

## LEXICAL MATERIAL IN MALTESE FOLKLORE

By J. AQUILINA and J. CASSAR-PULLICINO\*

In this study we are giving a list of archaic or obsolete words picked from the language of Maltese Folklore. They are words not very commonly used nowadays, but occurring mostly in old Maltese proverbs which have been handed down without any appreciable modification, as well as in folk-songs, popular riddles, charms and exorcisms, street-cries, children's games and folk-tales. As far as possible the words have been taken down as uttered by peasants in their everyday conversation, but as regards those words which survive in old collections of Maltese proverbs and sayings we have had to rely on Canon Agius De Soldanis's *Proverbi ed apostegmi maltesi*, in manuscript, preserved at the Royal Malta Library (Ms. 143) and published by Dr G. Curmi in *Malta Letteraria* (1929) and on M.A. Vassalli's *Motti, aforismi e proverbi maltesi* published in Malta in 1828. A few words included in the list are not found in dictionaries. For reference purposes we have consulted M.A. Vassalli's dictionary *Ktyb Yl Klym Malti 'Mfysser byl-Latin u byt-Taljan* (Rome, 1796), G.B. Falzon's *Dizionario Maltese-Italiano-Inglese* (Malta, 1882), A.E. Caruana's *Vocabolario della Lingua Maltese* (Malta, 1903) and G. Barbera's *Dizionario Maltese-Arabo-Italiano* (4v. Beyrouth, 1939-40).

Many of these words still form part of the spoken language of our rural population, although it is the older people that have preserved the traditional expressions. And precisely for this reason they are of the greatest importance and interest in that they provide examples of a living and ever-changing language. These words and ways of expression peculiar to a former generation offer good ground for comparison with the present vocabulary in common use.

It is worth noticing that the greater part of these words occur only in everyday proverbs and weather-sayings. This is as it should be, inasmuch as the proverbs of any country embody the sum-total of a people's experiences throughout a long period of existence, as memorised by a later

\* This linguistic investigation is a joint work — the fusion of originally two separate articles by two students of the Maltese Language whose interests and approaches are different but intersecting. J. Cassar-Pullicino is interested principally in folklore and he is responsible for the folkloristic information and the relevant vocabulary, while J. Aquilina is principally interested in the language as such, and is responsible for the etymological and linguistic annotations thereon.

generation in short and popular sayings. For this reason proverbs have come to be considered as 'the wit of one and the wisdom of many'. And of all types of linguistic legacies they suffer the least modification, because they are handed down orally from one generation to another, and used frequently in everyday conversation in which they are quoted with the persuasive force of an age-long tradition or belief and with the authority of an unwritten law. This can be noticed more clearly in the country than in the towns and cities, where the Maltese Language has suffered most through foreign encroachments upon the native stock, in the form of Romance loan-words and, recently, loan-words from English, whether of Germanic or Romance origin. In this sense old collections of Maltese proverbs, such as Vassalli's, are invaluable because they have fixed the traditional form of a particular saying or maxim. Grammatical types such as diminutives, forms of verbal derivatives which are now going out of use are met with in their original contexts, thus helping the philologist to rediscover, in part, some of the lost words of our forefathers.

The old prayers, exorcisms and songs that we are giving here have been personally heard in the various villages of Malta and Gozo. Outside Folklore, they may be of interest also to the Semitic glossarist and grammarian, shedding as they do light on original features of Maltese grammar, shared with other branches of the Semitic family of languages.

It would be wrong, however, to consider the words included in this list as completely obsolete; indeed, it is very difficult to decide whether a word is really dead or not. Some words are often retained by a particular section of the population long after their disappearance from the general word-currency of the people in general. It may also happen that they may be apparently dead, or nearly so, but later reappear in use with a slight modification in their meaning. For example, *widna*, 'ear', metaphorically 'spy', is occasionally heard in the expression *widna tas-Sultan*, 'spy employed by the Grand Master or King'; at the beginning of the Second World War it was used by peasants near Għar Hasan (Hasan's Cave) in Malta, and in Gozo, to denote 'a sound-detector'. Rather than obsolete, some words are obsolescent; and they have been termed 'archaic' in this study to indicate that they belong to an earlier generation, and that they are now no longer in current use, though some may be still heard sporadically in the Maltese Islands.

The list contains words which, etymologically, including some additional derivatives, may be classified into:

- (a) Local formations, that is words the morphology and/or the meaning of which has developed in the Maltese Islands;
- (b) Words that are matched with Arabic equivalents, the only difference

being phonetical.

(c) Words corresponding (i) to North African, or (ii) to Syrian words;

(d) Two words the meaning of which is more directly borne out by corresponding words in Hebrew;

(e) Words of Latin origin introduced into the language through Arabic, and finally

(f) Maltese words of Sicilian origin adapted to Semitic Maltese patterns.

Such words in the following six groups show, in brackets, the number of the corresponding folklore passage in which they occur.

Under heading (a) we include the following words: *baqqa*, 'to water (plants)' (7); *binnija*, 'construction' (34); *dura*, 'small house' (30); *farxa*, 'a shelf' (75); *gbira*, 'a collection' (78); *gbis*, 'stubble' (38); *gwieħ*, 'hunger' (76); *godda*, 'new' (27); *girma*, 'conical stone construction' (77); *ħela*, 'to waste' (47); *ħtebb*, 'to be loved' (48); *inklele*, 'otherwise' (29); *instalab*, 'ro be crucified' (9); *lewliemi*, 'rainy' (85); *lula*, 'misfortune' (54); [*Haġa*] *mohġaġa*, 'a riddle' (23); *mserka*, 'a spool, a quill' (22); *musan*, 'leftovers' (18); *mżużi*, 'squeamish' (60); *għaljiena*, 'sorrowful' (28); *għaxa*, 'supper' (41); *għobra*, 'woe' (44); *qożżot*, 'fie' (86); *sisija*, 'begging' (66); *tikkir*, 'misery' (87); *wejda*, 'little hand' (4); *xituta*, 'little rain' (3); *xtamba*, 'to require' (73).

Under (b): *amar*, 'to command' (32); *asahħ*, 'stronger' (33); *buq*, 'a hollow reed' (74); *darr*, 'to injure' (35); *dell*, 'a shadow, omen' (36); *gergħa*, 'a draught' (21); *godod*, 'new' (27); *grajra*, 'a little jar' (5); *ħajna*, 'malicious' (50); *ħatem*, 'seal, ring' (49); *ħtrieq*, 'scorching wind' (79); *hmum*, 'griefs' (40); *imrabbab*, 'a person that has been brought up' (70); *lewliemes*, 'the day before yesterday' (84); *libien*, 'incensed' (15); *megħuda*, 'promised' (83); *M'erħsu*, 'how cheap it is!' (56); *miel*, 'estates, riches' (57); *mindil*, 'napkin' (82); *mirjieħ*, 'windy' (58); *mniddi*, 'wetted, moist' (80); *moqul*, 'told' (59); *muna*, 'provisions, victuals' (81); *mxuma*, 'hand to mouth' (52); *naza*, 'to be in one's agony' (62); *għalet*, 'to deceive' (42); *għanem*, 'cattle' (43); *għar*, 'disgrace' (39); *għemum*, 'paternal uncles' (40); *għilla*, 'disease' (44); *għwajjar*, 'a small cave' (2); *qāra*, 'to study' (8); *qbur*, 'graves' (16); *Rabbi*, 'lord' (64); *serriegħa*, 'wrestling bout' (20); *siba*, 'piracy' (65); *tarr*, 'to lay eggs' (67); *tbiħ*, 'cooking' (68); *tellet*, 'to triplicate' (70); *terqħ*, 'to dissolve, melt indigo or paint' (69); *tifragħ*, 'emptying' (88); *titriegħa*, 'to be grazed (field)' (89); *tqajba*, 'a small hole' (6); *uħudna*, 'by ourselves (alone)' (25); *wadaf*, 'sling' (19); *widaħ*, 'ear wax' (71); *widek*, 'fatty substance' (71); *wited*, 'peg' (91); *xieghel*, 'to employ' (72); *żerqa*, 'blue' (26).

Under (c) (i): *baqla*, 'impetigo' (12); *ħorra*, 'honest' (46); *ħożza*, 'waist girdle' (51); *qarinza*, 'serenaders' (24); *qfejfa*, 'small basket' (1); *qluqi*, 'restless' (63); *reqa*, 'to charm' (11); *zenbħl*, 'large basket' (90);

(ii) *ħabar*, 'death knell' (45); *namar*, 'abundance' (61); *ntejfa*, 'a little piece of' (1); *reqa* 'to cure jaundice' (11).

Under (d): *bewwaq*, 'to hollow out (a reed)' (74); *dliel*, 'long hair' (13);

Under (e): *mindil*, 'napkin' (82).

Under (f): *fiet*, 'to cheat' (37); *izzinila*, 'to circle over' (10); *lillu*, 'finery' (55); *lissija*, 'lye' (53); *tutemb*, 'a truce' (31); *vrajs*, 'short verse' (9); *ħorba*, 'sorb tree' (17).

#### A. RIDDLES, SONGS, TALES, FOLK-PRAYERS, Etc.

##### (i) *Diminutives*

Nominal and adjectival diminutives in Maltese are formed chiefly (a) by the insertion of *-ejje-*, *-ejja-*, *-ajje-*, or *-ajja-* between the second and third radicals of the word, e.g. *tfajjel* from *tifel*, 'boy'; *fqajjar* from *fqir*, 'poor'; (b) by introducing *w*, which is often the second radical of the word, immediately after the first consonant, e.g. *dwejra* from *dar*, 'house', originally from  $\sqrt{\text{DWR}}$ ; *rwejħa* from *ruħ*, 'soul', originally  $\sqrt{\text{RWH}}$ ; or (c) by adding the female suffix *a* to the masculine form, e.g. *bieba* from *bieb*, 'door'; *fiesa* from *fies*, 'pickaxe'; *senduqa* from *senduq*, 'chest'. (Vide E. Sutcliffe, *A Grammar of the Maltese Language*, London, 1936, pp. 31-33; also A. Cremona, *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*, Part II, Third Edition, Malta 1944, p. 138).

Another form of Maltese diminutive, however, may be noted in such words as *geduda* from *gidi*, 'kid', formed by the repetition of the last consonant *d*, preceded by a long *u*. In other examples the *u* seems to express endearment and affection: thus *bedudu*, 'good luck', heard in children's games; *baħuħu*, 'darling', a term of endearment used by mothers; *ħkejkunu*, 'very small', common in baby language; *ħaqquħa*, 'small belly', and *ħinnuna*, 'small tooth', from *ħaqq*, 'belly', and *ħinna*, 'tooth', respectively, also heard in baby jargon; *ħarħuħa*, 'cartilage, or small remnants of meat after the fat has been melted down', from *ħarħaħ*, 'to dry'; *ħarmuħu*, term applied to small children, from *ħarmeħ*, 'a rusk or biscuit'.

Words in italics in the following examples illustrate one or other of the above-mentioned forms of Maltese diminutives.

	<i>Translation</i>
(1) <i>Twil imtawwal</i>	Long and lengthened,
<i>Aqta' u dawwar;</i>	Cut and roll;
<i>Ftit ta' ntejfa</i>	Put a small piece
<i>Aħmel ġol-qfejfa.</i>	In the small basket.

The answer to this still current riddle is 'a sausage'.  
*Ntejfa*, n.f. 'A little piece of'. Diminutive of *M. nitfa*, 'a small part or a

particle of'. It is found in Vassalli and Falzon only. With M. *nitfa* in *tab nitfa* (*ħobż*, etc.), mainly current in Gozo, cp. Ar. *أَعْطَاهُ تَيْتْفَةً مِنْ* 'he gave him a little of' (Hava). With the adverbial use of *nitfa* in M. *nitolbok tasal nitfa d-dar*, 'I ask you to come home for a little while', cp. Syrian *bətrağğâk tuşâl neţfê 'al-bâit*. Feghali, who gives this example in his *Syntaxe des Parlers Arabes actuels du Liban* (p. 30), illustrates its various uses with further examples which agree with Maltese. With M. *stenna nitfa* cp. Syrian *ntere netfa*, 'await a little'. With the M. diminutive cp. Syrian *ntâjġġê* (Feghali, *ibid.*, p. 477). M. and Ar. *nitfa* derives from  $\sqrt{\text{NTF}}$ , 'to pluck (the hair)'. For semantics cp. M. *ftit*, 'a little', from  $\sqrt{\text{FTT}}$ , Ar. *فَتَّ* 'to crumble with the fingers'; M. *ħafna*, 'much', from *ħusen*, 'to grasp'; *wisq*, 'a great deal of', from Ar. *وَسَّقَ* 'to contain (a thing), to load (a camel)'; M. *bosta*, 'a great quantity of', Ar. *بَسَطَ* 'extent, capacity', from Ar. *بَسَطَ* (unknown in Maltese) 'to widen, to stretch (the arm)'. The M. word *nitfa* in its recorded meaning is mainly Syrian. Beaussier gives only its literal meaning 'pincée de poils, de cheveux arrachée'.

*Qfejfa*, n.f. 'Small wicker basket'. Diminutive of sing. *qoffa*, pl. *qfief*, with which cp. Ar. *قَفَّةٌ* pl. *قَفَافٌ* whence also It. *coffa*. For the M. diminutive form cp. N. Afr. Ar. *قَفِيْفَةٌ* pl. *ات* 'petit couffin' (Beaussier). Another diminutive form *qoffina*, 'small wicker basket for shopping', is made up of *qoffa* + *ina*, Romance diminutive suffix.

- |                                  |                               |
|----------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| (2) (a) Sant'Anna u San Mikiel   | (St Anne and St Michael       |
| Gejġin mill- <i>għwajjar</i> ta' | Coming from the small cave of |
| Betliem . . .                    | Bethlehem . . .)              |

An exorcism to ward off the evil eye heard at Xewkija, Gozo.

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| (b) San Ġużepp daħal fl- <i>għwajjar</i> | (St Joseph went into the small cave |
| Biex jadura l-Bambin fqajjar. . .        | To worship the poor Child . . .)    |

Fragment of an old Maltese Christmas carol heard at Qormi, Malta.

*Għwajjar*, n.m. This is a regular Maltese diminutive formation of *għar*, 'cave', Ar. *عَار*. The pattern *qtajjal*, on which this word is formed, is shared by diminutive and plural formations. As a matter of fact, *għwajjar* is explained as a plural formation by Vassalli. Other similar Maltese plurals are *stajjar*, from *stira*, 'pancake', and *ħsajjar*, from *ħasira*, 'mat'.

- |  |                                     |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| (3) Ix-xita u x-xemx                       | (The rain and the sun               |
| U l- <i>għasfur</i> inaqqi l- <i>qemh!</i> | And the bird pecking at the grain!  |
| Ix-xita u x- <i>xituta</i>                 | The rain and the small rain         |
| In-nanna taħt it-tuta.                     | And Granny under the mulberry tree) |

A children's rhyme, heard when it rains and the sun shines at the same

time. The above version comes from *Munxâr*, Gozo.

*Xituta*, n.f. 'A drizzle', lit. small, used only in the above rhyme. Diminutive of M. *xita*, 'rain', Ar. شَيْءٌ 'rain' (Hava). With the interesting M. diminutive obtained by the addition of suffix *uta* after the elimination of final *a* cp. Ar. عَشْبِيَّةٌ (also عَشْبِيَّةٌ), diminutive of عَشْبَةٌ (M. *ġħaxija*) meaning 'nightfall' Ar. أَبْنُونَ, diminutive of بَنُونَ 'sons', pl. of بَنٌ, M. *iben*. (Vide Wright: *Arabic Grammar*, Vol. 1, p. 175, Third ed.).

(4) (a) *Abbi l-wejda!* (Kiss the little hand.)

Baby language.

(b) *Ara jahraq il-wejda.* (Mind you won't burn your little hand.)

A street cry peculiar to vendors of baked chestnuts.

*Wejda*, n.f. Irregular diminutive formation from M. *id*, 'hand', Ar. يَدٌ with which cp. M. *jedd*, 'right', a translation of the legal word *manus* of Roman law. With the M. diminutive cp. Ar. diminutive يَدِيَّةٌ Beaus-sier gives diminutives يَدِيَّةٌ and يَدِيَّةٌ. The M. diminutive seems to have developed from the N. Afr. variant يَدِيَّةٌ which, by dropping the first consonant *d* becomes *jajda*, whence *wajda* by change of initial *j* into *w* and dialectal variation of the diphthong *aj* into *ej*, whence ultimately *wejda*. The M. form is assimilated to the diminutives of nouns from *verba primae w*, which reject the first radical taking the feminine termination *a(t)* but which, in exchange, resume the *w* in their diminutives as Ar. وَعِدَّةٌ, diminutive of عِدَّةٌ, meaning 'a promise', from وَعَدٌ (M. *wieġħed*, 'to promise').

(5) *Bil-qtajra l-qtajra timtela l-grajra.* (Many a mickle makes a muckle.  
Lit. 'Drop by drop the pitcher is filled'.)

A Maltese proverb.

*Ġrajra*, n.f., 'a small or little jar'. Diminutive of *ġarra*, Ar. جَرَّةٌ 'earthenware jar', pl. جَرَرٌ (Dozy) M. *ġarar*, following the diminutive pattern *qtajla*, of such words as *bħajra*, 'a lake', from *baħar*, 'sea'; *tħajla*, 'a maiden', from *tifla*, 'girl'; *xtajta*, 'small or pretty seaside', from *xatt*, 'shore', with which cp. Ar. fem. dim. pattern فُعَيْلَةٌ with the medial Ar. vowel between the first and second vowels dropped in Maltese.

(6) *Bil-keġma t-tajba toħroġ il-far mit-tqajba.* (The soft word brings out the rat  
from its hole.)

Another Maltese proverb.

*Tqajba*, n.f. Maltese diminutive of *toqba*, 'a hole', from *taqab*, 'to pierce', Ar. ثَقَبٌ, 'to pierce', whence Ar. ثَقِيَّةٌ (M. *toqba*, 'a hole' (Hava).

(ii) *Archaic Verbs*

The following is a list of verbs that are very few in number and are but rarely, if ever, used outside folklore. Their chief interest lies in furnishing examples of lost meanings or words, and unusual forms of derived verbs.

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| (7) <i>Angla bella,</i><br><i>Issaqqi w tbaqqi:</i><br><i>Kemm-il werqa fih</i><br><i>Il-ħabaq għazzi?</i> | (Lovely Angela,<br>Watering repeatedly<br>How many leaves are there<br>In the basil plant?) |
|--|---|

This is the first part of a popular rhyme in dialogue form, presumably between a young man (a Prince) and a young woman who is watering a pot of basil on the balcony. Formerly a pot of basil on the window sill showed that in that house there were girls of a marriageable age — a hint to young men in search of a wife.

*Baqqa*, pp. *mbaqqi* (m), + *ja* (f), whence *tbaqqi*, 'you water or irrigate'. Cp. Ar. *بُقِيَ* 'to pour an abundant rain; cloud' (Hava); 'to spout from the mouth (Spiro Bey, who gives also *بُوقِي*, 'mouth' (cf. Lat. *bucca*, 'cheek')). Of a heavy rain pouring in bubbles we say *għamlet xita boqoq* or *tal-boqoq*, *boqoq*, 'bubbles', being the pl. of *boqqa*, 'bubble' — a Maltese formation. Caruana gives *boqqa żejża*, 'a baby's mouthful of sucking', from *zejża*, 'mother's breast'. A.E.C. wrongly lists *boqqa* (n) and *baqqa* (v) under different radicals.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (8) <i>Int Sultan, u bin is-Slaten</i><br><i>tikteb u tqari:</i><br><i>Kemm-il kewkba fih</i><br><i>Is-sema l-għali?</i> | (O thou king, son of kings,<br>Continually writing and reading:<br>How many stars are there<br>In the high heavens?) |
|--|--|

The girl's answer to the previous quatrain — an example of a primitive 'brains trust' or riddle contest. Both this and the preceding rhyme were heard at Luqa, Malta, during World War II. They are also found in L. Bonelli's *Saggi del folklore dell'isola di Malta*, Palermo, 1895, p.10.

*Qàra*, v.t. Third form of *qara*, 'to read' (Ar. *قَرَأَ*). Not in the Maltese dictionaries and unknown in the spoken language. The corresponding Ar. form *قَارَأَ* means 'to study; to read with' (Hava). This form does not occur in Beaussier.

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| (9) <i>Vrajssett u vrajs ingħid:</i><br><i>L-ikbar għuda tas-Salib;</i><br><i>min iħobb il-Bambin ckejken</i><br><i>Imut u jinstalab fih.</i> | (A small verse and a verse I have<br>recited:<br>The greatest Rood is the Cross;<br>He who loves the little Child<br>Shall die and be crucified on it.) |
|---|---|

The opening lines of an old folk-prayer recited by peasants before going to bed. It was heard at Xagħra, Gozo, in the summer of 1941.

Vrajs, vrajsett, n.m. Short verse. Two obsolete diminutive forms of *vers*, from Sic. *versu* or It. *verso*. *Vrajsett* is doubly diminutive in Maltese, being made up of *vrajs*, shorter form of *vrajjes*, + Italian suffix *etto* (It. *versetto*). For a similar diminutive formation from Italian cf. M. *Brajbu*, from It. *Verbo*, which is the name of a popular folk-prayer all over Italy (Cf. P. Toschi, *La Poesia Popolare Religiosa in Italia*, Firenze, 1935, p. 97).

Nstalab, v.int. To be crucified; also, to fall down with the arms stretched out in the form of a cross, the latter meaning being still common. This is the VIIth Form of Maltese radicals S-L-B-. Ar. *صَلَب*, 'to provide (a bucket) with two crosspieces', also 'to crucify' whence M. *salib*, 'a cross', and *sallab*, 'to crucify', or 'to make the sign of the cross frequently', Ar. *صَلَب*. The VIIth form is a local formation.

- (10) Id-dragun... malli wasal (The dragon... on catching up with  
*izzintla ruħu fuqu (xini).* them, circled above the ship to  
swoop down upon it.)

Quotation from the Maltese folk-tale known as *L-Erba' Snajja'* (The Four Trades) collected by Fr M. Magri (*Hrejjef Misserijietna in Kotba tal-Mogħdija taż-Żmien*, No. 18, 1902, p. 30).

*Izzintla*, v.int. To circle overhead (hawk, etc.) Not in the Maltese dictionaries but still used by quarrymen in the expression *spiera xibrejn zintlu*, 'a stone pit two spans in diameter'. Fr Magri (*op. cit.*, p. 32) explains *izzintla ruħu*, 'to fly in a circle, as a hawk does before swooping down on its prey'. An archaic form of current *iċċentra*, 'to centralize, to place in a central position', with *z* for It. *t* and *l* for *r*. For correspondence of archaic Romance Maltese *z* to It. *t* cp. M. *zuntier*, 'a churchyard', formerly used as a burial place, from sic. *cimiteriu* (Modern Maltese *ċimiterju*) and It. *cimitero*. For the interchange of *l* and *r* cp. dialectal M. *pitlorju* (for more current form *pitrolju*) from It. *petrolio*, M. *artal*, from It. *altare*. For the verbal pattern of *izzintla* cp. *iddiskla* (It. *discolo*), 'to lead a dissolute life'; *iddritta* (It. *diritto*), 'to straighten'; *illirtja* (It. *all'erta*), 'to be on the alert'. This is generally the pattern followed by Maltese verbs from the Italian, Sicilian or English. Examples from the English language are *iddajvja*, 'to dive', *illandja*, 'to land', *ipparkja*, 'to park' and *iffittja*, 'to fit'.

- (11) (a) H zie ʒa, H zie ʒa! (Ringworm! Ringworm!  
Mur għand ommok il-moqʒje ʒa: Go to your filthy mother:



*Nirqik, nerga° nirqik* I exorcise you and will do so again  
*Sa naqtagħlek l-egħruq li fik.* Till I cut your roots out.)

An exorcism recited to cure oneself of ringworm. An oil ointment, in which a live cowrie (M. *bahbuħa*) has been previously put, is rubbed over the affected part of the skin while the above words are recited. Vassalli records the practice of exorcisms and explains *kliem ir-riqi* as 'verba superstitiosa, seu oratio sacra simul profana cui occulta auruginis virtus tribuitur'. Besides Ringworm, other diseases such as Pterygium (M. *qarnita*) and Jaundice (M. *suffejra*) are believed to be amenable to cure by exorcism. The above lines appeared in L. Bonelli's *Il Dialetto Maltese*, published as a supplement to *Archivio Glottologico Italiano* (Torino, 1891-1897, p. 69).

(b) *Qarnita, ja qarnita,* (O Pterygium, Pterygium,  
*Irqejtek w aktar inqorr;* I have exorcised you and will do so  
*Naqalghæk bl-egħruq u* again;  
*x-xniexel* I'll cut your roots out  
*Nixħtek ġol-baħar fejn kont.* And fling you back into the sea.)

An exorcism recited to cure Pterygium, an eye-disease locally known as *Qarnita* (lit. 'octopus'). Connected with this practice is the use of a small silver ring with an octopus engraved on it. This ring is called *Il-Hatem* (the signet) and the man or woman who passes it over the afflicted eyes repeats the above lines, the meaning of which is very clear to a Maltese to whom *Qarnita* means both 'octopus' and 'pterygium'. These lines were still current at Kerċem, Gozo, in 1941.

*Reqa*, v.t. to cure jaundice, etc. The Maltese meaning must have originally been associated with charm and enchantment, which agrees with the definition given by Vassalli 'verba superstitiosa', with which cp. Ar. رقى 'to give a charm to, to enchant'. In meaning the Maltese word agrees with Syrian ريقان 'avoir le jaundice', denominative from raiqa:n, 'jaunisse' (Barthélémy). For the idea of charm cp. Also N. Afr. Ar. رقى 'charmer de l'eau, un puits, en prononçant des paroles ou en crachant dessus'; also 'garantir quelqu'un contre les sorcelleries par des amulettes' (Beaussier).

### (iii) *Miscellaneous Forms*

Among these are found some uncommon plural forms, archaic nouns and adjectives, etc.

(12) .....

*Narra ttiħa baqla sewda* (May she be plagued with Black spots  
*Timexxilħa marsuttin.* That will develop into a chest disease.)

A specimen of vitriolic expression of hatred in a Maltese folk-song heard at Birkirkara, Malta.

**Baqła**, n.f. This is the name given to a kind of cutaneous eruption accompanying malignant diseases. It may be either *baqla ħamra*, 'Purple Spots', or *baqla sewda*, 'Black Spots'. Vassalli explains it as 'impetigo'. Hava does not give this word as the name of a cutaneous disease. The Maltese word is semantically connected with Ar. بَقْلٌ 'to be covered with down (face)'. For the specific disease-name cp. N.Afr. Ar. بَقْلَةٌ 'coup de soleil; insolation, fièvre, typhoïde' (Beaussier).

**Marsuttin**, n.m. Tuberculosis; consumption, from It. *mal sottile*.

(13) (a) Holl *dliielek* u ġib iż-żejt. (Loosen your hair and bring oil.)

A Maltese proverb used as a warning that there is going to be trouble, enough time to comb your hair while the angry person is letting off steam. Barbera (*Dizionario Maltese-Arabo-Italiano*, Beyrouth, Vol. I, 1939, p.321) says of this proverb: 'questa frase fa ricordare l'uso del popolino in Sicilia ed anche a Malta di ravviare, acconciare la capigliatura con dell'olio, per dare ai capelli il lucido ed anche per rinforzarli; uso arabo'.

(b) Hu il-mant u omxot *dliielek*, (Here is the veil, comb your hair,  
 Hu l-muftieħ, ixrob u kul; Take the key, drink and eat;  
 – 'Jiena ikel le ma niekol – 'I will not touch any food  
 Qabel rahli, il-Mosta, immur'. Before I return to Mosta, my village.)

A stanza from the traditional ballad of 'The Bride of Mosta' (*L-Għarusa tal-Mosta*). First collected by Annibale Preca, a nineteenth century Maltese writer, this ballad was printed by Luigi Bonelli in *Il Dialecto Maltese* (1897, Supplement) and has since been extensively studied by local and foreign writers. Prof. Ettore Rossi, of Rome, is inclined to class it as a fifteenth century production – a period in which the pirates of northern Africa laid waste the island of Malta with frequent raids. In an eighteenth century manuscript diary preserved at the Royal Malta Library (No. 1146, Vol. 1) it is recorded that the Turks raided and sacked the village of Mosta in 1526, 'under the famous corsair Rajjes Sinen, taking about four hundred prisoners... as well as a bride, together with the guests all dressed for the wedding, about whom (bride) songs are still heard'. The ballad, therefore, cannot be older than the sixteenth century. For further study of this ballad cp. Ettore Rossi, *Scibilia Nobili e la leggenda Maltese della Sposa della Mosta* (extract from "Lares" sett. 1932, Firenze); Anthony Cremona, *Is the Maid of Mosta a Myth?* (Malta, 1934), and Raffaele Corso, *La canzone della sposa rapita dai pirati barbareschi*, in 'La Rivista d'Oriente', (Napoli, Ottobre, 1935).

Dliel, pl. n.m. Plural form of *dell* (Ar. <sup>دَلِيلٌ</sup>), 'shadow', the plural meaning being 'long, flowing hair', wrongly derived by Barbera from Ar. <sup>دَلَّ</sup> 'to direct, to indicate'. Dessoulavy refers to Ethiopic <sup>ሰላላ</sup> 'anything shady, screen; also shadows', plural of <sup>ሰላ</sup> (Hava). The meaning agrees more nearly with Hebrew <sup>לְלִי</sup> 'hair of the head' from <sup>לָלַי</sup> 'to hang, be low, languish (cp. M. *midliel*)'; weak, languishing, of delicate construction'. Cp. also *Delila*, the name of Samson's wife, famous for cutting the long hair of her giant husband. The Maltese word survives in plant-name *Dliel il-Madliena* (Greater Periwinkle). A fleecy sheep is still called *naghga midliela*.

- (14) (a) Narra l-*ghobra* tghabbrek! (May calamity fall upon you!)  
 (b) Minn surtek tidher *ghobortok*. (Your appearance betrays your misery.)

Two sayings given in Caruana's dictionary.

- (c) 'Ilbes, binti, ilbes, (Put on your dress, my daughter,  
 Hemm is-senduq, ilbes u There's the chest, dress and  
 zzejjem'. adorn yourself.'  
 –'Nilbes? *ghobra* ghala wiċċi –'Woe unto me! How can I  
 Waqajt ilsira ghala dejjem'. bother?  
 I have fallen a slave for ever!'  
 'Orqod, binti, orqod (Sleep, my daughter, sleep,  
 Hemm is-sodda, irpo ʒa, strieh. There's the bed, sleep and rest'.  
 –'Nirpo ʒa? *ghobra* ghala wiċċi!– –'Woe unto me! How can I sleep?  
 Waqajt ilsira għand il-klieb'. I have fallen a slave in the  
 hands of the dogs (Turks)).

Two stanzas from the Mosta ballad referred to above (No. 13 b). They were collected in 1942 and published together with all known stanzas and variants of the ballad. (G. Cassar Pullicino: *L-Għarusa tal-Mosta, b'xi zieda*, in 'Lehen il-Malti', Nos. 133-6, 1942, pp. 26-9).

*Ghobra*, n.f. Misery, distress. With the Maltese meaning of *ghobra* (pl. *ghebieri*, given by Vassalli) in *ghobra ghala wiċċi* cp. Ar. عَبْرَةٌ 'tears', pl. عَبْرٌ from عَبَرَ 'to shed tears', and اسْتَعْبَرَ 'to shed tears' also 'to weigh coins' (Hava) (M. *ghabbar*, 'to weigh, to ascertain weight') whence the combined Maltese idea of (i) tears, and (ii) oppression, in the latter sense as when we speak of one being 'weighed down with sorrow'. The use of the Maltese word is otherwise local. For associated meaning cp. also Heb. <sup>יַבֵּן</sup> 'overflow, arrogance, fury'.

- (15) Bamin ċkejken, ċkejken, (Little, little Child-Jesus,  
 Kollok xama' u libien, Surrounded with candles and  
 Nirrikmanda ruġi 'l Alla frankincense,  
 U l-bqija lil San Mikiel I recommend my soul to God  
 And the rest to St Michael.)

A folk-prayer recited by children before going to bed. The name *Il-Libiena* is still given to the first fortnight of November, when the weather is usually very fine and recalls that of Summer; hence its other name *Sajfta' San Martin*, 'St Martin's Summer'.

*Libien* (but *lubien* in Falzon) n.m. Frankincense. Now-a-days replaced by the Romance *incens* (It. *incenso*). Cp. Ar. *ثَبَان* 'olibanum; gum resin used as a frankincense' (Hava). With adj. *libien* (m), *libiena* (f), 'serene, fair (weather)' as in *sena* or *xitwa libiena* cp. Ar. *لُؤْبَان* 'burnt by thirst'. and the noun *لُؤْبَان* 'burning heat, hot day'. Falzon gives also the noun *libbiena*, pl. *libbiniet*, 'dryness, drought'; also derived from  $\sqrt{\text{LHB}}$ . Therefore, orthographically M. *libien* in the sense of 'serene, fair' (weather) should be written *lebbien* (m) and *lebbiena* (f). In Maltese we call a craving for something *lebba*, which word is not found in Caruana or Falzon, and corresponds to Ar. *لُؤْبَانَة* burning thirst. The cognate Maltese quadrilateral verb *lebleb*, is made up of *leheb* + *leheb*, with the omission of medial radical *b* and a reduction of vocalic sequence *e-e* to short *e*, whence the Maltese quadrilateral on the pattern *QeT+QeT* (e.g. *temtem*, 'to stutter', *leflef*, 'to devour', *gerger*, 'to grumble'). Barbera and Dessoulavy wrongly derive M. *lebleb* from Ar. *كَبَلَب* which corresponds to M. *lebleb*, 'to flap (sail, flag)' and *lablab*, 'to prate'. For semantics cp. Lat. *serenus*, 'fair, unclouded (weather)', perhaps cognate with Greek  $\xi\eta\rho\delta\varsigma$  'dry', Sanscrit *ksayati*, 'it burns', with which cp. Latin *serescere*, 'to grow dry' as in *vestes serescunt* (Lucret. I, 307).

- (16) Ibla' u fur (Rise and overflow  
 bħalma Kristu As Christ rose from his tomb.)  
 Tala' minn ġol-qbur!

A propitiatory rhyme, recited by bakers or other people engaged in kneading flour, to make the dough rise.

*Qbur*, n.m. Tombs, pl. of *qabar*, other plural forms being *qbura* (Caruana), *qobra* and *oqbra*. Cp. Ar. *قُبُور* pl. of *قَبْر* 'tomb'.

- (17) *Żorba* w lajn (Eng. line) mejjet! (Within the square or on the line  
 dead; i.e. the game is lost.)

*Żorba* (Luqa) or, in other localities, *Fatt* is the name of a children's

game played on condition that the boy whose marble stops within the square marked on the ground, called *Fatt*, or on one of the lines forming the square, loses the game. *Żorba* means also 'sorb tree', of which there are only a few specimens in Malta, one of them in the fields 'Tal-Lunzjata', belonging to the Carmelite Friars, beyond Rabat, Malta. *Waqaġt żorba* is a common expression meaning 'I have fallen down in a lump', denoting the helplessness and sudden onrush of physical collapse (lit. like a sorb) or of senile debility.

*Żorba*, n.f. Sorb. From Sicilian *zorba*, It. *sorba*. For correspondence of M. *ż* to Sic. *z* (ts) cp. M. *tuzżana*, from Sic. It. *dozzina*.

- (18) 'Il dan (żiemel)' qallu                      'Beat this horse thoroughly' he told  
 'idilku shiġ; lill-oħrajn                      him, 'and feed the others on the  
 aġhtihom il-musan'.                      leftovers'

A passage from the popular explanation of the Maltese folk-tale *Balmies*, heard by Fr Magri at Xagħra, Gozo, in 1905. M. Magri: *X'Igħid il-Malti fuq id-Dinja ta' Taħt u fuq ir-Rjieħ*, 1905, p. 38).

*Musan*, adj.m. Undamaged, in good condition (grass, etc.) Participial adjective from absolute M. *san*, *isun* (Falzon), with which cp. Ar. صَان 'to preserve a thing' (Hava). The Maltese form regularly should be *masun* or *misun* (cp. Ar. مَصُون 'guarded'). But the Maltese form has followed the participial adjectival pattern from verbs of the IXth form, like *musfar*, 'pale', and *muħdar*, 'greenish', from *sfar*, 'to grow pale', and *ħdar*, 'to grow green' respectively. Magri explains the word as 'damaged, that which is not accepted by others'.

- (19) '... qieghed ċaġħka fil-wadaf (He put a pebble in his sling, swung  
 tiegħu, xejjirha dawra mejt u it around and let it off.)  
 rħielha.'

A passage from the Maltese folk-tale *Il-Ġgant u s-Sajjied tal-Għasafar* (The Giant and the Bird Catcher) given by Fr Magri in his *X'Igħid il-Malti fuq Missirijietna u l-Ġganti* (1904, p. 36).

*Wadaf* (more commonly *wadab*, or, in Modern Maltese, *sbandola*, from Sic. *sbannòla* or *sbandòla* (Barbera)). Sling, Ar. وَصْف 'a sling', with which cp. وَصْف 'frondér' (Dozy) and وَصْف 'lancer des pierres avec une fronde' (Kazimirsky). For change of Ar. *f* into M. *b* cp. M. *bazza*, 'to fear', Ar. فَزَع; M. *qabeż*, 'to jump', Ar. قَفَز.

- (20) 'Issa immela ħalli nagħmlu                      (Let us then have a wrestling bout  
 serriegħa qabel ma nieklok.'                      before I eat you up.)

Another passage from the giant story mentioned in (19) above.

Serriegħa, n.f. A wrestling bout. Verbal noun from disused verb *saragħ*, with which cp. Ar. صَارَعَ 'to wrestle, to fight a duel with' (Hava), whence مَصْرَاعَةٌ 'prostrating his adversary' (Hava), whence also مَصْرَعٌ 'a wrestling place', with which cp. M. *misraħ*, 'an open space before a village church, so called because it originally may have served as a playground for demonstrations of personal prowess — a place for village recreations, display of athletics, etc. Final ħ in *misraħ* corresponds phonetically to unvoiced Ar. ع. With the M. verb *issara*, 'to wrestle' cp. N. Afr. تصارع (VIth form), 'lutter, combattre' (Beaussier).

- (21) 'Li ma għedtlix saħħa, qaltlu, (If you had'nt wished me good  
kont nibilgħek belgħa u kont health' she said, 'I would have  
ingerrgħek ġergħa'. swallowed and digested you.)

A passage from the Maltese folk-tale *Bin il-Mara l-Għarfa jgħib il-Għasfur iġħanni* (The Wise Woman's Son brings the Singing Bird) contained in Fr Magri's *Hrejjef Misserijietna* I, 1902, p. 43). These words are repeatedly uttered by three people whose help the Wise Woman's Son asked in his quest for the Singing Bird.

Ġergħa, n.f. Noun of unity from *ġera'*, to digest; to swallow up', and, figuratively, 'to tolerate (something unpleasant); 'to stand (a difficult or unpleasant man)'. Cp. Ar. جَرَعَ to swallow in one draught', and جَرَعٌ (IInd form) 'to cause one to swallow (water)', whence جَرَعَةٌ also جَرَعَةٌ 'draught or a mouthful' (Hava). The second form *ġerra'*, 'to digest', fig. 'to stand (a person)' is still used.

- (22) '... Għandi din l-*imserka* (I have this needle-case containing  
labar, fiha mitt waħda... ' a hundred needles.)

A passage from the Maltese folk-tale *Bin il-Mara l-Għarfa jgħib ix-Xebba tal-Gmiel* (The Wise Woman's Son brings the Maiden of Beauty), one of the series figuring the Wise Woman's Son, who may be compared to Hercules in his difficult tasks. (Cp. Fr M. Magri: *op. cit.*, Vol. I, p. 51).

Mserka, n.f. A quill; a kind of weaver's bobbin. According to Magri in the context of the story *mserka labar* means 'a needle-case' (Modern Maltese *stoċċ*, from It. *astuccio*). Mimated noun of instrument from obsolete verb *sirek*, which cp. with Ar. سَلَكَ 'to wind off (thread)', whence سَلَكَةٌ 'spun thread'. The Maltese mimated form is a local growth created by the local weaving industry. Note the interchange of Maltese and Arabic *r* and *l*. The masculine form *misrek* is still used of a lean man. *Mesrek*, 'to ply frequently between one place and another', which is a denominative verb from *mserka*, like *meslaħ*, 'to splutter', from *mselħa*, 'a broom', from √SLĤ, is still heard in Gozo.

(23) Haġa Moħġaġa.

Initial formula recited by children when playing at riddles, with which cp. Eng. 'me riddle me riddle', 'come a riddle, come a riddle', 'Ma riddledy, riddledy, rote d'tote', 'Riddle cum riddle cum rawley' (See Archer Taylor: *English Riddles from Oral Tradition*, University of California Press, 1951, pp. 230-232).

Moħġaġa, pp.f., A riddle, a puzzle. Morphologically this word is a participial adjective developed from an obsolete verb of the IXth form. Cp. M. *musfara*, 'pale', fem. adj. from *sfar*, 'to grow pale'. Actually, the Ar. verb is حَجَّ 'to overcome in a dispute', whence the IIIrd form حَجَّجَ 'to argue against', and تَحَاجَّجَ 'to afford arguments', and حُجَّةٌ 'argument, plea', and 'litigious' (Hava), whence M. *moħġaġa*, thing the meaning of which is disputed, hence 'a riddle'.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (24) <i>Qarinż</i> , <i>Qarinż</i> , <i>Qarinż</i> , | ( <i>Qarinż</i> , <i>Qarinż</i> , <i>Quarinż</i> ! |
| Gejt nitolbok wara biebek:                           | I have come to beg at your door:                   |
| Is-Sena t-tajba,                                     | A good New Year,                                   |
| L-ġhatba mbajjada,                                   | The doorstep is whitewashed,                       |
| Bajjadhielek is-Sultan;                              | The King has whitewashed it for you;               |
| Issa hu jrid xi haġa                                 | Now he expects something from you                  |
| Imur itiha 'l dawk it-tfal.                          | To give it to those children.)                     |

A rhyme which is still heard on New Year's Day in some villages in Gozo. *Qarinża* was the name given to the serenades heard on New Year's Eve, sung by carollers in front of the homes of the well-to-do. When someone appeared at the window and threw them coins, the carollers sprinkled lime on the doorsteps as an augury of good wishes and prosperity for the new year. But if no coin was thrown to them imprecations were uttered against the inmates while the walls of the house were befouled. This custom is by no means extinct. Our villagers still show their displeasure by throwing dirt at walls and doors. Up to some time ago the word survived in the nickname *Ta' Qarinż*. To-day only the memory of the *Qarinża* remains, but lime is still sprinkled on the floor of market stalls at the Valletta Market on New Year's Day, and at Luqa, up to the Second World War, it was customary for the village sexton or some other villager to sprinkle the doors of the villagers with lime before daybreak on New Year's Day. In Gozo there is the tradition that the *Qarinża* was discontinued about a hundred years ago, when one of the company, who was feigning Death during the ceremony, actually died and it was then decided not to revive the custom.

*Qarinża*, n.f. The Maltese word seems to link up with Algerian قريندة 'mandoline' (Beaussier). Cp. also قُرْنْدَة 'guitare - Turkish or Algerian'

(Dozy). Rather puzzling is the change of Ar. *d* into M. *z*.

- (25) Tabilhaqq li aħna *whudna* (It is true that none else but ourselves  
Sallabnieħ 'il-Iben tiegħek; have nailed your son to the Holy Cross;  
Fuq l-imqaddes is-salib, A crown of thorn on his head...)  
Fuq l-imqaddsa il-kuruna...

The above lines, heard at Xagħra, Gozo, in the summer of 1942, form part of a folk-prayer called *Salve Regina tad-Duluri* ('Salve Regina' of Our Lady of Sorrows) recited by peasant women. In the last two lines the construction of the adjective and noun, both preceded by the definite article, is very unusual, the usual construction being the noun preceded by the definite article and followed by the adjective with or without the definite article. This unusual order heightens the poetic effect of the lines. *Uħudna*, adv. By ourselves, alone. Common Maltese form is *weħidna*.

The word is made up of *uħud* (Ar. pl. وَاوْحِد but N. Afr. Ar. pl. وُحُوْد (Beaussier)) + pronominal suffix *na*, 'us', first person plural (Ar. + نَا).

- (26) L-ghajn il-ħamra (May the red eye go away with the sand;  
Tmur mar-ramla! the black eye with the wave and the  
L-ghajn is-sewda blue eye vanish like lightning!)  
Tmur mal-mewġa!  
L-ghajn iż-żerqa  
Tmur bħal berqa!

An exorcism heard at Luqa, Malta. It is a popular belief in Malta that the evil eye may be caused by the three predominant colours of the eye, namely, blue (*żerqa*), red (*ħamra*) and black (*sewda*). The belief in the magical influence of the eye is also testified by the following saying: *l-ghajnejn żoroq jisirqu n-nies mit-toroq* (blue eyes steal away people from the streets). In this connection it is interesting to note that in Morocco fair eyes inspire much fear among the Arabs of the plains, where such eyes are rare, and if a blue-eyed person looks at you it is just as if he killed you. At Andrija when a person is suspected of having been hurt by the evil eye they use an incantation containing the following passage: *A'ūdu bi llāh mēn l-'ain z-zārqa u mēn l-'ain l-ġārqa u l-'ain eđ ma lat-šallí ší 'āla rasulū llab*. 'I take refuge with God from the blue eye and from the deep-set eye and the eye which does not pray for the apostle of God'. (See Westermarck: *Ritual and Belief in Morocco*, 1926, Vol. I, p. 420). *Żerqa*, adj.f. Blue, feminine gender of masc. *iżraq*, pl. *żoroq*, both genders. Cp. Ar. زَرْقَاء fem. of masc. أَرْقُ pl. *zurq*, 'blue'. Of one who is stone blind we say that he is *aghma iżraq*. For the interesting use of *iżraq* in this adverbial sense cp. Ar. أَرْقُ مَوْتٌ 'violent death';



عدو. أَرْقُوْ، 'desperate enemy', literally 'blue-eyed enemy' (Hava).

- (27) *Ġodod!* Ġew il-ġodod! (New ones! Here are the new ones,  
i.e. herrings!)

A fish-market cry peculiar to herring vendors.

*Ġodod*, adj. (Modern Maltese *ġodda*), plural of *ġdid*, 'new'. With this plural form cp. regular Ar. pl. جُدَد of sing. جَدِيد 'new'. The Maltese plural *ġodda* is a local formation by analogy with the plural noun and adjective pattern *qotla*, like pl. *tobba*, from sing. *tabib*, 'doctor', and *qodma*, from sing. *qadim*, 'old'.

- (28) '..... (How sorrowful is Filomel,  
Filomen kemm hi *ġħaljiena* Because her Peppu (Joseph) has gone  
Ġħax Peppu marilha l-Kair!' away to Cairo.)

Lines from a folk-song collected by Bertha Ilg and published in *Maltesische Volkslieder im urtext mit Deutscher Übersetzung*, herausgegeben von B. Ilg und H. Stumme, Leipzig, 1909, p. 42).

*Ġħaljiena*, adj.f. (Modern Maltese *mġħollija*, or *iddispiċuta*, from It. *dispiacere*). Maltese adjectival formation from *ġħala*, *jaġħli*, pp. *mġħolli* (m) + *ja* (f), 'to boil', as in Arabic. But the adjective is a purely Maltese formation and its figurative meaning, 'sorrowful' seems to have been influenced by It. *bollire*, literally 'to boil', as in Maltese and Arabic, but figuratively 'essere in agitazione, in sussulto' (Zingarelli). In Arabic عَلِيَان also عَلِيَان means 'tall, bulky' (Hava).

- (29) '.....  
Hanini ġuvni smajjar, (My beloved is a dark young man,  
*Inklele* jarawh ġħajnejja.\* Or else that's how my eyes see him.)

Lines from a Maltese folk-song heard at Munxar, Gozo.

*Inklele*, conj. Otherwise. The more common form is *inkella* and the less common *jekklilē*. According to Dessoulavy 'De Sacy proposed to read يَكُونُ الَّتِي لَا for Maltese *jekklilē*'. A better explanation is that *inkella* is made up of *in*, with which cp. Ar. إِنْ 'if', + *kell*, shortened from *ikun* (Ar. يَكُونُ 'it be') (final *n* becoming *l* by regressive assimilation) + *le*, Ar. لَا 'no' literally 'if it be not so'. This word is a local formation.

- (30) *Dura durella!* (Little, little hut!  
- *Qasba żagarella,* A yard of ribbon  
*Hija l-Abbatija* My brother in the orphanage  
*Bil-maktur tal-mustaxija!* With a crepe handkerchief!  
- *Axxa!* - A-tishoo!  
*Missieri mastudaxxa!* My father is a carpenter!)

Children's doggerel recited during a ring dance. *Axxa* is a meaningless word added to rhyme with *mastrudaxxa* in the last line and recalls the third line of the English game-rhyme *Ring a ring o' roses*.

*Dura*, n.f. This word conveys a diminutive meaning of *dar*, 'house', is peculiar to Maltese, and sporadic. A toy house built of little stones by children. It is also the name of a semi-circular construction about three or four feet high, built of rubble stones and used by bird catchers as a watching place. Cp. Ar. *دارة* 'maisonette', and also *لعب الدارة* «jeu d'enfants», the name of a children's game' (Dozy). *Durella* is doubly diminutive by the addition of the Italian suffix *-ella*.

### (31) *Tutemb!*

A word used in children's games, meaning 'a pause!' or 'a truce!'. In some games, by crying 'tutemb' or 'tutemba!' one is allowed to go out of play for a short time, thus preventing the *qattus*, 'cat'. (Tunisian قطوس) from touching and 'killing' him out of the game.

*Tutemb*, adv. Bonelli says that this is a hybrid word for Italian 'a tempo'.

Phonetically a more acceptable explanation is that this word is made up of Sic. *to*, 'your', + *temp*, short for Sic. *tempu*, 'time'. The voicing of final *p*, as one can see in the variant *tutemba*, is a result of its phonological junction at the end of a word with preceding liquid *m*. *Tutemb*, which in the original Sicilian meant 'your time, your turn', took the general meaning 'to be one's turn; to be out of the game' because the grammatical meaning of the possessive *to* was not appreciated by the Maltese-speaking children. *No tutemb* given by Bonelli stands for 'no to temp', not your time (turn). For further usage of Maltese *no* in children's games also with Semitic verbs cf. *no qbadtni*, 'You haven't caught me'.

## B. PROVERBS AND OTHER SAYINGS

These have been grouped under two headings, i.e. (i) proverbs of everyday life, and (ii) weather-proverbs and sayings. Grammatical explanation is given only in some cases of unusual plural or verbal forms. We have retained the traditional forms given by Vassalli, De Soldanis or other early collectors of sayings, as the modernised form may have been slightly modified in the course of its passage to our generation.

### (i) *Proverbs of everyday life*

(32) (a) *Il-amar u s-smigh bhad-  
daqqa u l-hoss*

(Order and obedience are like a beat  
and its sound.)

(b) Li jien kont *emir*, u int (If I were master and you were  
 kont *emir*, master,  
 Kieku min isuq il-ħmir? Which of us would drive the asses?)  
 Amar, v.t. To command. Cp. Ar. *أَمَرَ* whence *أَمْرٌ* 'order' or 'decree', and  
 Ar. *أَمِيرٌ* 'chief, prince', with which cp. M. *amar*, 'an order' and *emir*  
 (obs.), 'leader'.

(33) *Asaħħ* kelmet il-Malti (You can trust the word (pledge) of  
 Minn ħalfet is-Sultan. a Maltese more than that of a King.  
 lit. 'the word of a Maltese is  
 stronger than the oath of a King'.)

The Grand Master of the Knights of St John of Jerusalem was known as *is-Sultan*. This meaning survives in some place-names, such as *Bieb is-Sultan*, 'the Grandmaster's Gate', as well as in such sayings as *il-bejta tas-Sultan* or *fejn jamar is-Sultan*, 'the Grand Master's nest' applied to Valletta, the capital, and *taħdem għall-ħabba tas-Sultan*, 'to work for the Grand Master's pittance' (literally 'grain', one twelfth of a penny).

*Asaħħ*, adj. Stronger. This is the archaic relative of *sħiħ*, 'strong', conforming to the now archaic pattern of adjectives with second and third radicals alike. Cp. Ar. *أَجَلٌ* 'more glorious', from *جَلِيلٌ* 'glorious'.

(34) *Fuq il-binnija* tidden is-sriedek (The cocks crow on the egg-nest,  
 Kull ma tagħmel turiħx 'I Do not let your children know all  
 uliedek. you do.)

*Binnija*, n.f. The secret place where hens lay their eggs and brood. Cp. Ar. *بِنْيَةٌ* (also *بُنْيَةٌ*) 'structure', from Ar. *بَنَى* (M. *benā*), 'to build'. This word is local in its meaning and form.

(35) *Aħna* li m'għandniex immorru (We that have not go to those who  
 Għand min għandu u *jdorru*. have more than is good for them.)  
 Darr, v.t. To injure or harm (bad food), from Ar. *صَرَّ* 'to harm, to injure'.

(36) *Mara bil-lejl dellba* tqil. (Heavy: evil) is the shadow of a  
 woman wandering about by night.)

The Maltese still believe in the evil influences of certain days, seasons or persons. Thus, Fridays are of evil omen, and so is the month of May. Care is taken not to begin work on a Friday, while some also avoid marrying in May, which is considered as the month of misfortune. A woman seen wandering about at night was likewise associated with bad luck.

*Dell*, n.m. Shadow and, figuratively, omen. Cp. Ar. *ظِلٌّ* 'shadow'. The association of *dell* with an omen of misfortune, as in the expression

*dellu tqil*, lit. 'his shadow is heavy', seems to be a Western superstition. The Maltese *dell* is a sort of بَرَكَة the like of which Westermarck seems to have recorded in his work 'Ritual and Belief in Morocco'. The Maltese meaning seems to be derived from that of the Latin *umbra*, whence Eng. 'The Shades', meaning 'The Abode of Spirits, Death', and the Italian 'le ombre'.

(37) (a) *Il-ghadu biex fietek bišek*, (Your enemy kissed you to cheat you,  
U int biex tfutu, aqleb fuqu. And you, to cheat him, will turn  
against him.)

(b) *Wisq drabi l-fomm ifut* (Very often the mouth betrays the  
il-qalb. heart.)

*Fiet*, *ifut*, v.t. To cheat. Dessoulavy wrongly derives the Maltese verb from Ar. فَاتَس 'to miss', and أَفَاتَس 'to cause to miss'. It derives from It. *fottere*, Latin *futuo*, 'to cheat, to have sexual intercourse with', which agrees with the meaning this verb has in Maltese. *Fotta*, *ifotti*, having the same meaning, is a modern loan-word, its Semitic equivalent *ḥaxa*, *jaḥxi*, meaning, like *fiet* and *fotta*, 'to cheat' and also 'to have sexual intercourse with', which is their original meaning in Italian and Latin.

(39) *Ir-ragħa fil-ġbis ma jsemminx.* (Feeding on stubble will not fatten  
the cattle.)

*Gbis*, n.m. Stubble (Falzon and Caruana). According to De Soldanis, quoted by Vassalli, *ġbis* is 'terra che si trova circolarmente nella creta, e con cui i cretari danno lustro o vernice ai loro vasi non cotti', Cp. Ar. جَبَس 'to become dry' (Hava), whence جَبِين 'pain sec, pain azyme' (Kazimirsky and Hava). Maltese *ġbis* and Ar. جَبِين share the idea of dryness, but the M. word is applied to dry straw or stubble, whereas the Ar. indicates dry bread. The M. word, though written with an *s* as the third radical, should really be written with a *z*. In Maltese voiced consonants at the end of a word are unvoiced and this explains why Maltese lexicographers have written the word with a final *s*.

(39) (a) *Qagħad id-dar ma fiħx għar.* (Staying at home brings no shame.)

(b) *Għall-ġhera u l-għar il-fqir* (On account of his poverty (lit.  
jitrekken ġewwa d-dar. nudity) and shame the poor man  
hides himself at home.)

(c) *Il għajb iġhajjeb u l-għar* (Equivalent to 'It's a case of the pot  
iġhajjar. calling the kettle black'; lit. dis-  
grace disgraces and shame shames')

(d) Il faqar mhuwiex *għar*. (Poverty is no shame.)

These four proverbs show the prevalence of the fear of shame or disgrace in life.

*Għar*, n.m. Shame, disgrace. Cp. Ar. عَار 'shame, disgrace, vice' (second radical *j*)—Hava. With the Maltese plural *għawar*, occurring in the proverb *it-ifal jikkxfu l-għawar*, 'children betray secrets', cp. the Ar. plural أَعْيَار in which note the interchange of M. *w* and Ar. *j*; and for the opposite phenomenon cp. M. *qajjem*, 'to awaken', second form of Ar. قَام 'to rise'. The M. word *għar* occurs generally jointly with *kaza*, forming the complete word *għarukaza* (*għar* + *u* + *kaza*), 'disgrace, cause for scandal'. *Kaza* is used as a verb in the sixth form only, *tkaza*, 'to express (generally self-complacently) astonishment at someone else's shortcomings', whence the Maltese proverb *min jitkaza jaqa' fil-kaza*, 'he who affects surprise at his neighbour's shortcomings will himself fall short of perfection' (lit. 'fall into disgrace'). The Maltese verb seems to be connected with كَوْن and تَكْوِين 'detractor, and 'sussurrus' (Dozy), whence the basic idea of the M. verb *tkaza*, that is, the scandal-monger's mischievous whisperings. *Kaza* and *tkaza* are otherwise local formations. An interesting example of mixed Maltese is the adjective *kazajr*, 'one who self-complacently expresses astonishment at his neighbour's shortcomings', also 'one who is impertinently inquisitive'. The word is made up of the noun *kaza* + Romance adj. suffix *ajr*, from It. *aro*.

(40) *Fin-niket u fil hmum* (Friends and relative indeed are  
*Jidhru l-hbieb u l-egħmum.* known in times of distress and need.)

*Hmum*, n.m. Grievances, worries. Plural of *hemm*. Cp. Ar. هَمّ 'anxiety, care', pl. هَمَم (Hava), whence همم (M. *hammem*), 'inquierer' (Beaussier). Hava gives the fifth form تَهَمَم 'to be anxious about, to search a thing'.

*Għemmum*, n.m. (Modern Maltese *zijiet*, irrespective of the maternal or paternal side) plural of *għamm*, 'paternal uncle'. Cp. Ar. عَمّ having the same meaning, pl. عَمَمَات the feminine of which is عَمَّة (M. *għammt*). 'paternal aunt', made up of fem. sing. *għamma* and surviving *t marbuta* Ar. pl. عَمَمَات (M. pl. *għammiet*)

(41) (a) *M'għandux għaxa ta' lejla.* (He can't even afford a night's  
 supper.)

(b) *Għax ittiekel għal ġaru* (Because he counted upon the assis-  
*Baqa' bla għaxa f'daru.* tance of his neighbour he had to  
 sleep without his supper.)

Ghaxa, n.f. Nomen unitatis from M. verb *għax*, 'to live'; Ar. عَاشَ which, like *għajxien*, 'a livelihood, a living', is a local growth. With *għaxa*, which according to the more common Maltese pattern should be *għaxja*, also heard, cp. M. *zieda*, 'an addition', from *zad* (or *zied*), *izid*, 'to add', Ar. عَيْشَةٌ 'living' and عَيْشٌ 'food' (Hava). Examples of the more common M. nominal pattern from hollow verbs are *sejba*, 'a treasure trove', from *sab*, 'to find'; *bajda*, 'an egg', from *bad* (or *bied*), 'to lay eggs'; *sajra*, 'a good cooking', from *sar*, 'to cook'; and *tajra*, 'a fowl', from *tar*, 'to fly'.

(42) Dak li jhobb jixrob l-ilma (He who likes drinking water only  
ma jgħletx fil-kilma. won't utter the wrong word.)

Għalet, v.t. To commit a mistake; in modern Maltese *zbalja*; from It. *sbagliare*. Cp. Ar. كَلَّمَ 'to commit a mistake, a slip' and كَلَمٌ (M. *għallat*, 'to deceive, to attribute a mistake to'; كَلَمٌ (M. *għilt*, 'mistake') 'a slip, mistake, lapse', and كَلْمَةٌ 'a slip, a mistake' (Hava). Elias gives the third form of كَلَمٌ (Egyptian) in the Maltese sense of *għallat* (second form) 'to swindle, to cheat'. Dozy quotes also the fifth form meaning 'errare' from Schiapparelli's 'Vocabulista' (Florence, 1871), corresponding to its Maltese equivalent 'to deceive oneself' or 'to be deceived'. The form is also given by Hava in this sense (dialect of Syria). One still hears the expression *mexa bil-għilt*, 'he used foul means'.

(43) Il-għana mill-għanem, u (Wealth from cattle, and cattle pro-  
l-għanem iġib il-għana. duce wealth.)

Għanem, n.coll. Herd, drove, cattle. The word corresponds to Ar. عَنَمٌ 'sheep, ewes, goats'. Canuana gives *għanen* instead of *għanem*, which must be a misprint.

(44) (a) Il-mewt dejjem b'xi għilla. (There must always be some cause  
for death.)

(b) Kulhadd b'xi għilla. (None without trouble.)

Għilla, n.f. Disease, Cause. Cp. Ar. عِلَّةٌ 'misfortune', from عَمِلَ 'to be ill'. In Maltese we have *għallel*, 'to devitalise, to weaken', and *tgħallel*, 'to grow weak, to lose energy', whence M. pp. *mgħallel*, 'devitalised, weakened', forms which are not recorded in the Maltese dictionaries. With the meaning of the Maltese second form cp. the Arabic fourth form عَمَّلَ 'to afflict with a disease'. Cp. also تَكَلَّمَ 'to adduce pleas, excuses' and عِلَّةٌ 'Efficient cause, illness' (Hava).

- (45) (a) Żelaq darba, hareġ *ħabru* (He slipped once, and soon everyone  
mad-dinja. came to know of it.)  
(b) Aġhti, Mulej is-sabar sa (Give, o Lord, patience till death-  
daq il-*ħabar*. knell.)

*Habar*, n.m. Rumour, death-knell. For Maltese meaning of death-knell cp. Syrian Ar *خَبْر* pl. *أَخْبَار* 'nouvelle de la morte' (Barthélémy). For the other Maltese meanings cp. also Ar. *خَبْر* pl. *أَخْبَار* 'information, news, notice' (Hava). Maltese *ħabar* in the sense of death-knell is presumably the original word used before it was replaced by modern *agunija*, and, like other Semitic Christian words such as *qrar*, 'confession', *tqarbin*, 'communion', etc., was very likely originally introduced into Malta by Maronite missionaries.

- (46) (a) *Aħjar imqattgħa u ħorra* (Better an honest girl in rags than a  
inkella għanja u morra. rich but evil-tongued one.)  
(b) *Fiż-żwieġ tfittix is-sorra:* (In marriage do not ask for the  
*Hu tifla fqira u ħorra.* bundle (riches, wealth), but choose  
a poor and honest girl.)

*Horra*, adj. f. Honest, unpolluted. Cp. Ar. *حُرٌّ* 'free-born, generous, pure, unmixed' also 'frank, speaking plainly' (dialect of Syria: (Hava), which, in N. Africa, may also indicate the virtue of legitimacy of birth; from Ar. *حَرٌّ* 'to be freed (slave); to be free-born (man)' (Hava). With the Maltese meaning cp. N. Afr. Ar. *حُرَّة* 'libre, bien née, vertueuse' (Beaussier). Spiro Bey explains *مرأة حُرَّة* as 'a respectable woman'. In Arabic one describes a *حُرٌّ* (+ \* fem.) anything that is pure or unmixed such as gold, language and one's birth.

- (47) *Min ma jraqqa° joħla f° daqqa.* (He that does not mend comes to ruin  
quickly.)

*Hela*, v. t. To come to ruin. Cp. Ar. *حَلَ* 'to become destitute or poor'. The Maltese verb in form corresponds to Ar. *حَلَكَ* 'to become vacant (place)' (Hava), and, in the dialect of N. Africa also 'dévaster, dépeupler' (Beaussier). The better known meaning of M. *ħela*, 'to waste or to squander', is local.

- (48) °... L-*ulied* (Were it not for love  
*Jekk ma jeħtebbux* it would not be easy to  
*Ma jitrabbux°.* bring up children.)

*Htebb*, v. int. To be loved or cherished. Eighth form of Maltese-Arabic *حَبِبَ* t.v., 'to love or to cherish'. The eighth form is a Maltese growth not found in other Arabic Dictionaries.

- (49) (a) Ghad illi marru l-*ħwietem* (Though the rings have gone yet  
baqgħu s-swaba'. the fingers remain.)  
(b) Għall-*ħwietem* u għall-imsielet (In order to buy rings and ear-  
Illum baqgħet xejn ma kielet. rings to-day she remained without  
her meal.)

The *ħatem* is also associated with the popular exorcisms recited to cure the eye disease called Pterygium, hence the Maltese name *Hatem tal-Qarnita* (Vide No. 11 (b)).

Hatem, pl. *ħwietem*, n.m. Seal, ring. In Modern Maltese we use *ċurkett*, It. *cerchietto*, 'anellino' (Zingarelli). The Maltese word corresponds to Ar. خَاتِم pl. خَوَاتِم (M. *ħwietem*), 'a ring, or signet-ring'.

- (50) Il-ħazin ilgħablu l-*ħajna*. (With an evil person use deceit.)

Hajna, n.f. Deceit, fraud. This word looks like the feminine adjective of *ħajjen*, 'malicious' (Ar. خَائِن) used nominally. It derives from M. *ħan* (m. pp. *mehjun*, (+ a, fem.) 'to deceive, to cheat', corresponding to Ar. خَانَ 'to betray, to embezzle', whence خِيَانَةٌ 'a perfidy, breach of trust', with which cp. M. *ħjiena*, 'malice'. In the dialect of Gozo a half-witted man who is easily taken in or fooled is described as *bla ħjiena*, 'silly', (lit. without malice).

- (51) Mhix kull *ħożza* tistor il-bażwa. (It's not every rug that hides a  
rapture.)

*Hożza*, n.g. Girdle, drawers. The Maltese word corresponds to N. Afr. Ar. حُرْزَة pl. حُرُز (M. *ħożoż*), 'coulisse de la ceinture d'un pantalon' (Beaussier). Dessoulavy derives it from Ar. حُرْزَة a reduction of حُرْزَة as explained in Freytag. Dozy in his *Dictionnaire Détaillé des Noms des Vêtements chez les Arabes* (Amsterdam, 1845, p. 139) writes: 'On sait que حُرْزَة désigne en arabe la coulisse par ou pass la تَكَّة c'est-à-dire la ceinture qui sert à attacher le caleçon. À Malte, le mot *ħożza* au pluriel *ħiżaż* (not in Maltese dictionaries which give *ħożoż*, cp. *idiom* donnok *ħożoż*, said of a *shabbily* dressed person) a reçu une acception plus étendue; il y désigne de nos jours le caleçon avec la ceinture' (Voyez Vassalli, *Lexicon Melitense*, col. 262).

- (52) Hajja dejjem *imxuma* aħjar (Better death than a life of  
il-mewt minnha. privations.)

*Mxuma*, pp.f. Full of privation (poor man's life). With the Maltese word cp. Ar. مَشُوم also مَشُوم 'inauspicious', from Ar. شَام 'to draw ill luck upon' (Hava).



- (53) Tahsel ras il-bmar tiflel (Washing a donkey's head is sheer  
 il-lissija u s-sapun. waste of lye and soap.)

With this proverb cp. It. 'Chi lava la testa all'asino, perde il ranno e il sapone'; Fr. 'A laver la tête d'un âne, on perd son savon'; Sp; 'Laver cabeza de asno, perdimento de jabòn'; Germ. 'Wer den Esel mit Seife wäscht, hat schlechten Lohn davon'; Eng. 'He that washes an ass's head, shall lose both lye and his labour'.

Lissija, n.f. Lye. From Sic. *Lissia* (Barbera). Marzano in his *Dizionario Etimologico del Dialecto Calabrese* (1929) gives also *Lissia*, 'ranno, liscivia', from Latin *lixivia*, whence It. *liscivia*, and Maltese verb *lissa, ilissi*, 'to wash with lye' (Falzon).

- (54) (a) Kulhadd b'xi lula. (Everyone has got his own trouble.)  
 (b) Lula ghalikom, ja boloh, (Woe to you, fools, if you don't heed  
 jekk ma tisinghux minni. my words.)

Lula, n.f. 'woe' is originally a composite word made up of article *l* + *ula*, the latter short for obsolete *għula*, 'woe' with which cp. Ar. عَوْل 'painful affair, lamentation' (Hava), and عَوْلُ فَكْرِن 'woe to him', which agrees with the use of the Maltese word in *lula għalikom!* 'woe to you!'. The feminine form is purely Maltese; though final *a* may also be the accusative ending of the Arabic word in the minatory phrase given.

- (55) Min irid il-lillu (He who wants finery must go on  
 Jishar lejlu killu. working all the night.)

Lillu, n.m. Finery. Dessoulavy has omitted this word while Barbera has derived it from Ar. الْحَلْو (M. *il-ħelu*), It. *il dolce*. But the Maltese word corresponds to the Sicilian *lilla*, 'panno vergato', and more closely to Italian *lillo*, 'ornamento vano', whence *lillato*, 'ornato di lilli' (Zingarelli). The word *killu*, rhyming with *lillu*, is a dialectal form common in Gozo and in some Maltese villages.

- (56) Irħis, u m'erħsu dan il-laħam, (This meat couldn't be cheaper than  
 Iżda la meraq u la xaħam. it is; but it is without gravy or  
 fat.)

M'erħsu. Exclamation. This composite word, which is not given in dictionaries, means 'What cheaper than?'. It is made up of preformative *m* reduced from *ma*, corresponding to Ar. مَا expressive of surprise and wonder, followed by the third person singular, masculine, perfect tense of the fourth form of the verb RoHoS, 'to be cheap', + pronominal suffix *u*, in Ar. رَحِصَ. The Maltese verb *roħos*, corresponds to Ar. رَحِصَ 'to abate (price)', of which the fourth form رَحِصَ means 'to

purchase something cheap'. Literally *merħsu* means 'What can one buy cheaper than this?'. Only a few other examples of this grammatical form survive in Maltese, i.e. *M'isbaħ l-indaġa!*, 'What is more beautiful than cleanliness?'; *M'akbrek, Mulej*, 'How great thou art, o Lord!', and *M'isbaħna għal min jaq jarana!*, 'What a fine figure we cut for anyone with an eye to see'; *M'isbaħ is-sikta!*, 'How delightful is silence!'. Sutcliffe (*op. cit.* p. 109) considers these expressions as curious survivals of the fourth derived Form of the verb. He says: 'In spite of the resemblance in form to the comparative the addition of the pronominal suffix shows that this cannot be a comparative.... On account of its resemblance to the comparative this form has come to be treated as such, e.g. *M'isbaħ l-indaġa*, 'what a fine thing is cleanliness'. Hence it may be said that in this construction in Maltese the word used is a comparative vocalization, and a verb in its ability to take pronominal suffixes'.

(57) (a) *Ahjar għerfek min mwielek.* (Better your wisdom than your riches.)

(b) *Dari dari, u darek darek, (My house is my house and your  
Mieli mieli, u mielek mielek. house is your house;  
My property is my property and your  
property is your property.)*

The proverb embodies the idea contained in the Latin maxim 'unicuique suum tribuere'. According to Caruana, a street in Rabat inhabited by the rich and the noble was known as 'Ta' l-imwiġel' (lit. the street of the rich.) *Miel*, n.m. pl. *mwiel*. Estates, riches. Cp. Ar. مال pl. أموال 'flocks, wealth'. This word occurs also in *ras il-miel*, 'capital whereon interest runs', a very archaic word which has not died out altogether (cp. Ar. رأس مال). Maltese place-name *Bormla* seems to be made up of *Bur*, 'uncultivated land', (Ar. بؤر) + *mula*, from Ar. مولى meaning 'Lord' from ولي and therefore has no connection with *miel*. But cp. also مال pl. of مال rich, wealthy man, or sing. fem. gender.

(58) (a) *Mejju mirjieħ, b'kull deni stennieh.* (May is windy; look out for all sorts of harm.)

(b) *Mejju mirjieħ, jaqleb il-wiċċ u l-qiegħ.* (May is so windy that it overturns both the surface and the bottom.)

*Mirjieħ*, adj.m. Windy. The corresponding Arabic word is مريح 'windy (day)' (Hava), but the Maltese form follows the pattern *meQTieL*, the participial descriptive pattern from verbs of the ninth form like *mid-biel*, 'withered', from *dbiel*, 'to wither', (Ar. دَبَل) and like *misnieħ*,

'rancid' from *snieħ*, 'to grow rancid' (Ar. سَنِخ), indicating the acquisition of a quality which may be good or bad.

- (59) Kull miktub kien *moqul*; (All that is written has been said  
Sata' jkun migdub u mirqum. before; it could have been invent-  
ed and embellished.)

According to Vassalli, this proverb implies disbelief.

*Moqul*, pp.m. of *qal*, 'to say', which is defective, used only in the third person singular masculine and feminine, in the third person plural of the perfect, and in the seventh form, its omissions being supplied by the verb *għad*, 'to say' (Cp. Ar. عَاد 'to repeat'). The corresponding Ar. قَالَ is regular in Classical Arabic. With M. *moqul* cp. Ar. مَقُول and مَقُول 'said, word' (Hava).

- (60) L-*Imżużi* ma fihx ħajr. (A squeamish person makes un-  
pleasant company.)

*Mżużi*, adj.m. Nauseating. From  $\sqrt{MZZ}$ , 'to be smelly', whence the other form of M. *miżż*, 'having a disagreeable smell' like duck's flesh. The Maltese verb links up with Ar. مَزَّ 'to be sour (beverage)', whence the Arabic adjective مَزٌّ (m), مَزَّة (f) 'sour' (Maltese *miżż* (m), *miżza* (f)). The adjectival pattern of *mżużi* is a local formation.

- (61)(a) Fih kemm in-*namar* Alla. (There is an innumerable quantity.)  
(b) It-tin għamel *namar* Alla s-sena. (This year figs are abundant.)

*Namar*, n.m. Abundance, a great number of. In the dialectal Arabic of Egypt and Syria we find نَمَّر 'to number', a verbal formation from Latin *numerus*. This word, which is not recorded by Beaussier, may have reached Malta through Syrian Arabic.

- (62)(a) Dejjem *inażi* u qatt ma jmut. (He is always at the last gasp but  
never dies.)  
(b) Waqt in-*nizi*, jekk ikollu dan (At one's last gasp, if one has  
il-waqt. time.)

*Nāza*, v.int. 'To be in one's agony'. Etymologically the Maltese verb should be written with final *gh*. Cp. Ar. نَزَعَ and نَزَع (third form) 'to be in the pangs of death', whence Ar. نَزَع 'pangs of death' (Hava). With the Maltese phrase *waqt in-nizi* or *fin-nizi* cp. Ar. فِي النَزَع 'à l'agonie' (Beaussier). As the Maltese verb occurs in the saying *dejjem inażi u qatt ma jmut*, the verb follows the conjunction of the third form of verbs with final *j* like *iqari* (No. 8) and *imieri*, 'he contradicts', that is to say, the Maltese verb, dropping final radical *gh* (Ar. ع), has been

assimilated to verbs of the third form having *j* for a third radical.

- (63) Ġurdien *qluqi* qatt far ma jsir. (A wandering mouse will never become a rat.)

*Qluqi*, adj.m. Fidgety, unstable. Adjectival form from Maltese *qileq*, with which cp. Ar. فَلِقَ 'to be restless' (Hava), and Tunisian *qoloq*, 'être ennui' (Bernadeau). Dozy gives فَلُوَق 'inquiet'. En parlant d'un cheval qui par inquiétude ne peut se tenir en repos quand il est sous le cavalier'. The Maltese form is given by Beaussier with inter-consonantal *a* between the first and second radicals, meaning 'impatient, irritable, restless'.

- (64)(a) Hsibt u rajt bejni u bejn *Rabbi*. (I have thought and decided between myself and my Lord.)

(b) *Rabbna* jagħmel! (The Lord's will be done.)

*Rabbi*, n.m. Grammatically the meaning is 'My Lord', the word being made up of obsolete *rabb* and first person singular pronominal suffix. Cp. Ar. رَبِّ 'the Lord, master'. The word is recorded by Vassalli in his collection of proverbs, where he says: 'detto in oggi raro, e rimpiazzato da 'Jagħmel Alla'. *Rabb*, dizione araba, forse portata da qualche schiavo venduto in campagna. Altrimenti sarà ebraica, e vale 'il maestro faccia'. Quando io la udii per la prima volta, mi fece sensazione, ma il senso era per il grande artefice'.

- (65)(a) Il-hidma fil-btala (Work on feast days causes ruin and waste.)  
*iġġib is-siba* u l-ħala.

(b) Barrani jahlik, ġewwieni (An outsider ruins you, but a relative enslaves you.)  
*jisbik*.

*Siba*, n.f. Slavery, enslavement. With Maltese verb *siba*, *jisbi*, 'to enslave, to ruin', cp. Ar. سَبَى 'to take captive' (Hava), with its cognate nouns سَبْيًا and سِبَاءً. *Misba*, 'pirate lair', given by Caruana, seems to be a local formation.

- (66) Dak li jidra jgħix bis-*sisija* (He who gets used to live on charity fares better than the farmer who owns a double plough at Hemsija.)  
Aħjar minn bi-ż-żewġ fil-Hemsija.

*Sisija*, n.f. Barbera wrongly derives this word from Maltese *saqsa*, 'to ask', Ar سَقَسَى 'interroger' (Beaussier), while Dessoulavy links it up with سَائِي 'a beggar' (Roland de Bussy) whence M. *sisija*, adding that 'formerly a link was sought with the Persian ساسان 'a beggar', thus

connecting with the tale of the founder of the Sassanian dynasty. It is now taken to be a reduction from a noun from *istaqsa*. But the proposed reduction of *sisija* from *saqsa*, 'to ask', is phonetically unsatisfactory. If the word is Semitic at all, one may suggest a possible connection with Ar. ساس 'to manage an affair', whence سباسة 'politics'; also 'habilité' (Dozy). Beaussier gives the phrase باسياسة 'doucement, tout beau'. Semantically, the connection may be explained on the ground that begging is very often considered as an attempt to live by one's wits at other people's expense. For a Semitic Maltese form cp. *binnija* (Vide No. 34), 'a place where hens lay their eggs', and *tusija*, 'an admonition'.

(67) *Iġġorr, iġġorr, sa l-bajda ttorr.* (It (bird) carries (the straw) till it lays its eggs.)

*Tarr*, v.t. 'To lay eggs, push them out'. Cp. Ar. تَبَّرَ 'to drive away' (Hava), 'rebuter, repousser' (Beaussier). Cp. also طَرَّ 'to fall from a terrace, to grow forth, plant, mustache (Hava)'.

(68) *Tbiħ* imsaħħan jingħaraf minn (You can tell warmed up soup by its toġħmtu. taste.)

*Tbiħ*, Verbal noun from *tebaħ*, 'to dress meat, to cook' (Falzon), with which cp. Ar. طَبَّح 'cooking of a dish; cooked food' (Hava), from طَبَّخ 'to cook meat'.

(69) *Hajja din ta' kul u ixrob,* (This life is just eat and drink, orqod u tterab. sleep and stretch yourself (in bed)).

*Terab*, v.t. To dissolve, melt indigo or paint; to stretch out; to cripple. Cp. Ar. طَرَح 'to fling or cast away', and Syrian طَرَحَتْ 'miscarried' (cp. Maltese *bajda mitruħa*, 'a prematurely laid egg'; also *it-tiġieġa titraħ il-bajd*, 'the hen lays her eggs prematurely'). With the Maltese noun *terħa* cp. Ar. طَرَحَة 'Persian mantle', with Maltese *terrieħa* cp. Ar. طَرَاخَة 'square mattress'. With the Maltese mimated noun *mitraħ*, 'Mattress', cp. N. Afr. Ar. مَطْرَح 'matelas à une place' (Beaussier) which, in non-dialectal Arabic, means 'a place where a thing is thrown'.

(70) *Armel u mrabbab ma fihx* (A widower with step-children is not x'ittellet. worth marrying for the third time.)

*Mrabbab*, pp.m. of *rabba*, in Arabic, 'to bring up a child', hence *mrabbab* means 'a person that has been brought up'. This word is an active participle meaning 'one that has brought up children'. In Arabic رَبُّوب (M. *rbib*) means 'a stepson or stepfather'.

Tellet, v.t. To make threefold, to triplicate. Cp. Ar. ثَلَّثَ 'to triplicate' (Hava).

- (71) Il-kromb bla *widek* bħal (Turnips without meat-fat are like  
widna bla *widaħ*. ears without wax.)

This proverb emphasizes the importance of fat in making the local variety of meat-soup called *kawlata* (It. *cavolo* + *ata*: local fromation).

Widek, n.m. Any greasy substance. Cp. Ar. دَسُّوْ 'grease, gravy' (Hava).

Widaħ, n.m. Ear wax. The Maltese meaning agrees with Ar. وَصَحْ 'saleté' given by Dozy. Otherwise the usual Arabic meaning is different.

- (72) Alla *xiegħhel* il-battâl. (May God provide work for the idle.)

Xiegħhel, v.t. To employ; to divert (the attention). Third form Maltese verbs having (ġ) or ġ for a second radical are incapable of reduplicating their radicals. They can adopt the third form instead, which corresponds to Ar. second form. With Maltese *xiegħhel* cp. Ar. شَعَّلَ 'to give much work-to' (Hava); 'donner de l'occupation' (Beaussier):

- (73) Fid-dar kollox *jixtamba*, sa (There is use for everything in the  
r-mied tal-kenun. house, even the ashes.)

Xtamba, v.t. To be needed, or in demand. This verb is a curious formation made up of indefinite pronoun *xi* (Ar. شَيْءٌ 'thing') 'what' and the verb *amba*, which in its turn is a reduction of *għamel* (Ar. عَمِلَ) *bi* (Ar. بِ) 'to need, to make use of', literally, 'to do with'. Consonant *t* is the infix of the eighth form as in *xtewa* 'to be roasted'. This verb is a local formation.

## (ii) Weather Proverbs and Sayings

- (74) (a) Mill-Milied il-fuq (From Xmas onward hunger strikes  
Il-ġuħ jibda jagħti bil-*buq*. with the staff.)

A Christmas saying.

- (b) Haġa moħġaġa: (Riddle me riddle: One and two  
Wiehed u tnejn mhuma xejn, count for nothing; two or three  
Tnejn u tlieta logħob u ħlieqa count for a joke; from three on-  
Minn tlieta 'l fuq jagħtu bil-*buq*. wards they strike with a stick.)

The answer to this still current riddle heard at Birkirkara (Malta) is 'children'.

Buq, n.m. A hollow reed. I have also heard the word *buq* used in the secondary sense of 'eyelid' in the phrase *il-buq tal-għajn* (Munxar

Gozo), which is unknown in Arabic. The meaning of Maltese *buq* seems to be associated with the use of the reed (cp. M. *zummarā*, Ar. زَمَارَةٌ 'a reed pipe') as a sort of flageolet, with which cp. Ar. بُووق (pl. أَبْوِاق M. *bwieq*), 'trumpet, bugle', whence Ar. تَبُووق 'to lie', (cp. It. *strompettare* and *strombazzare*, 'to boast publicly', from *trombetta*, 'trumpet') whereas the meaning of the Maltese fifth form *tbewwaq* is derived from the primary Maltese meaning of hollowness, 'to become hollow', which is unknown in other Arabic dialects, but occurs in the Hebrew fem. noun תִּבְוָה 'emptiness, devastation'. The Maltese word occurs also in the idiom *ma jibzax minn daqq il-buq* (or *tabal*), literally 'he is not afraid of the sound of the reed-pipe (or drum)', i.e. 'he is a brave, courageous man, not easily frightened'.

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| (75) <i>La jigi l-Milied</i><br>Arfa' xkubettietek<br>Fuq il- <i>farxa</i> tal-bieb. | (When Xmas comes, keep<br>your fowling-piece on<br>the shelf over the door.) |
|--|--|

**Farxa**, n.f. Besides the meaning 'a board sustaining the door-post' recorded in the Maltese dictionaries, *farxa* indicates also a sort of wooden board or shelf on which the week's loaves are kept. Thus in Gozo one speaks of *il-farxa tal hobz*, 'the loaves' board'; *hobzu fuq il-farxa*, 'his loaves are on the bread-shelf' i.e. he is well-off; and of a very tall man it is said *jilhaqba l-farxa!*, 'he reaches the bread-shelf'. In Arabic فَرْشَة means 'bed, mattress', linking up with Maltese *friex*, 'bedding'. The Maltese meaning, 'wooden board', unrecorded in Arabic dictionaries, links up with the secondary meaning of فَرَشَ 'to furnish (a house)'.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (76) <i>Sal-Milied</i><br>La bard u lanqas <i>gwieħ</i> . | (Up to Christmas there is neither<br>cold nor hunger.) |
|---|--|

For a similar idea cp. proverb under No. 74a.

**Gwieħ**, (but etymologically *gwiegh*, pl. of *guħ* (etymologically *gugh*, Ar. جَوْع 'hunger'). This Maltese plural form has been provoked by the necessity of assonance with *Milied*, 'Christmas'. It is otherwise unknown in spoken Maltese and in Arabic. The proverb runs also *Sal-Milied la brud u lanqas gwieħ*, in which note the plural formation *brud*, also unheard in ordinary speech, from sing. masc. M. and Ar. بَرْد 'cold'. The plural formation *brud* grammatically agrees with plural *gwieħ* in the same line.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| (77) <i>Meta tara l-beraq</i><br>Lesti l- <i>girma</i> fejn tintebaq. | (When you see lightning make sure<br>you have a shelter to go into.) |
|---|--|

*Girna*, n.f. This word indicates an ancient conical construction built of unplastered and undressed stone. The *giren* (pl.) are very frequent in some parts of Malta and Gozo and in Sardinia, where such constructions are called *nuraghe*. The meaning of Maltese *gorna* or *girna* does not agree with Sicilian *gurna*, which indicates a 'ricettacolo d'acqua stagnante nel quale si pratica la macerazione del lino, del canape' (Traina), a word which, according to Giacomo de Gregorio (*Studi Glottologici Italiani*, Vol. III) derives from Latin *urna* with initial addition of *g* as in the place-name *Gruwa* from Sic. *rua*, and in the Maltese-Sicilian surname *Grima*, from Latin *rima*. But the Maltese word seems to link up with Ar. جرن 'a pestle, stone basin' and in Syrian, 'stone mortar', from Ar. جرن 'to heap, lay in a heap' (Hava), which provides the radicals of the Maltese word. Cp. also جرين 'threshing place, drying place for dates' (Hava), linking up with Hebrew גרן which besides 'an open place at the gate of a city' means also 'a threshing floor, corn of the floor'. Grammatically *girna* is a noun of unity, literally meaning 'a heap or pile of stones', which is what it looks like to the passer-by.

- (78) Marzu (March, saturated with water,  
Bl-ilma xebghan, quickens the harvest and there  
Italla' *gbira* will be a larger quantity of wheat.)  
U. gozz ikbar ikun tat-tgham.

*Gbira*, n.f. A collection, a quantity of. A noun of unity from Maltese *gabar*, 'to collect', but in Arabic it means 'to set a broken bone, to restore one's business' (Hava). جيرة means 'leather bag' (Hava and Beaussier). Maltese *gabar* agrees with N. Afr. جبر 'trouver, retrouver, rencontrer' (Beaussier), and أجبر (fourth form) 'recouvrer, acquérir de nouveau une chose qu'on avait perdue'; 'cobrar lo perdido' - Alcalá (Dozy). Maltese *gbira* is a local formation from *gabar*, the meaning of which links up with N. Afr. Arabic. Other Maltese forms from *gabar* which are purely local are *magbra*, 'a collection of money, etc', and *magbar*, 'a great number or crowd of'.

- (79) Tidrisx fl-*ehtrieq* (Do not thresh during a period of hot  
Biex it-tiben ma jinħeliex. wind, lest you waste your hay.)

*Htrieq*, n.m. Verbal noun of eighth form from *ħaraq*, 'to burn'. Cp. Ar. احترق 'burning, combustion', from احترق 'to burn, take fire' (Elias).

- (80) (a) Sajf *imniddi* - ħarga (In a wet summer expect a full  
mimlija. growth.)



- (b) Il-qoton ma jibżaghx mix-xemx il-qawwija; (Cotton is not affected by (lit. does not fear) excessive heat but by excessive mist and moist.)  
 Jibża mic-ċpar bosta u mit-tnididja.
- Mnididi, pp.m. Wetted with dew. Past participial form of Maltese *nedda*, 'to moisten'. With Maltese *mnididi* cp. Ar. مَنْدِي 'dewy' (Hava).
- (81) Sant Andrija (By St Andrew's Day half the provisions have been consumed and half the seed sown.)  
 Nofs il-muna mitmuma  
 U nofs il-mi żirgħa mi żrugħa.
- Muna, n.f. Provisions, victuals. Cp. Ar. مَوْنَةٌ 'victuals, stores, provisions', from مَانَ 'to provide with victuals'.
- (82) (a) April (By April time the bread reaches the napkin.)  
 Il-hobż wasal fil-mindil.  
 (b) April (In April you need a large loaf in your napkin.)  
 Trid hobża kbira fil-mindil.
- Mindil, n.m. (Modern Maltese *sarvetta*). The omentum; towel, a napkin. The Maltese meaning 'omentum' is matched with that of 'caul' recorded by Elias, who gives مَنْدِيل under نَدْل. In this sense the Egyptian word is the synonym of *borqom*, Ar. بَرْقَع 'veil'. For other Maltese meanings cp. Ar. مَنْدِيل pl. مَنَادِل 'towel, napkin, veil' (Hava). According to Dozy Ar. مَنْدِيل or مَنْدِيل 'est le Latin *mantele ou mantile* et désigne comme ce dernier une serviette'.
- (83) (a) Ix-xita tal-qigħan *megħuda*. (It always rains when threshing floors are formed, as if by a promise.)  
 (b) Ix-xita ta' San Gorg *megħuda*. (It generally rains on St George's Day as if by a promise.)
- These two weather sayings are based on the fact that rain usually falls in mid-April and when threshing floors are being prepared in the fields about the beginning of June.
- Megħuda, pp.f. This is a more archaic form of the past participle of obsolete *wegħed*, 'to promise', now replaced by *wiegħed* (third form), whence *mwiegħda*.
- (84) Kien il-bieraħ u kien *lewliemes* (He was here yesterday and the day before yesterday, but to-day he will be carried away to his grave.)  
 Izda llum għal *gewwa d-dwiemes*.

Lewliemes, adv. The day before yesterday. This word is made up of *lewl*, for *l-ewwel*, 'first', and *iemes*, 'yesterday' (obsolete). Cp. Ar. لولامس 'avant hier', (Beaussier).

- (85) Meta Jannar tarah *lewliemi* (When January is too rainy the  
Ma tarax il-bidwi tant hieni. farmer is not so happy.)

Lewliemi, (m) + *ja* (f). The adjective presupposes the hypothetical quadriliteral verb *lewlem*, 'to rain, pour (rain, water)', from *ilma*, 'water', a composite word made up of article *il* (Ar. ال) + *ma* (Ar. ماء water). This form is a purely local formation.

- (86) *Qożżot*, *qożżot* għalik, Jannar! (Fie! Fie on you, January!  
Għaddejt bil-bard bla xita You have brought cold but not  
U ħallejtni bin-nagħaġ fil-għar. rain, and you left me with my  
sheep in the cave.)

*Qożżot*, excl. This word seems to link up with  $\sqrt{QZZ}$ , Ar. قَزَّ 'to loathe, to be affected with nausea', Ar. تَقَزَّرَ 'he loathed, shrank from', (Salmoné), whence also Maltese *qzież*, 'repugnance', Ar. فَرَّان 'impurity' (Salmoné). Final unstressed *ot* does not seem to be the stressed suffix of an abstract noun like *ut* in *għajjut*, though this suffix is always stressed, unlike *ot* in *qożżot*. One hears also *qożżu* in *nannu qożżu*, a children's word for a very old man. The word may also be a loan-word of unknown origin as the form is non-Semitic. For similar form cp. *Qorrot* in *Dahlet Qorrot*, a place-name in Gozo, in which *Qorrot* stands for Corrado, the name of a legendary saint.

- (87) *Iż-żahar* fil-berwieq u t-tewm bla (Asphodel in blossoms and garlic  
tabsir, without rot are a good sign that  
Tama qawwija li l-biedja tkun the harvest will be plentiful.)  
b'ebda *titkir*.

*Titkir*, n.m. Want, misery. This Maltese word seems to link up with Ar. كَدَّرَ 'to trouble', and كَدِرَ 'to be distressful (life)', whence تَكْدَرُ 'to be troubled' (Hava). In this sense Maltese *titkir* stands for *tikdir*, with a metathesis of the first and second radicals. If that is so, the change of voiced *d* to voiceless *t* is explainable by its phonological junction with its preceding voiceless consonant *k*. As another rare instance of progressive assimilation instead of the usual regressive assimilation cp. *żdied* 'to be increased' for *żtied*, eighth form of *żied* (Ar. زَادَ), 'to increase'. The word is given by Fr Magri who is uncertain about its meaning. But the meaning proposed by him, *nuggas*, *għaks*, 'want, misery', suits the context.

- (88) Mejju bla rih (If May is windless the wheat will  
 Il-biedja bla *tifriġh*. not swell out.)

*Tifriġh*, n.m. Ebbing away. Verbal noun from *foroġġ*, 'to ebb away', a passive form of *faroġġ*, the second form of which means 'to pour out'. Cp. Ar. فَرَّغَ 'to be empty' (Hava), and its N.Afr. verbal noun of action تَغْرِيبُ 'vidage', (Beaussier).

- (89) Ġmielek nwar taš-silla li *titriegħa*, (Your beauty is like the blossoms  
 Jitfi minn qabel tġhaddi ir- of clover that is grazed, it fades  
 Rebbiegħa. away before Spring is over.)

*Titriegħa*, v.int. To be grazed (pasture land). Sixth form of Maltese *ragħa*, Ar. رَعَى 'to pasture, to graze (the grass)'. In Maltese the third form (as well as the sixth form) is for the most part reserved for verbs which have *għ* (for  $\xi$  or  $\xi$ ) or the weak aspirate *b* for their second radical and are therefore incapable of doubling that radical as is required for the second form. The loss of this reduplication is compensated for by the lengthening of the vowel of the first syllable, which is the characteristic of this form. The third form is, therefore, practically an extension of the second and has the same meaning (Cp. Sutcliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 84(a) and explanation of *xiegħel* under No. 72).

- (90) (a) Novembru (In November they cut and break  
 Jaqtgħu, ikissru the olives and fill the baskets.)  
 U *jzenblu*.  
 (b) Min jerħilek *zenbilu* (He that passes his load on to you  
 għabbilu. try to load him yourself.)

Olives that are usually gathered in November are sometimes beaten with a piece of wood till they break: hence the street-cry *Imkisser il-Malti* (lit. The Maltese olives are broken!).

*Zenbil*, n.m. Cp. N. Afr. Ar. زَنْبِيل 'panier en sparte en forme de sac long ouvert sur le côté; il sert à transporter les fardeaux à dos d'âne; on l'y place comme une besace. Panier double. Très grand sac en sparte, triangulaire, pour les marchandises sèches, amandes éponges, etc.' (Tunis: Beaussier). Note that the Maltese *zenbil* is largely used for olives. The word occurs also in Egyptian in the sense of 'straw bag' (Elias), 'large native basket' (Spiro Bey, who derives it from Persian).

- (91) (a) Bejn tal-Qala u l-Milied (Between Conception Day, i.e. 8th  
 Arfa' l-moħriet minn ħalq December, and Xmas Day stop  
 il-wied, ploughing in the valley, and hang  
 Ixhet xkubettietek fuq l-*utied*. your fowling-pieces on the peg.)

(b) Ghadu l-*wited* ġhali  
u l-ġharbiel ġdid.

(The peg is still high and the  
sieve still new.)

The latter saying refers to two parties who cannot see eye to eye with one another.

Wited, n.m. pl. *utied*. Peg. Cp. Ar. **أوتاد** plural of **وتد** or **وتد** meaning 'stake, tent-peg' (Hava).