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THE PHRASEOLOGICAL USE OF THE VERBS 'QIES', 'GHADD' AND 'DANN'

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AS IN other languages, particularly in the Semitic languages and their dialects, Maltese verbs, besides their primary meanings, convey some other shades of meaning, either semantically similar, or different meaning.

The development of meaning of certain Maltese verbs may be noticed either in their syntactical construction or in their phraseological context in a sentence. The development of various shades of meaning in nouns is noticeable in their semantic implications because in these the metaphor plays an important share. An example of such metaphorical expressions, common in several languages, is found in the word *clove*, meaning a *spice* and the *glove-pink*, both derived from the Latin *clavus*, a nail. An equivalent example is the Maltese expression *msiemer tal-qronfol*, literally 'the nails of the carnation flower' for 'the clove-scented pink'. Another parallel metaphorical instance may be found in the Maltese word *snien* (teeth) which is applied to the cloves of garlic, so called because the bulb cleaves naturally into so many segments that look like teeth.

The verbs *qies*, *jqis*; *ghadd*, *jghodd*; *dann*, *jdann* meaning respectively 'to measure', 'to reckon', and 'to imagine' may take several shades of meaning according to their context in a sentence, or, in some instances, their syntactical function.

Qies (to measure): In Vassalli's Lexicon, besides the primary meaning 'to measure' ('metior', 'commetior', 'mensuro', etc.) are included in the secondary meaning 'to beware', 'to take care', 'to ponder'. The following examples may illustrate the various shades of meaning: *Qis mitt darba u aqta' darba* ('Measure twice and cut but once', corresponding to English saying: 'Look before you leap'). *Qis li hadd ma jkun jaf* ('See (i.e. make sure) that nobody will know'). *Qis li tkun hawn fil-hamsa* ('Take care (i.e. make it a point) to be here at five o'clock'). *Qis li ma tohrogx kelma minn fommok minn dak li ghidilek* ('Mind not to utter a single word of what I told you').

Such a variety of meaning is given also by some other lexicographers. Other phraseological expressions are to be noticed both in the verb *qies* and *ghadd* having in, some particular case, a common equivalence of

meaning.

The Imperative *qis* of the stem *qies* affixed to the pronominal suffixes *ni, ek, u, ha,* and *na, kom, hom,* is used as an adverbial phrase. Ex: *Qisu għadu tarbija, għalkemm għandu xi sentejn* ('He looks (behaves etc.) still like a baby though he is about two years old'). *Qišek iddum hawn Malta* ('Presumably you will stop long in Malta'). *Huma jtkellmu qishom bħalna* ('They talk practically as we do').

Għadd (to reckon). Vassalli for *għadd* gives only the following Latin and Italian meanings: 'Dispono, paro, numero, computo; It. 'Contare, numerare, computare'. Secondary meanings: 'Annumero, accenseo, recenseo'. It. 'Annoverare, mettere nel numero'. English equivalents: 'To count, to calculate, to enumerate, to compute', but the verb *għadd, jgħodd* is also used to mean: (i) 'To depend upon'. Ex: *Tista' tgħodd fuqi* ('You can rely or depend on me') (ii) 'To suit'. Ex: *Dak l-ilbies ma jgħoddx għalik* ('That dress is not suitable for you'). (iii) 'To apply'. Ex: *Dan il-proverbju jgħodd għalik* ('This saying (or proverb) applies to you'). It is used characteristically in the idiomatic expression: *Jaf jgħodd sal-għaxra* (Lit. 'He can count as far as ten' corresponding to English: 'He knows how many hens make five'). The Imperative *għodd*, followed by the word *ruħ* annexed to pron. suffixes (*ruħi, ruħek,* etc.), takes the meaning: 'to consider one self'. Ex: *Għodd ruħek bħala wieħed mill-iktar ixxurtjati* ('Consider yourself as one of the luckiest people').

The Impersonal Imperative *għodd*, annexed to the pronominal suffixes, and sometimes followed by the word *sejjer* (participle of the Arabic *sa:ʔir*) as mentioned also by Vassalli in his Grammar (Ital. edition. 1827. p. 144. par. 286), is idiomatically used to show that something is about to occur. Ex: *Kien għoddu qatlu* ('He had nearly killed him'). *Kien għoddu waqat* ('He had nearly fallen'). *Kien għoddbom waslu fil-port* ('They had almost reached the harbour'). *Il-ħela ta' flus kien sejjer jirvinah* ('His prodigality had almost ruined him'). *Għoddu sejjer jitlaq* ('He is about to leave').

Dann. ('to imagine, to think, to suppose, to conjecture').

This verb is used to denote several meanings according to context besides its primary and some of its secondary meanings mentioned above.

G.P.F. Agius De Soldanis in his *Nuova Scuola di Grammatica per agevolmente apprendere la Lingua Punic-Maltese*, etc. (1750) p. 129. for the word *donni* gives the meaning of 'I seem, I appear' ('mi pare, mi sembra') and traces it in Plautus' *Scene in Poenulus* 38, as being of Punic origin.

He further quotes Reinesio's version (*In Syntagma Variar, Dissert.* 1702) of the Punic words: *havo donni* of which De Soldanis gives a far-

fetches corresponding meaning for the Maltese *donni* ('mi pare'). De Soldanis, however, asked the opinion of better authorities as to the true etymology of the word *donni*.

D. Wilhelm Gesenius in his *Essay on the Maltese Language (Versuch über die Maltesische Sprache, etc., (1810) p. 49)*, in reviewing De Soldanis' *Essay and Grammar* refers to Hirt's *Arabic Grammar* and to Calleberg's *Dialogues* 5,7, and 6,3, wherein for *donni* is given the corresponding Arabic word ظنّي in the phrase ألي ظنّي (Ay thanny) – Yes, I think.

For a complete comparative analysis, it would be now opportune to quote from Vassalli's *Lexicon* the meanings of the verb *dann*, *jdann* from the verbal radicals d-n² vis-a-vis the Arabic root ظنى.

For *dann*, *jdann* Vassalli gives accordingly the following meanings: (i) 'Puto illum esse; credo illum rem esse; unde suspicor'; ('To believe to be; to deem, to consider, to suspect') (ii) Secondary meanings: 'Fallor per visu' ('To mistake a person for another'). (iii) (with pron. affixes) *Donnu*; 'Videtur (impers)'; ('It appears, it seems'). *Dann* (noun): (i) 'opinio' (Opinion) (ii) Secondary meanings: 'Suspicio', ('suspicion').

The Rev. C.F. Schlienz in his *Views on the Improvement of the Maltese Language, etc.* for the verb *dann* gives the Arabic meaning of 'to think' and also 'to count' or 'consider oneself' in the following examples: *Donnu raġel għaref* ('I think he is a well informed man'). *Donni minsi* ('I count, or consider myself forgotten'), which evidently shows in Schlienz a lack of thorough knowledge of the various true meanings of the Maltese verb *dann*, *jdann* and its phraseological use. He considers the verb *dann* as an apocopated form of اظنى regarded in Maltese as impersonal, and quotes Agius De Soldanis who describes it as a Punic word meaning 'to appear'. In quoting Vassalli, who translates ظنّم donnu mnnm with 'videtur', (it appears), Schlienz states that 'the difference between his idea and that of Vassalli and Agius (De Soldanis) is that he can trace the Arabic etymology in this word easily both as to the lexicon and grammar, whilst they must be satisfied with its being a Punic word. The tracing of its true meaning Agius leaves to other people.

In the two etymological dictionaries, C.L. Dessoulavy's and G. Barbera's the etymology of the verb *dann*, *jdann* may be summarized and given as follows: 'to deem, to appear, to seem, to have an opinion, to suspect, to suppose, and to mistake one thing for another'. Such meanings are found however to be based on those originally given in Vassalli's *Lexicon*, and later in Falzon's *Dictionary*, which may be considered a 'replica' of Vassalli's *Lexicon*, in a more concised form.

Dann, as a noun of action of the verb *dann*, *jdann*, meaning 'opinion', 'suspicion', is given in Vassalli's, Falzon's and Caruana's *Dictionaries*;

quoted and commented upon afterwards by Dessoulavy and Barbera in their etymological dictionaries.

The verb *dann*, *jdonn* in Caruana's *Vocabolario della Lingua Maltese*, is not found, but instead the word *donn* is given as a noun meaning 'appearance, semblance, aspect'. The noun *donn* (?) joined to pronominal suffixes, as Caruana explains, would give the equivalent phraseological meaning of the Italian verb *parere*, *sembrare*.

Caruana, ignoring altogether the grammatical and idiomatic function of the verb *dann* in *donni*, *donnok*, etc., justifies his explanation by the following example: *Donnok marid*, which would mean: 'the appearance of your face is of a sick man' or 'you look as a sick man'.

The following examples illustrate the various phraseological uses and meanings of the Maltese verb *dann*: *Dak il-bniedem indomih* 'I suspect that man or that man gives me the impression that...') *Donnejtu xi hadd-ieħor* ('I mistook him for somebody else').

Impersonal use of *dann*, *jdonn* (Imperative with pronom. affixes): *Donnu ilbierah* ('It seems to me as if it happened yesterday'). *Donnok ma tridx temmen!* ('You would hardly believe it!') – lit. 'It would seem quite unbelievable!') *Donnu mhux hu* ('It does not appear to be the man I mean') This phrase has other meanings as for instance; He is quite calm, impassible. *Min donnu?* – ('Whom does he look like?') *Donnu Fredu, il-ħabib tiegħek.* – ('He is (or looks) just like Alfred, your friend'). *Donnhom iridu jidhku bina* – ('They seem they want to cheat us'). The verb *jidhku* (prepositional + *bi*) has in this case the meaning 'to cheat'.

The phraseological and adverbial use of the three verbs *qies*, *ghadd* and *dann* are also, in a particular way, dealt with in Sutcliffe's as well in my grammar. (E.F. Sutcliffe: *A Grammar of the Maltese* 1936. Chap. VIII, par. 57. A. Cremona: *Tagħlim fuq il-Kitba Maltija*. 2nd Book p. 280, par. 720, 721, and 722).