Some little time ago, in following up a footnote reference,¹ I came across eight allegedly late medieval poems in a pointed Judaean-Arabic text. Preserved in a pocket-sized manuscript at the Vatican,² where I was eventually able to handle it, they were transcribed and published as long ago as 1949 by Ernest Mainz,³ but had somehow remained completely unnoticed and unknown here in Malta perhaps because it was then still universally believed that the Maltese language was not written down before the seventeenth century was well under way.⁴ Their author has remained unknown but experts suggested that he must have had contact with the Eastern Maghreb, i.e. substantially Tunisia.⁵ That he was a Jew goes without saying.⁶

¹ Blau, The Emergence and Linguistic Background of Judaean-Arabic (Herd, 1965), 187.
² Vatican Library, Hebrew Ms. 411.
³ Ernest Mainz, 'Quelques poésies Judaéo-Arabes du manuscrit 411 de la Bibliothèque du Vatican', Journal Asiatique, vol. 237 (1949), 51-83. This article is not available in Malta.
⁴ The publication in 1968 of a cantilena written by Peter Cazaro (f. 1439-1495) has shown that the Maltese language was certainly occasionally used for literary writings even if only rarely and those of a limited scope: Wettinger and M. Faqdi, The Cantilena of Peter Cazaro: A Poem in Medieval Maltese (Malta, 1968).
⁵ Mainz, loc. cit., believes that the first seven poems had one author, possibly Salomo Aharon b. Pinhas whose name appears in the manuscript, but could easily, Mainz thinks, have been merely the copyist. The eighth poem is totally different in style and content. Assemani attributed the
What struck the present writer most, of course, was that whole lines of the poems could be read off as Maltese and one could, if so inclined, imagine oneself to be reading stuff by an extreme exponent of Semitic Maltese, Malti safi. Repeatedly the thought struck one: 'Did we have here Maltese poems written by a Jewish inhabitant of Malta who was the contemporary, perhaps, of Peter Caxaro, the author of the Cantilena, the only poem in medieval Maltese so far known to have survived. Thus, in a language not unreminiscent of that of the Cantilena, this is how a lover addresses his lady:

sammaytek fi ġaniyyeti u fhartek ketir
waw raytek mubabbeti ya waqj el-ġamil.

In modern Maltese this could be rendered intelligibly as:

Semmaytek f'ghanjetti u jabbartek bil-ktir
U wregjet imhabit, ja wieċ il-gmil.

The morphology of the language of the poems resembles that of North-West Africa. Thus the verb contains such normal and well-known characteristics of Maghribi Arabic as as- and an...u for the first person singular and plural respectively of the imperfect:

nazul I go away naftakar I remember
narsh I see him našterah I rest
namši I walk natołob I pray, I beg
and
noqulu we say nal'abu we play
narqadu we sleep

Finality is introduced with either baš or aleš; 'a couple' is expressed by the word zawq. Of course, all these features are also to be found in Maltese. Particularly striking to Maltese readers is such verbal forms as beqayt, ġayt, sammaytek, habbajt, as well as straddayt and madayt. So far as is known, these are characteristic of Maltese, their diphthong -ay- in North Africa being normally represented by -ai- though it has been supposed that the diphthong may have once existed there too. The demonstratives include ħamma (Maltese benna, benn) as a variant of ħamma, unique so far as is known, to Maltese; one notices also the presence of hekda, so (cf. Maltese bekda [fl-art]) and ċayjn, nothing (Maltese xejn), the former reported by Beausssier alone outside Malta and with a different meaning, the latter either having no diphthong or no -n in its North-West African form. Mainz himself noticed resemblances to specifically Maltese morphological features, namely the use of the third and sixth verbal forms in place of the second and fifth with verbs containing -gb- as second radical (i.e. biebbed, biebbed). But his failure to use even the most common and popular Maltese dictionaries prevented him from giving the translation of at least five words: garreb, plural of qarraba, phials, flagons; fum el-luf, which perhaps he should have transcribed fum el-lup, in modern Maltese fum el-liipp, naspli, medlar (N.B. 'p' and 't' are represented by the writing of the manuscript to the fifteenth century: 'is codex decimoquietr centi secolo videtur descriptus': S.E. Assemanus, Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae Codicum Manuscriptorum Catalogus (Rome, 1756), 382.

7 Extracts from the poems are here invariably given as in the transcripts made by Mainz. The Maltese reader, in particular, must be warned that k = ġhayn, x = soft 'g' (Maltese ġ).

8 For this characteristic see Blau, 52–53, 120–120.

same sign in Hebrew); ġisi (ġ = rghayn), wrong transliteration for ġisi, in modern Maltese ġiżi, stocks (flowers); 'asgār el-lawq, in modern Maltese sigar tal-luq, poplar trees; 'asqunfi, in Maltese xkomp, a kind of citrus resembling a lemon, the whole line where it occurs

laranja ontrong 'asqunfi wa lumi reading in modern Maltese:

larin, tronq, xkomp u lumi

and would be perfectly readable and understandable to anyone knowledgeable in citrus fruit-trees. A knowledge of Maltese would also have enabled Mainz to avoid translating ġewabi as 'response' instead of 'cisterns, reservoirs', ignoring as he did the reference in the poems to the sea-fishes to be seen in them. Other words or phrases understandable in Maltese, modern or medieval, which Mainz translated correctly but did not notice their relevance to the problem of the poems' provenance, include abmar qoruli (Maltese abmar qoroli), coral red, qarlin (as in Maltese Judaeo-Arabic; modern Maltese: karlin, surviving in the phrase tliet kariniet), is-sardin, sardines, ġerasia (modern Maltese ġerasa), cherry, cherry-tree, qurtina, veil, screen, curtain.

It will be seen that all of these words are of Latin origin and could hardly have been in use in the Maghreb in the late middle ages, though Arabic dictionaries now give ġerasia and sardin while qurtina was in use in Moorish Spain but with a different meaning. 20

Several word formations different from Classical Arabic are identi
cical with their Maltese respective forms or meanings but are also to be found with those characteristics in one part or other of the Maghreb though perhaps never all in the same locality as here. Thus, yaḥsālu, they wash, where the 'h' has replaced the original rghayn, taqbej, jump, where the 'b' has taken the place of the Classical Arabic 't', naftakar (Maltese niftakar), where the 't' represents the original Arabic 't', saqrā, a tree, where the 's' stands for the original 's', lanqas, pears, and laranq (Maltese laring), oranges, where the 'l' is really the definite article. One observes also the word ankubut, Maltese gharqbuta, with the same meaning as in Maltese: a coweb, not a spider as in Classical Arabic, a transference of meaning which Malṭ also shares with Andalusian and possibly Algerian Arabic. 27

Of the undoubted differences from modern Maltese a number can be easily explained away. Thus 'l', 'we' and 'they' in the poems are expressed by the words ana, nehon or nhon and hom respectively while modern Maltese prefers jiena, abma (dropping the initial n-, like most of the dialects of the Maghreb), and huma. However, as late as 1660 Philip Skippon gives ama for 'I', nebun for 'we', and hom for 'they'. 28 Possession is at least twice in the poems expressed by the word mita, invariably represented in modern Maltese by ta; but mita has been found in fifteenth century Maltese place-names together with bita. 29 The Arabic for 'to an-

27 It is given as an alternative to the rghayn form in K. Stowasser and Moukhtar Ani, A Dictionary of Syrian Arabic: English Arabic (Washington, 1964), s. v. 'wash, to', but seems absent from the Maghreb where its occurrence would have been more relevant. Mainz also noticed this resemblance of yaḥsālu to Maltese, citing Sutcliffe, A Grammar of the Maltese Language, 6: Mainz, 56.

28 Dozy, s. v.

29 Ibid., citing Beauissier.

30 Ph. Marçais and M.-S. Hamrouni, Textes d'Arabe Maghrébin (Paris, 1977), s. v. in 'Lexique' section.

31 Stowasser and Ingloot, s. v.

32 Ibid., s. v.; alternatively the 't' of laring could be derived from the original 'd'.


swer' in the poems is ǧawaba as in Classical Arabic, while modern Maltese has uiegeb, but Skippon here again says that the Maltese for 'to answer' was goab, apparently indicating that the metathesis of the first two radical consonants had not yet taken place. 49 'Eleven' in the poems is expressed by ahaq as an while modern Maltese prefers bdax-il, but Judaeo-Arabic documents from Malta of 1476 show the same particle an instead of -il, 41 widely spread in Eastern Algeria and Tunisia. 42 The use of ill instead of illi is probably a mere Judaeo-Arabic orthographic archaism in the same way that in Maltese one writes ghandna but pronounces āna. 43 The use of kān li, I had, in the place of the modern Maltese kelli is paralleled by the similar occurrence in the fifteenth century Judaeo-Arabic writings from Malta. The fact that some care is taken to distinguish between some of the emphatic and the non-emphatic consonants, though the distinction no longer exists in modern Maltese, is again paralleled by the same feature in Judaeo-Arabic writings from Malta.

The vocabulary of the poems shows major and minor differences from that of modern Maltese. Among the minor differences one might mention that in the poems 'to forgive' is expressed by the word afer, not abher as in modern Maltese, and 'ezor, 'bedsheets', and ma, 'water', have not been fused with their definite article as in the Maltese lozor and ilma (cf. lanqas and larag above). The verb gal, 'he said', has not been replaced in the imperfect by the verb ghad, jghid, as in modern Maltese. 44 The original meaning of the Maltese word mohxir (i.e. 'stuffed', has now been relegated to a mere dialectal survival on the island of Gozo; cf. in the poems the phrase wəfakruna muinti, 'and a stuffed turtle'.

An idea of the scale of the vocabulary dissimilarity of the language of the poems to modern Maltese is perhaps best obtained by a detailed examination of any of the poems. Not one of the following verbs in the first poem has survived in modern Maltese in pre-

cisely the form in which it appears there (surviving words with the same roots are given in brackets): 45

nahrâ - I shall recount
aftu - be awakened
tibbsaru - you rejoice
nathayoli - I imagine
(cp. nisbatijilii)
nawsa - I'll recount

yênur - he shines
(cp. mnaawar)
zam - I decided
nuntzar - I await
yatabar - he avoids
(cp. ghabbar, ghabra)
yasra - he radiates

yisgad - they prostrated themselves
n(a)teq - I can
naqor - I thank
yinânor - he is relaxed
(cp. surname Xinba)
naawad - we custom
(cp. ghaawad)
nabu - we adore
(cp. place-name tal-Ghabid)
ballest - take
nattbar - I pay attention
hadar - he was present
(cp. baddara)
yatib - he repents
(cp. teuba)
yinor - he helps

The same single poem also contains a very large number of other words no longer extant in Maltese: 46

ahl - people

weed - love, friendship

jir - good, perfect, excellent (pl.)
munam - dream

ansan - man
(cp. nisa, woman)

aff - chaste, modest, pure
muhaff - parched, thirsty
sherif - distinguished, sublime
dall - despicable, contemptible

45Cp. Serracino Inglott and Skippon, op.cit., s.vv.
46G. Wettiger, The Jews of Malta in the Late Middle Ages (in the press).
47Marçiais, 178.
48It also appears in the Judaeo-Arabic documents from Malta.
49On the use of these words in Maltese compared to Maghribi, see J. Aquilina, 124-25.
50Mainz, 60-64.
51Ibid., 60-61.
[7] La majoraine et le romarin, forment encore plus.
[8] À leur vue l'homme reste diverti,
[9] étonné et ébahi (restez-il) pour la réponse.
[1] Comme il y voit même les poissons des mers,
[2] ... et le mulet : prends-le, mon ami,
[5] à toute solennité, fête et réunion (?).
[7] On y trouve des plantations de tous les aromates :
[8] du poivre, de la cannelle, du cardamome, du girofle
[9] et du safran de la montagne,
[10] de la côte,
[12] tu trouveras de tous les aromates, par ma vie.
[13] Et il me vint dans l'esprit d'y construire mon château,
[14] haut et ses tours seront dix,

Journal Asiatique, vol. 237 (1949), p. 80, with the corresponding original version in Hebrew characters from the Vatican Library, Hebrew Ms. 411, ff. 17v to 18v.
These differences in vocabulary are perhaps not as serious an obstacle as one might at first think to identifying the language of the poems as fifteenth century Maltese. The only known surviving specimen of Maltese of that century, namely the Cantilena of Peter Caxaro, proves that there was a substantial vocabulary displacement in the centuries that have supervened. In fact, at least two of the obsolete words of the Cantilena, are also to be found in these Judaeo-Arabic poems, namely 'tale', come along, in the first line:

Xideu il cada ye giren tale nichadithicum and yeutibe, which suits it, in the sixteenth line: biddilibe inte il miken illi yeutibe.
The first word occurs twice in the Judaeo-Arabic poems: raddat hiyya taneya ta'la la 'andana ta'la tatnazzah ya (a)hi fi (e)l nunayfar.
The second is to be found in the line: ugurareb tawati min surab gulhanaru.
One also notices the phrase ta'la 'u niżel, he went up and down, to be found both in the Cantilena.

Nitila vy nargia niniz dal eyem il bāchar il bādij in and one of these other poems: Sorta tala' wanażel min 'al bab el ġazala.

Several morphological and syntactic differences from modern Maltese will be noticed: (a) weak verbs with 'w' or 'j' as first radical retain the 'w' in the imperfect though it disappears in Maltese, e.g. compare nawsaf, I recount, with Maltese nasal, I arrive (from wasal); (b) verbs with a 'liquid' second radical consonant in the imperfect and imperative plural take a helping vowel after it instead of before it as in modern Maltese, thus the poems have aqlabuh, turn it over, nefrāhu, we shall be glad, where modern Maltese would have aqilbuh and nisfruh; "(e) ġaw taraw, come and see", where only the first verb is in the imperative while the second is in the imperfect, while Maltese would prefer eijew (for iğu) araw, both verbs being in the imperative; (c) the poems contain several examples of the use of the particle qad, used invariably with verbs in the imperfect, to emphasise the completion of the action: e.g. qad rewani, refreshed me, qad naser, has unfolded, qad lehani, has distracted me, qed ġa, has come, while in modern Maltese the word qed, of a totally different derivation, shortened as it is from qiegbed, is used with verbs in the imperfect in order to express the present continuous tense; (d) the poems contain innumerable examples of the stress shift which are such a distinguishing feature of Maghribi Arabic and which does not seem ever to have occurred in Maltese: Cl. Ar. qatula, Maltese qatel, Maghribi Arabic qtel. The last characteristic of the language is the most serious of all obstacles to identifying the language of the poems with Maltese, medieval or otherwise.

If, indeed, a Maltese origin is ruled out owing to the presence of this stress shift in the poems, one must next consider a Sicilian origin. Though in 1949 it was well known that Sicily had had a large Jewish population down to the expulsion of the Jews in 1492, it is, in fact, unlikely that Ernst Mainz and his advisers gave much serious thought to the possibility that they were written in a Sicilian milieu or by a Sicilian Jew, seeing that it was only in 1946 that Cecil Roth made it widely known that the Sicilian Jews continued to speak a form of Arabic right down to the latter part of the fourteenth century. Only a very much older Judaeo-Arabic docu-
ment from Sicily was then known.\textsuperscript{41} Even now, after the publication
of some sixty other Judaeo-Arabic documents from Sicily it is still
impossible to obtain a clear idea of many aspects of the Arabic
spoken there in the absence of a pointed text.\textsuperscript{42} Thus it is still un-
known whether the stress shift that, according to one theory, over-
took Maghribi Arabic in the fourteenth century affected Sicilian
Arabic as it did Andalusian.\textsuperscript{43} It should be remembered that the
Jews of Sicily were very closely connected with those of Tunisia,
and Tripoli while those of Malta, themselves just as closely con-
nected with their co-religionists of Sicily and Tripoly, were no
doubt held back from adopting the stress shift by the failure of the
Maltese language itself to accept it (in Sicily, of course, the
Christian population had already for a long time forgotten all its
Arabic). It is also quite possible that the poet himself, familiar
through his travels or his own family origins, with the Maghribi
stress shift, adopted it in his writings with or without a conscious
effort on his part and quite independently of its use or lack of use,
in the Maltese or Jewish community to which he might have be-
longed. In any case, there is no doubt of the general Maghribi
characteristics of Sicilian Arabic including, in particular the nqit/
nqitlu first person singular and plural of the verb in the im-
perfect, together with the use of zu\textsuperscript{\textdegree}g, a couple of, and mita\textsuperscript{\textdegree} to
indicate possession. Though the morphology of Sicilian Arabic is
still insufficiently known, there is enough evidence of its generally
close resemblance to the Maltese language for treating the resem-
bances noticed above between Maltese and the language of the
poems as applying with equal strength to Sicilian Arabic with the
added still unproven possibility that stress shift had occurred in

\textsuperscript{41}S. Cusa, I diplomi greci di Sicilia pubblicati nel testo originale, tradotti
ed illustrati (Palermo, 1682-88), pp. 495-6, plate v, more recently studied
by J. Wansbrough, "A Judaeo-Arabic Document from Sicily", Bulletin of

\textsuperscript{42}H. Brecc and S.D. Goitein, "Un inventaire dotal de Juifs Siciliens
(1479)", Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'Histoire par l'École Francaise de
Rome (Rome, 1970); A. Giuffrida and B. Rocco, "Un bilingue Arabo-
Sicula", Annali dell' Istituto Orientale di Napoli, vol. 34 (Naples, 1974);
A. Giuffrida and B. Rocco, "Documenti Giudeo-Arabici nel Secolo xv a Pal-

\textsuperscript{43}A. Borg, 203, citing F. Corrente, A Grammatical Sketch of the Span-
ish Arabic Dialect Bundle (Madrid, 1977).

\textsuperscript{44}Giufrida and Rocco, 'Documenti', 82.

\textsuperscript{45}Marcis, 74.

\textsuperscript{46}Giufrida and Rocco, 92. It is worth remembering that present Jewish
practice in Tunis in this respect resembles that of Maltese rather than
that of these Judaeo-Arabic poems and of Sicilian Judaeo-Arabic c. D.

\textsuperscript{47}It occurs in the Judaeo-Arabic document published in Brecc and Goitein,
"Un Inventaire dotal de Juifs Siciliens (1479)". A dowry contract from
Malta of 7 July 1503 contains this item: 'una curtina blanca: onze v';
Notarial Archives, Valletta, Register of deeds of Notary Cons. Canchur,
R 140/1, f. 212v.

\textsuperscript{48}The explanations given so far of the etymology of gizi are particularly
unconvincing. Barbera, op. cit., s.v.; would have it originate in the Moroc-
can DUB\textsuperscript{\textdegree}U\textsuperscript{\textdegree}S abbreviated to \textsuperscript{\textdegree}S. The derivation from \textsuperscript{\textdegree}S, a
different flower, would have to overcome objections both with regard
to flower identity and to the presence of the final -\textsuperscript{\textdegree}S, normally a most signi-
ficant phoneme in Maltese. For the Greek \textsuperscript{\textdegree}S see H.G. Liddell and R.
Scott, Greek English Lexicon (Oxford, 1940), s.v.
very well have existed in Sicilian Arabic, though the modern Sicilian for 'coral' now is *cura’dul*, but it is difficult to imagine it existing in Maghribi Arabic, where the Arabic for 'coral' is *marjan*. The word *asqunfī*, a kind of lemon, exists in modern Sicilian (*scumpiu*) as well as in Maltese (*xkomp*). Though the word *gerasqa*, cherries, now appears in Arabic dictionaries, it is unlikely to have formed part of the Arabic language in the fifteenth century. The same could also be said of *sardin*, sardines, a word which, of course, has existed for centuries both in Maltese and in Sicilian. The word *garlin*, carline, refers to a coin of ten *grani*, and therefore *begarlin naqes habbayn*, in Maltese *b’karlin nieqes babbejn* (*babba = grano*) is equivalent to the sum of eight *grani* or *habbit* in Maltese. The word itself refers to Charles of Anjou who seems to have brought the coin into use, but has survived in Maltese right down to the present, remaining in use in spite of radical changes of currency. It appears extremely frequently in the singular or plural in the nine Judeo-Arabic documents from Malta but not a single time in any of the sixty such documents from fifteenth century Sicily. It would be difficult to see how this relatively minor coin could have been known in North Africa. The reference in the poems to the type of fish called *tanka*, a name apparently otherwise unknown in the Arabic world, except perhaps in French occupied Algeria, but probably cognate to the Latin *tanka* and English *tench*, forcibly recalls the references to the fish called *tenchi* in fifteenth century price lists from Caràia. The two remaining words *milu* and *fustayn* are also interesting; though they both exist in Maltese, they are given in the poems, in forms which show undoubted Sicilian as distinct from Maltese influence:

*milu*, a mile, modern Sicilian *miggbiu*, medieval Sicilian


*Co. for its occurrence in Sicilian Italian: Trina, s.v.*

*A. Milano, Storia degli ebrei in Italia (Torino, 1965), 223 ff.*

*G. Wettinger, The Jews of Malta in the Later Middle Ages (in the press).*

*Co. Milano, 231.*

would have a special interest in that they would be the first such poems originating in Sicily to have been discovered so far, and would give added urgency to the search and study of examples of Judaeo-Arabic from that island. To the Maltese linguist, always interested in the 'missing links' of his language, their importance is obvious. In addition, whatever their origin, the poems have an interest for the Maltese general reader all their own. With no further effort than would be required of him to read the oldest surviving poem in Maltese, he has here a set of poems on subjects as various and of as universal appeal as (a) a visit to heaven in the footsteps of the prophet Elias, (b) a lass greets her lover at home from the sea, (c) a lark's song, (d) a skit on marriage, (e) a humorous dialogue between water and wine similar to those which frequently appear on Maltese humorous or satirical periodicals, (f) a lover to his lass, (g) 'It is my intention to make a garden...', and (h) a moral song on the transitoriness of human affairs.

THE MEDITERRANEAN ISLANDS AS PLACES OF SYNTHESIS BETWEEN ARAB CULTURE AND EUROPEAN CULTURES

by J. CASSAR PULICINO

(Working Paper, with particular reference to Malta, discussed at the Conference on the same theme held at the Grand Hotel Verdala (11-14 September, 1978) on the joint initiative of the Tunisian and Maltese National Commissions for UNESCO)

Since the earliest times the Mediterranean has been the meeting place of different, often diverse and rival cultures. S. Moscati has shown that recent archaeological research in the central Mediterranean area bounded by Tunisia to the South and Italy to the North revealed that certain islands, such as Malta, Sicily (Motya) and Sardinia, played an important role in a process of cultural interaction in ancient Mediterranean history. These islands served as crossroads where ancient cultures met or followed one another in time. Sometimes, as in the case of Malta, a succession of civilizations imposed themselves on previous ones over a period of some three thousand years, the component elements being prehistoric, Phoenician-Punic, Hellenistic-Roman and Christian. It is evident, therefore, that these islands have been the scene of cultural synthesis well before the emergence of the Arabs as a power in the Mediterranean.

The theme of our meeting concerns the interplay and fusion, in the Mediterranean islands, of the Arab culture and the European cultures. Historically, the period of the Arab expansion westwards (7th to 9th C.) may, therefore, be taken as the point of departure for our approach. The subject, however, has to be studied from various aspects with some considerations of a general culture.

SOME GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

The islands of the Mediterranean are so numerous that for prac-