

## PREFACE

This issue of the *Journal of Maltese Studies* ranges from literary and linguistic aspects of Peter Caxaro's Cantilena to the notarial milieu and the manuscript culture that provided the poem with favourable conditions for its transcription and preservation. While literary devices analysed in the first chapter stress the importance of actualizing the Cantilena as an artistic experience, the notarial milieu broadly depicted in the second chapter provides the social fabric in which the poem was originally transcribed. The third chapter resumes the focus on poetic diction, yet locates it within the wider field of western Arabic dialectology, revealing nuances of poetic meaning through this comparative approach. The last chapter's codicological field once again assumes an extraliterary standpoint, from which the reader gains a rare glimpse of the writing material, the binding process, and other physical features of the Cantilena manuscript.

This volume's academic contributions give scope for a healthy intersection between literary and extraliterary concerns relevant to the oldest extant poem in Maltese. The first chapter's analysis of the poem's allegorical image of a collapsed building, for instance, bears an evident relationship with the notarial practice of dealing in landed property, a well documented concern of notaries amply discussed in the second chapter. And conversely, the second chapter's

depiction of the varying fortunes of Maltese notaries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries highlights the Cantilena's ultimate focus on "vintura," the poem's rhetorically enhanced subject of changing fortunes. While poetic devices transform historical fact into literary artefact, a lived history continues to provide the cultural and social origins of literary motifs. The necessary correlation between a literary text and a wider historical context can also function as the working principle of a single study. The third chapter of this volume, for instance, draws on the more comprehensive repertoire of Andalusian and Maghrebian dialects only to better expound linguistic features and interpretive difficulties within the text. On the other hand, the codicological interest of the last study reminds us that a written work, more so a manuscript, could only subsist in the tangible reality of procuring parchment, paper, thread, and ink, materials that might easily be ignored, but that formed the broader sphere of consumable supplies upon which manuscripts constantly depended.

For decades now, the Cantilena has inspired an unending exchange of critical, historical, linguistic and other scholarly views. This issue of the *Journal of Maltese Studies* merely recognizes and extends this fruitful correspondence between learned Cantilena studies, bringing the research priorities of their respective fields into mutual proximity. Through this volume, the Department of Maltese continues to uphold and encourage the ongoing interdisciplinary approach to our language and its literature.