

The Sfaxi (Tunisian) Lexical Element in Maltese

Between 1975 and 1990, Maltese philology was enriched with the publication of two important dictionaries, namely Erin Serracino-Inglott's *Il-Miklem Malti*, a Maltese-Maltese dictionary in ten volumes (I (1975) – IX (1989); vol. X (Addenda 2003)), and Joseph Aquilina's *Maltese-English Dictionary* in two volumes (I (1987) – II (1990)). Both dictionaries include etymological data related to the Maltese lexical items of both Arabic and non-Arabic origin. As far as the Arabic lexical component is concerned, both authors make recourse to almost the same lexicographical resources, particularly the old Classical Arabic dictionaries by Freytag (1830-37), Kazimirski de Biberstein (1860), Hava (1899) and Dozy (1927). On the other hand, references to etymological data from Arabic dialectal sources are very scarce, with both authors relying principally on Beaussier's Arabic-French dictionary, covering Algerian and Tunisian (1887) and Barthélémy's Arabic-French dictionary of Levantine Arabic. Given the bias in favour of Classical Arabic etymologies, both abovementioned Maltese dictionaries hardly throw any significant light on the areal affiliations linking Maltese to the Arabic dialects. In the meantime, the latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of Arabic dialectology into a fully-fledged linguistic discipline, attracting the attention of both Arab and non-Arab linguists. As a result, a number of lexicographical resources have been published, covering a number of Arabic dialects. This paper presents new etymological data based on Zwāri & Sharfi's Arabic-Arabic glossary of Sfaxi Arabic (1998), confirming the widely-accepted belief in the very strong linguistic links between Maltese and Tunisian in particular, and the rest of the Maghribi varieties in general. Notwithstanding the lip-service made to this particular linguistic relationship, this area of study still awaits to be thoroughly investigated. The lexicon is a convenient point to start from. The common Maltese-Sfaxi lexical evidence highlighted in this study is also compared and contrasted with other Maghribi dialects. Moreover, in view of the availability of much more Arabic dialectal lexicographical resources, the paper also suggests the need for a thorough revision of the Maltese-Arabic etymologies propounded by Serracino-Inglott and Aquilina.