller; remuer’ (Beaus)
28. ṢYḤ:

M. 〈sejjieħ〉 ‘rubble wall, such as enclosed areas of fields in Gozo and Malta’

Sf. ṣayyāḥ ‘stones placed on the edges of a roof, in two continuous rows, without using mortar, to prevent thieves from scaling the walls’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. < Ar. siyāḥ ‘travaux de construction en boue, and < Ar. siyā‘ ‘boue mêlée de paille (Kaz.)’
29. ṬWB:

M. 〈tuba〉 ‘clod’

Sf. ṭūba ‘a clod of lime, mud, or sand’

Mor. ṭōba ‘a clod of earth, an untreated brick’

Aq. < Sic. tubba quantità di terreno il quale non è altro che rena di varia grana un poco impietrita (Mort.)
30. WTY: M. "wieta - iwieti" ‘to be/prove beneficial, to benefit (food)’

Sf. wāta - ywāti ‘to agree; be fit, adequate, suitable’

Mor. wāta ‘to be suitable, appropriate’

Aq. cp. Ar. وئى ‘faire mal’ (Beaus);

cp. OA يواتى – واتى ‘to be favourable, propitious, convenient’ (Wehr 1047)
H. No Etymologies

31. BDL:
M. ‹biddel› ‘to put on clean [clothes] or new ones ....’

Sf. mbaddil ‘someone wearing new, or clean clothes’

Mor. tabdīla ‘all clothing and linens which one changes every week’

Aq. No etymology
32. **HḌR:**

M. 〈aḥdar〉 ‘envious, malicious, jealous, cruel’

Sf. Ḥḍārət ‘ayneyh biš-šarr lit. ‘his eyes became green with evil > hunger’

Mor. klām Ḥḍər ‘words uttered without reflection’; Ḥḍōra ‘inconsiderate, thoughtless remark’; fīh lə-Ḥḍōra ‘He does not think before he acts’

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Aq. No etymology
33. SQ‘:

Mal. 〈seqi〉 ‘chilblains’

Sf. siq‘ / šiq‘ ‘severe cold; the swelling and reddening of the fingers due to coldness; a cold-natured person’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. No etymology [in entry SQY]
34. ‘MR:
M. ⟨għamara⟩ ‘furniture’
Sf. ‘māra ‘dowry and furniture, including mats, chairs, cushions; small children’
Mor. Not attested

Aq. No etymology

35. FRFR:
M. ⟨farfar⟩ ‘to shake off/brush off the dust from’
Sf. farfar ‘to dust off’
Mor. Not attested

Aq. No etymology
36. FṢṢ:

M. ‹fossa› ‘stone of a ring’

Sf. fiṣṣ (pl. fṣūṣ) ‘gems mounted on a ring’

Mor. faṣṣ (pl. fṣōṣ) ‘precious stone (on a ring, jewellery), stud’

Aq. No etymology
37. KSR:
M. 〈kisra〉 ‘a piece of bread’
Sf. *kisra* ‘a slice of bread’
Mor. *kəsra* ‘a slice of bread’

Aq. No etymology

38. MLḤ:
M. 〈tmellaḥ〉 ‘to be frivolous, to trifle with’
  〈mur tmellaḥ〉 ‘go to Jericho / go to hell’,
  〈x’nitmellaḥ!〉 ‘I could not care less’
Sf. *tmallaḥ minnu* ‘he showed indifference towards him’
Mor. Not attested

Aq. No etymology
39. QṢR:

M. «qasir» ‘shallow (sea)’

Sf. qṣīr ‘shallow (sea)’

Mor. qṣēṛ ‘shallow (well)’

Aq. No etymology
40. QNZḤ:
M. 〈tqanţah〉 ‘to strain oneself, to make a strenuous effort’

Sf. qanzaḥ ‘to groan, moan (when working or due to an adversity’

\[\text{yitqanzaḥ fī dfū‘ il-flūs} \] ‘he finds it difficult to pay the money’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. No etymology
41. W‘D:

M. 〈weghda〉 ‘a vow’

Sf. wi‘da ‘a vow’

Mor. wa‘da (m‘ā) ‘a vow, a conditional promise made to a saint’

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Aq. No etymology (only etymologies related to promises)
42. ZNZN:

M. 〈żanżan〉 ‘to wear a dress for the first time; to use, display s.th. for the first time’

Sf. zanzan ‘to wear a dress, or use utensils, for the first time’

Mor. Not attested

Aq. No etymology
Conclusions:

• The need to carry out research into the linguistic links between Maltese and the Maghribi, particularly Tunisian, dialects

• Thorough revision of the etymological sections in Aquilina’s *Maltese-English Dictionary*

• Regular updating