AN EARLY MALTESE WORD-LIST

By WILLIAM COWAN

THE earliest recorded examples of Maltese that I have been able to exam-
ine are those included by Megiser in his description of Malta of 1611.[1]
Megiser is said to have visited Malta in 1588;[2] according to his account
he published some of the forms he recorded there in his *Thesaurus Poly-
glottus* of 1603. I have not been able to investigate this latter work.

Megiser's list consists of 121 items recorded in transcription, each
followed by a German gloss. Most are single words, but some consist of
short phrases. The last 34 are the numbers from 1-20, the decades to 100,
100 to 500 by hundreds, and 1000. The material is difficult to subject to
any sort of through going analysis. Megiser obviously did not know Maltese,
the text is quite short, has almost no repetitions, and is much marred by
misprints. In addition, his transcription appears to be rather ad hoc, de-
signed to give only a rough approximation of the Maltese sound. Neverthe-
less, some information can be gotten from the list, and some speculations
can be made. In the interests of providing scholars interested in Maltese
with the material, and in the hope that it will further the study of the
historical phonology of Maltese, I present the list of forms, along with
Megiser's introduction.

The following arrangement has been used in listing the forms: First,
the form as recorded by Megiser, followed by emendations where these
seem indicated, and the German gloss. Next the modern Maltese equivalent,
where known, in phonological transcription, equated with the form as it is
in Classical Arabic in a standard transliteration, or a Romance form. The
presentation of Classical Arabic as an equation rather than a derivation
reflects my conviction that Maltese, as other dialects of Arabic, is not
necessarily descended from Classical Arabic, but from a form of speech
that was cognate with it. This is followed in many cases by comments on
the forms, or glosses where the meaning of the Maltese differs from the
meaning of the cognate Classical Arabic form. A number of obscure points
remain unsolved; I hope that other investigators will be able to shed
some light on them.

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[1] Hieronymus Megiser, *Propugnaculum Europae*... (Cracow, 1611).
[2] C.L. Dessoulavy, Review of Sutcliffe *A grammar of the Maltese language, BSOAS*
8.1175-1188.

'Ein kurzes Specimen der Maltesischen Sprach/oder verdeutschung etlicher gemeiner wörter der Africanischen oder Morischen sprach/wie solche von altersher und noch heutigs tags in der Insul Malta gebreuchlich.'

1. *Alla* 'Gott'. /ʔálla/ = /ʔallaah/. The widespread emphasis of Arabic /l/ in this word is reflected in the Maltese vocalization with /a/.

2. *Semme* 'Himmel'. /séma/ = /sama:ʔ/. Megiser's writing of geminate consonants does not seem to have any relation to the presence or absence of gemination in the form itself.

3. *Digna* 'Welt'. /dínya/ = /dunya:/.

4. *Razal* 'Mann'. /rá:jel/ = /rajul/. The use of the graph *z* was probably an attempt to indicate an affricate of some kind which Megiser would have no other way of indicating.

5. *Mara* 'Weib'. /mára/ = /ʔimraʔah/.

6. *Ebni* 'Sohn'. /ʔíbni/ = /ʔibni:/ 'my son'. Megiser's form includes the possessive pronoun.

7. *Schems* (*Scheb-*) 'Jüngling'. /šep/ = /šabb/.

8. *Schiech* 'Alt'. /šíeh/ = /šayx/. The present day Maltese form is irregular in development, showing /ie/ < /i:/, where the expected reflex of Ar. /ay/ is /ey/. The form may be borrowed from a North African dialect of Arabic where the standard of development is /i:/. If the German graph *ie* is to be read [i:], then Megiser's form shows that the pronunciation with /i:/ was current in his day, and the diphthongization to /ie/ had not yet taken place.

9. *Rani* 'Reich'. /ʔá:ni/ = /γaniyy/. Dessoulavy has already pointed out that Megiser's use of *r* here indicates that he was attempting to reproduce the voiced velar spirant /γ/, which was still distinct from the voiced pharyngeal spirant /9/.

10. *Euchir* (Fuchir) 'Arm'. /fʔí:r/ = /faqi:r/. Megiser's form may reflect an intermediate stage */fuqi:r/, where the */u/ developed from analogy with the plural /fuqara:ʔ/.

11. *Sabec* 'Schön'. /sabíeh/ = /ṣabi:ḥ/.

12. *Ecre* 'Heszlich'. /ʔíkreh/ = /ʔakrah/. In general, the Maltese elative forms show irregular development, and have probably been subjected to analogical reformations of various types.

13. *Guir* (*Gbir*) 'Grosz'. /gbí:r/ = /kabi:r/.

14. *Schechen* 'Klein'. /škéyken/. The etymology of the word is disputed, though obviously of the Arabic diminutive pattern.

15. *Alle* 'Hoch'. /ʔá:li/ = /9a:li:/.

16. *Nostrane* (*N_srane*) 'ein Christ'. /nusráːni/ = /nuṣraːniyy/.

17. *Turco* 'ein Turk'. /tórk/ = /turkiyy/. Megiser's form is from Romance rather than from Arabic.

18. *Bachzeb* (*Ḅachr--*) 'Schiffman'. /bâhri/ = /baḥriyy/.

19. *Scit* (*Seit*) 'ein Fischer'. /sáyt/ = /ṣayd/ 'hunting'. Megiser probably got the wrong word here.

20. *Chaiat* 'ein Schneider'. /hayyáːt/ = /xayyaːṭ/.

21. *Racilta* (*Razal ta-*) 'ein Ehrlichman'. /ráːĵel ta-/. The /ta-/ is a genitive particle derived from the 'taaʔ marbuːṭa', and generalized to use after all nouns, both masculine and feminine. In modem Maltese, the /ráːĵel/ is frequently left off, and expressions like /talhalíːp/ 'milkman' and /talláham/ 'butcher' are current. Megiser did not record the rest of the phrase, which could have been anything.

22. *Embliet* 'ein Landsman'. In modem Maltese, /blíet/ = /bilaːd/ is the plural of /bélt/ 'town'. Megiser's form may come from a phrase like /min bilaːd/ 'from (the) country' or the like.

23. *Essem* (*Zessem*) 'der Leib'. /ĵísem/ = /ĵism/.

24. *Ras* 'Haupt'. /ráːs/ = /raʔs/.

25. *Kalc* (*Halc*) 'Mund'. /hálʔ/ = /ḥalq/.

26. *Mnieher* 'Nasz'. /mníeher/ = /manaːxir/ 'nostrils'.

27. *Einnen* 'Aug'. /ʔâynéyn/ = /9aynayn/ 'two eyes'. Megiser's graph *ei* (as opposed to the graph *ie* in the above and other items) reflects the open diphthong [ay] conditioned by the preceding /9/.

28. *It* 'Hand'. /ʔíːt/ = /yad/. The Maltese form, like the same word in many other Arabic dialects, probably goes back to a by-form */ʔiːd/.

29. *Tria* 'Arm, brachium'. /dríeh/ = /ðiraː9/. The use of a final *a* in this form can be taken as an indication that at the time it was recorded, /9/ was still distinct from the other velar and pharygeal spirants in this position. On the initial *t*, see the discussion below.

30. *Bezzile* (*Rezzile*) 'Fusz'. The modern Maltese word for 'foot' is number 32: /síeʔ/, glossed by Megiser as 'thigh'. Megiser's form is obscure, but may be connected with the word for 'leg', /ríĵel/ = /riĵl/, if my emendation is correct.

31. *Sabba* 'Finger'. /sába/ = /ʔiṣba9/.

32. *Siech* 'Schenkel'. /síeʔ/ 'foot' = /saːq/ 'leg'.

33. *Chops* 'Brot'. /hóps/ = /xubz/.

34. *Embit* 'Wein'. /mbíːt/ = /nabiːð/.

35. *Elma* 'Wasser'. /ʔílma/ = /ʔalmaːʔ/ 'the water'. The Maltese form has an agglutinated article.

36. *Summara* 'Flus' (Flöte). /zummâːra/ = /zummaːra/.

37. *Hot* 'Fisch'. /hûːt/ = /ḥuːt/.

38. *Lachan* (*Lacham*) 'Fleisch'. /láham/ = /laḥm/.

39. *Toffia* 'Apffel'. /tufffeha/ = /tuffa:ḥa/.

40. *Lancias* 'Bim'. /lanǰá:s/ = /ʔinǰa:ṣ/. The Maltese has an agglutinated article.

41. *Sigura* 'Baum'. /síǰra/ = /šaǰara/. Megiser's form probably needs amending, since the graph *gu* would probably indicate a voiced velar stop [g], which seems unlikely in this form.

42. *Vebeb* 'Gold'. /dé:p/ = /ðahab/. Dessoulavy viewed the *v* in this form as an indication that */ð/ was still pronounced as a voiced spirant in Megiser's day. This seems unlikely in comparison with 29: *Tria* = /ðira:9/, and 34: *Embit* = /nabi:ð/, in both of which the phoneme is rendered as a stop.

43. *Ofeda* 'Silber'. /fídda/ = /fiḍḍa/. Megiser's initial 'o' is enigmatic.

44. *Flus* 'Geldt'. /flú:s/ = /fulu:s/.

45. *Sarbon* 'Schuch'. /zarbú:n/ = /zarbu:n/.

46. *Chtieb* 'Buch'. /ktíep/ = /kita:b/.

47. *Tar* 'Hauss'. /dá:r/ = /da:r/.

48. *Sotto* 'Bett'. /sódda/ = /sudda/. Megiser's form probably needs amending, but presents too many difficulties.

49. *Eimorro* 'Gehen'. /ʔéyya mmórru/ = /hayya: namurr/ 'let's go!'. Since double letters in Megiser's transcription are no sure guide for gemination, we cannot be sure whether the Maltese form of his day was the one cognate with Ar. /marr/, or the one current in modern Maltese, which is cognate with /ma:r/ 'to move',

50. *Cul* 'essen'. /kól/ = /kul/. This is an imperative. Megiser is inconsistent in choosing which inflected form of a verb to quote.

51. *Nisitop* (*Nisirop*) 'Trinken'. /níšrop/ 'I drink' = /našrab/ 'we drink'.

52. *Camer* 'Mon'. /ʔámar/ = /qamar/.

53. *Belt* 'Statt'. /bélt/ = /balad/.

54. *Nerquo* (*Nergbo*) 'Reitten'. /nírgbu/ = /narkab/.

55. *Mesicchero* (*Nesicchero*) 'Schiffen'. This is probably the first person plural of a *fa99al*-type verb.

56. *Siemel* 'Pferd'. /zíemel/ = /za:mil/.

57. *Kelb* 'Hund'. /kélp/ = /kalb/.

58. *Kattus* 'Katz'. /ʔattú:s/ = /qattu:ṣ/.

59. *Far* 'Mauss'. /fá:r/ = /faʔr/.

60. *Borin* 'Raubvogel'. The Maltese is obscure. The first part is to be equated with the element /bu-/ = /ʔabu:-/, current in many Maltese plant and animal names.

61. *Beberi* 'Geyer'. The Maltese is obscure. It probably refers to a sea bird of some sort.

62. *Sajjak* 'Spr...tz'. Both the German and the Maltese are obscure, but the Maltese is probably to be related to /zakak/ 'chaffinch'.

63. *Asaph* 'Sperber'. The Maltese remains obscure, but may be connected with /ʔạsfûːr/ = /9aṣfuːr/.

64. *Balarg* 'habich [sic]'. The Maltese remains obscure.

65. *Allas* 'Falck'. The Maltese remains obscure.

66. *Aroch* 'Adler'. The Maltese form is cognate with /ʔarruxx/ 'Roc, mythological bird'. Modern Maltese does not appear to have preserved the word.

67. *Teiep* 'schöne heutere zeit'. /táyyep/ = ṭayyib/.

68. *Hasseltrisse* 'Bösenwetter'. The first part of the word may be related to /hazfːn/ 'bad' = /ḥazîːn/ 'sad'. The *-trisse* remains obscure.

69. *Schini* 'ein Galee'. /šîːni/ = /ši:niː/.

70. *Riech* 'Wind'. /rîeh/ = /riːḥ/.

71. *Guart* 'Rosen'. /wârt/ = /ward/.

72. *Schiobo* 'Kätz'. /šabó/. According to Barbera,[3] who quotes Falzon, the Maltese comes from French /žabo/ 'frill of a shirt'.

73. *Sfragel* 'Quitten apffel'. /sfárjel/ = /safarjel/. Megiser's form may be a misprint, but there could equally well have been a metathesis in a form of this nature.

74. *Char* 'Cucummer'. /hyâːr/ = /xiyaːr/.

75. *Tin* 'Feigen'. /tîːn/ = /tiːn/.

76. *Ecnep* (*Einep*) 'Trauben'. /ʔénep/ = /9inab/.

77. *Alla scleb* 'Gott grüsz euch'. The first word is obviously to be connected with /ʔallaːh/, the second is obscure. It is possible that emendation to (*selem*) may be correct, connecting the form with modern /séllem/ 'to greet' = /sallama/.

78. *Sbe elcit* 'ein Guten Morgen'. The modern Maltese word for 'morning' is /zbîeh/ = /ṣabaːḥ/. Megiser's form needs emending, but presents too many difficulties. The *elcit* may be equivalent to /hâyr/ = /xayr/ 'good', with a prefixed definite article and a *t* misprinted for *r*. The phrase would be like modern Arabic /ṣabâːḥ ilxéːr/ 'good morning'.

79. *Belt elcita* 'Guten abend'. The Maltese is obscure. The *elcita* appears to be a feminine form of the *elcit* above. Perhaps we should emend the first word to (*lelt*) and equate it with the word for 'night', /léyl/ = /layl/. The *t* would be a representation of the *taaʔ marbuːṭa* of the singulative /leyla/.

80. *Nesi ceiri* 'Gott danck euch'. /nîzzi hâyr/ = /nijzi: xayr/ 'we thank'. *Ceiri* may be equated to /xayriː/ 'my thanks'.

81. *Alla jack* 'Gott behüt euch'. The phrase is probably equivalent to

[3] D.G. Barbera, *Dizionario Maltese-Arabo-Italiano* (Beyrouth, 1939).

/ʔallaːhu maʕak/ 'God (be) with you', in modern Maltese /ʔálla míːyak/.

82. *Ve mort ve conto* 'Wo seit ihr gewest'. /féyn mórtu-- féyn kóntu/ = /ʔayna murtum--ʔayna kuntum/. The phrase appears to mean 'Where did you all go--where were you all'.

83. *Cale amar* 'Wils Gott/geliebts Gott'. /kallayámar/ = /kallaːhu yaʔmur/ 'as God wishes'. The prefixed /k/ is equated in modern Maltese with /yék/ 'if', of doubtful origin.

84. *Iena* 'Ich bin'. /yéna/ = /ʔanaː/.

85. *Entiboa* 'Du bist'. Megiser has interpreted two words as one: *enti-* is the same as modern /ʔínti/ = /ʔinti/ 'you'. It is feminine singular in Arabic, but is a free variant of /ʔínt/ in Maltese, which makes no distinction here between masculine and feminine. The *-boa* is the same as modern /ʔúːwa/ = /huwa/ 'he'. The use of the third person masculine singular independent pronoun as a copula survives in modern Maltese, but is generally reduced to /ʔúː/.

86. *Hua* 'Der ist'. Either this or the preceding *-boa* is probably a misprint. It is possible that a stress difference could account for the difference in vowel.

87. *Lachanat* 'Wir seind'. /ʔáhna/ = /nahnu/. The initial *l* may represent a change /n/>/l/, seen also in item 68. The modern /ʔáhna/, corresponding to the form current in most other dialects, is not a development from Megiser's form or the one current in Classical Arabic, but represents what must have been an alternative form in Proto-Arabic.

88. *Quachat* (*Guachat*) 'Eins'. /wíehet/ = /waːhid/.

89. *Fne* 'Zwey'. /méyn/ = /ʔiθnayn/. Dessoulavy[4] took the *f* in this form as an attempt by Megiser to record some sort of voiceless spirant, presumably /θ/, an indication that it had not gone to /t/ before Megiser's day.

90. *Fliesan* (*Flieſan*) 'Drey'. /tlíeta/ = /θalaːθa/. This is another example of Megiser's use of *f* to indicate voiceless spirant. The final *-n* remains obscure.

91. *Herba* 'Vier'. /ʔérba/ = /ʔarbaʕa/. The initial *h-* may be a typographical mixup, and Megiser may have recorded the form as *erbaba*. See below the word for 'seven'.

92. *Camsa* (*Chamsa*) 'Fünff'. /hámsa/ = /xamsa/.

93. *Seta* 'Sechs'. /sítta/ = /sitta/.

94. *Sebaha* 'Siben'. /séba/ = /sabʕa/. Megiser's use of *-h-* here is probably an attempt to represent the reflex of the /ʕ/.

95. *Sſniema* (*Sſmiena*) 'Acht'. /tmíenya/ = /θamaːniya/. The use of *sſ* here is obscure.

[4] op. cit.

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96. *Tesa* 'Ne⌐ /dísa/ = /tis9a/. One of the most puzzling problems of Maltese historical phonology is why the modern Maltese word for 'nine' begins with /d/ instead of the expected /t/. Sutcliffe's[5] explanation that the /s/ voiced to /z/, causing the /t/ to voice to /d/, whereupon the /z/ devoiced back to /s/, is unacceptable. Similarly unacceptable is Dessoulavy's[6] contention that Megiser, as a German, was congenitally incapable of distinguishing an initial /d/ from an initial /t/, since Germans can and do make this distinction in their own language, and presumably could in Megiser's day. Speakers of English, however, have difficulty in hearing the distinction that Germans make, since the German allophones are different from the English allophones. The fact remains that Megiser did record some words with *t* which begin with /d/ in modern Maltese, like *Tar* 'house', modern /da:r/, and *Tria* 'am', modern /dríeh/, forms which the comparative evidence indicates were always pronounced with /d/. He also recorded with *t* words which begin with /d/ in modern Maltese, like *Tesa* 'nine', modern /dísa/, and *Tesatasch* 'nineteen', modern /tsatá:š/ (at an earlier stage */disatá:š), which the comparative evidence indicates were once pronounced with /t/. Note, however, that he records the related word for 'ninety' with initial *d*: *Dischin*, modern /diséyn/. I do not think the two cases have anything to do with each other. In the first case, it is probable that Megiser used a *t* to indicate an emphatic */ḍ/, and which would have developed in the words under question through proximity to /r/ and /a:/. The vocalization of modern Maltese words like /dá:r/ 'house', /ná:r/ 'fire', as well as the evidence from other dialects, shows that /r/ next to /a:/ was emphatic at a previous stage of the language. This emphasis influenced neighboring sounds, and was still present in Maltese when Megiser recorded these forms. It has since disappeared from Maltese, but its effect can be seen in vocalizations such as /á:/, as opposed to the non-emphatic reflex /íe/.

In the second case, we are not dealing with sound change, but with sound substitution. There are no phonological factors that could have changed /t/ to /d/ in the words related to 'nine' in Maltese, so the explanation of the forms must be sought elsewhere. Megiser's list gives us a clue. I consider his record accurate: the words for 'nine' and 'nineteen' began with /t/, and the form for 'ninety' began with /d/. What Megiser has preserved for us is analogical change in mid-stream, so to speak. Mutilation of numbers for purposes of concealment is a feature of Mediterranean culture.[7] The word for 'ninety' had suffered a mutilation of this

[5] op. cit.
[6] op. cit.
[7] Ph. Marçais, *Le parler arabe de Djidjelli* (Paris, n.d.).

type in Maltese prior to Megiser's visit to Malta, perhaps because of some magical or other special reason. The mutilation was probably recent, because the related words for 'nine' and 'nineteen' had not yet been affected by the analogical change that subsequent to Megiser's departure did affect the words to the extent of changing their initial /t/ to /d/ to coincide with the initial /d/ of 'ninety'. The regular reduction of unstressed vowels in open syllables and the subsequent devoicing of the /d/ before a voiceless /s/, both of which are regular developments in Maltese, brought about the modern form of 'nineteen' with the initial /t/, fortuitously restoring the original sound.

97. *Assara* 'Zehen'. /ʔặšra/ = /9ašara/.

98. *Tash* 'Eilf'. /hdá:š/ = /ʔaḥada 9ašar/. The modern vocalization indicates that the /d/ comes from an earlier */ḍ/, again recorded here by Megiser with *t*.

99. *Fnas* (*Fnash*) 'Zwölff'. /tná:š/ = /i9na: 9ašar/.

100. *Flietash* 'Dreyzehen'. /tlittá:š/ = /θala:θata 9ašar/.

101. *Herbatasch* 'Vierzehen'. /ʔerbatá:š/ = /ʔarba9ata 9ašar/.

102. *Chamsatasch* 'Funffzehen'. /hmistá:š/ = /xamsata 9ašar/.

103. *Setasch* 'Sechzehen'. /sittá:š/ = /sittata 9ašar/.

104. *Sebatasch* 'Siebenzehen'. /zbatá:š/ = /sab9ata 9ašar/.

105. *Sfniematasch* (*Sfmientasch*) 'Achtzehen'. /tmintá:š/ = /θama:niyata 9ašar/.

106. *Tesatasch* 'Neunzehen'. /tsatá:š/ = /tis9ata 9ašar/.

107. *Aszrin* 'Zwanszig'. /ʔọšrí:n/ = /9ašri:n/.

108. *Quachat* (*Guachat*) *aszirin* 'Ein und zwanszig'. /wíehed uʔọšrí:n/ = /wa:ḥid wa9ašri:n/.

109. *Flieti* (*Flietin*) 'Dreissig'. /tletí:n/ = /θala:θi:n/.

110. *Herbin* 'Vierszig'. /ʔerbéyn/ = /ʔarba9i:n/.

111. *Chamsin* 'Funffszig'. /hamsí:n/ = /xamsi:n/.

112. *Setin* 'Sechszig'. /sittí:n/ = /sitti:n/.

113. *Sebei* (*Sebein*) 'Siebenszig'. /sebéyn/ = /sab9i:n/.

114. *Sfremi* (*Sfmenin*) 'Achszig'. /tmení:n/ = /θama:ni:n/.

115. *Dischin* 'Neunszig'. /diséyn/ = /tis9i:n/.

116. *Mia* 'Hundert'. /míyya/ = /miʔa/.

117. *Metein* 'Zwey hundert'. /mitéyn/ = /miʔatayn/.

118. *Flehmia* (*Flefmia*) 'Drey hundert'. /tlít míyya/ = /θala:θumiʔa/.

119. *Herbamia* 'Vier hundert'. /ʔerba míyya/ = /ʔarba9umiʔa/.

120. *Chamsmia* 'Fünff hundert'. /hámes míyya/ = /xamsumiʔa/.

121. *Elf* 'Tausent'. /ʔélf/ = /ʔalf/.

Megiser closes with the following statement:

'Mehres vo. dieser Maltesischen wie auch andem Africanischen Sprachen findet man in meinem Thesauro Polyglotto vō 400 Sprachen: so gedruckt ist zer Franckfurt in 1603 Jahr: dahin ich den Günstigen Leser wil remittiert haben.'

More material of this nature is needed. When other lists, recorded by speakers of other languages, and speakers of Maltese itself come to light, we will be able to establish a body of texts whose analysis and comparison will clarify even more the permutations that Maltese has undergone from the earliest times of the Arabic conquest to the present day.[*]