

# PROTESTANT MALTESE BIBLE TRANSLATION 1870-1872

by Rev. Mgr. Prof. C. SANT

IN the first half of the nineteenth century there was intensive activity in the field of Bible Translation in Maltese and other languages of the Mediterranean area.

On the initiative of Rev. William Jowett the representative of the *Church Missionary Society* in Malta the Gospel of St. John, prepared by G. Canolo, was published in 1822 and the Gospels and Acts in one volume, prepared by M.A. Vassalli, in 1829. The *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* published in 1845 in Maltese the Book of Common Prayer containing extensive extracts from the whole Bible and, later in 1847, the whole New Testament, both translated by Rev. M.A. Camilleri.<sup>1</sup>

In the meantime, this Society was engaged in Bible distribution in Malta, mostly to military and civil personnel passing through the Island, and abroad along the shores of the Mediterranean. Circulation among the Maltese themselves met with little success; in fact the depot in Malta was closed in 1870. Precisely at this period, however, the British and Foreign Bible Society (BFBS) undertook the preparation and printing of the Scriptures in Maltese.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For further information see:

K. Sant, *It-Traduzzjoni tal-Bibbja u l-Ilsien Malti* (Malta 1975); P.P. Saydon, *History of the Maltese Bible* (Malta 1957); 'The First Maltese Translation of the Bible', *Sundial* 4(1948) 10-13; 'The Earliest Biblical Translation from Hebrew into Maltese', *Journal of the Malta University Literary Society*, 2(1937) 1-12; 'The Maltese Translation of the Bible', *Melita Theologica* 16(1964) 1-22; A. Cremona, *Vassalli and his Times*, trans. M. Butcher (Malta 1940).

<sup>2</sup> *L'Evangelium Imkaddes ta Sidna Gesù Cristu min San Mattew rivedut u collazionat fuk l'Original Grec* (London, 1870).

## ORIGIN AND PURPOSE OF THIS TRANSLATION

When Rev. W. Jowett, the representative of the Church Missionary Society (CMS) in Malta (1816-1830),<sup>3</sup> was supervising the printing of Vassalli's Gospels and Acts in 1828, he wrote to the BFBS, whose agent he was, that he 'should have felt exceedingly happy to have been able to recommend the printing of the Maltese Gospels by the BFBS; but there are reasons, arising out of the comparatively uncultivated state of the Maltese language, which totally preclude for the present such a course. I have no doubt, however, but, that in due season this interesting translation will become theirs – an event, in which none will more sincerely and heartily rejoice than myself'.<sup>4</sup>

His dream came true fifteen years after his death with the publication by the BFBS in 1870 of the Gospels of St. Matthew, St. John and the Acts of the Apostles based on the New Testament of 1847.

The initiative came from, of all places, the Police Office Hall of the Malta Dockyard. In December, 1869, Mr. George Pratt, a Police Officer, wrote to Mr. H. Innes, who had been Secretary of the Dockyard for 23 years and then retired in Devonport,<sup>5</sup> that a Religious Tract: *The Brazen Serpent* translated by Paul Bonavia had just been published and successfully circulated in Malta.<sup>6</sup> It was intended to publish more such tracts 'to prepare the native mind to receive a far more important work, namely, the New Testament, which, we trust, God will stir up friends, to have revised and reprinted, for as it is now, 'it is next to useless ... Such revision is made necessary by the errors it contains as well as by its orthography'.

*L'Evangelii Imkaddes ta' Sidna Gesù Cristu min San Giuan rivedut u collazionat fuq l'Original Griec* (London, 1872).

*L'Atti tal Apostli rivedut u collazionat fuq l'Original Griec* (London, 1871).

The three of them were all printed at the Cambridge University Press.

<sup>3</sup>K. Sant, *It-Traduzzjoni tal-Bibbja u l-Ilsien Malti: 1810-1850* (Malta, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>4</sup>CMS – C/MO39b/114.

<sup>5</sup>Letter 1. This article is mainly based on a collection of eleven letters printed below under the heading: *Documents*. Their authentic respective copies are preserved in the records of the British and Foreign Bible Society, London. The number refers to the numbering printed at the head of each letter.

<sup>6</sup>Letter 2.

Pratt appealed to Mr. Innes to get in contact with friends of means to help him in this venture, for it would be beyond the means available in Malta. Moreover, Pratt insisted that P. Bonavia's name should not be bandied around and recommended him for a post of A/Schoolmaster in the Dockyard 'to make him independent of his countrymen'.

Mr. Innes, favourably impressed by this plea, made contact with Rev. M.A. Camilleri, then Vicar of Lyford, Wantage, and with Mr. T.J. Kirby, the depositor of BFBS publications in Malta.

Rev. Camilleri replied on 21 February 1870, reminding Innes of his having edited the 1847 New Testament. Admitting that 'they require a revision to adapt them to the spoken language' he showed himself willing to do this work himself. He suggested that he would use Italian orthography, and that the Italian text of Martini be printed parallel with the Maltese text.<sup>7</sup>

Mr. T.J. Kirby replied from Malta on 7 February 1870. He opines that P. Bonavia, 'very timid in all that appertains to Religion ... forced to endeavour to keep well with both sides', is competent for a *free* translation but as to Scriptures he is unacquainted, with either Hebrew or Greek and of course would have to render them from the Italian, and not from the original'. However, he would do the work 'well and faithfully' but secretly. He insists that Vassalli's use of archaic vocabulary and strange orthography was beyond the reach of the 'lower orders for whom it was principally intended ... Simplicity as well as fidelity must be studied in all translations for the partially educated poor.' He recommended a new edition, possibly starting with Luke, as more congenial and attractive to the 'unconverted people'. The cost would be around £50, to be raised by subscription among friends and a subsidy from the BFBS; through its sale a fund would be created for further publications.<sup>8</sup>

Mr. H. Innes, wrote to the Secretary of the BFBS enclosing the two letters from Camilleri and Kirby respectively. He introduced himself as a friend and subscriber of old standing to the Society, and continues: 'I send for your perusal the enclosed letters with the view of enquiring whether your Committee would be disposed to consider the question of a revision of Vassalli's [Gospels]<sup>9</sup> or a retranslation of the whole New Testament'; he went on to recom-

<sup>7</sup>Letter 4.

<sup>8</sup>Letter 3.

<sup>9</sup>This is Camilleri's translation, wrongly attributed to Vassalli. Letter 7.

mend strongly the use of Italian orthography and the printing of the Italian text along with the Maltese. St. Luke should be published first, then Romans for 'the quiet circulation of these in unpretending style, would cause less attention and opposition, than the issue of the whole New Testament at once'. He further recommends Camilleri for the job, and Mr. Loundes, an agent for many years of the BFBS in Malta, for advice.<sup>10</sup>

The reaction of the BFBS was positive; they contacted Mr. Loundes in St. Agnes in England, Mr. Swabey in London and Mr. Kirby in Malta. Mr. Loundes, who for fifteen years (1845-1860) was the agent for the BFBS in Malta, believed that Joseph (not Paul) Bonavia was 'pretty efficient, as far as ability goes'. He raises the question of orthography, stating that since the one used in the pamphlet just published was accepted 'it would be preferable to adopt the system of orthography used in it, and it may be as good as any other'; moreover a 'fair translation may be obtained and that under the circumstances, it would be desirable to print one Gospel as a specimen, and perhaps Luke would answer the best'.<sup>11</sup>

Rev. Swabey, on behalf of the SPCK, informs them that they still had 'about a dozen copies and it is not stereotyped'. He had nothing else to tell them except that 'the letter from which I have quoted speaks of the great difficulty to be expected in the work of circulating a gospel in the Vernacular, if it were produced'.<sup>12</sup>

Before coming to a firm decision, however, as to the advisability and usefulness of producing a translation and as to the best way of distributing it, the Editorial Committee set a number of questions to Rev. T.J. Kirby to obtain specific information as to the literacy, cultural level and interest in the Scriptures in Malta.

Rev. Kirby answered these questions exhaustively in a letter dated 31 March 1870, stating that 'the information now sent may be considered trustworthy as it has been gathered, not only from those in no way connected with us, but from friends interested in Scripture dissemination'.<sup>13</sup>

Kirby reports that there was secret sympathy with Protestantism; no more hostility to the distribution of Scriptures, which one sold in the heart of Valletta; Protestant worship was held in public in two stately Churches in Valletta and Burmola. Still Kirby was of

<sup>10</sup>Letter 1.

<sup>11</sup>Letter 5.

<sup>12</sup>Letter 6.

<sup>13</sup>Letter 7.

the opinion that 'the great majority walk in darkness and what is more sad, love to have it so ...'

Only 10,000 Maltese are able to read their own language 'principally women and children – country people or villagers'. Nothing is printed except for some devotional works and textbooks for schools. To this one may add a Maltese-English-Italian Vocabulary. Those who understand Italian, understand and read Maltese as well; but the poor who attend government schools are unable to understand Italian; they learn only Maltese. Only 6404 read English, while 14,103 Italian.

As to interest in the Scriptures he has this to say. Few copies of the New Testament of 1847 were sold. Still, Kirby continues, 'Italian Scriptures now and again are sold to Maltese who have travelled ... we must not overlook the fact that Italian Bibles may and do find their way to Malta from England, America and besides which *all or nearly all educated* Maltese possess Martini's Italian Bible with notes in 3 Volumes costing 12/6'. It should not be expected that the book would be read in Schools, where orthodox books *alone* are accepted.<sup>14</sup>

Kirby then states that a translation from the Latin Vulgate, *unless it is accompanied by notes*, would not secure Ecclesiastical approval. A new translation or revision of the old one would be enough.

Mr. Bonavia, the translator of the *Brazen Serpent* 'is quite competent to rewrite any of the gospels in the orthography most intelligible to the Maltese'. He would only have to change that of the SPCK edition and remove obsolete words; then the MS should be submitted to Mr. Camilleri.

Finally a subscription 'has been opened here, to meet the expense of a revision of Matthew's Gospel (part of which is ready) so perhaps you may sanction and assist in bringing out the gospel previous to Luke, which could follow when we see what success attends the issue of Matthew'.

Armed with this information, the Editorial Committee decided upon the publication of the gospel of St. Matthew and work proceeded smoothly. On 27 May 1870, Mr. Kirby reported to Mr. Girdlestone, the Editor Superintendent, that the translation of Matthew was handed to him, with a request for him to go through it, which

<sup>14</sup> Catholic authorities opposed the circulation of the Scriptures *without notes*; unnotated Scriptures were banned. In fact, Kirby admits that nearly all educated Maltese were in possession of Martini's Italian Bible.

he was doing, revising from 5 to 7.30 a.m. daily. He found it an improvement on Vassalli's (that is, the SPCK editions of 1847 wrongly attributed to Vassalli) as to fidelity and cleanness, but it too contains omissions and errors. He acquired the assistance of a brother of a Professor of Theology in the University many years ago. In three weeks time he would finish and send a fair copy, to be handed to Mr. Camilleri, who should keep in mind that he has been for many years away from Malta; and hence not perfectly acquainted with contemporary spoken language. He consulted also Rev. G. Wisely, the minister of the Church of Scotland in Malta, as to the meaning of the original Greek. Work would be finished in all respects within three months.

Kirby reports also that sufficient funds have been subscribed and suggests printing in England in small pica 32<sup>o</sup> cloth. In a postscript by Mr. T. Bruce, it is stated that no printer in Valletta would dare print the Gospel.<sup>15</sup>

The fair copy was sent to England in July 1870. Kirby informs Mr. Girdlestone that the MS requires little revision 'as much care has been expended thereon already'. He delightedly adds that his 'coadjutor has become enamoured with the word, and purposes to revise Mark's Gospel on his own account'. Kirby decides to assist him, hoping that the whole New Testament would be covered in twelve months' time.<sup>16</sup>

Things moved swiftly, for on 4 August 1870, Rev. A.M. Camilleri accepts to go through the MS.<sup>17</sup> Two days later Camilleri writes again expressing his joy with the work stating that such a translation would be useful for all Maltese – not all those who read Italian understood it – in Malta and in North Africa.

Thus the work went through successfully. *St. Matthew* (without the Italian text), printed by the Cambridge University Press, was published in 1870; *Acts of the Apostles* in 1871; *St. John* in 1872 with reprints of the three of them in 1893 and 1912.

This brief survey shows that this translation is actually a revision of Camilleri's work of 1847 by Mr. P. Bonavia. It was checked by Mr. Kirby, with Maltese assistance, and finally examined by Camilleri; the purpose of this work was to provide the people with a simplified version of the Scriptures 'to set before them [the Maltese] the truth, as it is in Jesus, and trust to the Holy Spirit's

<sup>15</sup> Letter 8.

<sup>16</sup> Letter 9.

<sup>17</sup> Letters 10 and 11.

power, to enlighten their minds and touch their hearts'.<sup>18</sup> They had no interest in the Maltese language as such, as was the case with their predecessors in the first half of the century.

#### THE QUALITY OF THE TRANSLATION

The aim of the revisers was to produce a text accessible to the partially educated poor for simplicity as well as fidelity must be studied in all translations for such people.<sup>19</sup> Therefore, they had to simplify the orthography and the language by introducing a simple alphabet and removing archaic and difficult words. How far and to what extent did they succeed?

Camilleri in 1842 used the English alphabet and orthography, while Bonavia has chosen the Italian one, neither of which does full justice to the nature of Maltese, with its Semitic sounds and morphological structures.

This chart shows the differences between them compared with the system of the Ghaqda (1924):

Ghaqda (1924)	ċ	ġ	gh	h	j	k	q	w	x	ż	
Camilleri (1847)	ch	gi	ge	ā	h̄	y	k	q	u	sh	z
Bonavia (1870)	ci	j	gh	h	i	ch	k	u	x	z	
	ce										

as for the rest, they are the same.

Obviously this kind of alphabet does not distinguish between the ġ and g; ċ and k; i and j; h and h̄; u (vowel) and w; ż and z. Moreover, this kind of alphabet cannot represent adequately the Semitic morphology of the language. But then, the main purpose of Bonavia and his friends was not philological or literary, but simply evangelization, and hence they used a simplified orthography, which, they expected, rendered the reading of the text easier; in actual fact, however, it rendered it more confusing to the 'poorly educated' and repellent to the fully educated.

Besides orthography, the other problem facing a translator of a biblical text is what kind of language to use; the predecessors of Bonavia, – Vassalli, Camilleri, Taylor – tried to keep the middle road with a more or less conscious bias towards the Semitic element of Maltese. Bonavia preferred the unpolished spoken language.

<sup>18</sup>Letter 3.

<sup>19</sup>Letter 7.

The following conspectus presents graphically the differences as to vocabulary and grammatical and morphological structures between the old translation (1847) and the new revision (1870):

*Camilleri* 1847

*Bonavia* 1870

(Gospel of John 3, 1-20)

*Vocabulary:*

Verse	1 Kbarat	Cap
	2 ājubij iet	miracli
	3 tabilhaqq	tasew
	5-6 ruh	spirtu
	16-18 mnissel-wahdu	unigenitu
	17-18 jaāmel haqq	jiccondanna
	ikollha l hlas	tissalva (sic)

*Syntactic Structures:*

	2 inti māalem jey ...	int imghallem li geit ...
	2 Yiek Alla ma ikunsh miau	hliief jec Alla hua mighu
3	Wiejeb Jesu ...	Gesù wiegeb ...
3	Yiek wiehed ma jitwieledsh minn jdid ...	hliief jec uiehed ma jitwieledx min gdid ...
4	Kif bniedem yista' jitwieled meta hu shih?	Chif jista il bniedem jitwieled meta jixjieh?
6	Dak li twieled mil-jisem hu jisem ...	Dac li hu mwieled mil gisem hua gisem
7	Sheyn tistaājeb ...	la tistaghgebx ...
7	Yahtiejilkom titwiieldu minn jdid ...	illi jahtieg li intom tituiieldu min gdid ...
8	Ir-rih ifewej feyn irid, u int tisma' hossu, izda ma tafx mneyn jey u feyn sēyer hekk hu kollmin twieled mir-Ruh ...	Ir rih jonfoh fein irit, u inti tisma hossu, izda ma tafx mnein hu gei u fein imur: hec huua collmin jitwieled mil li Spirtu ...
11	U ma tilqawsh ish shhieda taāna ...	izda intom ma tilqghux ix xieda tagħna ...
12	tal ard ...	ta fuk l'art ...



- |    |  |  |
|----|--|--|
| 13 | hliief min nizel mis-sema,<br>Bin il-bniedem li hu fis-<br>sema ...  | hliief huua li nizel mis sema,<br>l'Iben tal bniedem li huua fis<br>sema ...   |
| 15 | Biesh ...  | Sabiex ...   |
| 20 | Āash kollmin jaāmel il-<br>ħazin jobāod id-dawl, u ma<br>yijish āad dawl biex ma jit-<br>lumush li āmeyel tiaū ... | Għaliex collmin jagħmel il<br>ħazen jobghod id dawl, u ma<br>jigix lein id dawl, sabiex l'opri<br>tighu ma jintgħarfux ... |
| 21 | Imma min jaāmel is sewa<br>jigi āad dawl biesh jidhru li<br>āmeyel tiāu āsh ntaāmlu<br>f'Alla ...                  | Izda min jagħmel is sewwa jigi<br>lejn id dawl, sabiex l'opri tighu<br>jidhru, illi huma magħmulin<br>f'Alla ...           |

From this conspectus one can see that Bonavia substituted Italian loan words for Semitic terms – one must admit that the latter do not always convey the exact meaning of the original text – or more familiar Semitic ones for less familiar ones.

As to grammatical structures he substituted less idiomatic and popular ones for idiomatic and less known ones in the spoken language. Moreover one notes also that he did not pay any attention to the basic morphological rules governing the modifications of the basic root structures of the Semitic words.

One doubts very much how much of an expert in handling written, not to say literary, Maltese, Bonavia was.

It is quite obvious that he and his friends were not in the least interested in the philological or literary finish of the language. They were more interested in evangelization than anything else. This, however, is a boomerang, because a biblical text, to be effective with all classes of the community, must be translated in a language in between a high literary style and the lower uncouth, if not vulgar, style. In other terms it must use, what is called, for lack of a better term, common or popular language, acceptable and understandable to both cultured and uncultured readers, provided that it reproduces the meaning of the original and possibly creating the same impression on the new readers as that on the readers of the original.

#### CONCLUSION

One may synthesize the result of this brief survey thus. In 1870 a group of people bent on Protestant evangelization through Bible distribution without any philological or literary interest, as was the case in the first half of the century, decided to publish a new

translation (or rather a far reaching revision of the previous one) in Maltese of the Scriptures, starting with one of the Gospels. The project had the full support of the BFBS and a number of private subscribers. Paul Bonavia undertook the revision of the text of the New Testament edited by M.A. Camilleri in 1847. He 'simplified' the orthography and style making it more accessible – or so he thought – to the general public. Only *St. Matthew*, *St. John* and *Acts* were published. Because of the limited literacy of the people and Catholic opposition to Scriptures without notes success was limited. It was the merit of Bonavia, however, to have worked with the sole purpose of bringing the Bible to the people for its own sake without ulterior motives of a literary or philological nature as such.

No such activity, except for the reprints of 1895 and 1912 was ever undertaken in this field before 1914, when fresh translations were made on the initiative of Dr. G. Wisely, then the minister of the Church of Scotland in Valletta for many years. The last attempt from the Protestant side was the publication of the New Testament by the Trinitarian Bible Society in 1971, being a revised text of Saydon's translation.

At the end of the century however, Maltese Catholics started to take Bible Translation in all earnestness; in fact by 1936 the *whole* Bible was translated into Maltese. Such activity has been going on until the present day. In 1959, Prof. P.P. Saydon finished his translation of the whole Bible from the Original Hebrew and Greek and in 1975 the New Testament was published by the Catholic Malta Bible Society in the common, but not less polished language of the people, cultured and uncultured alike.

## DOCUMENTS\*

(1)

[166] *Letter from Mr. Henry Innes to the Secretary, received 23 February 1870.*

Devonport, February 22

I know I shall be excused bringing the following subject, under the consideration of your Committee, as you may remember my long residence in the Island of Malta, where I held [167] the appointment of Dockyard Secretary for 23 years. I co-operated in placing your Depot there in a more prominent position than it occupied before 1842-3, and advised on the question, which led to the establishment of the Agency under Mr. Loundes. Both as an old subscriber to the Society, and an earnest friend of Bible circulation on the shores of the Mediterranean, from my long residence in Malta, I feel I have some claim to be considered in the following appeal. I believe I have taken as active a part in all evangelical efforts in that island as most men, since the Church Missionary Society broke up their establishment there. And looking back on efforts made by Scripture readers, native and English, Tract distribution, religious discussion through the press, and by special publication, and prominently the enterprise of the 'Malta Protestant College' designed as a 'banner' in that Island of Established Truth [of which I was Treasurer for many years, and cooperated with your President in holding that banner up]. Still the result of all those labours, has led me to sympathise with the language of the Prophet: 'I have laboured in vain, and spent my strength for naught etc'.

But I have also learnt that whilst flesh and blood has its despairing views, the eye of faith is assured that all is not in vain 'in the Lord'. I have been in England now for six years, but still continue to take an interest in that island, and to feel for its poor people shut up, by their peculiar language in the errors and magic of Rome. The incidental letter of a pious man in humble position, brought before me the fact of the imperfect translation of the New Testament Scriptures in the vernacular of the Island, and led me

\*BFBS-Editorial Correspondence: Inwards Vol.7: pp.166-175; 186-188. 206-211.269-271.296.307.308. Thanks are due to Miss Kathleen Cann, the Archivist of the BFBS (London) and to Mrs. Tessie Camilleri (née Burtigieg), Secretary of the Faculty of Theology 1971-1975 for transcribing and typing the photocopies.

to institute enquiries in Malta and to put myself into communication with the Rev. M.A. Camilleri – Vicar of Lyford, Wantage in Berkshire, a converted Maltese Roman Catholic priest, [168] whom I have known for a quarter of a century. And I send for your perusal the enclosed Letters<sup>20</sup> with the view of enquiring whether your Committee would be disposed to consider the question of a Revision of Vassalli's Gospels or a retranslation of the whole of the New Testament. What I would strongly recommend, as also does Mr. Camilleri, is the Italian and Maltese in separate columns, Italian is the official language of the Island and taught in all the primary schools, but to read, to the mass of the people, the Maltese Vernacular, is of primary importance. I concur with him also, that the Italian orthography should be adopted.

I place the subject before you for initiatory consideration. Will you cause copies of any of the enclosed letter to be made that you may require returning the originals to me at perfect leisure? At the end of next month I am retiring from the public service on my pension; I shall continue to reside here I think. But I hope in May or June to be in London, when I could enter more fully on the subject. I would recommend the Gospel of St. Luke being completed and put into circulation *at first*. Then the Epistle to the Romans, the quiet circulation of these in unpretending style, would cause less attention and opposition, than the issue of the whole Testament at once.

Mr. Camilleri, you will perceive, offers his services. I have not communicated with my old friend the Rev. Mr. Loundes on this subject. He will, if needful be valuable in counsel on this subject, and perhaps a reference to him of my letter and the enclosed correspondence may be desirable.

(Signed) Henry Innes

(2)

[169] *Letter from Mr. George Pratt to Mr. H. Innes received February 1870.*

Malta, Dec. 1869

I take the liberty of writing to you, feeling sure you will be pleased to hear, that your efforts in bygone days for the enlightenment of the Maltese are just now we hope about to produce some fruit. We are now distributing with some encouragement a Religious

<sup>20</sup>Letters 2, 3, 4.

Tract! 'Is Serptal Bronz', which has been translated and printed by Mr. Paul Bonavia your godson, who through your kindness was educated at the St. Julian College. He is well qualified for such work, and we hope to be enabled through him to give to the natives some plain religious tracts, which will by God's blessing, prepare the native mind to receive a far more important work namely the New Testament, which we trust God will stir up friends, to have revised and reprinted, for as it is now, it is next to useless. Sir, I have made bold to put our plan before you, knowing that you have ever taken a deep interest in the spiritual welfare, and enlightenment of the Maltese, and that you are connected with many persons of means, who would gladly come forward with their assistance, if it was made known to them, what is required to be done. We think that the best way to forward the work here is not to cause controversy with the natives, but to set before them the truth, as it is in Jesus, and trust to the Holy Spirit's power, to enlighten their minds and touch their hearts.

The Tract, which has been translated, a copy of which I enclose, has been well received, only one person has refused as yet to take it from me, and even he allowed me to read it to him, and one has proffered his aid in its distribution. I feel assured that the time is come, when the Bible should be put into the hands of the Maltese, for I find that the minds of many of those, who have received even but a poor education, are much shaken in their [170] belief of some of the doctrines of their Church, and this goes on, and leads to no belief at all, just because they have no Protestant Religious Literature, to show them the way of salvation. It is really necessary that plain Tracts should be prepared for them, but however willing God's people here may be, it will be far beyond their power to do all that is required, as it will cost £8 to translate St. Matthew only, besides printing etc. which will cost upwards of £40 more, if done in Malta, and for that reason I take the liberty of appealing to you, Sir, and to all who love the Lord, to 'Come over and help us'. And hoping, I may say feeling sure, that the Lord will stir up his people to this work at home as well as here.

(Signed) George Pratt. Police Office  
Hall Dockyard. Malta

P.S. The revision of the New Testament is made necessary by the errors it contains as well as by its orthography, which differ as much from the present system, as the old English does from the modern.

N.B.: Please to keep Mr. Bonavia's name from being made public, or it may interfere very much with the work, in fact put a stop to it I fear, for having before his mind's eye, what his father suffered, he is naturally timid and no wonder. He wishes for employment that would make him independent of his countrymen, but I fear he will not find it here. It would be a good thing if he would get the office of Assistant Schoolmaster in the Dockyard, which is now vacant, but good friends would be required to obtain it for him.

(Signed) G.P.

(3)

*Letter from Mr. T. Kirby to Mr. H. Innes, recd. Febr. 1870.*

Malta February 7.70

In answer to your letter concerning P.B. I am glad he associates with such good men as Pratt, [171] Brown and Bever (sic), and I sincerely pray that grace, may be given him to walk in the 'Bona Via' which if persevered in, will lead to the 'Bona Vita' good or eternal life. As to P.B.'s capacity as a translator from Italian into Maltese (from the opinions I have heard expressed regarding the Maltese copy of the 'Brazen Serpent'), I believe he is quite competent to the work of a *free* translation of the sense, or general purpose, scope or meaning of any little tract or pamphlet, but as to the Scriptures he is unacquainted, with either Hebrew or Greek and of course could have to render them from the Italian, and not from the original. Were such a work entrusted to him, I believe it would be well and faithfully done, but translation and printing would have to be done in secret, for he is very timid in all that appertains to religion, and alas! that he should in a measure (so to say) forced to imitate his poor father in the worse than useless endeavour 'to keep well with both sides'. This would not be the case, could permanent employment be found him, free from Romish influence. I have long been convinced that the Maltese are open to conviction, but this is no very genial clime for native converts to give up friends, home, and daily bread is truly up-hill work - but grace will I trust (one day) enable even such timid souls to ascend the 'hill difficulty', go past the lions in the road and the seductions of 'Vanity fair' unscathed to the 'city' whose maker and builder is God'.

Many many years ago the Scriptures were translated by Mr. M. Vassalli (father to the printer whom you know so well) but the or-

thography now in use differs very considerably, and I must say for the better, for Vassalli's edition, though faithful had many words, too classical or more Arabic than Maltese, to be easily understood by the lower orders for whom it was principally intended. Simplicity, as well as fidelity must be studied in all translations intended for the partially educated poor. Vassali's edition however, [172] was not 'labour in vain' for a thirst for the Scriptures was created thereby, and now an improved edition ought to be issued, beginning with a revised or fresh translation of one of the Gospels – for hitherto only such small portions of the 'living water' have been dispensed to the people as might be found in a short summary of Old and New Testament history issued from time to time (with Ecclesiastical authority) but to my knowledge no entire Gospel or Epistle, has ever been (so) issued. Now as to the part to be selected I prefer Luke's Gospel (to Matthew) because to unconverted persons readers, (sic) our Lord's genealogy will have little interest, especially at the beginning of a book, and before they can get interested in it. Luke gives the account of the Angel's visit to the ever blessed Virgin – a portion sure to attract and win the sympathy of all Romanists, teaching them (at the same time) that Mary was 'highly favoured among' not above 'women', and that she acknowledged *her Son to be her Saviour*, and therefore as the mother of our Lord *she is to be respected and loved not adored*. You will at once see that this Gospel strikes at the root of the great error of the age, and therefore the most suitable for dissemination among Romanists, besides which, where shall we find such a faithful picture of sinful man and of God, of repenting prodigals and a father love? The parable is true to the life of sinners in all ages, and the character of God is drawn with such sublime beauty and simplicity as to be calculated to encourage the penitent to return to their loving father and their God, and the portrait is faithful and true for it is by a *Son*, who dwelt in the bosom of the Father from all eternity. The Father in the parable loved his erring son, even before his return even so 'while we were yet sinners' God loves us.

Now as to the probable expenses. [173]

Translation	£12.0.0
Ten reams of paper	5.0.0
Printing	17.0.0
Binding 1000 copies in cloth	16.0.0
TOTAL	<u>£50.0.0</u>

My letter exceeds the length anticipated, but I will trespass upon your valuable time a little longer by giving you just one incident (out of many) to prove that the work done by you and others in years gone by, has not been in vain. Some time ago I received a letter from a gentleman (long occupied in Mission work in North Africa, one who I believe has done somewhat for the master) on the subject of colportage. On the 31st January last, I received the following answer to a communication I sent him. 'I thank you for your welcome lines, as on a *former occasion*, when you had a Colporteur to recommend to me, I was for the time supplied, so it is now. The young *Maltese* whom I lately engaged has recovered from his illness and is now fully at his work, with some promise of success. He is both apt and intelligent, moreover he appears entirely alienated from his own religious community, and desires to become a Protestant, not without some appearance of sincerity. Yesterday four Sicilians walked in at church time to be present at Divine service. He had spoken to them and given them some tracts a few days before, and they have since asked to be instructed in the Protestant faith.

In conclusion, may I suggest that friends here and in England raise £25, and *when this is done* apply to the Bible Society for the balance; were the first edition to be sold at 2d each, some £15 would be realized; this sum would materially assist the bringing out of another Gospel and so on — the supply creating the demand and the increased demand increasing the supply. I do not know whether the Bible Society would sanction Martini's edition of Luke, if so, *the whole would sell at cost price* as I can get permission from ABC, who is [174] uncle to P.B.

Mr. Pratt sends his kind regards, and believes it will not be necessary for him to write at this time now that I have given you full information on this subject. Of Vassalli's edition not a copy is to be had, and with the exception of the before mentioned abridgement of Scriptures I can find nothing.

(Signed) Thos. J. Kirby

(4)

*Letter from the Rev.d. A. Camilleri to Mr. Innes.*

Wantage February 21.70

Meanwhile let me inform you that I have got not only Vassalli's translation of the Four Gospels and the Acts, but my own as well



and St. John's Gospel translated by another Maltese. Did you forget that my good friend the late Bishop of Gibraltar, made me translate the Epistle and Book of Revelation into the Maltese and revise Vassalli's Gospels and Acts? I have edited them all. I have got all these works by me. But as you well say, they require a revision to adapt them to the spoken language. That I shall be most happy to do for the Bible Society. Not long ago I revised the Italian Prayer Book of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge Soc.y (sic) and edited two editions, which are circulated by thousands in Italy, and I am that Society's Italian editor. Also I am the Italian editor of the Anglo-Continental Society whose object is to circulate divinity books in Italy and elsewhere. Let me also inform you, that the Gospels and Acts of Vassalli, and John's Gospel of the other translation have double columns one for the Latin Vulgate in Vassalli, the other for the Maltese, and in the other instead of the Latin, there is the Italian of Martini. Both were printed in London by Watts, I should say for the Bible Society, the Gospel of St. John in 1822 and Vassalli's Gospels and Acts in 1829. I like [175] very much the idea of having the Italian printed in one column and the Maltese in the other—verse opposite another verse. For you know that all those from among the natives of Malta who can read, are acquainted with the Italian language. Another advantage would be, that the readers will be better able to appreciate the Bible, and also read it to the Maltese who are unable to read themselves. And I should not be surprised, if the priests, will make use of the Maltese translation for the pulpit. One great defect of Vassalli's and my own translation is in the orthography. The People insisted on using the English orthography and Vassalli introduced the Russian letters, when all the Maltese preachers, who alone write the Maltese for their Sermons use the Italian orthography which I would recommend in preference to any other. When you come I will show you these translations. Of course in my translation, I have consulted and adhered as closely as possible to the Greek. But in the case of a revision, I would make use of the spoken language neither more nor less. You may mention my name to the Bible Society or any one.

[Mr. A. Camilleri]

[186] *Letter from the Rev. I. Loundes to the Rev. R. Girdlestone.*

St. Agnes, March 14.1870

I am in possession of your note of the 11th, relating to one received from Mr. Innes, who recommends printing some portion of the Scriptures in the Maltese language. And you make reference, also to a Tract, the brazen serpent, that has been printed and circulated in Maltese. I have a letter from Mr. Kirby dated the 9th ultimo, who alludes to both these subjects. He says, this Tract has been translated, by two or three of God's children who feel interested in the welfare of the Maltese, and 1000 copies of it printed, and put into circulation in their own language, that it has been received with much interest both by friends and foes – the former open their eyes in astonishment at the freeness of salvation, the latter have been heard to say: What no confession? no penance? what next? It has been denounced from the altar in various churches, but it is read notwithstanding.

Mr. Kirby in connection with this says: 'Friends here, and in England, are taking steps, for bringing out a revision of the Gospels in Maltese, and adds that he believes the time has come for it. Portions were translated some years since by Giuseppe Canola (sic), and another person of the name, of Vassalli, and I think also, the ex-priest Camilleri [187] did something in this way. Mr. Kirby says the translation of Vassalli has created a thirst for the Scriptures, but it is too classical for the common people and needs revision. I know the ex-priest Camilleri very well. I also knew very well the Bonavias, father and son. For some time they were Protestants by profession, but returned again to their original system. If they are the individuals I mean, of which I have no doubt, the name of the son is Joseph, not Paul. I should consider the young man pretty efficient, as far as ability goes. The last time I saw him, he was in Alexandria as a teacher of languages. He is a native of Malta. Camilleri may be very useful also in the prosecution of the work, and as a preparatory step, you do well to raise the question about the orthography. Various systems, I think nine, have been proposed, specimens of which I once sent to Mr. Meller. In some of these, printed works have appeared, portions of the Gospels, schoolbooks, lesson boards, etc. But as this Tract has been circulated recently and found acceptance with the people, I should say it would be preferable to adopt the system of orthography used in it, and it may be as good as any other.

I think a tolerably fair translation may be obtained and that under the circumstances, it would be desirable to print one Gospel as a specimen, and perhaps Luke would answer the best.

If it please God, I hope to be in London the former part of next month on my way to Switzerland and I have noted down some remarks, on the Greek Scriptures respecting which, I should like to speak with you then.

(Signed) I. Loundes

(6)

[188] *Letter from the Rev. H. Swabey to the Rev. R.B. Girdlestone.*

London, March 15/70

The question of Scripture Portions in Maltese, is now before us as well as you, and is, as you say encompassed with difficulties. I have now before me the copy of a letter from Malta, dated 18th January, 1870, which speaks of a 'new Testament' in Maltese — printed many years ago and of which there are now no copies remaining. A revision of the text was necessary because that edition was to a good extent useless, on account of the mode of spelling adopted, and also of the introduction of many words not understood by the natives. All this I take to refer to the S.P.C.K. book. We have about a dozen copies and it is not stereotyped. The letter from which I have quoted speaks of the great difficulty to be expected in the work of circulating a Gospel in a vernacular, if it were produced. I imagine that the Gospel, which your Society is asked to print is a revision of St. Matthew made from the S.P.C.K. book, spoken of in the letter before me, as having been made by some Christians in Malta. I fear I have now told you all I can, and that that is very little.

(Signed) Henry Swabey

(7)

[206] *Letter from Mr. I. J. Kirby to the Rev. R.B. Girdlestone.*

Malta, March 31/70

Your favour of the 11th instant came to hand in due course, and I now hasten to answer it, promising that the information now sent may be considered trustworthy as it has been gathered, not only from those in no way connected with us but from friends interested

in Scripture dissemination. To enable you to judge as to the merits of the case, to which your attention has been called, a simple affirmative or negative, in all cases would not be sufficient. I have therefore appended, a few remarks to some of the answers sent. I will now proceed [207] to take up and answer your questions in the order in which they stand.

Q.1. What proportion of the Maltese can read their own language?

A. About ten thousand, principally women and children – country people or villagers.

Q.2. What is printed in their dialect, over and above the Testament?

A. History of Malta, 2 vols. 8vo, Robinson Crusoe – Stories for children. Lives of various Saints – Office for Holy Week – Psalms by Taylor – Hymns for divine service throughout the year – Life of Christ – Vocabulary Maltese English and Italian – and other books used in Government and private schools.

Q.3. What success did the S.P.C.K.'s Testament meet with?

A. A few were sold – more given away gratuitously and probably some remain to this day in England with that Society.

Q.4. Is there any Protestantism among the Maltese?

A. Openly so – No – Secret sympathy is with us much – at least we do not see anything like the inveterate hatred to Protestantism, openly manifested by all classes, when the S.P.C.K. brought out the Maltese New Testament – let us compare Malta in 1820 with 1870. We are no longer obliged to hide the Scriptures in a private dwelling, but enjoy the right of offering them for sale publicly in a handsome shop, in one of the most respectable streets of Valletta, near the Palace and Public Library in a building formerly the Treasury of the Knights.

We are no longer compelled to hold divine service in a private house, with a soldier or policeman at the door. No, we have two stately Episcopal and Presbyterian Churches, both in good positions in Valletta – besides the military churches in Valletta and Burmola where Christians of all denominations worship.

On the decease of the Translator of the S.P.C.K.'s Maltese Testament, burial was refused (in the Romish cemeteries) and the drawbridge at Porta Reale had to be drawn up. And the guard turned out, to prevent the enraged populace, tearing [208] the de-

funct to pieces,<sup>21</sup> – not so now. We often see respectable Maltese uncovering on the passing of a funeral cortege, and you may even hear them say (in reference to some consistent-godly Protestant) 'There goes a good man'. 'One better than a Christian' (i.e. Roman Catholic) or 'If that one is lost who can hope to be saved?' Not so once, the universal belief then was 'No salvation out of the Romish fold'. In times past the burial of a Protestant was that of a dog! The elevated crucif (sic) preceding the hearse alone secured respect, thank God, things are not so bad now. Maltese as well as others, who differ from us in faith, begin to see the force of our Saviour's words ('By their fruits ye shall know them') and to judge accordingly righteous judgement. But while I believe the 'heaven' is at work, and that there are many secretly favourable to Protestantism, I must not ignore the fact that the great majority walk in darkness and what is more sad, love to have it so, and many many of the rising generation remain ostensibly in communion with Rome while infidel at heart – of these, some, from the natural antipathy of the human heart to true godliness, have no desire to search and try whether Protestantism may not be better

<sup>21</sup> This is completely incorrect. The incident referred to occurred on 5th Aug. 1826 on the death of 'one of the first Maltese to become a Protestant' (See E.H. Fawthrop, *The Floriana Story being an account of Methodism in Malta* (Methodist Church, Malta, 1963), pp. 10-11). This individual could not have been any one of the bible translators that we know of: M.A. Vassalli died on January 1829 at Pietà outside the city walls; G. Canolo was still alive then, and M.A. Camilleri died around 1903. (See K. Sant, *op. cit.* pp. 24-29). For the last days of Vassalli see letter by C.F. Schlienz, one of the Anglican Missionaries in Malta and an intimate friend of Vassalli, who writes to the Secretary of the CMS on January 29, 1829, just a fortnight after Vassalli's death: 'As Mr. Vassalli never made a profession of being a Protestant we would have him buried in a Catholic burial place. However, when we presented the licence of the Police to the Parish Priest he refused burying him, from reason that Vassalli *had never been legally married* and ought therefore to be put among the dishonest, at the wayside, without any ceremony. To this we would not consent and with the consent of the relict and the sister of the deceased applied to Government for a licence to bury him in the Protestant burial place, and as his Excellency the Lt. Governor was pleased to grant us a licence thereto, the reliques, *in a private and honest manner*, were conveyed into the protestant burial place'. CMS C/MO65/11. It is quite obvious that Vassalli was not given a 'Catholic burial' not because of the Gospel translation, which after all was published after his death (See K. Sant *op. cit.* p. 29), but because of his irregular marriage.

than the creed renounced by them as a blot on the intelligence of the age, and others ignorantly believe all religions alike, each and all craftily used by kings and priests to enslave the people. O! when will the Sun of Righteousness arise and dispel the gross darkness brooding over this people.

Q.5. 'Do you think that if we print we must conform to the text of the Vulgate?'

A. Conforming to the Vulgate would not secure Ecclesiastical approval unless printed with the usual notes appended. This I have ascertained since writing to Mr. Innes. I was then informed that the Martini Testament would not be condemned, my informant spoke as he believed and wished the case to be, but on enquiry found out his mistake [209].

Q.6. Cannot all Maltese who can read at all, read Italian?

A. Maltese who understand Italian find no difficulty in reading their native dialect, the character is the same *Roman*, but the poor, who attend government free schools (generally) learn Maltese alone, and do not understand Italian, which to them is as much a foreign language as English. In 1861 the number of Maltese speaking English was

8675
reading it           6404
writing do           5556
speaking Italian   15806
reading do           14103
writing do           12696

I do not find any return of the numbers reading Maltese, but I believe the answer to Question 1 to be within the mark, for many of those entered as capable of reading Italian may not understand all they read, not so Maltese, if they can read at all, they are likely to understand more of their native dialect than of a foreign tongue.

Q.6a. Have you found them practically willing to read and buy the Scriptures?

A. Not as a body, but Italian Scriptures now and again are sold to Maltese who have travelled. Coming in contact with more enlightened nations – away from priestly surveillance, they acquire pretty correct estimate of things in general, and of religion in particular. Some have declared (in confidence) to me, that when in foreign parts, as in England or America they have attended Protestant worship regularly, but Maltese, who have never left the

island seldom, (I cannot say never) become purchasers of Scriptures at least from your Dépôt, but we must not overlook the fact that Italian Bibles may and do find their way to Malta from England, America and besides which, all or nearly all educated Maltese possess Martini's Italian Bible with notes in 3 vol. costing 12/6. [210]

Q.7. Please send me a copy of the Brazen Serpent.

A. Sent enclosed in this letter.

Q.8. Have you found it (the tract) has been read and understood and that its style and orthography is satisfactory?

A. One word alone (pointed out to me by Vassalli) I objected to is 'Christ was *butchered* for us'. I suggested *slain* or *crucified* for us. 'Im sal-ep'. Otherwise the tract was a faithful though free translation, and has been duly appreciated in several quarters; but more especially by those who feel, that if such doctrine were to be generally received, the Pactolean streams of saintly intercession or Priestly absolution would soon cease to be profitable. As things are at present 'Peters Pence' are getting beautifully less and less. Mr. G.P. who took an active part in bringing out the tract, has been asked, 'Do you not enjoy a comfortable living?' 'Why do you not leave the poor priests alone? they find it very difficult to live!!' G.P. asked: 'How have I injured their prospects in life?' The answer he received was 'You have printed and distributed a tract, which says nothing about confession or penance, saint or priest', or in other words, if people read, believe, and act as the tract instructs them to do, they will in future see no necessity to part with their money for Masses for the dead or indulgences for the living.

Q.9. If the (sic) is to be done would you suggest 1000 should be printed or only 500?

A. Five hundred would do (as a beginning) as probably the greater portion would have to be given away gratuitously. I believe the S.P.C.K. have some intention of bringing out one of the Gospels. Could not some arrangement be made, by which both Societies should share the honour and expense?

Q. 10. Are there any Schools in which the book could be read?

A. None whatever. All Government or Private Schools use [211] what (are called) orthodox books *alone*. We have 3 Protestant schools in Malta for children of English parentage. Maltese is

taught in none of these, and I believe only in one is any Scriptural instruction given (that in connection with the Church of Scotland).

Lastly the person who translated the 'Brazen Serpent' is I should think quite competent to re-write any of the Gospels in the orthography most intelligent to the Maltese – for he would have that of the S.P.C.K. to copy from, and he would only have to change such words as are obsolete, or little understood, for those in use now, but it would be as well to submit the manuscript for revision by Mr. Camilleri previous to printing. It may not be out of place to remind you that once the Maltese approximated more to the Arabic (as in Vassalli's time) and that the dialect is gradually being more and more Latinized, and that the edition now to be brought out, may require revision once more, at some future day. I may also add, that a subscription has been opened here, to meet the expense of a revision of Matthew's Gospel (part of which is ready) so perhaps you may sanction and assist in bringing out this Gospel previous to Luke, which could follow when we see what success attends the issue of Matthew. You will also be interested to hear, that a devoted Maltese Lady, is about to bring out a Maltese Summary of the Gospels, at her sole expense for gratuitous distribution among the poor – and from what I have seen the selection is excellent, and likely to be of considerable benefit, to those for whom it is principally intended, though not to the same extent to be expected from the entire Gospel narrative. As soon as I hear from you I will place myself in communication with Mr. Band let him know the result of your deliberations, until then he will be usefully employed on the revision of Matthew.

(Signed) T. J. Kirby

(8)

[269] *Letter from Mr. T. J. Kirby to the Rev. R. B. Girdlestone received 6 June 1870.*

Malta May 27/70

I now pen a few lines in answer to your favour of the 6th instant – a few days ago B's translation of Matthew was handed to me, with the request that I would look over it. I did so and found, that in several places B had improved much on Vassalli, both as to clearness and fidelity – but I also found parts of paragraphs omitted [270] and other errors. Friends here have therefore requested



me to go carefully over the whole — this I am doing devoting 2½ hours daily (or from 5 to 7½ a.m.) to the work. I have the assistance of a friend of Mr. Camilleri — whom he may perhaps remember, as the brother of the Theological Professor in the Malta Government University many years ago. I hope to finish this very interesting work in some three weeks time. The Gospel will then have to be copied fair, and in proper manuscript, so as to be ready for Mr. Camilleri, and for that gentleman's information, I would add, many words are now used, which few of the Maltese understood formerly. Mr. C has been for many years absent from Malta, but I believe he will at once perceive the change and understand any new word in the present translation as 'fidi' for faith, instead of the old word 'twemmin' and Matthew 5 chap. ver. 3 the word which signified in Maltese 'Happy' has been changed to 'Blessed'. Matt. c8 ver. 28. 'Two mad men' has been changed to 'Two possessed with Devils' and Matt. ix v17 were (sic) Vassalli has 'neither do men put new wine into old bellies' B has put 'old barrels' but I think the word 'Lutri' a word well known and used by Maltese here and by Arabs and Maltese in Africa and elsewhere (including Spain) and signifying 'skin' in which water, oil and wine, are carried from place to place even to the present day, even in Greece and India. When in doubt, as to the most proper word to be used, we consult the Italian, as well as English Version, and I have more than once consulted the Rev. G. Wisely, as to the meaning in the original Greek. Probably we shall have to wait some three months, ere we shall be privileged to hand to the Maltese a readable as well as faithful translation of Matthew's Gospels. And we believe it will prove a blessing to them, as it has to us, who feel (in a measure) the greater force and attraction [271] of our Lord's words, to a native, in his own dialect, and our desire, is that we may be led by the Spirit, to choose words best suited to convey to them, the mind and will of Christ, so that some, even of the Maltese may learn to know *Him* whom to 'Know is life eternal'.

Funds sufficient to pay for the translation of Matthew, have been already subscribed, and will be devoted to that purpose. And in reply to your question, as to where it had better be printed, I would prefer its being done by you (in England) and that the type be good, like your English Gospel Small Pica 32mo cloth.

Receive yourself and kindly tender to the gentlemen on the Committee, our united thanks, for the promptitude with which needed help has been given us.

(Signed) T.J. Kirby

I am glad that at last something is likely to be done for Malta. I do not think any printer in Valletta dare print the Gospel. When the man who has revised it meets Mr. Kirby, he scarcely ventures to salute him.

(Signed) T. Bruce

(9)

[296] *Letter from Mr. T.J. Kirby to Rev. R.B. Girdlestone.*

Malta July 12.70

This comes by way of Italy, to prepare you for the receipt, per next Southampton Mail of the Maltese Gospel, which I believe will require little revision, as much care has been expended thereon already. My coadjutor has confessed, that although he has read the Scriptures, here and there a portion, he had never gone through them consecutively before, he has become quite enamoured with the word, and purposes to revise Mark's Gospel on *his own account*. He has got as far as Mark X, and I have gone over some of the chapters with him and I will continue to do so, in my leisure hour, until the whole of the New Testament is done. If he does not tire or change his present purpose, the whole will be ready in about twelve months' time (he is a printer and cannot devote the whole of his time to the work) but my sincere prayer is that the people may be ready to receive it also.

(Signed) T.J. Kirby

P.S. I trust ere long to hear that the Gospel is in the press.

(Signed) T.J.K.

(10)

[307] *Letter from the Rev. M.A. Camilleri to the Edit. Supt.*

Wantage 4th Aug. 70

I shall be most happy to read over the new revision of the Maltese Bible, and will tell you candidly all I think about it. Send it therefore, as soon as you like, and I hope when the proof sheets are ready for correction I shall see to at least the second or last sheet. It is very important that the spelling should be very correct in a work of this kind.

*Letter from Rev. M. A. Camilleri to the Ed. Supt.*

Aug. 6.70

I need not tell you, how thankful [308] I am that your Ven. Society, has undertaken this work. There are men even in high stations who do not appreciate this labour of love. But the men of faith know better how to husband the gifts of God, in his Blessed Word and in the easy means of making it known.

It is all very well to say that the Maltese, who can read may have the Italian Bible. It used to be said the very same thing of the Irish and the Welsh. But most of the Maltese though able to read Italian *do not* understand that language, but fully understand the Maltese spoken by them, and heard by them in the preaching of their clergy. Your Ven. Society must also consider that by making the New Testament read easy and correct, the very priests at Malta will use your work for their sermons.

And what say we of the thousands who on the coasts of Barbary and the Mediterranean away from the priests, have no means whatever for holding their faith and understanding of the Scriptures? Ah if you knew what I know of those abandoned Maltese, how wicked, ignorant and self deceiving they are in the midst of the more wicked and darkened Mohamodans! Pray thank the Board for this their work, for it will not return void, but will bear its fruit in due season.

(Signed) M. A. Camilleri

*University of Malta*