SOME GRAMMATICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF
THE PLACE-NAMES OF MALTA AND GOZO
IN EARLY MODERN TIMES

by

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It has already been shown by the present writer that, among the
thousands of Maltese and Gozitan place-names of the period 1370-
1600 recorded in extant documents, a few hundreds contain at
least one non-Arabic word.1 These could be either one or other of
a select group of common descriptive words like Stabal, Forn,
Cens, Birgu, Mandra. The majority, however, consist of non-Arabic
personal nouns, surnames or nicknames referring to some former
proprietor or benefactor of the area. On the other hand, an examina-
tion of the morphology of Maltese and Gozitan place-names of the
same period shows an almost total lack of non-Arabic morphologi-
cal elements among the common descriptive topographical words,
and the syntax of the compound place-names is also almost com-
pletely Arabic, except for one particularly important feature which,
though present in dialectal Arabic from elsewhere, does not seem
to have affected Arabic place-names in the way it has clearly
done in the Maltese islands.2 The present study shall examine the
mimated place-names and the diminutives, as well as the charac-
teristics of composite formations. The particularly Arabic charac-
ter of Maltese and Gozitan place-names should become amply
evident.

THE MIMATED PLACE-NAMEs

The Maltese language, like most of the Semitic languages in
general and Arabic in particular, can form nouns of location by the
use of the m- prefix. It is only to be expected that the medieval
place-names of the Maltese islands contain innumerable examples.
Several of them indicate the presence of water:

Tal-Maqghad, of the place where water collects:
Giuseppe de Guevara, NAV, R 224/1, f. 363.
L-Imnejqa ta' Bir Miftuh, the small field, small enclosure or pond at the open well (Bir Miftuh):

Il Mineycha ta Bir miftuch, land belonging to the bishop near Casal Chircop: 1733, Cabreo of Bishop's Mensa, plate XX.

Ta' l-Imnejqat, of the small fields, enclosures or ponds:
talmineycat, clausura in contrata santa agatha: 24.xi.1530, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/12, f. 169v.

Il-Mineq, the small fields or enclosures or ponds:

Il-Mahšel, the washing place:
ilmahisel, territorium: 28.vii.1495, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1;

L-Imhæsel, the washing places:
lumahasel, territorium: 9.iii.1487, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1;
tal michasil, clausura in contrata il guardie: 30.viii.1504, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/2, f. 78.

Other mimated place-names refer to buildings and other constructions:

Tal-Maqbar, of the grave or cemetery:
tal macabar, one of a group of fields belonging to the bishop of Malta: 18.vi.1517, NAV, R 140/7, f. 99v.

Tal-Miğlis, of the sitting room or council chamber:

Ta' l-Imhæzen, of the store rooms:

Ta' Misged, of the synagogue (miskita, from Arabic masgid, mosque):
ta misged, galcula in contrata lahyfar: 17.x.1537, Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/5, f. 65.

Tal-Mithna, of the mill:

Mqabba, the square building:
Ta' l-Imsiekel, of the small subsidiary buildings (perhaps pig-sties or other small rooms for animals):

Ta' l-Imtamar, of the underground grain silos:
*ta ilmitamar, galea in casali Tarxen: 30.x.1500, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2; ta ilmitamar, vigna in ta il mizeb (ta') rahal tarxen: 3.viii.1499, idem, ibid.*

It is, of course, certain that the field referring to the Jewish synagogue merely belonged to the synagogue inside Mdina. It is possible that there was a similar relationship between the fields indicated by the other place-names recorded above and the buildings to which they refer.

Several other mimated place-names refer to pastoralism:

Il-Merhla, the sheep-fold, the animal yard:
*ilmerhile, one of a group of fields belonging to the bishop of Malta: 18.vi.1517, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/7, f. 99v.*

Merhlet il-Mog'hoz, the goats' pen:
*merbelet ilmohos, guardia ob scandalum pestis in suburbio maris: 1.vi.1523, Cath. Arch., Mdina, Ms. 36, f. 439.*

Mriejel, the animal yards, sheep-folds, etc.:
*mirachil: 1.x.1467, Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, f. 21v; mirabel, locum: 9.iii.1487, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; tal mirebel, contrata: 18.i.1525, Not. L. Hagius, NAV, R 7, f. 5v.*

Mriejel Lapsi, Lapsi's (nickname) animal yards or sheep-folds:
*mirechel lapsi, contrata: 15.xii.1558, NLM, Treas. A74, f. 10.*

Ta' l-Imrejhliet, of the small animal yards or sheep-folds:

Tal-Merqad, of the sleeping place:
*talmercad, galea in contrata casalis Luca: 1.viii.1525, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/10, f. 299.*

Il-Mentina, the place of stench, the dunghill:

Mizibla, the rubbish dump, the town midden:
Miżbla tas-Saqqajja, the rubbish dump or town midden at Saqqajja: *misbile dela saccaya*, contrata: 27.iv.1545, Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/15, f. 395v.

Tal-Miżbliet, of the rubbish dumps or town middens:

L-Imżejbla, the small rubbish dump or town midden:
*ilmiczeibile*, galcula in contrata ta bur mule: 30.xi.1528, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/12, f. 24.

L-Imżiebel, the rubbish dumps or town middens:
*ilmisebil*, clausura in contrata talmisebil: 5.i.1512, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/5, f. 103v; *misebil*: 1.vi.1523, Cath. Arch., Mdina, Ms. 36, f. 468; *lo mundizaro*, guardia ob scandalum pestis in suburbio maris: *ibid.*, f. 439.

MZlebel Simna, Simna’s (name) rubbish dumps or town middens:

The following are apparently of Romance origin but have been assimilated so successfully that they follow closely the whole Arabic pattern:

Il-Mandra, the animal pen or yard:
*il mandra*, galcula in casali Spital: 12.x.1519, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/8, f. 80v.

Mnajdra, the small animal pen or yard:
*minaydra*, galketta: 5.iii.1496, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1.

Il-Mnadar, the animal pens or yards:

In Egyptian colloquial, *Mnadar* means ‘reception parlours for male visitors’, but in Tunisian it means ‘threshing floors’, for which *andar* was the word used in the Maltese islands in the fifteenth century and *qieghain* in more recent times.

Winter quarters for animals or ships were also indicated in the place-names:

Mixta, the wintering place:
Il-Mixta ta' Kalment, Clement's wintering place:

Muxet, wintering places:

Marsa Muxet, the harbour of the wintering places:
*cala marsha mixet*: 24.xi.1468, NLM, Univ. 11, f. 2v; Marsa mixet, portus: 19.x.1523, NAV, Univ. 12, f. 341.

Bee-keeping, wine-making, fishing and harbour activity are suggested by the following:

Tal-Miġba, of the beehive:
*tal mighiba*, clausura: 17.viii.1500, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/1, f. 46.

Miġebah; beehives:

Mgħasra, the grape or olive presser:

Msida, the fishing place or harbour:

Marfa, a landing place:
*la marfa di Malta*: 13.iii.1514, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/6, f. 50.

Marsa, an anchorage, a harbour:

Some of the mimated place-names refer to natural topographical features:

Mejda, the tableland:

Mwejda, small tableland:
*īll müeyde de Sant ermu* (the small tableland of St. Erasmo):

**Mwejjed**, tablelands:

**Miġbla**, a place of a lot of stones or boulders:

**Minfes**, a blow hole:

**Il-Mixraf**, the elevation, height, hill:

**Mixraf il-herba**, the elevation or hill of the ruin:

**Ta’ l-Imxieref**, of the elevations, heights, hills:

**L-Imxieref iċ-Ċkejken**, the small (district called) l-Imxieref:

**Tal-Munxar**, the saw edge (of a ridge above or below sea-level):

Others refer to the openness or the closed nature of the locality:

**Tal-Magħlaq**, of the enclosure:

**Il-Magħlaq ta’ l-Gherien**, the enclosure of the caves:

**Misrah**, an open area with a good view all around:
- *misrah*, spacium: 22.xi.1499, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2; *tal misrah*, clausura: 13.iii.1529, Not. Gr. Vassallo, NAV,
R 464/4, f. 178v: 'taberna sita in dicta casali Luca in qua et in eius miserach sive platea...': 18.ii.1521, NLM, Univ. 12, f. 261.

L-Imsejraḥ, the small open space:

L-Insierah, the open spaces:
*ilmiserach*, terra: 8.i.1520, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/8, f. 29.

Innumerable mimated nouns, however, expressing other ideas can also be found among the place-names of Malta and Gozo. The following refer to tools and instruments with a real or fanciful connection with the locality:

Ta' Marżebba, of the beetle or large wooden mallet, probably a fanciful reference to the megalith in the area:

Ta' Mrejżba, of the small beetle or wooden mallet:

Ta' I-Imghazqa, of the mattock:

Tal-Muftieh (modern standard pronunciation), of the key, perhaps originally Mifiteh, an Arabic personal name:

Tal-Migbid, of the beam by which the water wheel is turned:
*ilmigibid*, clausura in contrata casalis Tarxen: 18.iii.1506, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/3, f. 9; *tal migibid*, duas lencias.
Ta' Migbid l-Ghajn, of the water-wheel beam of the spring:

Tal-Mingle, of the sickle:

Ta' Misluta, of the ear-ring (nickname?):

Tal-Mismar, of the ‘single pipe wood-wind instrument resembling the oboe’, unless it is really *Musmar*, a nail:

Ta' Mterqa, of the hatchet:

Several of these mimated nouns indicating instruments really appear in the place-names as the nicknames of persons associated somehow with the locality of the place-name. Mimated nicknames do not, however, have to be names of instruments. Their number, in fact, is so large that they cannot all be given here, especially if one added those which were also used at some time or other as surnames in Malta or Gozo:

Ta' Mahdi, cf. Mehedy bin Mehedy moro di Alessandri, 21.xii.1585: NLM, AOM 442, f. 247r-v:

Tal-Mahnuq, of the hoarse person, cf. surname Mahnuq:
Ta' Mawwija, Arab name, i.e. Mu'awiyah:


Ta' Merżuq, Arab name, cf. Mihammet bin Merzuc moro gerbino, 17.xi.1632: AOM, 464, f. 321v:


Ta' l-Imghawweg, the bent one, nickname:


Tal-Misilmin, of the Muslims:


Tal-Mislem, of the Muslim:


Ta' Muḥammed, Arab name used as surname in Malta as late as the fifteenth century:


Other surnames, nicknames or Arabic names enshrined in Malta’s and Gozo’s place-names include the following: Mabluf, Maltta, Mindbin (Midinbin?), Mdorbu, Merhube, Merqi, Merzuaq, Mghegheb, Mgħajjen, Mgħabel, Mgħalbal, Misluq, Misfruda, Mifruq (perhaps, however, it describes a divided field), Mifruqa (a divided field?), Milfuq, Milwieb, Mintuf, Misluq, Mislab, Mislub, Mislab, Mizangar (fifteenth century surname), Miżrut, Mqarqa, Mqaxxra, Mrabat, Musfar. It will be seen that several of these and the preceding place-names really are past participles and their meaning has no direct relevance to the place to which they refer.

DIMINUTIVES

Although the Arabic internal diminutive formation is still fairly well known in modern Maltese, it tends increasingly to occur among village folk rather than townsfolk, among the uneducated rather
than among those who have any pretensions to a regular education, except for the fossilized occurrences in everyday speech where the diminutive has been almost entirely lost. However, the place-names of Malta of the period 1370-1600 exhibit a great abundance of this formation:

Hābel, a field-strip
Hbejel, a small field-strip

as distinct from the diminutive formed by suffixes taken over by Maltese from Sicilian or Italian:

Il-Busket, the small forest, derived from Bosk, a forest
Kemmunett, small Comino, the name of the tiny islet near Kemmuna
Gomerinu, small Ghemieri, a curial Latin version of the name of a fief at Ghemieri
Wied Insaldin, little Ansaldo's valley, the name of a valley in Malta at Ghajn Rihana now known as Wied Sardin!

The diminutives of Arabic type take various forms. When the singular has the form CVVCV, the diminutive is formed on the patterns of CCajjeC, CCajjeC, CCejjaC, CCejjeC. The orthography of the time, however irregular and inconsistent it might be, frequently seems to indicate quite strongly that the second vowel of the syllables ajja, ejje, ajje, ejja was not pronounced, in this, therefore resembling the original Arabic formation of the diminutives.

Qsajjem. dim. of Qasam, a small fief, a small estate:

Qbajjar, dim. of Qabar, a small grave:

Rhaejel, a small village:

Sbejjah, dim. of Sabih; sweet, pretty (nickname):
Ubejjel, dim. of Uabel, a small field-strip:


Dmejjjen, dim. of Dimna, a small hut or cottage, a small ruin?


Gbejjel, dim. of Gebel, a small hill:


Shejjem, dim. of Sehem, a small share or portion:


Hreibeb, dim. of Herba, a small ruin:

Yl hyreyb, tres galcae in contrata hyseuy di birkircara: 17.iii.1535, Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/2, f. 264.

Snejjed, dim. of Sind, a small hill-side patchy field:


When the second radical is j or w the diminutive takes the following forms:
Wejjed, dim. of Wied, a small valley:
   *il. gueyd*, galca in contrata Bir Czebuge: 18.x.1517, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/7, f. 128v.

Xwejjah, dim. of Xin, a little old man (nickname):

Bwajjar, dim. of Bur, a small meadow:

Bwajrat, pl. dim. of Bur, small meadows:

Ghaweijjen, dim. of Ghajn, little spring:

Feminine nouns of three radical consonants in the singular have these forms: CCAjCa, CCEjCa. If the first consonant is gḥ then it is followed by its own vowel even in the diminutive form:

Bqajla, dim. of Bagla, name of a plant or herb:

Gwejda, dim. of Gudja, a small hillock:

Ghalejqa, dim. of Ghalqa, a small field:
   *la gulejca*, vinea in contrata gued rum: 11.x.1514, NLM, Univ. 12, f. 92; *il guleyca*, galcula in contrata gued seude: 15.xi.1514, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/6, f. 90v; *el ghuleica*, clausura in contrata di buleben: 5.ix.1542, Not. Gius. de Guevara, NAV, R 224/1, f. 368v.

Ghaqajba, dim. of Ghqaqba, a small hillock:

Ghatajsa, dim. of Ghatsa, a small hillock:
   *ta hataysa*, galca in contrata gudie: 30.x.1500, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2.


Mnejqa, dim. of Menqa, a small enclosure of water or artificial pond: *tal mineyca la suprana*, pars feudi de lu zeituni: 7.viii.1521, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/9, f. 19v.

Mgajra, dim. of Migra, a small stream or watercourse: *lM MiJayra*, galca in contrata handac: 9.xi.1540, Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/8, f. 73v.

Qlejgha, dim. of Qalgha, a small fort or steep hill-top: *de aq[i]le[a*, quoddam pheudum terre curie in eadem insula mediveti: 21.viii.1408, ASP, Real Cancelleria, vol. 44/45, f. 405 (olim, 350); *ll culaya*, pecia terre in contrata de bungemma: 30.x.1467, Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, f. 39v; *culeya*, pheudum: 24.viii.1495, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; *choleya*, pecia terre in contrata zebug, Gozo: 3.xi.1585, Not. J.D. Formosa, NAV, R 271/1, f. 627.

**Trajga**, dim. of **Targa**, a small step or stairway:

*trayge*, galca: 1.ix.1532, Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/1, f. 80v;  
*il chubeyel ta tirayge*, clausura: 9.v.1544, Not. Br. de Caxario,  
NAV, R 175/13, f. 562v.

**Trajba**, dim. of **Torba**, a small cemetery?:

*ta traybe*, pecia terre in contrata Cortin Samat: 20.viii.1534, Not.  
G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/2, f. 90.

**Wlejga**, dim. of **Wilga**, a small field on a valley side:

*ilbuleyge*, clausura in contrata casalis curmi: 16.xi.1497, Not.  
J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2; *il guileige*, clausura in casali Gudja:  
3.i.1513, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/5, f. 183v; *il buleyge*,  
clausura in contrata casalis balczan: 22.i.1542, Not. Juliano  
Muscat, NAV, R 376/5, f. 315; *il guilege*, clausura in contrata  
sancti Antonj casalis cuderj: 7.i.1556, Not. Br. de Caxario,  
NAV, R 175/49, f. 1238.

**Xghajra**, dim. or **Xaghra**, a small area of scrub land, rough grazing  
land:

*xhayra*, pecia terre in contrata gebel chantar: 30.iii.1498, Not.  
J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2, f. 111v; *xabira*, contrata: 6.ix.1508, Not.  
C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/4, f. 29v; *xabayra*, clausura de feudo si­  
ve territorio Episcopatus: 7.ix.1518, idem, NAV, R 140/8, f. 4v;  
ixhayra, clausura in contrata ta sebbech: 5.i.1586, Not. Ferd.  
Ciappara, NAV, R 185/1, f. 554v.

**Xhajma**, dim. of **Xahma**, little fatty, little softy, a nickname:

*ta xichayme*, locum in contrata Nadur, Gozo: 29.xi.1575, Not. L.  
de Apapis, NAV, R 203, f. 149; *ta xichayme*, clausura in contrata  
185/3, f. 543v.

**Xbejka**, dim. of **Xibka**, a small net, perhaps a nickname:

*ta xibeyke*, pecia terre in contrata tabrie: 26.ix.1533, Not. G. But­  
tigieg, NAV, R 105/1, f. 280; *ta xibeiche*, clausura in contrata ta  
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**Hmajra** is, however, the diminutive of **Hmara**, a small donkey, a  
personal nickname:

*ta chumayra*, clausura: 7.x.1530, Not. Gr. Vassallo, NAV, R 464/6,  
f. 30v; *ta humayra*, clausura in contrata ta liscof: 8.v.1543, Not.  
Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/11, f. 498.

The following particular form should also be noted and carefully  
distinguished from its normal plural:
Anejdir or more simply Nejdir, dim. of Andar, a small threshing floor:

The plural form is the following.

Anieder, pl. of Andar, threshing floors:
linedir ta ismundin, galca (small fields) in contrata casalis pascualini: 23.vii.1530, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/12, f. 155.

Not only would the corresponding Arabic forms make the distinction clear, but the descriptive language of the documents themselves gives a sure indication, Nejdir being always described as a single field, while Anieder is described as the name of several fields.

Place-names of the pattern CCύC form their diminutive on the pattern of CCάjjaC, CCάjjeC, or CCεjjeC:

Blajjet, dim. of Blat, small rock or boulder:

Ghejjen, dim. of Gnien, a small garden, but cf. Gnejna, with the same meaning:
N.B. Ġnejna can also be the diminutive of the Christian name Johanna, as in the following:


Sqajjaq, dim. of Sqaq, a small alley:


\textit{Ta sucayac itigeg} (the field of the little lane of the chickens), clausura in contrata Ta gar il Jobon: 22.i.1549, Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/23, f. 728v.

The Semitic diminutive formation is so strong that a Romance word like \textit{cens} also formed its diminutive in the same way:


In Maltese, as in Arabic, nouns of four consonants form their diminutives according to a slightly different pattern:

Brājtel, prob. dim. of Bartal, little Bartholomew:


Grājden, dim. of Gardin, little garden:


Brejbet, prob. dim. of Barbat (nickname or surname):

\textit{tel brejbet}, animagium in hac Jnsula gaudisii in contrata Jl carb (Gharb): 14.xii.1586, Not. J.D. Formosa, NAV, Ms. 836, f. 72.

Brejqex, dim. of Berqax (surname or nickname):


Frajtes, dim. of Fartas, bald headed (nickname):

\textit{tal fraites}, clausura adjoining il bur tal fraites: 11.x.1621, NLM, Treas. A 74, f. 128.

Fnejdaq, dim. of Funduq, a shop:

\textit{tal fineydac}, galcula in contrata casalis cadim: 3.ii.1523, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/10, f. 22.

Ghasajfar, dim. of Ghasfur, a small bird:

Mghajlaq, dim. of Maghlaq, a small enclosure:

Mrejksi, prob. dim. of Markis, a small marquis (nickname):

Mfejleg, probably dim. of Mifleg; the little maimed or paralysed one (a nickname):

Mnejhor, dim. of Minhar, little nose (a nickname):

Mnejrah, dim. of Misrah, a small open space, a small square:

Qrajten, dim. of Qortin, a small rocky bluff or hill-top:
  *tha curajtin*, galca in contrata curajtin: 27.i.1520, Not. P. d'Alaymo, NAV, Ms. 779.

Slejlem, dim. of Sellum, a small ladder, a small series of terraced fields up a hill-slope:

The following feminine quadriliteral (four consonant) place-names of the pattern CvCCCa form their diminutive on the pattern CCajCCCa or CCejCCCa:

Mnajdra, dim. of Mandra, a small animal pen:

Mżejbla, dim. of Miżbla, a small rubbish dump or dunghill:
As in Arabic, nouns, whether place-names or not, lose the last consonants after the fourth one in the diminutive form:

**Mrejzba**, dim. of **Marzebbba**, a small beetle:


It will be noticed that several of the above words are not themselves of Arabic origin; yet they have developed a normal Semitic diminutive form by internal rearrangement of letters and the addition of the normal -aj- or -ej- syllables, e.g. Brajtel, Grajden, Brejbet, Mrejks.

Naturally the diminutives may themselves be in the plural: This is formed by the feminine termination in -at or -iet, whether the singular was a feminine noun or not:

**Blejbliet**, pl. of **Blejbla**, itself the dim. of **Bilbla**, small larks, a nickname:


**Blejqa t**, pl. of **Blejqa**, itself the dim. of **Belqa**, small dark-coloured goat, a nickname:


**Bwajrat**, pl. of **Bwajjar**, small meadows:


**Cnejjesiet**, pl. of **Cnejjes**, small census paying lands:


**Objejliert**, pl. of **Obezjel**, small boulder-lands (?):


**Gnejniet**, pl. of **Gnejjen** and **Gnejna**, small gardens:

Ghalejqat, pl. of Ghalejqa, small fields:
Il guleicat tal jubirat, tres clausurae in contrata casalis antun:
29.xii.1545, NAV, R 224/3, f. 150v of 2nd pt.

Hbejliet, pl. of Hbejjel, small field-strips:
Il hubeylet, contrata: 1.viii.1496, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1;

Hrejbiel, pl. of Hrejba, small ruins:

Mrejhliet, pl. of Mrejha, itself the dim. of Merha, small animal yards:
Dili mireihelet: 15.vii.1538, NLM, Univ. 13, f. 159; Tha Jlmieychilet, quarta pars pheudi Episcopi: 14.i.1542, Cathedral Archives, Mdina, CEM, RA, vol. 3, f. 17.

Mnejqat, pl. of Mnejqa, small water enclosures, artificial ponds:

Nejdriet, pl. of Nejdir, small threshing floors:

Qlejgliat, pl. of Qlejgha, small forts or small rocky hill-top bluffs:
Ta ilculeyat, specia terrae: 24.xii.1496, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1.

Wlejjet, pl. of Wlejja, small hill-side fields:

Composite Formation Characteristics

It is very rare indeed for Maltese place-names to consist of one single word. These would include the names of the four islands
that make up the Maltese archipelago: Malta, Ghawdex (Gozo), Kemmuna and Filfla. With them one would have to include numerous names of foreign islands, countries, towns and other localities, e.g. Sqallija, Spanja, Franza, Sirakuža, Katania, Palermu, Ruma, Perigi, Kreta, Cipru, Tunes, Tripoli. However, numerous other foreign place-names not referring to towns or islands take the definite article in Maltese: il-Grecja, il-Čermanja, il-Libja, il-Palestina, il-Marokk, il-Turkija. Minor localities within the Maltese islands themselves take the definite article always unless they are already rendered definite in some other way, e.g. il-Mellieha, l-Imdina, il-Hamrun, il-Miżieb, iż-Zurrieq, but Marsamxett, Marsaxlokk, Hal Balzan, Wied Żnuber, Għajn Tuffieħa, where the relation between the two component elements (Marsa Mxett, Marsa Xlokk, etc.) is enough to express definition.

Compound formations are of various types. What seems the simplest is that consisting of a word indicating possession; like the modern ta' or the Late medieval bita or mita. However in all such place-names there is a missing main component which is left to the context to supply. Thus Ta' Briffa stands for Għalqa ta' Briffa at Mrieħel and Habel ta' Briffa at Ċagħki:

ta briffa, clausura in contrata Mirahal: 20.ii.1497, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2


This is a very large class of place-names, being extremely common both in Malta and in Gozo. The missing component could be Andar, Bir. (well), Bur (meadow), Dar (house), Ġebel (hill-side), Ġnież (garden), Ġħar (cave), Għalqa (field), Habel (field-strip), Herba (ruin), Qortin (bluff or brow of a hill), Ras (headland, top of a valley), Rdum (cliff), Wied (valley), Wilġa (valley-side field), Xagħra (scrub, rough grazing land), with their plural formations, their diminutives, and the plurals of their diminutives. The full form is, of course, quite common, e.g. L-Andar tal-Qortin (the hill-brow’s threshing field), il-Bur ta’ Randun (Randon’s meadow), Rdum ta’ Venuta (Venuta’s cliff), il-Wilġa ta’ Paula (Paola’s hillside field).

The word ta', indicating possession in Maltese, is a corruption of the original Arabic mtag, btag. In fifteenth and early sixteenth century documents it is frequently still represented by bita or mita. Some 97 occurrences of the former and 12 of the latter have been found:
Ta’ Aragona, Aragona’s:  
*bita Aragona, terrae in insula gaudisii: 1.viii.1487, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1.*

Tal-Baghal, the mule’s, the bastard’s (nickname):  
*bita il bical, galca: 9.iii.1487, Not. J. Sabara, NAV R 494/1.*

Tal-Barrani, Barrani’s, the outsider’s, the stranger’s:  
*bita barrani, contrata: 15.xii.1527, Not. Gr. Vassallo, NAV, R 464/3, f. 70.*

Ta’ Bir Žebbuga, Bir Žebbuġa’s, at Bir Žebbuġa:  

Tal-Ghafrida, Ghafrida’s,  

Tal-Gharab, the Arabs’:  
*bita chrab, clausura in contrata chandac: 5.i.1527, Not. Gr. Vassallo, NAV, R 464/3, f. 74.*

Il-Habel Ta’ Santa Marija, the field strip belonging to St. Mary:  
*Ilchabel bita santamaria, lencia terrarum: 6.xii.1454, Cathedral Archives, Mdina, CEM, AO, vol. 4, f. 220v, will drawn up by Not. Angelus de Fauzono.*

Ta’ Longubordi, the Lombard’s:  
*bita longu burdi, contrata: 1486, Not. Bartholomeo Sillato, NAV, R 1069, f. 1v.*

Ta’ Mundrani, Mundrani’s (presumably a surname, perhaps Jewish)  
*bita mundrani, pezza di terra nella contrata della chiesa di S. Andrea: 13.x.1474, Not. L. Sillato, item preserved in an eighteenth century note in NLM, Ms. 360, p. 923.*

Ta’ Hamed, Hamed’s:  
*bita hamitu, tenimentum terrarum in Gozo, 14.vii.1399, Archivio di Stato di Palermo, Real Cancellaria, Vol. 35, f. 241v. Perhaps hamitu would be better read hamicu as Gamicu was a surname still in fifteenth century Gozo and ‘c’ and ‘t’ were frequently indistinguishable in the writing of the time.*

Tal-Wileg, of the valley side fields:  
*bital guilig, 5.iii.1539, Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/4, f. 371v.*

Il-Wilga, Ta’ Gullielmu, William’s valley-side field:  
*ilbuilge bita gullielmi, tenimentum terrarum in contrata dar iczarra: 6.xii.1454, Cathedral Archives, Mdina, CEM, AO, vol. 4, f. 222, will drawn up by Not. Angelus de Fauzono.*
At least 61 of the 96 known examples of the use of *bila* in Maltese late medieval place-names were written by Notary Graciano Vassallo between 1488 and 1531. Notary Jacobus Sabara recorded some 19 examples between 1486 and 1496; in his later deeds he always used *ta* instead. Notaries Luca and Bartholomew Sillato, Antonio Fauzono and Brandano de Caxario are responsible for only a few examples each. The last known use of *bila* occurs in 1539 in the deeds of notary Brandano de Caxario: On at least twelve other occasions *mita* was preferred to *bila* to indicate ‘possession’:

**Ta’ L-Andar**, of the threshing floor:


**Ta’ Bir il-Miqlis**, of the well at the sitting room or council chamber:


**Tal-Fies**, of the pick-axe:

*Amita fies*, beneficium: 1436, De Mello’s Rollo, seventeenth century copy in NLM, Ms. 721, item 2.

**Ta’ Ġorman**, Gormaine’s:


**Ta’ Ġewwa r-Roqha**, at Ġewwa r-Roqha:


**Ta’ Għattar**, Għattar’s, the apothecary’s:

*Amita battar*, galca in contrata casalis Pascualini: 1486, Not. B. Sillato, NAV, Ms. 1069, f. 1.

**Tal-Ħadded**, the blacksmiths’:


**Tal-Ħadid (?)**, of the iron:


**Tal-Misilmin**, of the Muslims:


**Ta’ l-Imsierah**, of the open spaces, of the town or village squares:

Ta' Sgejriet, of the small trees:

Tas-Sigra, of the tree:

Though there was an overwhelming disposition to prefer the use of bita to that of mita in the Maltese islands, the recording of mita sigeyret and bita sigeyret in one and the same document (another example is that of mitalmisen and bitalmisen by Graciano Vassallo in 1527) shows that persons were themselves sometimes undetermined which to use. Both words tended to be replaced by ta, i.e. the modern ta, ta il or tal, well before the fifteenth century came to an end. Notary Paulo Bonello always prefers the latter form in his surviving deeds of 1467:

Ta' Xellule, Xellula's:
ta xellule, galcula in contrata deyr issafisaf: 3.ix.1467, Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, f. 5.

Tal-Blat, of the rocky place:
ta ilbilat, galcula in senebu castri maris maltae: 5.ix.1467, ib., f. 6v.

Ta' Hanfus, the beetle's (perhaps a nickname):
ta chanfus, galcula in contrata matab: 15.x.1467, ib., f. 30.

Ta' Burga, Ambroga's:
ta burge, contrata: 16.x.1467, ibid., f. 31.

Tal-Ghawdxi, the Gozitan's, or Gauci's:
taul gaudixi, pecia de terra in contrata beb il gisire: 23.x.1467, ibid., f. 35v.

Not. J. Sabara, fl. 1486-1501, an occasional user of bita, uses ta at least just as frequently. Not. Graciano Vassallo himself tended increasingly to use the latter in his later years, but still seems to prefer bita. After 1539 the word ta remains in sole use. It is presumed that this written tradition in the use of mita, mita and ta reflects to a large extent their use in the spoken language, probably with a time-lag of a decade or two on average.

Nouns in the Construct State

Very often Maltese and Gozitan place-names consist of two nouns in the so-called construct state. Originally, when case-endings still existed, the second noun was in the genitive and the first in the nominative but without nunation, to show that it was definite. Late me-
dieval Maltese, of course, had no case-endings but the bond between the two words was still one indicating possession, and the first word's definiteness was still made clear, as nowadays, by the omission of the definite article. Normally, the first word element indicates the type of feature referred to, whether a hill, a well, a house, field, cliff, valley, etc., while the second element would refer either to a distinguishing feature (a tree, a house, a church, a well, etc.), a locality, or a person by name, nickname or surname. Only a few examples of each can be given here.

**Gebel Ġakobb**, Jacob's hillside:


**Bir Żebbuga**, the wild-olive tree well:

birzebuge, contrata: 27.x.1467. Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, f. 36.

**Bir Merżuq**, Merżuq's well:

bir merzuc, terrae: 9.i.1538, Not. Gerolamo Cumbo, NAV, R 196/1, f. 82.

**Bir Jahlef**, Jahlef's well:


**Wied il-Qlejgha**, the valley at Qlejgha:


When the first element has the Ta-marbuta ending in its original Arabic nominative form (represented by a simple -a in Maltese), it takes an -et, -it, or even -ot ending when in the construct state:

**Torbet Garfagna**, Garfagna's (Gravagna's) tomb:


**Hagret il-Blies**, the peregrine falcon's megalith (probably a nickname):

chagret ilbes, octava pars feudalii territorii sancti Nicolai in contrata casali chibir: 27.i.1531, Not. J. Bondin, NAV, R 69.

**Hirbit il-Forn**, the ruins of the oven (lime kiln):

chirbit ilfum, beneficium! 22.ix.1467, Not. P. Bonello, NAV, Ms. 588, f. 19.
Ghardret ix-Xorraf, Xorraf’s lake, or the lake at Xorraf:

gadiret ix-xorraf, contrata: 8.iii.1564, Not. Matteo de Brincat, NAV, Ms. 767.

Hofrot is-Simar, the depression of the ruses.


Qalghet il-Ghabid, the slave’s fort:


Xaghet il-Ghadir, the scrubland at the lake:

xaret il hadiri, contrata: 12.v.1487, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; ta xarit gadiri, lencia terrae near feudum buleben: 7.iii.1536, Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/3, f. 1'47.

It should, however, be remembered that several Maltese place-names ending in -a do not take the Ta’ marbuta, a characteristic which they share with their cognate Arabic words, e.g. Migra, Marsa:

Il-Mentqa [Ta’] Migra Ilma, the small strip of land at Migra Ilma, the small strip of land at the watercourse:


Marsalforn, the harbour at the limekiln:


It also sometimes happens that the construct state is carried through more than just two nouns. This occurs where one element itself consists of two nouns in a construct state:

Bwajjar  Herbet Bakkar, the small meadow of Bakkar’s ruin:


Habel Bir il-Wilga, the field-strip at Bir il-Wilga, the field-strip at the well by the hillside field:

chabel bir il guilge, clausura: 1.x.1520, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/8, f. 134v.

Ras Xuereb il-Ghaqin, the headland at Xuereb il-Ghaqin:


Rqajja’ Habel Hemsija, the field patches at the Hemsija field-strip:

Such names, closely knit as they are grammatically, cannot but prove to be more than a mouthful to pronounce with ease, and they tend to be somewhat rare. In some, the second element of two words in a construct state has coalesced so completely in the Maltese language that the two component parts are, and probably in Early Modern times were, already no longer felt to be two words. These are mostly compound personal names, sometimes attributes of the Deity:

Rahal Binsinjur, Bonsinjur’s village:

Rahal Ghabdirzeq; Ghabdirzeq’s village:

Wied Bingemma, Bingemma’s valley, or the valley of Gemma’s son:

Wied Bin Ljun, the valley of Leo’s son:
  gued bin liun, terrae in contrata dilo migiarro, Gozo: 27.viii.1582, Not. Ferd. Ciappara, NAV, R 185/6, f. 703.

Wied Birkirkara, the valley of the well near the limekiln:

Wied Bufula, the white throated wren’s valley (Bufula: Abu + fula):
  gued bufule, clausura in contrata ta ilgebel: 12.ii.1500, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2.

This has been carried a stage further in the following example:

Wied Bir Ghabdilla, the valley of the well of the slave of God, Ghabdilla being a common surname in Malta:
  te gued bir. abddlla, contrata: 13.i.1542, Not. Juliano Muscat, NAV, R 376/5, f. 244v.

In most cases, however, the use of the construct state breaks down and a looser construction is preferred. Thus in the following example two pairs of nouns in the construct state are linked together by ta’ instead of being related to each other by the further use of the construct state:

Rqajja’ l-Mixta Ta’ Ghar il-Hasan, the patchy cultivation of the wintering place at Hasan’s Cave:
Qortin Sammat Ta' Bugibba, Sammat's rocky bluff at Bugibba.


A similar function is performed by ta' or tal- in the following examples:

L-Andar Ta' Bieb il-Merhla, the threshing floor at the entrance to the animal yard:


Il-Bur Ta' Hofret Ghajxa, the meadow at the depression at Ghajxa (personal name):

il bur ta bufurut hayxe, clausura in contrata ta hayxe: 3.iii.1536, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/11, f. 48.

Il-Habel Ta' Turbit Garfagna, the field-strip at Garfagna's tomb:


Čens Ta' Mwiegen Żurrieq, the census paying land at the Zurrieq reservoirs:


Habel Roqgha Ta' Gawhar, the field-strip at the patchy cultivation at Gawhar:


Of course, with Ta' at the beginning of the place-name one must supply a missing word like Habel, field-strip, or Ghalqa, field, as in the following examples:

Ta' Bir il-Hamiem, of the well of the bath-house:


Ta' Ghar il-Harruba, (the field) of the cave by the carob tree:


PREPOSITIONS

All the prepositions in use in these Maltese place-names of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries are of Arabic origin. Those found
so far include the following:

\begin{align*}
\text{bejn, between} & \quad \text{g ewwa, in, within} \\
\text{fi, in, at} & \quad \text{taht, beneath, below} \\
\text{fuq, on, above} & \quad \text{wara, behind}
\end{align*}

To these may be added 'genb', beside, though it is grammatically a noun not a preposition.

**Bejn il-Gwiedi**, (Ta', (the area) of between the hillocks:

\text{bejn il. guedi}, \text{contrata: 22.ii.1528, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/11, f. 166.}

**Bejn l-Eghlieqi**, Ta', (the field) of (the area) between the fields:

\text{ta beyn il. galekj, clausura in contrata talmuezib: 2.viii.1522, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/9, f. 112.}

**F' Ras il-Qortin**, at the head of the rocky bluff or headland:

\text{fi ras il.Cortin, contrata: 13.viii.1543, Not. Juliano Muscat, NAV, R 376/7, f. 492v.}

**Fuq il-Hajj**, above the wall:

\text{di fuq il. hayit, clausuncula in contrata gumerino prope ecclesiam Sancti Antonii delo gumerino: 29.ix.1556, Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/52, f. 107v.}

**Ta' Gewwa il-Hara**, situated within the precinct:

\text{ta geue il. bara, tres clausurae in casali micabibe: 8.i.1561, Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/64, f. 491.}

**Ta' Taht l-Imdina**, below Mdina:

\text{ta taht il. midina, contrata: 29.viii.1548, Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/21, f. 827.}

**Ta' Wara l-Bjut**, behind the houses:

\text{ta huara ilbiuth, lencia terrae at Axac: 26.vii.1508, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/4, f. 13.}

**Ta' Genb il-Gudja**, beside the hillock:

\text{a genb il. gudie, chensi: 15.ii.1530, Not. Gr. Vassallo, NAV, R 464/5, f. 199v.}

The prepositions isfel, 'beneath', 'below' and barra, 'outside', have not yet been found in the place-names examined so far, though they are both well known in the contemporary nomenclature of the Maltese islands.

**Adjectives**

Only the adjectives referring directly to the character of the topography are examined; those referring solely to persons associated with the features named are ignored in this study. Even so, the adjectives of a topographical meaning fall into several classes,
those e.g. of location, size, shape, colour, quality, age. Here again every word encountered is of Arabic origin.

**Locational Adjectives**

The following locational adjectives have been found in the place-names of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (with a few later occurrences). Most of them have been formed from the prepositions already examined by the addition of -ani, -anija, or -ni, -nija.

barrani, *outer, outsider* (masculine)  
(formed from barra, *outside*)

barranija, *outer, outsider* (feminine)  
(formed from barra, *outside*)

-gewwieni, *inner* (m.)  
gewwenija, *inner* (f.)  
saflieni, *lower* (m.)  
siflenija, *lower* (f.)  

To these may be added:

**Bir il-Barrani,** the outside well, the outsider’s well (in the latter case, Barrani would refer to a person):  
*bir il barrani,* cisterna in casali percop: 9.ix.1523, NLM, Univ. 12, f. 338.

**Rqajja’ Tal-Barrani,** patches of cultivation at Barrani or belonging to the outsider, the stranger (N.B. Rqajja’ is plural, Barrani is singular, *etc.* shows that Barrani has a personal meaning):  
*rivalat* (sic). *ta Jl barrani,* tres lenciae de terra in contrata Jlbar- 

**Xghajra Barranija,** the small outer scrubland:  
*xibayra barranie,* clausura in contrata rahal Jauhar: 30.i.1537,  
Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/4, f. 159.

**Ta’ Nardu 1-Barrania,** Nardo’s outer (field), Barranija here referring not to Nardo (Leonard), but to Ghalqa, which is not expressly mentioned (N.B. Nardu is masculine, Barranija is feminine):  

Without going into the same detail, examples follow of the other locational adjectives:

**Andar il- Gawwieni,** the inner threshing field:  
*Landar Jl gebuenj,* clausura in contrata casalis tymyn: 2.xii.1579,  
Not. Enrico Zarb, NAV, Ms. 1144/3.

**Tal-Geuwenija,** of the inner (field):  
*tal geuhenie,* calcula in contrata bubacra: 27.xi.1511, Not. C. Can- 

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Hal Saflieni, the lower village:
Dar is-Silienija, the lower house:
  dar Jsilene (sic), clausura in contrata casalis charrad: 14.i.1586,
  Not. Andrea Alban, NAV, R 12/4, f. 20v.
Hal Fuqani, the upper village:
  rahal fucani, clausura: 22.i.1516, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/7,
  f. 6v.
Hofra il-Fuqanija, the upper depression:
  il chofra fucanie, clausura in contrata casalis attardo: 10.v.1548,
  Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/21, f. 629v; Jl bofra Jl fucanie,
  clausura in contrata casalis attardo: 21.iii.1587, NLM, Univ. 175,
  f. 403v.
Bir it-Tahtieni, the lower well:
  bir itabteni, cisterna in territorio di Vinecia: 9.2.1487, Not. J.
  Sabara, NAV, R 494/1.
Hofra it-Tahtenija, the lower depression:
  Jl bofra itabtenie, clausura in contrata casalis attardo: 21.iii.
  1587, NLM, Univ. 175, f. 403v.
Tal-Wistanija, of the central (portion, share):
  talguistanie, clausura in contrata casalis Axac: 13.xi.1508, ta
  bustanie, clausura in contrata bubacra: 8.x.1532, Not. Ant. Rapà,
  NAV, Ms. 1033/1A, f. 118v; tal guystania, galca in contrata casal-
  is balzan: 29.viii.1542, Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/9, f. 455;
  tal uistanie, clausura in contrata casalis far: 22.iii.1548, Not.
  Gius. de Guevara, NAV, R 224/4, f. 282.
To these may be added 'gholja', high (f. and pl.), and 'xemxija',
  sunny (f.):
Il-Gudja l-Gholja, the high hillock:
  la gudia el halia, in contrata gued bufula: 14.ix.1654, NLM, Treas.
  A 154, f. 368.
Tax-Xemxija, of the sunny (area):
  Ta xemmisie, clausura in contrata cortin marco: 28.xi.1537, Not.
  Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/2, f. 289.

ADJECTIVES OF SIZE

Two Arabic adjectives of size in their masculine and feminine
forms, singular and plural, were in common use, together with one
of obscure origin although it is also to be found in dialectal Arabic
(cf. E. Serracino Inglott, Il-Miklem Malti, I, s.v. ,cokon, where it is
also related to Spanish 'cequeno'):
kbir, big (m.)  żghira, small (f.)
kbira, big (f.)  ċkejken, little, very small (m.)
żghir, small (m.)

Għar il-Kbir, the big cave:

L-Għalqa l-Kbira, the large field:

Misrah Żghir, the small open space, the small square:

L-Għalqa ż-Żghira, the small field:

L-Għelieqi Żghar, the small fields:

L-Imxieref iċ-Ċkejken, the small Imxieref (N.B. Mxierref, pl. of Mix-raf, means elevations, heights, hills; presumably the adjective ‘ċkejken’ was adopted to distinguish the locality from another one of the same name, the precise original meaning having been for-gotten or ignored. Otherwise it could mean ‘the elevations or heights of the little one’, the adjective being taken to refer to a person.):

ADJECTIVES OF SHAPE

The adjectives of shape are concerned with width and slope of land or other feature of the topography:

wiesa’, wide (m.)  twila, long (f.)
dejjaq, narrow (m.)  twal, long (pl.)
irqaq, slim, narrow (pl.)  wāti, flat (m.)
twil, long (m.)  wieqaf, steep, upright (m. or pl.)

Wied il-Wiesa’ the wide valley:
  gued ilhuasa, contrata: 19.i.1498, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/2, f. 82.
**Habed Dejjaq**, the narrow field-strip:

**Il-Hbejjiet Irag**, the narrow small field-strips:
*il hubeyleth ricac*, cabella belonging to the bishop: 6.iii.1521, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/8, f. 177.

**Bir it-Twil**, the long well (presumably a well in the shape of a tunnel), or Tawil’s (personal name or nickname) well:

**Il-Hara Twila**, the long housing neighbourhood or precinct:

**Ta' Haqar it-Twal**, of the long megaliths (or menhirs):
*ta hagi ar ittual*, clausurae in contrata tal haseli: 2.iv.1593, Not. J. de Lucia, NAV, R 229/4, f. 934v.

**Bur Watyi**, the flat meadow:

**Il-Hagar Wieqaf**, the upright menhirs:

**ADJECTIVES OF QUALITY**

Adjectives of quality refer most often to the type of soil or rock in the field or on the site of the place-name reference:

- ahrax, *rough, uneven* (m.)
- *taflija, clayey* (f.)
- geblj, *stony* (m.)
- *tqil, heavy* (m.)
- tafli, *clayey* (m.)

**L-ahrax (tal-) Mellieha**, the rough area (full of karstic solution holes and protuberances) of Mellieha:

**Tal-Geblj**, of the stony ground:
*tal geblj*, clausura in contrata casalis seyech: 23.iii.1514, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/6, f. 56v.

**It-Taflija**, the clayey ground:
*tafelie*, contrata: 9.iii.1487, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1; *la tafalie*, insituitaru in contrata ayn casab prope capellam seu parro-

Hubel it-Tqil, the field-strip of the heavy man (nickname), or the heavy field-strip (i.e. with heavy soil); on the whole the first explanation seems more probable:

\[\text{habel } \text{jtikil, } \text{clausura in contrata ta dahar: } 19.\text{vi.1525, Not. J. Hajus, NAV, R 7, f. 35v.}\]

It is probable that further research will lead to the discovery of Maltese and Gozitan place-names with other adjectives, e.g. 'qaw-wi', strong, hard, tafla, clayey (m.), bewwiela, watery, ramli, sandy. The following three adjectives showing age should also be noted:

\[\text{g } \text{dida, new (f.) } \text{qadim, old (m.)}\]

Tal-Ġdida, of the new

\[\text{ta } \text{gidi} \text{de, } \text{clausura in contrata ta gued Jlballut: } 18.\text{v.1538, Not. Gerolamo Cumbo, NAV, R 190/2, f. } 40\text{v of 1st pt; } \text{ta } \text{gidi} \text{de, } \text{clausura in contrata ta gued Jl ballut: } 30.\text{xii.1544, Not. Gius. de Guevara, NAV, R 224/3, f. } 150\text{ of 1st pt.}\]

Il-Ġnien Qadim, the old garden:

\[\text{Jl } \text{ginen } \text{cadim, vineale in contrata il gadire: } 10.\text{iii.1582, NLM. Univ. 175, f. 313.}\]

Adjectives of Colour

\begin{align*}
\text{abjad, } & \text{ubit.e (m.) } \text{sewda, black (f.)} \\
\text{bajda, } & \text{white (f.) } \text{isfar, yellow (m.)} \\
\text{ahdar, } & \text{green (m.) } \text{iżraq, blue (m.)} \\
\text{ahmar, } & \text{red (m.) } \text{bajjada, whitish (f. or pl.)} \\
\text{ḥamra, } & \text{red (f.) } \text{ḥamran, reddish (m.)} \\
\text{iswed, } & \text{black (m.)} \\
\end{align*}

Gebel l-Abjad, the white rock, the white hill-side:

\[\text{gebel } \text{labiath } \text{contrata: } 11.\text{viii.1501, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/1, f. } 102; \text{ta } \text{gebel labi}, \text{galca in contrata } yl \text{gizire sancti tomasi: } 29.\text{iv.1538, Not. G. Buttigieg, NAV, R 105/5, f. 338v.}\]

Il-Bilata l-Bajda, the white rock:

\[\text{bilata iľbayda } \text{contrata: } 8.\text{vii.1505, Not. C. Canchur, NAV, R 140/2, f. } 143.\]

Ta’ l-Ahdar, of the green (probably a nickname):

\[\text{a } \text{lachdar, } \text{clausura congionta con v Tifali ta ghar taflia: } 21.\text{i. 1629, NLM, AOM, } 462, \text{f. } 326v.\]

Gebel L-Aḥmar, the red rock, the red hill-side:

\[\text{gebel } \text{lachmar, } \text{contrata, Gozo: } 29.\text{ix.1580, Not. Thomeo Gauci, NAV, Ms. } 867/9, \text{f. } 187v.\]
L-Ghalqa l-Hamra, the red field:
Jl bærke il chæmra, contrata: 3.i.1523, Not. J. Bondin, NAV, R 69.

Andar l-Iswed, the black threshing floor, but more probably the black man's threshing floor, Iswed being taken for a nickname:

L-Ghalqa s-Sewda, the black field:
Jl głeca Jseude, vineale in territorio hius Jnsule gaudisii in contrata della Madalena: 29.xii.1584, Not. J.D. Formosa, NAV, R R 271/1, f. 67v.

Gebel L-Isfar, possibly the yellow rock or hill-side, but more probably and grammatically 'Isfar's(nickname) hill-side':
gibell Isifar, pecia terrae in contrata deyr handur: 20.i.1495, Not. J. Sabara, NAV, R 494/1.

Il-Qolla s-Safra, the yellow hill-top:

Ta' Ghar l-Izraq, of the blue cave:

Bajjada, the whitish land:

L-Andar Ta' Hamran, Hamran's threshing floor:
landar ta hamran, clausura in casale micabibe: 11.x.1621, NLM, Treas. A 74, f. 126v.

COMPLEX PLACE-_NAMES OF LOOSE CONSTRUCTION

With nouns, adjectives, prepositions, words showing possession like bita, mita, or ta, and the use of status constructus it is possible to find compound place-names of a much more complex form than have been examined so far. To some they might appear as mere prosy descriptions and not real names at all, until it is pointed out that they have been found in documents written in Latin or Italian and have been recorded normally in Maltese with an obvious care on the notary's part to preserve the exact form and words of the place-name. Frequently they are recorded in more than one document and at fairly widely separated dates, showing that they were not the result of the fertile imagination of a single farmer or notary but widely accepted and rendered permanent.

65
Il-Wilga Ta' Taht il-Qolla s-Safra, the hill-side field below the yellow peak:


Il-Gnien il-Qadim Ta' Ġebel iċ-Ċantar Ta' Isfel, the old garden at the lower part of Ċantar's hill-side:


Il-Gewwenija u L-Barranija Ta' L-Ibrag, the inner and outer fields at l-Ibrag:


L-'.ndar Ta' Wara l-Knejjes, Tal-Baqari, the threshing floor behind the churches at Baqari:

landar ta huara il chineyes tal baccari, clausura domini Episcopi in contrata tal bacchari: 3.xii.1581, NLM, Univ.175, f. 309.

Saqwi l-Barrani (Ta') Għajn Tuta, the outer irrigation at the blackberry spring:


Il-Wilga Tal-Qassis (Ta') Santa Katerina (Taż-) Żejtuni, the hill-side field of the priest of St. Catherine's at Zejtun:


Habel l-Iblaq Ta' Ġewwa l-Gnien, the many-coloured (or dusky) field strip inside the garden:


Iċ-Ċens Ta' Fuq il-Wied il-Kbir, the land on long lease above the big valley:


Very often only common sense, not grammar, can determine to which noun a particular adjective in such a cumbrous place-name applies. Thus 'fucanie' in the following place-name is clear enough:
Bur Tax-Xghajra t-Tahtenija, the meadow of the lower scrubland (had tahtenija referred to bur it would have become tahtieni, masculine):


But in the following example the adjective ġewwieni, could refer either to bur or to harbux:

Il-Bur Ta’ Harbux il-Ġewwieni, either ‘the inner meadow at Harbux’ or ‘the meadow at Inner Harbux’. On the whole, the former explanation is preferable, as in most such cases the adjective seems to be added on as an afterthought, and it therefore refers to the main feature of the place-name.

ii. bur ta charbux il geueni, clausura in contrata xarit il micallib: 6. i.1541, Not. Br. de Caxario, NAV, R 175/7, f. 191v.

Habel Hagar Qubleni il-Fuqani, the upper field-strip at Qubleni’s (personal name or nickname) megaliths or the field-strip at upper Hagar Qubleni:

chabel bajar cublensi il. fucani, lenciae terrae de feudo Buleben: 24. iiii.1523, Not. C., Canchur, NAV, R 140/10, f. 36v.

CONCLUSIONS

The most important characteristic in which Maltese and Gozitan late medieval place-names differ from the normal place-names of Arabic countries lies mainly in that their construction is freer. This has come about by the frequent avoidance of the construct state and its replacement in whole or in part by a looser form made possible by the use in place-names of the possessive ta’ or tāl- and of a multitude of adjectives and prepositions, the first and last of which do not seem to have been normally regarded as acceptable components of place-names in Arabic-speaking countries. That Arabic place-names do not use ta’ or tāl- has been pointed out long ago by Professor Aquilina; this is true also of their cognate Arabic forms bita’ and mita’, though they are in common use as possessives in everyday speech in several Arabic countries.

Though chains of more than two nouns joined together in the nexus of status constructus are quite common in the place-names of the Arabic world, it has proved impossible for the present writer to find any examples of Arabic place-names consisting of any words except nouns or nouns and adjectives. Perhaps scholars of Arabic simply ignore or reject unorthodox forms such as the more complex Maltese place-names. Indeed, it would not appear that the latter themselves have been noticed before this: their formation and popular recognition, if not their acceptance by scholars, has been un-
doubtlessly helped by the circumstance that they occur in archival records drawn up invariably in a non-Maltese language like Latin or some form of Italian, while they are themselves almost always carefully recorded in Maltese, with extremely few exceptions, if one ignored the occasional rendering of ta' by di and tal- by di il. Thus they stand out from the rest of the text as recognisable entities in a way they would not have done had the records been totally written out in Maltese. In the Arab world place-names would normally be recorded in texts which are themselves written in Arabic and would not therefore stand out at all: prosy place-names would tend to be regarded as mere portions of the text not place-names with an individual existence of their own independent of the text in which they are found. This perhaps explains why the longer and more complex Maltese place-names do not seem to have a parallel in the Arabic world, although the whole of their normal vocabulary, whether nouns, adjectives or prepositions, is of Arabic extraction.
