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SOME PARALLELS BETWEEN MALTESE AND ARABIC FOLKLORE

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Since the earliest times the Maltese Islands have come in contact with different cultures. As a result, a rich pattern of traditions, beliefs and practices has developed that makes these islands a unique place for folklore research within the wider framework of Mediterranean civilizations.

At the Unesco Conference on the Role of Mediterranean Islands as Points of Contact between Two Civilizations, held in Malta in September, 1978 I dealt generally with the theme of Malta as a place of synthesis between Arab Culture and European Cultures, quoting various examples drawn from Maltese History and Folklore (CASSAR-PULLICINO 1979).

Owing to the same historic processes that gave rise to the linguistic and ethnic admixture of the people of Malta and Gozo, the main constituent elements of Maltese Folklore are (i) Semitic and (ii) Romance. The latter element is comparatively easy to identify because it is of more recent origin and because nowadays it pervades practically the whole spectrum of human activities, popular artistic expression and external religious manifestations. The other fundamental constituent — the Semitic or Arabic element — can only be identified after a detailed analysis of the available material on a comparative basis.

In my paper entitled "Some Considerations in Determining the Semitic Element in Maltese Folklore", read before the First Congress on Mediterranean Studies of Arabo-Berber Influence",[1] held in Malta in April, 1972 I had explained the position in these terms: "By contrast (with the Romance superstructure), the Semitic content of Maltese folklore is not so manifest. In the course of centuries there has been a process of continual change, transformation, substitution and addition to the texts and forms in which folk-traditions, narrative material, ritual and belief have been handed down, with the result that the original sources have in some cases been modified, contaminated or completely submerged by succeeding waves of fresh Romance concepts, newer practices and re-adaptations of older material to changing, or different, patterns and norms of practice". Some illustrative

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material was then mentioned, underlining the importance of words and phrases still current in Malta and relating to funeral and mourning practices, birth, infancy and marriage ceremonial.

The purpose of the present study is to identify more specifically relationships and parallels between Maltese and Arabic folklore falling under four main headings: (a) rhymes (b) folktales (c) proverbs and (d) customs and beliefs. The Maltese material is here presented together with similar or corresponding ideas and motifs occurring in texts and other ethnographic data found in publications relating mostly to the North African and other Mediterranean or Middle East countries belonging to the Arab world. The comparisons thus drawn, and the examples given, enable us to establish the main areas of Maltese folklore that still preserve distinct links with parallel material current among the Arabic-speaking peoples.

A — Rhymes

1. Some children's rhymes are in the form of simple dialogue based on everyday things and needs. In spite of verbal changes over the centuries, or the addition and modification of motifs, it is possible to trace a definite link with a probable Semitic stream of thought surviving in some parts of the Arabic-speaking world. To quote one example: from Birkirkara I heard the following rhyme during the last War:

Tat-tila tula!	Thou of the long dress (clothes) /tentative meaning suggested/
X'kilt il-lejla?	What have you eaten tonight?
— Ħobż u ġbejna.	— Bread and a small cheese.
Minn fuq?	And after that?
— Terz ilma.	— A measure of water.
Minn isfel?	And next?
— Terz inbid.	— A measure of wine.
Għandek xi kelb jinbaħ?	Have you got a dog that barks?
— Għandi. Wu! Wu!	— I have: Wu! Wu!

From Tarxien and Birgu I took down the words of a better known version:

Baqrambù!	Baqrambù! (a word suggestive of the mooing of cows)
X'kilt illum?	What have you eaten today?
— Kejla ful.	— A measure of beans.
Xi xrobt fuqha?	What did you drink after it?
— Bajda friska.	— A fresh egg.
Mela idħol ġewwa	Get inside, then,
W itla' fuq,	And go upstairs,

Ar' tkissirli l-friskatur	Mind you don't break the basin,
Għax mhux tiegħi — tas-sinjur.	For it's not mine, but the master's.

This apparently nonsense verse assumes importance as the vehicle for the transmission of folk-culture when one realises the direct relationship between the Maltese lines and the following <u>rengaine populaire</u> from Lebanon given by Feghali (1928: 467).

Wáin ként el-bârha	Where were you yesterday?
ʿénd ʾéhté ṣâlha	At my sister Salha's house.
ʾáš tá ʿmtak ʾ'	What did she give you to eat?
Ǧébnè mâlha	Salted cheese.

A Palestinian version of this rhyme given by Stephan (1932: 78) runs as follows:

ya qamarna ya-bu lele	O moon of ours, one night old!
su t'asset il-lele?	What did you have for supper to-night?
"hubze u jibne malha	"(A piece of) bread and salty cheese
min 'ind halti Salha'.	From my maternal aunt Salha".

2. A Maltese proverb says: <u>Għal kull ħatba hawn il-mannâra</u>, 'there is an axe for every (piece of) wood'. Indeed, life is in many respects a chain of destruction: wherever we are and whatever we do the predestined end is inescapable. This fatalistic attitude emerges from the following verse, which I took down in the summer of 1940 from an 80-year old blind villager from Xewkija, in Gozo:

X'jiswa li jiena xemx	What use to me to be a sun
La hemm sħaba tgħattini?	Once there is a cloud hiding me?
X'jiswa li jiena sħaba	What use to me to be a cloud
La hemm ir-riħ imexxini?	Once the wind drives me away?
X'jiswa li jiena riħ	What use to me to be a wind
La hemm il-ħajt jilqagħni?	Once the wall obstructs me?
X'jiswa li jiena ħajt	What use to me to be a wall
La hemm il-ġurdien igħawwarni?	Once the mouse bores into me?
X'jiswa li jien ġurdien	What use to me to be a mouse
La hemm il-qattus jaqbadni?	Once there is a cat to catch me?
X'jiswa li jien qattus	What use to me to be a cat
La hemm il-kelb jaqbadni?	Once there is a dog to catch me?
X'jiswa li jiena kelb	What use to me to be a dog
La hemm l-istanga għalija?	Once there is a bar to beat me?
X'jiswa li jiena stanga	What use to me to be a bar
La hemm in-nar għalija?	Once there is the fire to burn me?
X'jiswa li jiena nar	What use to me to be the fire
La hemm l-ilma jtaffini?	Once there is water to extinguish me?
X'jiswa li jiena ilma	What use to me to be water
La hemm il-baqra tixrobni?	Once there is a cow that will drink me?
X'jiswa li jiena baqra	What use to me to be a cow
La hemm is-sikkina toqtolni?	Once there is a knife to kill me?

X'jiswa li jien sikkina	What use to me to be a knife
La hemm il-ħaddied għalija?	Once there is the blacksmith to strike me?
u x'jiswa li jien ħaddied	What use to me to be a blacksmith
La hemm il-mewt għalija?	Once death will carry me away?

For a long time I could not relate the subject-matter of this verse to similar texts from neighbouring Mediterranean countries. Some years ago, however, I came across the following Palestinian Arab folk-tale in a learned article by S.H. Stephan (1923: 179–180). The title given to this story is "Vanitas Vanitatum", and it reads as follows in the English translation:

> "The fly stamped with her foot on the wall and said: "I wonder, o wall, how high you are!" The wall answered: "What is all my length and height to me, when the mouse picks holes in me?"
>
> So she went to the mouse and said: "I admire your power of making holes in the wall". "Alas", said the mouse, "I'm afraid it's of little use to me, as long as the cat eats me up." The fly went on to the cat and said to her: "How can you like to eat mice?" The cat said: "That won't help me in the long run, since the stick beats me." Off went the fly and said to the stick: "O stick, I wonder why you are so fond of beating." "What's that to me?", retorted the stick. "In the end the fire will consume me." The fly continued her way to the fire and admired its power to consume everything. "But that's of little help to me", was the answer, "since the water extinguishes me". So the little fly came to the water and expressed her astonishment over its power of extinguishing fire. "It would be all well and good", said the water, "if the horses did not drink me". The fly went to the horse and said: "O horse, why are you so fond of drinking water?" "Well", retorted the horse, "that's nothing, since the man rides on me." And the inquisitive fly came to the man and exclaimed: "O man, I admire your ability to ride horses." "Oh", was the answer, "that's not worth while mentioning. For it won't help me a bit when the angel of death visits me."

To the same tradition belongs a Berber story told in Morocco about a partridge pricked by a thorn.[2] The fire that consumed the thorn was extinguished by the water which, in its turn, was drunk up by the oxen. The cuckoo dispersed the oxen but had to hide in the mountain which was levelled down by the pickaxe. The axe found its way to the blacksmith who was suffering from fever which attached itself to the clothes that were carried away by the river. At the conclusion of this chain of events the ant drank up the water of the river.

3. An old Maltese rhyme still dear to Maltese children opens with the words: Darba kien hemm sultan, 'there was once a king'. At least six versions have been collected from various parts of Malta, the first one being published by L. Bonelli (1895: 9–10). In the course of time some lines were either forgotten or omitted in the process of oral transmission; how-

ever, some of the versions still currently used contain lines that fit in with and help to complete the sequence of ideas in the Bonelli version. Thus reconstructed, this is how the rhyme goes:

Darba kien hemm sultan	There once lived a sultan
Habat tintu mat-tigan	Knocked his buttocks against a pan
It-tigan irid il-bajd	The pan needs eggs
Il-bajd għand it-tiġieġa	Eggs are laid by the hen
It-tiġieġa trid in-nuħħala	The hen wants bran
In-nuħħala għand il-furnar	The bran is at the baker's
Il-furnar irid il-flus	The baker wants money
Il-flus għand l-istampier	The money is at the mint-man
(L-istampier irid ir-ram	(The mint-man needs copper
Ir-ram għand Mastru Ġwann)	Copper is at Master John's)
Mastru Ġwann irid il-ward	Master John wants roses
Il-ward ġewwa l-qasrija	Roses are in the flower-pot
(Il-qasrija trid il-ħamrija)	(The flower-pot needs soil)
Il-ħamrija trid l-ilma	The soil needs water
L-ilma ġewwa l-bir	Water is in the well
Il-bir irid il-qannata	The well needs a pitcher
Il-qannata trid il-ħabel	The pitcher needs a rope
Il-ħabel ta' l-istoppa	The rope is made of oakum
(L-istoppa tikber fl-għalqa	(Oakum grows in the field
L-għalqa trid ix-xita	The field needs rain
Ix-xita Alla jaf mita)	And God knows when it will rain)
Il-qattusa tkakki	The cat relieves itself
U int timbokka.	And you swallow it.

J. Bezzina (1962: 74–78) has traced a parallel between this rhyme and the lines of an Iraqi version appearing in E.S.Stevens's "Folktales of Iraq (1931: 95). The first six lines have no connexion whatever with the Maltese text: the reciter recalls that his grandparents have travelled to Mecca, that they gave him (or her) a dress and a thread ball, and then she asks: "Where shall I keep the ball of thread?" From now on the story unfolds on comparable lines as the Maltese rhyme:

.....	
Adhumha batn es sandu:q	I will put it in the box
As sandu:q yari:d miftah	And the box will need a key
Wal-miftah yari:d hadda:d	And the key will need a smith
Wal-hadda:d yari:d fulu:s	And the locksmith wants some pay
Wal fulu:s ʿand al ʿaru:s	Who will pay it? The bride may!
Wal ʿaru:s batn al hamma:m	But the bride is in the bath
Wal hamma:m yari:d qandi:l	And the bath must have a light
Wal qandi:l ta:mus bil-bi:r	And the candle is in the well
Wal bi:r yari:d habl	And the well needs a rope
Wal habl yari:d fatta:l	And the rope must first be twisted
Wal fatta:l yari:d ja:mu:s	A buffalo the twister's needing
Wal ja:mu:s yari:d hashi:sh	The buffalo needs grass
Wal hashi:sh yari:d matar	And the grass needs water
Wal matar ʿand Allah!	And the rain comes from Allah!

From further afield in the Arab world, from Sana'â', in Yemen, the late Ettore Rossi (1939: 122, 127–128) recorded two versions which also offer interesting points for comparison. Here again the first four lines differ from the opening lines in the Maltese rhyme. The first Sana'â' version, which is a song addressed to the sun when it is obscured by clouds, reads as follows:

yā šäms, fiddi fiddi,	O sun, rise, rise,
gäd gaṭá'nā ra's āl-Hindī.	We cut off the head of Al Hindi
wal-Hindī yištî ká'keh	And Al Hindi wants a ring-cake
wal-ká'keh min äl-mäḫzan	And the ring-cake (comes) from the store
wal-mäḫzan yištî miftâḥ	And the store needs the key
wa-l-miftâḥ min än-näǧǧár	And the key (comes) from the carpenter
wan-näǧǧár yištî läbän	And the carpenter wants milk
wal-läbän min äl-búgrī	And the milk (comes) from the cow
wal búgrī yištî ḥašîš	And the cow needs grass
wal-ḥašîš min äl-ǧäbäl	And the grass (comes) from the hill
wal-ǧäbäl yištî maṭár	And the hill needs rain (water)
wal-maṭár min Allâh	And rain (comes) from Allah
yā sîdī 'Abdallâh	O my master Abdallâh
gum, ṣállī!	Arise, finish your prayer!
gâl: mā minnähä' šî'.	He said: "What use is it to me?"
gâl: gum, käddid äl-birmeh.	They said: "Arise and clean the pot!"
gâl: ḥâḍir.	He said: "Here I am".

The second version is a nursery rhyme recited by the mother while she junps the child on her knee:

yā rúkabī, woggaḥī, woggahī;	O knee, jump, jump;
'azzawwuǧiš bäl-miftâḥ.	I shall make you marry with the key.
yā gaṣabah, nûdī, nûdî	O pipe (narghilé), dance, dance
ū-sállimī 'alâ sîdī;	And salute my master;
kamâ sîdī ḥaḍur Mäkkeh	My master is in Mecca
wa-'abîdeh fī d-däkkeh	And his slaves are at the bench,
wad-däkkeh tištî 'ammâr	And the bench needs the mason
wal-'ammâr yištî ka'keh	And the mason wants the ring-cake
wal-ka'keh min äl-mäḫzan	And the ring-cake (comes from the store
wal-maḫzan yištî dâ'ir	And the store needs the key
wad-dâ'ir min än-näǧǧâr	The key (comes) from the carpenter
wan-näǧǧâr yištî sumûn	And the carpenter wants butter
was-sumûn min äl-bágareh	And the butter (comes) from the cow
wal-bagareh tištî ḥašîš	And the cow needs grass
wal-ḥašîš min äl-ǧäbäl	And the grass (comes) from the hill
wal-ǧäbäl yištī maṭar	And the hill needs water
wal-maṭar min Allâh...	And water comes from God...

The ending is the same as that of the first version.

With the Maltese text one may also compare an animal story from Palestine, entitled "The Goat and the Ghoul", which contains a 'verse' uttered by the ghoul (STEPHAN 1923: 173). The final part of this verse reads as follows in translation:

"O forest, please give me some wood, which I require for the oven in order to get some crisp bread from him. This I'll give to the dog, who will give me some dung for the sweet basil. And a leaf from the sweet basil I have to bring to the spring in order to be allowed to water the yoke of oxen for the thresher. He will give me some grain for the hen, and the hen will give me an egg, which I'll hand to the grocer and take from him a comb for the carder-woman, that she may comb my tail and make it sleek and smooth, like that of a goat, to enable me to devour the kiddies of the goat."

4. A popular rhyme which is still current in both towns and villages aims at showing off the reciter's rhyming skill or virtuosity. It is an exercise in vocabulary, the significant words of each line of a rhymed couplet — in itself this is quite an unusual feature in Maltese folk-poetry — being placed in contrast and repeated in inverse order in the first line of the succeeding couplet, i.e. the last part of one couplet is repeated at the beginning of the next one (anadiplosis) as in the following example:

Ara, l-iblah mhuwiex għaref,	See, the foolish man is not learned,
Il-frieket mhumiex mgħaref;	The forks are not table-spoons;
L-imgħaref mhumiex frieket	The table-spoons are not forks,
Dak l-imqajjem mhuwiex rieqed;	The man who is awake is not asleep;
Ir-rieqed mhuwiex imqajjem	The man who is asleep is not awake,
U dal-ħbula mhumiex ktajjen...	And these ropes are not chains...

The present writer has collected seven versions of this rhyme, two of which from Gozo. The one reproduced here was recited by Pawlu, nicknamed Il-Bies (The Falcon), a blind folk-singer from Żejtun, on January 6, 1945:

Għandi t-tila u għandi l-mila[3]	I've got the canvas and I've the mila
U l-musbieħ irid il-ftila;	And the lamp needs the wick;
Il-ftila mhijiex musbieħ	The wick is not a lamp
Inti ikrah, jien sabiħ;	You are ugly, I am handsome;
Int sabiħ u jiena ikrah	You are handsome and I am ugly
Inti għaref, jiena iblah;	You are learned, I am a fool;
Inti iblah, jiena għaref	You are a fool, I am learned
U l-frieket mhumiex imgħaref;	And the forks are not table-spoons;
L-imgħaref mhumiex frieket	The table-spoons are not forks
U x-xadin mhux gidmajmett;[4]	And the baboon is not a monkey;
Il-gidmajmett mhuwiex xadin	The monkey is not a baboon
U l-flawt mhux pastardin;	And the flute is not a lyra-viol;
Il-pastardin mhux flawt	The lyra-viol is not a flute
U l-gandott lanqas hu ħawt;	And the rut is not a trough;

Il-hawt mhuwiex gandott	The trough is not a rut
U l-boċċa mhix ballabrott;	And the bowl is not a ball;
Il-ballabrott mhux boċċa	The ball is not a bowl
U l-kalies[5] mhuwiex karrozza;	And the carriage is not a coach;
Il-karrozza mhix kalies	The coach is not a carriage
U d-dgħajsa mhijiex moqdief;	And the boat is not an oar;
Il-moqdief mhuwiex dgħajsa	The oar is not a boat
U l-bilbla mhix durrajsa;	And the short-toed lark is not a bunting;
Id-durrajsa mhijiex bilbla	The bunting is not a short-toed lark
U l-mara mhijiex tifla;	And the woman is not a little girl;
It-tifla mhijiex mara	The little girl is not a woman
Ta' quddiem ma jiġix wara;	He who sits in front will not sit at the back;
U l-ġurdiena mhix ġurdien	The she-mouse is not a he-mouse,
Din l-għanja vvintajtha jien.[6]	This song has been invented (composed) by me.

Lines 4 to 7 of the Maltese rhyme, which differ in style and structure from the rest and may well belong to an older tradition, can be compared to the following extract from a Kuwahla Love-Song given by Hillelson from the Sudan (1935: 142–143).

.....	
Inti t-tulba, ana d-dīwān,	You are the tax, I am the dīwān,
Inti l-ḫēma, ana s-sulṭān,	You are the tent, I am the sultan,
Inti l-manīha, ana l-ʿušmān,	You are the gift, I am the hopeful one,
Inti z-zāmla, ana l-batlān,	You are the riding beast, I am the weary traveller,
Inti n-niʿāl, ana l-ḥafyān,	You are the sandal, I am the bare-footed one;
Inti l-ḥidim, ana l-ʿiryān,	You are the garment, I am the naked one,
Inti l-moiya, ana l-ʿaṭšān,	You are the water, I am the thirsty one,
Inti l-wābil, ana l-widyān.	You are the rain, I am the wadi.

5. A few Maltese adult songs, composed in the traditional form of the four-line stanza, are philosophical in mood and content. One of these, which is often quoted to underline the vanity of human wishes and the futility of 'high-vaulting ambition', runs as follows:

Fejn hu żmienek, ja ħerba!	Where is the time of your pride, ye ruins!
Kont imdawwra bil-lellux;	Once surrounded with marigolds
Ḥitanek kollha waqgħu —	All your walls now have crumbled down
Ġejt imdawwra bil-bebbux!	And snails surround you everywhere!

Almost identical in wording and ideas are the following three lines currently used in Libya, which were quoted to my friend Dr. V. Depasquale by M.A. Annemri, of the National Historical Library, Tripoli, who visited Malta as a member of a Cultural Delegation in January, 1974:

Wen hu ġmālek, ja ġebya?	Where is your beauty, o cistern?
Kunti mdawra bil-lellux	Once surrounded with marigolds
Eljom imdawra bil-belbux!	Snails now surround you everywhere!

B — Folktales

It is not possible to deal with this topic in a comprehensive manner within the short space of this article. A few of the more important aspects are here presented, pointing the way to more detailed treatment at a future date.

1. Initial Formulas

These are often an integral part of the technique of storytelling. The formulas are more or less fixed, but some lexical addition is possible within the limits of the traditional patterns. A study of these patterns in Malta shows that the most common formula is that containing the words kien hemm wieħed (raġel, sultan, etc.). This clause opens up a line of fruitful comparative study. It immediately recalls the opening formulas of various tales collected from many countries of the Arabic-speaking world. J. Oestrup (1897: 7) writes that in modern Arabic tales la plus fréquente (formule de commencement), surtout en Egypt, est la phrase solennelle: Kân fîh wâhid, mots qui ont pour l'oreille des Orientaux le même timbre fantastique et merveilleux que pour nous autres les paroles: 'Il etait une fois'... Oestrup adds that the formula kân ma kân is commonly used at the beginning of Syrian tales. E.S. Stevens states (1931: XIII) that in Iraq at the beginning of the recital both Moslems and Christians employ the formula

Kān u ma kān (or kān ma kān)	It was and it was not
ʿAla Allah at Tuklān	(Our) reliance is upon God.

Regarding the opening formula the same writer says: "It is difficult to find the translation for this tag, the literal translation being somewhat unmeaning. A local name for folktales is 'Kān ma kān stories' and the tag may come from some classical source. Turkish and Armenian stories sometimes open 'There was was not' (a king, man, etc.) much as we begin 'Once upon a

time'. I think the purpose of the rhyme is twofold, first to imply that the story is a fanciful one, and second to invoke God's name against malign influences which might be conjured up by the narration, especially when the jēnn appear in it". It is interesting to note that this opening formula can be traced in the initial line of a Maltese rhyme i.e. Darba kien ma kien..., collected from Imdina, in Malta, and published by H. Stumme[6] in the early years of this century (1904: 67).

A perusal of Spitta-Bey's "Contes Arabes Modernes" (1883) shows that eleven out of the twelve tales included begin with the formula Kân fŷh wâhid. From Ṣanaʾâ' (Yemen), the nine tales collected by Rossi (1939: 67–92) begin with the words Kân bih (mareh, 'asfarah, waħid raġġal, etc.). Kân he-r-râġel is the opening formula of two tales from Djidjelli (Algeria) given by Philippe Marçais (1954: 94–137), while G. Colin's tales in Moroccan Arabic and Socin-Stumme's tales from Houara (Morocco) start with the formula "kan (or kant) wahd..." (COLIN 1939; 1942; SOCIN and STUMME 1894).

We have here unmistakeable evidence pointing to the Semitic origin of Maltese narrative technique. This is furthermore borne out by the North African meaning of Ar. darba in the sense of 'fois' recorded by Beaussier and Kazimirski.[7]

2. Rhymes in folktales

Another feature found in folktales everywhere is the inclusion, and repetition, of rhyming stanzas or couplets — arresting, memorable lines representing sometimes the experience of human or supernatural beings, animals and birds. The following are a few examples selected from the published texts of Maltese folktales:

(a) Readers of European story books are familiar with the giant's awe-inspiring rhyme

> Fee, fo, fi, fum
> I smell the blood of an Englishman,
> Be he alive, or be he dead
> I'll have his bones to make my bread.

In Maltese folktales it is generally an old woman to whom the young hero has shown some kindness who utters the following rhyme:

Li s-sliem ma kienx qabel il-kliem,	Had you not saluted me before you spoke to me
Kont nibilgħek belgħa	I would have swallowed you up
Inġerrgħek ġergħa	(I would have) digested you
U niżirgħek żergħa.	And (would have) buried (lit.sown) you.

This links up directly with the rhyme heard by Fr. Magri on Mount Lebanon:

Lewla salàmek
Ma ṣabaq kelamek;
Kont nfass'fesek int
U għadamek. (MAGRI 1904: 116.)

Very close to the Maltese welcome greeting are the words used by the ghul (ogre) in Legey's Moroccan tales (1926: 105):

Koûn ma slâmek sbeq slâmi ndir lhamek fi dorma,	Had not your greeting preceded mine I would have made a mouthful of your flesh
u demek fi jorma,	A throatful of your blood
Ou 'azamek nterkonhoum bin snani.	And I would have crushed your bones between my teeth.

In some North African tales the hero usually takes the ogress (għula) by surprise and drinks milk out of her breast in order to put himself under her protection. In one such example, given by M. Galley (1971: 131, 148), the għula tells the hero:

> Had you not drunk the milk out of Aissa and Moussa's breast
> I would have made a mouthful of your flesh
> A throatful of your blood
> And crushed your bones between my teeth.

As against this adoption rite through drinking of the ghula's milk there is the opposite belief found in the Sudan. In one of the folktales given by Hillelson (1935: 11), called "The Ghula", two girls and their brother came to their misfortune upon the house of a għula and went into it. "When night came the għula went and drew milk for them from her breasts and brought it for them to drink, in order that they should be unable to get up, for whosoever drinks the milk of a għula is rendered powerless." The boy warned his sisters against eating or drinking anything that this woman brought them, but one of the girls forgot the warning, and drank and she found herself unable to get up. As the ghula came to her she said: "Today your flesh is my meat and your blood is my drink", and she ate her up.

The adoption rite motif mentioned above does not figure in the Maltese folktales published so far. The hero of the Maltese stories may seek the protection of the ogre by feeding him and obeying his instructions; in other cases he may encounter an old man who, provided the hero greets him kindly or shaves him, etc., will assist him and give him good advice for the continuation of his journey.

There is, however, one particular belief relating to the mother's breast that should be mentioned here. Unconsciously, the people attribute baraka to the mother's breast as the source of milk that sustains life in early infancy. Nothing more terrible can occur than biting off the breast of one's mother. A curse is sure to follow — a punishment for the ingratitude shown in hurting the mother. At Siġġiewi I was told that a person who suffers one misfortune after another may utter the expression: anqas li ġdmit beżżult ommi!, "as if I have bitten off my mother's breast!" Professor Aquilina informs me that the expression ġdimt beżżult ommok, "you have bitten off your mother's breast" is said to someone who is unfortunate in business. By way of contrast, one may point out that in Morocco swearing by the mother's breast helps one to affirm one's innocence. According to Westermarck, "when a son is accused of having stolen smoething from his mother, he puts his hand underneath her clothes, takes hold of one of her breasts, and swears: Ḥaqq ḥād l-bezzula, "By this breast" (Ulâd Bu ʿazîz). So also, when a brother charges his brother with an offence, they go to their mother and the accused one takes hold of her breast, saying: Ḥaqq ḥād l-bězzûla lę ʿaddha sebʿă aʿyûn, "By this breast which has seven springs". Among the Ait Sadden a person may make an assurance by oath to a woman whom he has sucked as a child..." (WESTERMARCK 1926/I: 500).[7]

(b) In the Maltese tale known as The Gold Slab three daughters of a widower were sent out of the house by the cruel stepmother. They lived in a field, sustained by a cow which, after grazing, used to go up to them every day and, according to one version, say to them:

Imbuq, imbuq, imbuq!	Imbuq (suggestive of cow's mooing)
Il-ħalib ġewwa biżlejja	The milk is in my udders
U l-kaghak ġewwa qarnejġa.[8]	And the ring-cakes are in my horns.

The cow fed them in this manner and the sisters survived.

In the Palestinian story of "The Goat and the Ghoul" we read (STEPHAN 1923: 169, 172) that the goat went out grazing every day, leaving her three kiddies at home. In the evening she returned, carrying grass between her horns, and her udders distended with milk. She knocked at the door and said to them:

Iftaḥûli ya-wledâti	Open the door to me, o my kiddies,
w-yl-ḥalibât by-bzêzâti	For the milk is in my swelling udders
u-il-ḥatabât ʿa-dhêrâti	The wood is on my back
w-il-ḥašišât bi-ṙûnati.	And the delicate grass is between my hornlets.

(c) In the Algerian tale "La fille du Marchand de Pois Chiches" given by M. Galley (1971: 163, 178), the Prince tested the girl's ability by asking her:

Ayya mûlât la-ḥbaq,	Allons! fille au basilic,
asgîh u-naqqîh	Arrose-le bien
u- ʿaddi aš̆ḥâl	Nettoie-le bien
man urqa fîh.	Et compte bien
	Combien il a de feuilles!

These lines are close enough to the rhyme with which the prince in the Maltese tale tried to ridicule the baker's daughter as she was sprinkling two pots of basil on the balcony:

Anġla bella!	Lovely Angela!
Issaqqi u tbaqqi,	Watering abundantly (the pots)
Taf tgħidli	Could you tell me
Kemm-il werqa fih	How many leaves are there
Il-ħabaq għazzi?	In the basil plant?

Maltese tradition recalls that in the past a pot of basil on the window-sill served to show that in that house there was a girl of a marriageable age — a hint to young men in search of a wife.

The tale type (No. 879) with which these rhymes are associated is known as "The Basil maiden" (The Sugar Puppet). The Maltese story containing the above lines was collected by L. Bonelli in 1894 (BONELLI 1897: 94–95). Sicilian counterparts may be read in S. Lo Nigro's "Racconti Popolari Siciliani" (1958: 192–194). The story is widely diffused in the Middle East, especially in Turkey. According to Aarne-Thompson (1961: 297), versions have been registered from Italy, Spain, Iceland, Hungary and Greece; it has also travelled to Latin America. However, this Mediterranean tale type has also spread its roots to North Africa, as Dr. Galley (1971: 178) shows in her notes on the Algerian tales collected by her, where she identifies Egyptian and Fasi parallels for the basil motif, and Moroccan and Berber versions for the sugar puppet motif. She also points out that one can see pots of basil on the terraces of most Moorish houses, even on the balcony of modern apartments. The basil motif is charged with special symbolic meaning in Mediterranean tradition as a means of communication between lovers. Referring to Malta she says: "Le langage métaphorique du basilic était utilisé à Malte où l'on peut encore observer sur la façade des vieilles maisons un rebord de fenêtre, ou plus exactement une pierre qui fait saillie (en maltais: 'ħarrieġa' — mot-à-mot 'celle qui sort') et forme un support pour recevoir le pot de basilic ('Habaq'): la tradition voulait que la

famille annonçât publiquement, par ce moyen, qu'il y avait une fille à marier."

Professor F. Karlinger also comments as follows on the use of the basil motif in the Maltese story: "... The maiden places basil on her balcony and tends it with care. This signifies that she is not betrothed and would like to get married. Basil and carnation are synonymous in flower-language, both being symbols of a young man, while the rose takes the place of a young girl. It is only possible to understand typical Latin love lyrics if one knows these symbols: all one has to do is to substitute 'lover' for carnation and 'beloved' for the rose. So, if a maiden carefully tends a flower that is the symbol of a young man she proclaims that she does not have a sweetheart. As soon as she is engaged carnations and basil disappear from her balcony. When the son of the king asks the young girl about the basil it is not actually a riddle but a question asked in jest, which the girl parries with a real puzzle."[9]

(d) In a folk-tale given by Fr. Magri,[10] an angry shepherd who was disappointed because January had been rainless, and therefore grassless, that year, rebuked him with the following words:

Qożżot, qożżot għalik, Jannar!	Fie, fie on you, January!
Għaddejt bil-bard blą xita	You passed (along) with cold but no rain
U ħallejtni bin-nagħaġ fil-għar.	Leaving me with the sheep in the cave.

January was so annoyed that he borrowed two days from his brother February and in these two days it rained so heavily that the shepherd and his flock were drowned in the cave.

Westermarck gives interesting parallels of this story from Morocco. He writes: "I was told that Tamġart (or Háiyạn) was an old woman living at the foot of Buiblän, the highest mountain in the district of the Ait Waráin. Once when it was raining during the first three days of the said period (i.e. 25th February to 4th March—Old Style) the calves in her yard took refuge in her tent, but she drove them away telling them not to be afraid of a little rain. Then Ḥáiyạn said to Mars (March), "Ya Márssu sellef li nhársu, nąqtel bih ʿaguzt su, "O bad March, lend me an evil day, I shall kill the bad old woman with it." March, who then had thirty-two days, lent one of them to Brâyer (February), so that only thirty-one remained. Now there came much rain and cold and snow. Tamġart and her tent and all her animals were transformed into stones, and are still to be seen at the foot of Buiblän..." The same writer refers also to another story told in the Ḥiáina, where the

second day of the above period is called nhār lă-ʿgûz, "the day of the old woman". According to this story: "there was an old woman who went out on the pasture with the sheep and goats. As the ground was very dry and the crops were suffering from drought, she asked Ḥáiyạn to send rain. Ḥáiyạn in his turn asked March to lend him one day; this he did, and rain fell so heavily that the old woman was killed, whereas the animals escaped to the village" (WESTERMARCK 1926/II: 174).

In Palestinian tradition one also finds a period of three "borrowed days" in February, followed by another four days of March during which the rain pours, the storm blows and the cold tries to make itself felt. Regarding this period, known as mustaqrêḍât, T. Canaan (1923: 27; see also HANAUER 1907: 307), gives a variant of the rhyme relating what February says to March in these days:

adar yâ ibn 'ammî	March, my cousin, let three days
talâteh minnak u arba'ah minni	of yours and four of mine (unite in
tānhallî wâdha ighannî	bringing so much rain) that we cause her (the village's or, according to others, the old woman's) valley to sing (i.e. much water will flow through her wadi).

The story relates that the old woman had her poor hut (ḫarbûseh) in the wâdî and, as she cursed February, the above saying was uttered.

Aquilina (1972: 556) quotes various versions of the rhyme collected from the region of Damascus by R. Tresse, as well as the following one from Lebanon given by A. Frayha:

aðða:r ya bin ʕammi:	"O Cousin March" (says February)
ʔarbaʕa minnak wi tla:ta minni	Four days from you and three from me (for a severe storm)
ta nwaqqid el ʕadʒu:ʔ du:la:bha:	Which will make the old woman burn her spindle.

Fr. Magri (1925: 162–163) mentions two other variants of the story from the land of Moab. In one of them we read that February (Xbat) had passed without bringing any rain. The old woman (l-għaġuża) mocked February saying

Ja Xbât, habbât!	O February, you trouble-maker!
Ma mejjiltx il-għamuda	You have not caused the pole supporting the tent to bend
U ma qtiltx il-għaġuża!	And you have not killed the old woman.

On hearing this February turned to his brother March for help, as in the other versions we have mentioned.

One must point out that while in the Maltese tale it is January who borrows the three days, in Morocco, Palestine and the other places mentioned above it is February who does so. Aquilina (1972: 555) shows that the same motif is transferred to a later data (March/April) in a Sicilian variant of the story. Fr. Magri (1925: 167–168) suggests that this is due to the fact that in Malta, it being a small island, the agricultural year progresses earlier than, say, in Moab. He also points out that while the old woman in the story from Moab is drowned in her tent, in the Maltese story January drowns the ġhaġuża in the cave. In keeping with his theory about the origin of Maltese folklore, he suggests that this is as it should be, considering that when our forefathers (i.e. the Phoenicians, according to him) came to Malta, there were no inhabitants or buildings here, but only a few caves on the coast and inland.

3. Similarity of Stories

As a result of cultural contacts in the past there has been a lot of give-and-take in story-telling between peoples of different countries. The close similarity of Maltese stories to Sicilian and Italian parallels is unmistakeable; yet there is still room for a systematic comparative analysis of Maltese folktales to identify their relationship with those of the Arabic-speaking people as well. In this respect Dr. M. Galley has already established parallel or counterpart links between some Maltese stories, i.e. "Dak li jħobb 'l Ommu jew Is-Sansun Malti" (The Hero who loves his Mother or the Maltese Samson) and the Algerian tale "Ali and his Mother" (Types 590 and 300), "Tifla teqred Gganta" (A Girl destroys a Giantess) with the Algerian "Mqideš and the Blind Ogress" (T. 327 and 328), the story of Bidibekk with that of the North African hero Mqideš or Šater (or diminutive Šuîter), not to mention the humorous character Ġaħan as a local version of Ġuha, a Mediterranean hero.[11] Many other comparisons have been indicated by G. Mifsud-Chircop in his unpublished thesis "Type-Index of the Maltese Folktale within the Mediterranean Tradition Area".[12]

The relationship between Maltese folk-narrative and the tales contained in the "Arabian Nights" is worth considering, if only because it is known that many a tale forming part of this world-famous collection of oriental fairy stories, adventurous travel, fables, legends and humorous anecdotes has entered into the folklore of most European countries. That some motifs in Maltese folktales bear a similarity to the "Thousand and One Nights" was clearly pointed out by Victor Chauvin in the early years of

this century. Chauvin had published a comprehensive bibliography of works dealing with "Alf laila wa-laila" in "Bibliographie des ouvrages arabes" (Liège, 1900–1903, vols. 4–7). In 1905 he reviewed Hans Stumme's "Maltesische Märchen, Gedichte und Rätsel" published in 1904, and after noting that Malte est un terrain où les influences occidentales et celles de l'Orient se rencontrent d'une façon très intéressante, he commented on certain motifs in Stumme's collection which could be matched with similar ones in the "Mille et une nuits" (M.N.). To give some examples: Tale No. VIII — "Lejla u Kejla", he says, is certainly borrowed from the East — it is No. 331 of M.N. He relates No. XII — "L-Ghasfur li jgħanni u jnaqqas sena mill-għomor" (The Bird which sings and reduces life by a year) to No. 273 of M.N. No. XV, about Ġaħan the Fool trying to sell things to a statue, runs parallel to M.N. No. 280.

Stumme's No. XVII — "The Ape which kidnapped a Girl", recalls M.N. Nos 101–103. No. XVIII — "The Priest Dun Sidor" corresponds to M.N. No. 107. No. XXIII — "Ix-Xemx u l-Qamar" (The Sun and the Moon) combines the tale of the amputated arms (M.N. No. 67) with certain episodes of the story of the "Jealous Sisters" (M.N. No. 375). Nos XXIV — "The Seven-Headed Serpent" and XXXIV — "The Seven-Headed Dragon" constitute a variant of the story of the "Three Brothers" (M.N. 101 et seq.). Tales Nos XIV and XXXV relate the same story, i.e. Ġaħan and the Chick Pea — the hero, who has a pea or a bean, makes a series of increasingly advantageous exchanges. For parallels of this story Chauvin refers to the following works: Caisc, "Contes oubliés de Mille et une nuits" — L'homme à la fève, 1893 No. 28 et seq; Basset, "Contes populaires d'Afrique", p. 266, and H. Stumme, "Märchen und Gedichte aus der Stadt Tripolis in Nordafrika", pp. 118–120. Tale No. XXXVI tells the adventures of the young hero who leaves his mother's home; the coffins or caskets mentioned could possibly recall the Fourth Voyage of Sindbad the Sailor. The range of such parallels, which Chauvin based only on an analysis of the tales collected by Stumme, can be considerably widened by a more extensive coverage of Maltese tales included in other collections e.g. by B. Ilg, Fr. Magri and the present writer.

I shall now reproduce, in English translation, three Maltese stories which show close resemblance in plot and content to the versions recorded elsewhere in the Arabic-speaking world.

I

The first story, of which I collected two variants between 1943 and

1946 (CASSAR-PULLICINO 1967: 49–50), one from Valletta (Il-Mandraġġ) and the other from Rabat, in Gozo (Triq tal-Għajn) runs as follows:

> Once upon a time there was a lady, and an old man came up to her and said: "Guess where I have seen your son". "Where?", she replied. He told her: "I saw him selling garlic at the gate of Hell". On hearing this she exclaimed: "Alas, that my son, who is born a gentleman, should take up this calling! Selling garlic!" And then she said to the old man: "Here, take this purse full of money and give it to my son so that he can set up in a better line of business." The old fellow took the purse and left. He walked and walked and came up to where there was a man hoeing, and he said to him: "This is rather hard work for you, old man!" and he went on his way.
>
> The master came home and his wife told him: "Guess whom I have met today! An old man came and told me that he saw my son." Her husband asked: "Where did he see him?" She said: "He saw him selling garlic near the gate of Hell." "And what did you do?" he asked her. She replied: "I gave him a purse full of money to give it to my son so as to enable him to set up a better business." He told her angrily: "He has fooled you. Let me go and overtake him." So he set out and that same day he caught up with him, not knowing, however, that he was the man he was looking for. And he asked him: "Have you seen an old man with a purse in his hand?" The other replied: "No! There is no one here, but if you go further on you will find someone there." The enraged husband told him: "Would you hold my horse for a little while until I find him?" And he went off. The old man said to himself: "This is indeed a stroke of good luck! For I have both the purse and the horse now!" And he mounted the horse and rode away at great speed.
>
> The master came up to the other old man who was still hoeing the ground and said to him: "Is it you who have the purse with the money which my wife gave you to pass on to her son?" The old man said: "No! Can't you see! I have not even moved from this place! And I have been working here since yesterday and the day before that." When the master went back he found neither the old man nor the horse. He said: "He has tricked me too!" And he went home to his wife and said to her: "We are both in the same position now; for not only has the old man fooled you but he has tricked me as well!"

In the Gozo version the woman is told that her son was to be seen, naked, selling garlic at the gate of Hell. On losing his horse the husband had to walk all the way home and his wife asked him: "Have you managed to overtake him?" The man replied: "Yes, I did, and I told the old man: "Take this horse as well, and give it to the son so that he will use it for his trade."

I now give the translation of a Cairene story published by Prof. A.H. Sayce (1900: 357–358):

> There was once a fellah, who being annoyed with his wife left the village and went away; he came to another village, went to a house there and begged. The mistress came to him: "Where do you

come from (she asked)?" He replied: "I come from hell." She said: "Have you not seen my son Mohammed (there)?" He answered: "Yes, I saw him, poor fellow, naked and hungry." When she heard that she cried exceedingly, and went and got some clothes, and bread, and money, and gave them to him, saying: "Give these to my son Mohammed along with many remembrances from me." The fellow took the clothes and went away, saying to himself: "It's not my wife only who is a fool, all women are the same." Presently the (Turkish) soldier (who was the woman's husband) came home and finds his wife crying, so he asks: "What's the matter, Fatuna?" She replied: "A man has come from hell, who has seen my son Mohammed (there) miserable, and naked, and hungry; so I have given some linen clothes and some food to take to my son Mohammed." The soldier cried: "You are a fool, no one ever comes back from hell! Where's the fellow?" She said: "He is gone in such and such a direction." The soldier mounted his horse and rode off in order to overtake the fellah and recover from him the linen clothes. The fellah saw him coming in the distance and hid the clothes in the well of a water-wheel and said to the irrigator: "Take a piastre and bring a stick from the garden (yonder)." The lad jumped over the walls; the soldier came and asks the fellow: "Good Sir, has no one passed this way with a bundle of clothes?" He replied: "Yes, soldier, he has just jumped over into the garden." The soldier said: "Hold the horse till I come (back)." He mounted the horse and took the clothes and went off. The soldier searches and searches; there is no one (to be seen). When he returns from the garden he cannot find the horse. He took his departure and returned home; his wife came to him: "Where's the horse?" He answered: "I have sent it to Mohammed in order that he may ride it in hell."

II.

A common motif in popular legends or stories about the saints, be they Cristian or Mohammedan, is that they can move from one place to another in ways contrary to the laws of nature. One such story is told in Malta about a hermit or holy man, Korrado, who, hundreds of years ago, lived in a tiny church in Wied il-Għasel (The Valley of Honey). Time and again he exhorted the people living in those parts to change their wicked ways and repent and do penance for their misdeeds. But they would not listen; they turned against him and forced him to flee from his solitary hermitage. Pursued by his persecutors, the holy man came to the water's edge where, to everybody's surprise, he spread out his cloak and, kneeling over it, he was miraculously transported over the water towards the island of Għawdex (Gozo) and was seen no more.

In Morocco it is said of Sîdi 'Abdlhâdi that he wanted to cross the river on his way from Azila to Sîdi Qâsĕm's shrine and that when "the ferryman told him to wait for a while because they were busy, he put on his

slippers, which he carried in his hand, and walked over the river on the surface of the water (WESTERMARCK 1926/I: 148). At Rabat and Salé, another Moroccan legend tells of two saints who crossed over the waves, one of them mounted on a sheepskin which served him also as a mat at prayer-time, and the other, Sidi-Bou-Zemmara, walked on the surface of the water as if he were walking on land. L. Brunot (1920: 62), who gives this legend, adds that every shore there vaunts some saint who walked over the water.

III.

The following is one of the stories told in Palestine of the jester Johha, who corresponds to our Maltese trickster Ġaħan:

> "One day Johha borrowed a large 'tanjera' or copper sauce-pan from a neighbour for domestic use. Next day he returned it together with a very small, but quite new one. 'What is this?', asked the surprised owner. 'Your tanjera gave birth to a young one during the night' replied the jester, and, in spite of the incredulity of the other man, maintained his assertion, refusing to take back the smaller tanjera, on the ground that the young belonged to the parent, and the parent's owner. Besides, it was cruel to separate so young a child from its mother. After a deal of protestation, the neighbour, believing him mad, resolved to humour him, and took the small tanjera, greatly wondering at the jester's whim.
>
> Its point was revealed to his chagrin, some days later, when Johha came and borrowed a large and valuable copper 'dist' or cauldron. This he did not return, but carried it off to another town, where he sold it. When its owner sent to Johha to reclaim it, the knave said that he regretted his inability to send it back, but the utensil had unfortunately died and been devoured by hyenas. 'What!', exclaimed the owner angrily, 'do you think me fool enough to believe that?' 'Well, my friend', was the reply, 'wonderful things sometimes happen. You allowed yourself to be persuaded that your tanjera, for instance, gave birth to a young one; why, then, should you not believe that your dist, which is simply a grown-up tanjera, should die?' In the circumstances, the argument seemed unanswerable, especially when after searching through Johha's house, the cauldron could not be found" (HANAUER 1907: 86–87).

This story follows very closely the Maltese tale entitled "Ġaħan quddiem l-Imħalleb"(Ġaħan before the Judge) given in my collection (CASSAR-PULLICINO 1967: No. XVII: 35):

> "Although Ġaħan passed for a fool, in reality he was a very cunning person. One day he borrowed a cauldron from an old woman who was considered to be a good soul. When he returned it to her, he gave her also a small pot, saying: 'This too belongs to you, for the cauldron which I borrowed from you gave birth to a young one, and I do not keep for myself things that belong to other

people. I will never dream of doing such a thing! The daughter belongs to the owner of the parent, isn't that so?'

The old woman, although she knew quite well that the cauldron could not be delivered of a child, and that Ġaħan was a simpleton, did not bother to look too closely into the question; she accepted it gladly and told him: 'You were right in bringing it to me.'

After a time Ġaħan went again to borrow the cauldron, and its owner willingly gave it to him, saying to herself: 'Let's see whether she will give birth to another young one this time.' When a long time had passed, and the cauldron was not returned, its owner went to look for Ġaħan and when she found him she said to him: 'O Ġaħan, why have you not brought back my cauldron? You have kept it too long!' To this he promptly replied: 'Old woman, you can't imagine how much sorrow it has caused me this time! You should know that both the cauldron and the young one died in childbirth, and to tell you the truth I could not bring myself to come and break the bad news to you. I'll tell you what can be done. Bring up the first daughter as fast as you can; she is the elder sister and I recall she was quite healthy and will be able to take her mother's place.'

On hearing Ġaħan's reply the woman grew furious and she called him all sorts of names. She threatened to take him to Court, and there and then she took steps to have him summoned. When they appeared before the judge on the following day, and he learned about the knavery of the two rogues, the judge said to the woman: 'Once you believed on the first occasion that the cauldron gave birth to a young one and you accepted it without saying anything, it behoves you now to believe a second time, for it can indeed happen that a first delivery is uncomplicated, whereas a second labour results in both maternal and foetal death. Get out of my sight, you crafty ones! Take them away, and give them a good beating!'."

C — Proverbs

Maltese proverbs embody the sum-total of the people's wisdom and experience throughout a long period of existence. They also provide evidence of cultural contacts and influences. What interests us most here is the Arabic element in local proverbs.

This is a fascinating line of investigation but also one fraught with pitfalls and difficulties. Professor J. Aquilina was quite aware of this in compiling his monumental "Comparative Dictionary of Maltese Proverbs" (1972). In the introduction to this work he referred to the survival of some Arabic proverbs still current in the spoken language in spite of the

nearly 1000 year-old discontinuation of direct contact with the Arab world. He explained that he was both purposeful and selective in his comparative sections; in fact he included "not proverbs which just convey the same meaning or suit the same contexts but proverbs which are verbally close and which therefore might serve as pointers in the history of paremiological migration and loan translations" (p. xii). On the basis of this comparative material he concluded that "in spite of the similarity between the Maltese and Arabic proverbs, the area of diffusion is sometimes so wide that for some of the proverbs one cannot postulate a direct Arabic or Sicilian origin. The question of direct or indirect lineage in the case of proverbs which are more or less textually alike can be rather more complex than it looks because the present textual similarity may be a post-Arabic adaptation to a practically similar proverb in another language, in our case generally Sicilian or Italian. Some words in the original Arabic may have been changed to agree with the corresponding proverb from a Romance source. The lineage is often a matter of usage and context... but when all this is said there is no doubt that the greater paremiological heritage reached Malta via Sicily" (p. xvi).

In his communication"Comparative Maltese and Arabic Proverbs" read at the XXVIIth International Congress of Orientalists held in the University of Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1967 the same writer said: "Of the whole collection of proverbs comparatively very few are of Arabic origin, but the total list of correspondences in all the work is fairly impressive. Some of these proverbs are mixed in the sense that they may be Arabic and European at the same time. Here arises the question as to the criteria that must be adopted to establish which is the original version. Comparatively only a small number of Maltese proverbs corresponds to Arabic ones because since 1090, when the Normans conquered Malta, the social context of our country moved in the direction of Sicily" (AQUILINA 1976: 142).

Aquilina (1976: 144) laid down a first criterion by which one can definitely consider a Maltese proverb as of exclusively Arabic origin, i.e. when there are no literal, or approximate, correspondences in Sicilian and other European languages. By this criterion he listed 35 proverbs of Arabic origin which include some of the more well-known sayings, such as Il-borma fuq tlieta toqgħod, 'the pot rests on three (legs)' / Ar. 'A tripod stands only on three legs'; Qabel ma tara (tikri)d-dar, għandek tistaqsi għall-ġâr, 'Before you rent a house, inquire about the neighbour' /Ar. 'Inform yourself about your neighbour before you buy your house'; Iż-żejjed ħu

n-nieqes, 'too much is the brother of too little' /Ar. identical; Bla flus, la tgħannaq u lanqas tbus, 'without money one can neither embrace nor kiss'/ Ar. identical; Kulħadd jidfen 'l ommu kif jista', 'Every one buries his mother as best he can' /Ar. 'Everyone buries his mother as he likes.'

In addition to the 35 proverbs mentioned above there are other Maltese sayings for which Aquilina does not give corresponding sayings from European languages and which, by the above criterion, could also be considered as being of Arabic origin. The following are a few examples selected from his "Dictionary":

Under Heading XV — Home, Family and Relatives — Proverbs Nos 6, 20 and 30, viz: Il-ġewwieni jeqlik (jaħlik), il-barrani jiklok (jisbik), 'The relative fries (ruins) you; the stranger eats (enslaves) you' /Ar. ʕammak yaʕmi:k u xa:k yaxli:k, 'your father's brother will make you blind, and your brother will make you destitute'; Il-bosk ħatbu jaħarqu, 'the wood is burnt by its own wood (i.e. trees)' /Ar. L-ga:ba ma iħaraqha men ge:r ʕu:dha, 'The forest is only burnt by its own wood'; Naddaf darek ghax jiġi jżurek min qatt ma żarek, 'Clean your house for someone may visit you who never visited you before' /Ar. naddef baitek ma btaʕref min biđi:fek, 'Clean your house, for you do not know who will ask your hospitality'.

Likewise, under Heading XVI — Children and Parents — Nos 28, 33, 83 and 88 may be classed as possibly of Arabic origin, i.e. It-tfal l-hena taddar, 'Children are the joy of (one's) house' /Ar. fa:kyat ed-dar ʔawla:d ʕga:r, 'the young children are the rejoicing of the house'; Min iħalli leħitu f'idejn it-tfal jintfuhielu, 'He who trusts his beard in the hands of his own children will see it plucked hair by hair" /Ar. hada bisallim daqnu laula:du?, "Does any one deliver up his beard to his children?"; Min ħalla l-ulied bhal kieku ma miet, 'For him who has left offspring, it is as if he had not died' /Ar. min xallaf ma ma:t, 'he who leaves children behind is not dead'; L-ulied jixxiebhu 'l-missirijiet u 'l-ommijiet, 'Children take after their parents'/Ar. el-bint laʔimma weʕ-ʕabi: laʔabu:h, 'a girl (resembles) her mother and a boy his father'.

A few other examples may be given:

Heading XVII — Love, Sex and Marriage: No. 4 — Aħjar imqattgħa u ħorra milli ghanja u morra, 'Better (marry) a tattered but honest lass than one who is rich and bitter of tongue' /Ar. ʔiđa tsʕabbi ʕabbi l-meski:na a:lu dʒi:b la ge:r l-xobza u s-serdina, 'When you take a wife take a poor one, even though you bring her only a loaf of bread and a sardine (she will be content).

Heading XIX — Neighbours, Friends and Personal Relations: No. 12 — Bormot ix-xirka qatt ma ssir sewwa (taqbad), 'The communal kitchen (lit. pot) is never cooked well (gets burned)' /Ar. kaθrat elʔeya:da: taʃawwaʂ ʔau tahraq eʂʂaʕa:ma:t, 'where many hands are working, the dishes get burned'.

Heading XXII — Self-Interest: No. 43 — Fejn għajnejk, oħrajn għajrek, 'Where your eyes are, other people's eyes are too' /Ar. fain ʕainek ʕain ġairek, 'where your eye is, is the eye of somebody else'.

Heading XXVI — Work, Diligence and Idleness: No. 108 — Min irid (ihobb) il-lillu, jishar (jahdem) lelju killu, 'He who would like to have fine things must spend all his night working' /Ar. ðhabb nennu yeʂhar l-li:l kullu, 'he who wants something pretty should wait all night'.

Heading XXVIII — Money and Wealth: Nos 60, 95 — Ħobżu maħbuż u żejtu fil-kus, 'His bread (is) in the pantry and his oil is in the jar' /Ar. xebzu maħbu:z wemwaiytu fel-ku:z, 'His bread is ready, his water is in the small jug' ; Kelma bejn tnejn, bejn tlieta mnejn sa fejn? 'A word between two, why should it be between three?' /Ar. el-kla:m bain zo:dʒ weθa:lat fd̠wali:, 'a conversation takes place between two (only); a third one is indiscrete', or kelma bein tnein tasi:r bein elfein, 'a word (secret) between two becomes known to two thousand'.

Heading XXIX — Poverty and Thrift: Nos 14, 113 — Minn kull fejn taqta' (tmiss) joħroġ id-demm, 'Wherever you cut (or touch) blood comes out'/Ar. men'eyn ma ðarabat elagraʕ yasi:l demmu, 'whenever you strike the bald person his blood comes out' ; Is-sikkina messet (laħqet) l-għadma, 'The knife has touched (reached) the bone' /Ar. veʂlet es-sekki:n lel adem, 'the knife has reached the bone'.

Heading XXXIII — Practical Wisdom and Foresight: No. 91 — Akbar sena jaf iżjed mitt sena, 'He who is a year older knows a hundred years more' /Ar. ʔakbar minnak byaum akbar minnak bsina, 'he who is one day older than you are, has one year's experience more than you do'.

Heading XLIII — Superstitions: No. 23 — Min ma jsumx f'Ras ir-Randan imut f'denbu (jekluh il-klieb), 'He who does not fast at the beginning of Lent will die at the end of it (shall be eaten by dogs)' /Ar. ʔel-ma biʂu:m sabt en-nu:r bidebbu:h bet-tannu:r, 'He who does not fast on holy Saturday (last day of Lent) shall be thrown in the oven'.

Heading XLV — Weather and Husbandry Lore: No. 386 — F'Mejju aħsad imqar kien plejju 'In May reap, even if it is (as short as) penny-royal

mint' /Ar. fi ma:yu ahsad zarʕak walau ka:n fla:yu, 'In May reap your barley, even if it be penny royal'.

Another criterion could possibly be formulated on the basis of the following statement by Westermarck (1930: 47). "It must always be borne in mind that the resemblance between proverbs may have another cause than diffusion, namely, the uniformity of human nature, which makes men in similar situations think and feel alike. The real test of a common origin is therefore not the mere similarity of ideas and sentiments expressed in the proverbs, but the similarity of formal expression, with due allowance for modifications that are apt to occur when a saying is adopted from another language and transplanted into a new soil..."

Applying this principle to the extensive comparisons established by Aquilina for the 'mixed' proverbs, and contrasting the basic idea on which the corresponding Arabic and European sayings are formulated, other Maltese proverbs may be classed with those having possibly an Arabic origin. The following are some examples, selected from Aquilina's "Dictionary":

1. Meta taqa' l-baqra jaqghu ghaliha skikienha, 'When the cow falls, the knives fall down on her' (VIII, 9).

Aquilina gives three Arabic variants, i.e. (a) waqʕet el-baqra u ketru es-sellaxin, 'the cow falls and the butchers arrive in great numbers'; (b) iðа ʧa:ñat el-bagra kaθrat saka:ki:naha, 'When the cow is felled, the number of knives around her increases'; (c) ki:f taʧi:h el-baqra yakturu saka:kinha, 'When the cow falls the number of knives increases'. To these one may add two other animal sayings from Palestine: (d) yn wỷ(e)ʿ (y)t-tór btîktar, sallâhîno, 'when the ox is down on the ground, his slaughterers are numerous', and (e) yn wỷyʿ ij-jàmal, btỷktar sakakîno, 'When the camel has fallen, there will be many knives (tc kill him)' and one from Egypt: 'In 'wi' 'it il-ba'ara 'kitrit saka:kinha, 'when the cow falls many knives will offer' (STEPHAN 1925: 100, 103; TALAAT 1975: 61).
has fallen, there will be many knives (to kill him)' and are from Egypt: 'In 'wiʕit il-ba'ara 'kitrit sakaibirha, 'when the cow falls many knives will offer' (STEPHAN 1925: 100, 103).

This proverb is also current in various European countries, e.g. It. "sopra l'albero caduto ognuno corre a far legna"; Sic. "Ad arvulu ognunu curri e fa ligna'; Quannu lu voi è a lu maceddu, tutti currinu cu lu cuteddu"; Fr. "Quand l'arbre est tombé tout le monde court aux branches"; Port. "De árvore caída, todos fazem lenha"; "Quando cai a vaca, afiar os

cutelos"; Eng. "When the tree is fallen, all go with their hatchet"; Dutch "When the tree falls, everyone runs to cut boughs".

It will be seen that five out of the six Arabic proverbs specifically mention, like the Maltese saying, the cow (or bull), which is replaced by the camel in the fifth one. Four examples refer, like the Maltese one, to knives, and two to the related action of slaughtering the animals. On the contrary, only two out of the eight examples from Europe, i.e. those from Sicily and Portugal, mention a cow and a knife. In the other six examples a tree takes the place of the cow — a distinctly different line of thought. It seems safe to suggest an Arabic origin for this Maltese proverb.

2. Kull helu fih il-morr, 'In everything sweet there is bitterness (XI, 77).

The Arabic equivalent here reads as follows: halla bya:kol hla:we:ta bya:kol mra:reta, 'He who tastes the sweet things of life, must taste its bitterness.' Corresponding European proverbs are: It. "Non v'è gioia senza noia;" Fr. "Toute joie fault en tristesse;" Sp. "Aunque hoy goces las dichas, teme mañana las desdichas;" "Las dichas y las desdichas suelen andar juntas;" Eng. "No joy without annoy (alloy); "No pleasure without pain (repentance)." From the point of view of formal verbal expression the Maltese proverb is much closer to the Arabic text.

3. Lil kif trabbi fiċ-ċkunija ssibu fix-xjuħija, 'As you bring up (your child) when young, so will you find him (her) when you grow old' (XVI, 54).

The corresponding Arabic proverb is rabbi ʔebnek uhu zgi:r betla:qih uhu kbi:r, 'bring up your son well while he is young, and you will find it when he will grow up'. The Sicilian proverb says: "L'omu è figghiu di l'educazioni.' Again, on the score of formal verbal expression the Maltese proverb points to an Arabic origin.

4. Lil ibnek (it-tifel) kif trabbih, żewġek (il-missier) kif iddarrih, 'your son (i.e. his behaviour) will be as you bring him up, and your husband as you accustom him" (XVI, 55).

Aquilina gives two Arabic versions of this proverb: (a) ʔebnek ʕala: ma rabbeiti:h gweyzek ʕala: ma ʕalamti:h, 'Your son as you have brought him up, and your husband as you have accustomed him;" (b) dʒauʒik ʕala: ma: ʕauuadti:h u ibnik ʕala: ma: rabbaiti:h, 'Your husband is what you have accustomed him to, whereas your child is what you have brought him up to.' The European equivalent is Fr. "Les enfants sont ce qu'on les fait." There can hardly be any doubt here about the Arabic origin of the Maltese proverb.

5. Lil min ǧaghġen isilfu ħobża, 'Lend a loaf to him who kneads the flour (i.e. makes bread)' (XXVIII, 59).

The corresponding Arabic proverb says illi ʕandu l-qamh slef ed-dqi:q, 'He who has the wheat finds where to borrow the flour.' The European counterparts are: Fr. "On ne prête qu'aux riches" and Dan. "It is safe to lend barley to him who has oats." Discounting any Danish influence, for which there is no historical evidence in local folklore, one may conclude that the local proverb is closer to the Arabic than to the French saying.

6. Il-Gharbi jgħid: "Il-miktub mhux maħrub", 'The Arabs say: "What has been written cannot fly away" (XLIV, 29).

The Arabic saying runs: el-maktu:b ma mennu maħru:b, 'One does not escape one's destiny.' The European equivalents are variants of Latin "verba volant, scripta manent", viz. It. "Le parole volano, quel ch'è scritto rimane;" Sic. "U scrittu è scrittu;" Fr. "La parole s'enfuit, et l'écriture demeur." "Les paroles s'envolent, les écrits restent;" Sp. "Las palabras vuelan, los escritos se conservan;" "Asi estaba escrito;" Ger. "Die Rede verfliegt, das Geschriebene bleibt."

Keeping in mind that, as Aquilina explains, "the proverb can mean either no one escapes one's destiny or, if you want to be sure of an agreement, put everything in black and white" the connotation of destiny, coupled with the introductory formula "The Arabs say", marks out the local saying as being derived from the Arabic proverb.

By this method a few more proverbs from the Maltese corpus of proverb lore could be added to the list of sayings originating from Arabic ones. However, the number would still be too small to justify any changes in the conclusion reached by modern scholarship regarding the lineage of Maltese proverbs.

D — Beliefs and practices

In this section I include a few ancient beliefs which may appear trivial when viewed in isolation but which acquire significance as part of a widespread Mediterranean tradition shared, inter alia, with various Arabic-speaking peoples. Some of the ritual practices mentioned have come down to us clothed in Christian garb which, however, allows us to see through the thin outward veil and to perceive the more primitive features that are easier to link up with corresponding and parallel lore surviving in other countries.

1. The Maltese people consider bread as a blessing from God (grazzja t'Alla) and up to a few years ago special precautions were taken in order not to lose the benefits of this blessing. The person cutting the loaf would sign it with a cross before slicing it with the knife. Rather than using the knife to cut fresh bread, one should tear off a piece with one's hand. Children were taught to kiss a piece of bread before throwing it away; and "should a piece of bread be found by the roadside it would be lifted by a passerby, reverently kissed and placed on the wall or ledge so that it would not be trodden under foot" (LEOPARDI 1966).

Similar beliefs and practices are found among the Arabic-speaking peoples. E. Panetta (1943: 40–41) points out that the custom of picking up and eating bread found on the ground is traced back to the Prophet himself, and adds that among the Arabs (DAUMAS, "La vie arabe", p. 271) it is prohibited to cut the bread with a knife as this would violate such a holy thing. The Egyptians show a great respect for bread, which they call 'eysh (lit. 'life') and, as Lane (1944: 298) puts it, "on no account suffer the smallest portion of it to be wasted, if they can avoid it. I have often observed an Egyptian take up a small piece of bread, which had by accident fallen in the street or road, and, after putting it before his lips and forehead three times, place it on one side, in order that a dog might eat it, rather than let it remain to be trodden under food". In Morocco, Westermarck (1926/I: 239–240) records that "bread must never be trod upon nor exposed to the uncleanness of the ground... If a person finds a piece of bread on the road he should pick it up, kiss it, and eat it, or take it home with him or put it in some place where nobody can walk over it; it will 'kiss him' in return, that is, he will have much bread, whereas if he leaves it on the ground he will suffer want". In Lebanon, Frederic Sessions (1898:17) found that "customs connected with bread are curious. It is unlucky to cut the thin cake-loaves with a knife; they must be torn by the hand. In Beyrouth, a Moslem will stop to pick up a crumb on the roadway; and to throw pieces of bread about produces horror and indignation...".

2. Up to some years ago Maltese children were told not to look at themselves in a mirror lest the Devil will appear, look at them from the mirror and frighten them. Parallel beliefs can be quoted from the Arab world. In Syria "he who looks at himself in a looking-glass in the dark runs the risk of going out of mind". In Morocco "it is considered bad for a person to look at himself in a looking-glass at night; some people say that if he does so a jenn will go into his eyes and make them sore, or that he

will become squint-eyed or wry-mouthed or foolish. Little children are not allowed to look at themselves in a looking-glass even by day, nor should this be done by anybody whose eyes are not strong. But I was told that women are not afraid of looking-glasses, being themselves haunted by jnun" (WESTERMARCK 1926/I: 272, 370).

3. According to an old Maltese belief, one should not sweep the floor at night lest one will also sweep away the angel of the table (M. l-anġlu tal-majda). In Egypt "it is not considered permissible to sweep out a house at night since a jinn may be struck and injured and so induced to revenge himself". In Morocco "people refrain from sweeping the floors of their houses or tents in the evening or after 'asar, or mid-afternoon prayers, the reason being that "on the surface of the earth the jnun are most plentiful and active after the 'asâr, which time of the day is their morning, when they get up". Westermarck further says that at Fez and Tangier, "people refrain from sweeping their houses on the 'asura day, lest they should sweep away the rezq (i.e. all sorts of good things contributing to the comfort of life) of the house" (WESTERMARCK 1926/I: 297, 594; 1926/II: 75).

4. In Malta it is considered taboo to cut off the head of a dove (M. ħamiema) as this bird symbolizes the Holy Ghost. So one has either to twist its neck or think of some other way of killing it. One comes across a similar belief in Morocco, where "certain species of birds are regarded as more or less holy... the swallow, the turtle-dove, and the wild dove... Pigeons are sometimes supposed to be dead saints in disguise". By way of explanation we read that "the wild-dove once saved the life of a Prophet when he was persecuted by Christians, by telling them that he had gone one way although he had gone another, and for this reason the faithful were forbidden to kill any bird of its species... The tame pigeon (called in Arabic ħmâma, plur. coll. ħmâm) is frequently killed and eaten. But the Shloh of Aglu and Glawi refrain from killing any pigeon, whether wild or tame...". At the other end of the Arab world, in Syria, "it is believed that the turtle-dove is constantly invoking the name of God" (WESTERMARCK 1926/I: 115; 1926/II: 337).

5. Fr. Magri (1925: 134–135) gives the following information about a "water sacrifice" which the Maltese people unwittingly repeat every day. "They draw some fresh water and pour it out on the ground lit by the sun, either in the courtyard of the house or in the street outside. This takes place once a day, about midday; in summer the practice is followed more regularly, but always once a day. This is done in order to relieve the souls

(M. l-erwieħ). Hot water should not be used, for it will burn them (M. ixawwat l-erwieħ). If a person pours out water he is advised to say: "Għall-erwieħ! Għall-erwieħ xejn m'hu mitluf" which means "May it be poured out to the profit of the souls; nothing is lost of what is done for the souls." Also, when one drinks fresh water one says: "Għall-erwieħ!, For (the relief of) the souls!" Mrs. A.M. Galea, one of Fr. Magri's collaborators, informed me that one of her maidservants, from Għajnsielem, in Gozo told her that while pouring out hot water one should always say: "L-erwieh iwarrbu!", 'Let the souls move out of the way!'

The same respect for, or fear of the spirits occupying the ground lies at the base of similar beliefs in Egypt and Morocco. In Egypt, according to Lane (1944: 229), "it is a common custom... on pouring water, etc. on the ground, to exclaim, or mutter 'Destoor', that is, to ask the permission, or crave the pardon, of any ginnee that may chance to be there...". In Morocco "he who pours hot water on the ground is liable to be struck by the jinn or jnūn living in it,or the mwâlīn l-ard, 'masters of the ground', and 'it is likewise dangerous to pour hot water into a watercloset" (WESTERMARCK 1926/I: 114, 275, 295). In Syria "it is prohibited or considered dangerous to pour out hot water in a kitchen at night" (WESTERMARCK 1926/I: 374).

Conclusion

This survey, however limited in its coverage, bears testimony to the opportunity for comparative study provided by an analysis of the substratum of Maltese primitive ritual and belief, and of the surviving rhymes, folk-narrative and proverb lore. In identifying parallels and relationships with Arabic folklore our aim has been to supplement the numerous links and correspondences that have already been established with the folklore of European countries on the northern side of the Mediterranean, especially Sicily and Italy, so that eventually we might get a more balanced view of the main constituent elements — Arabic and Romance — of local traditional lore. Over the centuries these two elements have merged in one another to such an extent that it is now difficult, if not impossible, to assume that the complex body of Maltese folklore, of which the texts and other material we have investigated form but a small part, is descended exclusively from one or other of these sources. The similarities we have noted underline the need of

further identification of Arabic parallels in other areas of folklore along the lines followed in this study.

Notes

[1]See Proceedings of the First Congress on Mediterranean Studies of Arabo-Berber Influence. Algiers, 1973, pp. 371–381.

In the transcription of the Arabic texts we have followed as much as possible the one given in the publications where the texts reproduced in this study originally appeared. As regards the spelling of the Maltese texts, the following consonants are pronounced as indicated: ċ like English ch in "church"; ġ like English j in "jar" and g in "genius"; ż like English y in "yes"; ħ is silent except in some villages; ħ is aspirate; għ (għajn) is usually silent; q is a glottal stop; x like English sh in "show"; z like English z in "buzz" and ż like English ts in "bits".

[2]Duquaire 1943: No. 96. Text extracted from the study on the Berber dialect of the Zaian and Aït Sgougou published by Loubignac (1924). For interesting comments on the distribution over Europe, Asia, Africa and America of this cumulative tale (Aa. Th. Type 2030) see Stith Thompson (1951: 232–233).

[3]Mila, which does not occur in Maltese dictionaries, is meaningless word included with the sole aim of rhyming with tila in the opening line of the text.

[4]Gidmajmett, for gidmajmun, from Italian gattomammone, "a monkey".

[5]Kalîes, dialectal variation of kaless, a two-wheeled carriage with two or four seats, very popular in Malta throughout the 18th century and in the early years of British rule in the 19th century.

[6]The singer's claim to authorship is quite unfounded. Variants of this rhyme are still current, some of them dating from the early 19th century. As for lines 4 to 7 of the above rhyme, this type of composition seems to be well established also in Italy. Writing about children's rhymes in Calabria F. Mango (1882: 240) includes the text of a rhyme (No. XXX) that offers definite points of similarity in form and structure to the Maltese example reproduced above, as the following extracts show:

...A notti un' è de Diu,
Un' è de Diu a notti,
I spini nu' su botti,
Nu' su botti i spini ...

Fimmina prena un' è zitella,
Un' è zitella frimmina prena.
Agustu un' è primavera,
Un' è primavera agustu.
L'acitu un' è mustu,
Un' è mustu l'acitu...

[7]Professor J. Aquilina – personal communication on 15th November, 1958.

[8]Cassar Pullicino 1967: 6–8. In the version given above, the second line is more appropriately worded and makes for a better rhyme than in the

variant form Il-ħalib qiegħed ġo fija which appears in my book. For another variant see Ilg 1906/I: No. 45, 163–167.

[9]Karlinger 1960: 306. See also translation by Imogen Taussig in Maltese Folklore Review. No. 4 (1973), p. 337.

[10]Magri 1925: 162. Aquilina (1972: 555) also reproduced the following 18th century version given by Agius de Soldanis in his manuscript dictionary "Damma...":

Qożżot, qożżot għalik, Jannar.
Islifni jumejn, sieħbi Frar.
Jien nisilfek. Int x'issemmihom?
Waħda l-Candlora, l-oħra San Blas.
Bihom ngħarraq lilek u ngħaġtek
ġo l-għar.

Fie on you, fie on you, January.
Lend me two days, my pal February.
I'll lend you. How will you name them?
One Candlemas Day and the other St. Blaise (i.e. February 2 and 3).
With them I'll drown you and your sheep in the cave.

[11]Galley 1977: 161–173. "Celui qui aimait sa mère ou le Samson maltais" in Calame-Griale 1975: 32–44 and 1971.

[12]A typewritten copy of this thesis, presented for the degree of M.A. in September, 1978, is available for reference in the Library of the University of Malta.

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