LATE MEDIEVAL JUDAEO-ARABIC POETRY
IN VATICAN HEBREW MS. 411: A POSTSCRIPT
by Godfrey Wettinger

Only a few months after the publication of the present writer’s article proved unfruitful. A few months later, a glance at some old documentary transcripts made years before brought the following passage to light: 3

Item cortina una cum suo Jnbolachio listato sericiis.

The poems themselves similarly associate 'anburlak with cortina: 4

мансâfâ min suf el-dib 'ankâbullu
hi l-qurtina
weöl'-anburlak min quqaz
min newer el-yâqtina

Both 'anburlak and Jnbolachio would seem to refer to the bed canopy, of course now long disused, still known as celú or sopracelú. However, Genevieve and Henri Bresc have already studied the work from Sicilian documents. In their study 'La casa del "borghese" in Sicilia', 5 this is what they say:

Ma il letto, con la sua cortina, le lenzuola listate di seta e l'imbrulachium (cielo del letto), il cassone, le tovaglioli, sono lo specchio di una civiltà abbastanza ricca.

For them, however, the origin of imbrulachium remains obscure.

It is clear, in any case, that this word can only be associated, so far as is known, with Malta and Sicily. In the latter island, the Brescs themselves have found it in no less than nine out of the 23 documents they examined for source material on middle class homes in late medieval Sicily. 6 In one particular marriage agreement 7 not only does the word imbrulachium itself appear, but one also finds another strange word, otherwise apparently unknown, which is found in the Judaeo-Arabic documents of Vatican Hebrew Ms. 411. This is the word dubler: 8

3Cathedral Museum, Mdina (Malta), Curia Episcopalis Melitensis, Acta Originalia, vol. I, fol. 29v, dated 16 August 1428. Compare the passage with 'item, una supra chelo de una cortina cum so frontali isilati', 7 July 1503, Notarial Archives, Valletta, deeds of Notary Consalvo Cachur, R 140/1 (1409-1505), fol. 212v.
6Ibid., table on p. 126.
7Ibid., footnote 7 on p. 125.
8Mainz, p. 70.
Dore: I vestiti della sposa, 'farsium unum pro lecto, mataracia duo, plomacium unum, paria tria lintheaminum quam unum debet essere ad listas sericas ed alia due de tela alba nova, cultras duas albas novas, cortinam unam, imburlachium unum, dublecta tria, sucranus tres, dubleria seu mensalia quinque, tobalias duas, ad aves...

Needless to say, and understandably, Ernest Mainz was unable to translate into French either 'anburlak or dubler.

One other phrase left without a French translation occurs in the following two lines:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{zewi} & \text{ ha} \text{ watem} \text{ mi} \text{ n \gu} \text{ mar} \\
\text{w(e)l-agfiya} & \text{ getare} \text{s.}
\end{align*}
\]

Agfiya must be an irregular plural form of the Arabic word \textit{wagf}, an ivory bracelet; \textit{getare} would be the plural of \textit{qatre}. The latter has not been found in Arabic dictionaries but must be derived from the Sicilian word \textit{catreia}, vertebrate bones. The two lines should therefore mean:

A pair of rings [made] of dwarf fan palm leaves

And ivory necklaces [made] of vertebrate bones.

Once more, therefore, one is forced to resort to Romance Sicilian for a full understanding of a part of the poems, and this would pretty definitely exclude the possibility of a Maltese origin.

\textit{Ibid.}, p. 72.

\textit{A. Traina, Nuovo vocabolario Siciliano Italiano,} s.v.

\textit{In Maltese, and possibly in Sicilian Arabic, \gu} \text{mar is the plant known botanically as 'dwarf fan palm': J. Borg, Descriptive Flora of the Maltese Islands ... (Malta, 1927), p. 799.}