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**A Mixed Orthography of the Maltese Language:
The Latin-Arabic Alphabet**

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A MIXED ORTHOGRAPHY OF THE MALTESE LANGUAGE: THE LATIN-ARABIC ALPHABET

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ABSTRACT

The article outlines the history of the mixed Latin-Arabic alphabet which was utilised by a number of scholars to write the Maltese language between the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries. The author argues that, while the 19th century writers (Azzopardi, Trapani, Casolani, Canolo) made use of a rather limited amount of Arabic characters (not more than six), during the eighteenth century this practice was extended to include up to twelve Arabic characters which could be combined with Latin letters (e.g. De Guignard, *Regole per la lingua maltese*, Thezan).

This orthographic system found strong opposition during the nineteenth century (e.g. Cumbo, Badger, Vella) and eventually, it was the Latin alphabet which was to be adopted for the codification of the Maltese language. However, a closer study of the mixed alphabet could shed further light on the phonological evolution of the Maltese language as well as on certain linguistic traits which had disappeared earlier in time in spoken Arabic but might have still been maintained in spoken Maltese.



One of the aims behind G.P.F. Agius De Soldanis's grammar was to provide the Maltese and the Knights with a uniform linguistic code based on the Latin alphabet:

Conosco molti Maltesi e stranieri, li quali diletlandosi di questa lingua Punica Maltese la scrivono come meglio loro torna in acconcio, servendosi altri puramente del carattere Latino, altri del Latino ed Arabo, come appunto costuma di fare lo studioso, ed erudito Sacerdote *D. Giovanni Cachia Maltese*, perito della lingua Araba si antica che moderna. Mi giova sperare, che con questo nuovo Alfabeto, quei che si dilettaano, e quei che di proposito studiano questa lingua, da oggi in avanti potranno scriverla e leggerla agevolmente col carattere Latino [1 pp. 18–19].

According to De Soldanis, '*D. Giovanni Cachia Maltese*' was only one example of those 'Maltesi e stranieri [...] [che si servono] del Latino ed Arabo' to transcribe the Maltese language. The Gozitan scholar does not give us any other names of people who adopted such a mixed alphabet. However, examples of such scripts have survived to our days.

The last time such a mixed script was recorded seems to have been the year 1844 (approx.). The *Piccolo Dizionario Maltese-Italiano-Inglese*, published anonymously in 1856 (but possibly compiled by Baron V. Azzopardi), reproduces the following words which must have been included in a text-book prepared for the Lyceum students:

Composto per il Liceo dell'Università degli studi.

ح cabel, *corda*
 خ maخzen, *magazzino*
 ق naقra, *leggo*
 ش shein, *niente*
 W bedwi, *contadino*
 ع eidli, *ditemi*
 غ sغ-i-ra, *piccola*. [3 chart pp. 3–5]¹

The above list comprises the six Arabic characters ع, غ, ح, خ, ق and ش, which stand for the current Maltese letters *gh*, *h*, *q* and *x*.

1. This chart, entitled *Elenco di alcuni alfabeti maltesi*, contains a list of 15 alphabets which were used prior to the *Piccolo Dizionario*. The above list is inserted between two other lists dated respectively, 1844 and 1845.

Going further back in time, one comes across the *English and Maltese Reading book for the use of Government Primary Schools*, published in 1839 [6],² and *A Catalogue of the different kinds of fish of Malta and Gozo with their Maltese, Latin, Italian, English and French names as well as their season*, published by G. Trapani in 1838 [21]. The same six Arabic characters utilized in the 1844 publication are again made use of in Trapani [21] and [Casolani] [6] to represent the four current Maltese letters *gh*, *h*, *q* and *x*. In an unnumbered page entitled EXPLANATION, Trapani [21] points out: ‘The right pronunciation of the following characters cannot be conveyed except by word of mouth; but it is precisely as that which is given to them in their original Arabick alphabet, ح, ق, خ, غ, ع, ش’, while [Casolani] [6] gives the following explanation on the pronunciation of the letters in the unnumbered page entitled ‘Pronunciation of the Maltese Alphabet’:

Maltese pronunciation	English pronunciation
ح ح in	soft guttural h
خ خ ait	hard guttural h
ق ق alb	hard guttural k
ش ش em ش	as sh in shame

ع andي } these two letters have no corresponding sounds in the English alphabet, and can only be acquired by hearing them pronounced.

Other nineteenth century writers made use of Arabic characters. Amongst other things, G.M. Canolo published in London an anonymous translation of the Gospel, according to St John. In the unnumbered page entitled *NOTIZIA*, he gives the following explanation regarding his alphabet:

NOTIZIA

NELL'ALFABETO seguente si spiega, in qual modo si deve pronunciare il Maltese, il quale si conforma per la maggior parte all'Italiano, in quanto ai vocali, ed ai consonanti.

Siccome però il Maltese è un dialetto veramente Arabo, viene aggiunta una colonna indicando quelle lettere particolari, che hanno

2. It is Badger [4 p. 129] who attributes this reading book to A. Casolani. On this, and the following nineteenth-century mixed alphabets [2 pp. 75–101].

la derivazione Arabica. Le due lettere ع e Ġ, come pure Arabe, si sono stampate tali quali: non vi ha carattere Europeo, che possa rappresentare in modo giusto la pronunciazione delle medesime.

Per riguardo a certe parole Italiane, che si trovano miste col Maltese, si è conformato all'Italiano nello scrivere le lettere, C, e G; e.g. Giuanni, Ligi, etc. [5]

F. Vella also feels he has to give an explanation regarding his use of the following Arabic characters:

ع Ġ •

Daun it-tliet ittri •uma ittri ع arab l'euel tisseyah ع in, it-tieni Ġ in, it-tielet •e. Il-pronunzia tahhom, u tal littri l'actar tkal turia is sura l'issib il koddjem [22 p. 4].³

Despite the fact that a mixed Latin-Arabic alphabet was not so easy to master, this orthographic system found favour not only amongst writers but also amongst certain educationalists and administrators. John Hookham Frere openly advocated the adoption of a mixed alphabet in a memorandum he sent to the University Council: 'It has been shown already that the Maltese language may be usefully employed if written in the Arabic character, and that this is an acquirement within the reach of mere children, who ought not to be left in ignorance of the grammar of the language which they habitually speak. I should, therefore, venture with submission to propose that the grammar of the Maltese language combined with the Italian, and the practice of writing it in the Arabic and perhaps also in the common alphabet, should be introduced in the lower school, and taught at the same time with the rudiments of Latin to boys of ten years old and under'.⁴

However, the proposal of a mixed alphabet also met with opposition on the part of others. The educationalist, Salvatore Cumbo, clearly dismisses the idea of any semitic characters being added to the Latin letters: '[. . .] per facilitar l'istruzione, ed aprire l'adito alla lingua italiana, lingua la più necessaria per gli studii in quest'isola, l'idioma maltese

3. It is J. Aquilina who attributes this anonymous work to F. Vella [2 p. 85].

4. I am quoting from Marshall [16 p. 11]. According to Badger, the creation of a mixed alphabet is to be attributed to the Government commissioner, G.C. Lewis: 'Nella formazione di quest'alfabeto non abbiamo certamente di che ammirare la saviezza del Sig. G.C. Lewis, uno dei Commissionarj di S.M. il quale per quanto siamo informati ne fu principale compositore' [4 p. 125].

dovrebbe scriversi coll'alfabeto italiano; nè a questo devono aggiungersi lettere prese dall'arabo, perchè queste di loro natura sono incompatibili colle italiane' [12 p. 4n].⁵

G.P. Badger is also convinced of the non-practicality of such a system: 'Richiamiamo in primo luogo l'attenzione dei nostri leggitori sull'alfabeto che venne adottato per scrivere il maltese nelle scuole del governo. Egli è composto di quasi tutte le lettere romane, e di sei lettere arabe, le quali ultime non solo tolgono la simmetria dei caratteri romani, ma offrono altresì varj inconvenienti sì nello stampare che nello scrivere. Questa inutile innovazione [. . .]' [4 p. 124].

The fiercest opposer of the mixed system was probably F. Vella, a Maltese grammarian who published his works in Leghorn, Italy [23, 24, 25, 26].⁶ According to him, the mixed alphabet adopted in some primary schools of the time contributed substantially to discouraging pupils from attending school:

Tal male [riduzione degli iscritti nelle scuole primarie] non sta nella distanza [tra scuole e villaggi], ma nell'alfabeto arabo-romano, che ha confuso la mente dei maestri e degli scolari, inutile per imparare la lettura araba, e pieno di difficoltà per imparare l'italiano. [. . .] Dalla scelta dell'alfabeto dipende la coltivazione della nostra lingua, l'istruzione popola[re], il progresso, o l'abbandono. [25 pp. 4-6]

If the first few decades of the twentieth century have left their mark on Maltese history because of what is universally termed the *language question*, Vella was totally convinced that the first few decades of the nineteenth century were leaving their mark on Maltese linguistic history because of a veritable *alphabet question*! It was to solve this *questione alfabetica* once and for all that he devised his orthographic system based on Italian letters. Such an intention is clearly highlighted in the following appeal to his Maltese compatriots:

5. The English translation of this passage, given in Marshall [16 p. 17], omits the rendering of 'nè'. This obvious oversight contributes to giving a false impression of Cumbo's ideas on the subject.
6. The 1838 and 1839 anonymous publications are certainly Vella's, not only because they are published in Livorno but also because the alphabet used is that created by him (e.g. *h'*, *h'*, *g'*, etc.).

Concittadini!

Il desiderio da voi espresso d'introdurre la nostra lingua scritta nelle scuole del popolo, mi suggerì il pensiero di compilare un Vocabolario Maltese, Italiano ed Inglese.

I dizionarij del Vassallo, del Cardinali, e del Baretti mi servirono di guida nelle rispettive lingue, e l'unico alfabeto che concilia l'ortografia italiana, e maltese mi giovò per scrivere quest'ultima.

Dedicandovi il mio lavoro sento il bisogno di aggiungermi, che il nostro concittadino G.M. Pulis si è generosamente incaricato della stampa. Se le mie fatiche saranno da voi gradite, cesserà l'interminabile questione alfabetica; la lingua Maltese avrà adito nelle scuole, e l'opera del Vassallo riceverà lo sviluppo che attende da mezzo secolo! [26 unnumbered page]

History has now shown that the stand taken in favour of a Latin alphabet by people like De Soldanis, Vella, Cumbo and the *Accademia Filologica* was to be the winning one.

THE MIXED ALPHABET IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Very little is known about 'D. Giovanni Cachia Maltese'. It seems that De Soldanis must have shown him the manuscript of his Maltese grammar before sending it into print. In fact, Cachia wrote to De Soldanis on 27 September 1749 and gave the latter his views on the characters adopted by De Soldanis.⁷ Apart from the ξ , which should stand for current *gh*, Cachia does not suggest which Arab characters should be utilized to represent other current letters like *g*, *ġ*, *h*, *ħ*, *k* and *q*. But his belief that the guttural sounds in the Maltese language should be rendered by Arabic characters is clearly highlighted in his letter. [7 pp. 35–46]

A clear eighteenth century example of the Maltese language written in the mixed alphabet is given in the description of Malta published in 1791 by a French visitor to the island [13].⁸ De Guignard points out that there exists no stable orthography of the Maltese language and that this is due mainly to the fact that, distances being so short on the island, hardly anybody ever resorts to writing: verbal communication seems to be most suited to the size of the island. However, De Guignard suggests that

7. The letter is to be found at the *National Library of Malta*, in the Ms. catalogued as Libr. 155, ff. 130r–131v.

8. This anonymous work is attributed to F.E. de Guignard, *Compte de St. Priest*.

someone should take it upon himself to come up with a fixed orthographic system:

Maintenant pour écrire le patois Maltois il faut emprunter des caractères étrangers chacun libre d'orthographe à volonté tâche en multipliant les lettres qu'il emploie, ou de toute autre façon, de rapprocher le lecteur de la véritable prononciation du mot qu'il lui présente. Cet inconvénient est peu senti parce-que la langue maltoise se trouve restreinte dans les bornes de l'Isle & que dans cette isle les distances sont trop peu considérables pour que les affaires s'y traitent par écrit de particulier à particulier. Il seroit cependant intéressant que quelqu'un s'occupât de fixer toute incertitude sur cet article en déterminant invariablement un alphabet. [13 pt. II pp. 62-63]

As an example of the Maltese language, De Guignard reproduces the following three quatrains written by Gioacchino Navarro:

Tliet . gaxxiel bil Malta 2176

I.

Min għitma fit-tama
It-tamā tšarraġ biez,
Ja għmel ir-riez fil bomblu
Ja zsep l'isiefer biez.

II

Smaic l'inti tarbit l'imzabba,
Għidli fl'imzabba üi zralek
Eja tżaddet għommoċ migei,
Għü nazzseb liena zrali pżalek

III

għadira li tiürop minnza,
Nitolboċ lad-dardarżje ü,
Għü imür zmjén'u izi jezor
Tfit tiüza mas-sibzje ü.

The alphabet used by Navarro is made up of Latin letters together with another twelve characters loaned from Arabic or Persian. According to De Guignard, this orthographic system was the best which had been produced to his day.⁹ However, the Frenchman himself does not resort to the use of Navarro's semitic characters, as can be gathered from his transcription of Maltese place names. The following are but a few, selected from Part II of De Guignard's work: p. 11 *Zebug* (with *g* for current *ġ*); p. 10 *Uyed el osel*, p. 12 *Ghar Kbir*, p. 15 *Ayn Filep*, p. 18 *Aassieli* (with *o*, *gh*, *a* and *aa* for current *gh*); p. 6 *Rahal* (with *h* for current *ħ*); p. 11 *Qrendi*, p. 16 *makluba* (with *q* and *k* for current *q*); p. 7 *Marsaschiroque*, p. 11 *Nasciar* (with *sch* or *sc* for current *x*).

De Guignard does not specify which are the twelve semitic characters and obviously does not distinguish between the Arab and the Persian ones. However, the five characters that appear in the twelve lines composed by Navarro are quite clearly Arabic ones. One of them, the *gim* (utilized instead of current *ġ*), had never been recorded in the nineteenth century [2 chart between 90–91]. Moreover, last century no more than six semitic characters were utilized by writers adopting the mixed alphabet. These were all Arabic ones since nobody seems to have resorted to the use of Persian characters.¹⁰ Thus, one could come to the conclusion that while nineteenth century writers were moving further away from the idea of having the Maltese language transcribed in Arabic script (Bellanti is obviously the big exception), eighteenth century linguists were much more attracted by this solution: they not only adopted more Arabic characters but also resorted to the use of Persian ones.

THE THEZAN MANUSCRIPT

The grammar and dictionary compiled by the French Knight Thezan, and mentioned in I. S. Mifsud's *Biblioteca Maltese* confirm this hypoth-

9. 'Les chansons maltoises rapportées dans le paragraphe suivant sont écrites par M. l'Abbé *Navarro*, qui pour en faciliter la lecture à ceux qui sont pas versés dans la connoissance de la langue Arabe, n'empruntant que douze lettres de cette langue ou de la Persanne & les ajoutant à l'alphabet italien dont l'usage a prévalu, s'en est formé un plus parfait que tous ceux qu'on avoit essayé jusqu'à ce jour' [13 pt II p. 63].
10. Naturally, I am not taking into consideration G.G. Bellanti's *Avvertimenti per la ristorazione della lingua maltese* (National Library Malta MS., Bibl 446, 1829) since the alphabet proposed by him is totally semitic, and thus not a mixed one. '[Bellanti] advocated the use of the Arabic alphabet plus the Persian symbols for *ċ* and *ġ* respectively, and included also letters for lost Arabic sounds but provided no symbol for non-Arabic *p* sound and the vowels *e* and *o*' [2 p. 85].

esis. P. Glison had described the Thezan manuscript as comprising a Maltese grammar ('Contiene la Grammatica Maltese'), an Italian-Maltese dictionary ('col suo Dizionario Italiano'), and a Maltese-Italian dictionary ('e Maltese'). Glison gives us the title of the manuscript (*In nomine Domini nostri Jesu Christi, Amen.*), but not the name of the author (*'Grammatica Maltese composta da un personaggio Francese'*).

Mifsud elaborates further, in a footnote on the manuscript:

Il suddetto mss. fu composto da un Cavalier Francese, essendovi in fine della Grammatica notata la seguente memoria: 'Fine della Grammatica del Thezan, nobile, pio, Cavalier Francese'. Vi sono nella detta Grammatica tutte le regole, ma per l'alfabeto si assegnano dieci lettere Arabiche, con le quali si uniscono le lettere Latine, per dar grata armonia, ed aver una facile pronuncia. Siegue il Dizionario Italiano-Maltese, comodo per i Forestieri, ma non è compito, mancando in esso diverse parole. [18 p. 325n]

He thus specifies the surname of the author of the grammar ('Thezan'), confirms that the manuscript contains a grammar and a 'Dizionario Italiano-Maltese' but makes no mention at all of a Maltese-Italian dictionary. Most important of all, he gives a short description of the alphabet adopted by Thezan: ten Arabic characters combined with Latin letters.

We do not know anything else about the content of this manuscript, which may be considered as lost. However, Mifsud, who had the opportunity to examine the manuscript closely, dates it back as far as the year 1600.¹¹ The next time we hear of it is in 1781. Francesco de Smitmer includes Thezan's manuscript in the fifth section of his catalogue, entitled *Istorie particolari relazioni ed altri varj trattati e notizie dell'isola di Malta, e delle sue chiese, antichità, lingua, ed uomini illustri* [14 p. 214]. The entry on Thezan is not marked by an asterisk. Since De Smitmer had stated in his preface that 'I libri indicati con asterisco sono quelli, che già possiede il Commendatore Smitmer. Gli altri son quelli, ch'egli cerca per compire la sua Biblioteca' [14 Pt. III], it is obvious that he did not possess the manuscript. Moreover, the extremely limited and incomplete information given by him ('THESAN', Cav. Grammatica Maltese. MS') leads me to believe that he might not even have seen a copy of the text.

11. Cfr. the *Indice Cronologico degli Scrittori, delli quali si fa menzione nell'Appendice* [18 p. 324], where the Thezan manuscript is catalogued as follows: 'Anno di Cristo 1600-Cavalier Thezan - Grammatica Maltese, e suo Dizionario'.

On the other hand, a nineteenth century attestation of Thezan's work points to the fact that the manuscript was definitely still in circulation in this period.¹² On 2 November 1841, the 'Società Medica d'incoraggiamento di Malta' adopted the following alphabet to transcribe the Maltese language:

**ALFABETO SANZIONATO DALL'ACCADEMIA
PER SCRIVERE LA LINGUA MALTESE**

Nome delle figure	Figure sustituite	Valore italiano	Esempi	
Alef	A a	A	Art	Terra
Bet	B b	B	Bniedem	Uomo
Ċim	Ċ ċ	C	Ċpar	Nebbia
Dalet	D d	D	Dar	Casa
E	E e	E	Elf	Mille
Fe	F f	F	Fart	Toro
Ġim	Ġ ġ	G	Ġbin	Fronte
Het	H h	—	Hadid	Ferro
Ijeł	Ij ħ	H	Ijena	Consolazione
Iod	I i Y y	I	Yeddeiyak	Restringersi
Koff	K k	—	Kaddsu	Celebrarouo
Lamed	L l	L	Leil	Notte
Men	M m	M	Mohtar	Scelto
Nun	N n	N	Neda	Ruggiada
O	O o	O	Omm	Madre
Pe	P p	P	Perper	Sventolare
Qeff	Q q	Ch	Qeuqba	Stella
Res	R r	R	Ràs	Capo
Samel	S s	S	Sema	Cielo
Tet	T t	T	Tafal	Argilla
Uau	U u W w	U	Wahdu	Solo •
Ve	V v	V	Venven	Vibrare
Xin	X x	Sc	Xatt	Spiaggia
Zain	Z z	Z	Ziemel	Cavallo
Ċade	Ċ ċ	Ts	Ċopp	Zoppo
Ġimel	Ġ ġ	Gh	Ġendus	Vitello
Zain	Z z	—	Zar	Antro

12. I am indebted to the pro-rector of the University of Malta, Prof. R. Ellul Micallef, for pointing out this important document to me.

This alphabet was drawn up by Prof. Stefano Zerafa, who had been commissioned by the 'Società Medica' to do so. The following are the minutes of 2 November 1841 sitting of the 'Società Medica':

Tornata del 2 novembre. Il Segretario partecipò alla Società il tenore della lettere de' Signori Dottori AURANEL, e BARTHELEMY dirette al Presidente, in cui lo pregavano a voler proporli quai soci corrispondenti insieme col Sig. Dr. THORE—Indi annunziò che il Sig. Dr. FENECH resignò la carica di Vice-presidente.

Il Sig. Dr. N. ZAMMIT lesse il secondo trattenimento delle sue riflessioni su la Frenologia.

Il Segretario lesse il rapporto della commissione incaricata di esaminare la memoria del Signor Prof. ZERAFÀ su la lingua maltese. I relatori applaudirono i principi contenuti in essa produzione, e raccomandarono l'approvazione dell'alfabeto progettato. Le principali proposizioni sono—che il parlar di linguaggi è di pertinenza fisiologica, e quindi il determinare il numero delle articolazioni che suonano in bocca di un popolo—che le articolazioni maltesi ascendono a 27—che nel tradurre in iscritto le articolazioni non si deve usare una lettera per più articolazioni, e vice-versa—che nelle scienze esatte si dà la preferenza a quel che per lo primo fu fatto, onde l'alfabeto progettato fu composto da segni già usati da TEZAN, ABELA, AGIUS, WIZZINO, e VASSALLI—L'opinione della commissione anzidetta si accettò dall'Accademia, e si deliberò invitare tutti i membri a farne uso dell'alfabeto sanzionato scrivendo l'oriental lingua maltese (1).

In seguito a proposta fatta dal Sig. Dr. LA FERLA l'Accademia deliberò intraprendere la compilazione della biografia medica maltese [20 p. xxxiii].¹³

The above information is of extreme importance for two reasons. In the first place, we are informed that Zerafa based the codification of his alphabet on the work of his predecessors. It stands to reason, therefore, that in 1841 Thezan's grammar and dictionary were still available to scholars since Zerafa had actually consulted them. The second conclusion one can draw is that Thezan must have definitely written his work in the seventeenth century. In fact, when reading out Zerafa's report, the secretary of the 'Società Medica' lists the five scholars of Maltese in chronological order: Thezan (?), Abela (1647), Agius [de Soldanis] (1750),

13. The alphabet is at p. XLV.

Wzzino (1752) and Vassalli (1796). Thus, the Thezan manuscript should have been drawn up between 1600 (date given by I.S. Mifsud) and 1647 (date of publication of G.F. Abela's *Descrittione di Malta*).

THE 'REGOLE PER LA LINGUA MALTESE'

E. Michel is the author of various articles on the holdings of foreign libraries concerning Malta. While going through his *I manoscritti delle biblioteche di Roma relativi alla storia di Malta*, [17 pp. 115–142] I came across the following annotation which aroused my curiosity:

In fine, risalgono al secolo XVIII il breve di Clemente XI, [. . .], e un volumetto di piccolo formato, di ff. 190, intitolato *Regole per la lingua maltese* (P. 164). È una specie di grammatica, con una breve trattazione delle parti del discorso: tutto il volume si può dire piuttosto un dizionario alfabetico italiano maltese. Non porta alcuna indicazione di autore. [17 p. 133]

The volume Michel was referring to is to be found at the Biblioteca Vallicelliana in Rome, catalogued as P. 164. It is hard bound with a yellow cover and measures 14.7 × 10.25 cm. The total number of leaves is 193 and each sheet (14.3 × 10 cm) has been numbered progressively in red by the Vallicelliana librarians: This means that the *Regole per la lingua maltese* is made up of a total of 386 pages.

The name 'L-ga- P. Spinule' is written on f. lv. The ink and handwriting are different from those of the rest of the volume.

The title of the book, *Regole per la lingua maltese*, is written on f. 2r.

Ff. 3r to 11r are taken up by a short grammar of the Maltese language. This makes a total of 17 pages. The grammar is structured in the following way:

Ff. 3r to 4v are devoted to the explanation of the ten Arabic letters that, together with the normal Latin letters, make up the author's Maltese alphabet. The ten letters that are not common to Romance orthography are thus described by the author (the examples are also given by him; I have limited myself to one or two only):

1. ث [t] – questa lettera si chiama, the in arabo et si pronuncia giungendo la Lingua a li denti d'alto. e.g. ثعين, due.
2. ذ [d] – questa si chiama dhal, et si pronuncia dell'istesso modo, del the, e.g. ذel, ombra.

3. ق [q] – questa si chiama, caf, et se pronuncia tutta della gola, e.g. قalbi, core mio.
4. ح [h] – questa si chiama, hha, et si pronuncia con forza e.g. حابib, amico.
5. خ [h] – questa si chiama cha, et si pronuncia come se ci volesse sputare, e.g. خيا, fratel mio.
6. چ $\begin{bmatrix} dx \\ tx \\ c \end{bmatrix}$ – questa lettera et persiana et si chiama cim et si pronuncia come il ce et il ci in italiano (marìچ non voglio; kon چeri tu).
7. ش [x] – questa è un, scim, et si pronuncia come sc in italiano. e.g. شe, che.
8. ع [gh] – questa si chiama, ain, et si pronuncia aprendo la bocca tutto della gola, e.g. عandi – io ho; عain – fontana (originally written aعندي; aعین).
9. غ [gh] – questa si chiama, gain, et si pronuncia come ain. e.g. غar, grotta; غani, ricco.
10. ه [h] – questa si chiama, he, et si pronuncia con forza dello stomaco [no example given].

The grammar of the Maltese language comes to an end at f. 11r. Ff. 11v, 12r, 12v, 13r, 13v are all blank. An Italian–Maltese dictionary starts at f. 14r with the letter A and ends at f. 112r with the letter Z. Ff. 112v, 113r, 113v, 114r and 114v are all blank. A Maltese–Italian dictionary starts at f. 115r with the letter A and ends at f. 185v with the letter Z. At the end of the Maltese–Italian dictionary, which is followed by a couple of blank pages (186r and 186v), one comes across a fourth section of the volume, entitled *l ta'glim a'el Soldat* (f. 187r–f. 190r). This section contains an Italian–Maltese list of expressions in use in the Order's armed forces. The sub-title of this lexicon of specialistic terminology is 'methode pour fair faire leexercice des armes en langue maltoise'.¹⁴ The *Regole per la lingua maltese* comes to an end at f. 193v (ff. 190v to 193r are all blank). On the last page of the volume, written upside down, one finds the name 'Monsieur Le Chevallier. De La Bastie Fogasses'.

14. This, together with certain linguistic features of the text that follows and of the preceding dictionaries, is clear proof that the *Regole per la lingua maltese* was written/copied out by a Frenchman. For more details on the recovery and content of the *Regole* [10].

From internal evidence, one can gather that this hitherto unknown manuscript is a copy/enlargement of a previous text. In fact, there are various instances where the copyist skips from one line to another while transcribing the dictionary lists. He then realizes his mistake, corrects it by crossing out the wrong entry and replaces it with the right one (cfr., e.g. f. 80r, I 2672: 'letti-ei madri con un padre ò di'; f. 86v, I 2941: 'Riso, ros. ridosso, ken far'). As for the dating, the year of demise of the last possessor of the volume, Girolamo Spinola,¹⁵ the period of peak production of the paper on which the manuscript is transcribed,¹⁶ and the description of the musket given in the *Ta'elim a'el Soldat* all point towards the latter part of the seventeenth century.

The fact that the previous possessor of this manuscript was 'Monsieur le Chevallier De la Bastie Fogasses, a knight of the Order of Jerusalem from Provence, and that the copyist was certainly a Frenchman, leads me to think that the *Regole per la lingua maltese* might be a copy/enlargement of the Thezan manuscript. It is obvious that the *Regole* is not the same copy possessed by I.S. Mifsud [8 pp. 7–10, 10 pp. 54–58]. However, there are various features which both the *Regole* and the Thezan manuscript have in common: both texts comprise a grammar, an Italian–Maltese dictionary, possibly a Maltese–Italian dictionary. Both manuscripts adopt an alphabet which has ten Arabic characters (even though, to be more precise, one of the Arabic letters of the *Regole* is actually Persian), both were composed/copied out by Frenchmen and both were in possession of Knights from Provence (the Thezan family also hailed from Provence). I would thus consider it quite possible that the original seventeenth century grammar and dictionary composed by Thezan was circulated amongst, at least, other knights of the same langue in augmented and/or modified copies. The *Regole* could be one of these copies.

The *Regole per la lingua maltese* is important not only because it is the earliest extant text which adopts a mixed alphabet but also because it is the earliest extant Maltese grammar and dictionary. However, the manuscript could be of extreme interest not only to scholars of Maltese but even to scholars of Italian, French and Arabic. With regards to the latter, the *Regole* confirms that the θ sound was still alive in seventeenth-century

15. Girolamo Spinola, the Genoese knight who last possessed the manuscript, died in 1721 [10, 11].
16. The double chain watermark reveals that the paper was produced in Genoa. This kind of watermark reached its height of production in the period that goes from the late seventeenth century to the first decades of the eighteenth century [10 pp. 59–60].

Malta ('questa lettera si chiama, the in arabo et si pronuncia giungendo la lingua a li denti d'alto'). This proves that the different rendering of *t* in H. Megiser's Maltese 1606 word list is not to be attributed to mistakes on the author's part but to his intention of transcribing the different pronunciation of the *t* sound in Maltese in the early seventeenth century.¹⁷

Judging by G. Cachia's comment in his letter to De Soldanis, it would even seem that, though hardly perceptible, the θ sound survived till, at least, the mid-eighteenth century:

Nella pronuncia della lettera *t e th*, non vi è gran differenza sicome nel T. Th. però per farli bene intendere colle nostre lettere latine pare difficile, per confonderli *est labor improbus* e per distinguerli bisogna che uno sudi, queste differenze mettendole alle stampe non so come ponno bene comprenderle, e pronunciarle colle dette nostre lettere, e come riuscirà à quei che desiderano apprenderli dal libro; per confonderli, non è più regola.¹⁸

A closer study of those Maltese texts which made use of a mixed Italo-Arabic orthography could maybe throw further light not only on the phonological evolution of the Maltese language but also on certain linguistic traits which had disappeared earlier in time in spoken Arabic but might have still been maintained in spoken Maltese.

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18. Cfr. G. Cachia's letter to De Soldanis, *cit.*, f. 131r.

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