It was customary that, three days before his solemn entry, the new Bishop should leave his palace at Valetta and proceed in state to Notabile. At the small church of Our Lady of Victory, near the Mental Hospital, he was met by the Captain of the Rod, the Jurats and other distinguished persons. There the Bishop alighted from his carriage, and the whole assembly, all on horseback, rode straight to St. Dominic’s Priory at Rabat.

Rull departed from this tradition. On the 24th June he was present at St. John’s Conventual Church for the feast of the Patron Saint of the Order, and the following evening he went privately to his palace at Notabile. The day after he received the congratulations of the Reverend Chapter, the Captain of the Rod — Baron Mark Anthony Inguez — and of other distinguished persons.

That same day, the 20th June, a notice was issued from the Magistral Palace at Valetta ordering all coaches belonging to the Order, as well as those for hire in the different parts of the Island, to assemble the following morning at the Palace Square to be ready to convey the Knights who were to accompany the Grand Master.

On that memorable morning, June 27th, the sun was still hidden below the horizon, when at 4.30 a.m. His Most Eminent Highness was already in his state coach drawn by six superbly caparisoned horses, and with him were the Grand Prior Mainardi—in private attire—and Bailiff Tomasi.

It was a splendid spectacle well worthy to complete the cycle of the Arthurian Legends. First came the drummers, then an escort of dragoons—a fine body guard with drawn swords—all on horseback. These preceded the Grand Master’s carriage which drove between the Commodore of the Body Guard on the right and another Commodore on the left. Then followed a long line of coaches conveying Grand Crosses, nearly all the Knights, in gala dress, and many other private individuals. And the dazzling cavalcade wound its way majestically towards Notabile which was by this time bathed in the golden rays of the morning sun.

THE MALTESE LANGUAGE
Phoenician or Arabic?

by the V. REV. Fr. S. M. ZARB, O.P., S.T.M., S.S.D. (Vat.) Professor at the Royal University of Malta

(The Maltese Language is essentially a Semitic Tongue, with a slight influence of European Languages with which during the Christian Era it has come into contact.) We prefer for the moment to distinguish neatly between the fundamental Semitic element of the Maltese Language and its European evolution, leaving aside for the moment the latter and taking into consideration only the Semitic stock, by far the most important, in this language. (It is historically known that the Phoenicians, the Carthaginians and the Arabs have for long centuries occupied these Islands and introduced among the inhabitants their respective tongues. Notwithstanding that the Arabs, the last Semites who occupied Malta, have been expelled nearly ten centuries ago, still the language spoken by the Maltese even unto the present day is indisputably Semitic. Hence the question: Whether the present Maltese Language is derived either from Arabic or from Punic or Phoenician?

It must be carefully noted that the question is not whether the present Maltese Language had a Phoenician origin or Punic; it is quite obvious that in the days, previous to the Arabic domination of the Island, the Semitic Language spoken in Malta, an allusion to which is made in the Acts of the Apostles (xxviii,1) and a categorical proof is supplied by the Punic Inscriptions found in Malta and dated from this period, was Punic, an immediate offspring of Phoenician; and it is similarly obvious that before the Carthaginians affirmed themselves on these Islands, the language of the inhabitants was Phoenician. Therefore, the whole question is to know whether in the present Maltese Language we can still discover Phoenician or Punic
elements and to what extent? To affirm that the present Maltese Language is wholly Arabic equals to the affirmation that Arabic has completely absorbed or totally assimilated the Punic or Phoenician Language previously spoken by the Maltese. This fact is not impossible, but it supposes either a very long domination of the Arabs in Malta, or a very intense immigration of Arabs into the Island so that they could completely absorb and assimilate the inhabitants. Neither of these suppositions seems historically proved and, consequently, it seems probable that in the present Maltese Language we may still discover traces of a Semitic tongue older than the Arabic. I believe to have stated as clearly as possible the knot of the problem; I now endeavour to collect evidences which might help towards its solution.

To start with, one must note that in order to discuss the origin of the Maltese Language it is not enough to count how many words in the Maltese vocabulary are of Arabic origin and how many of Phoenician or Punic derivation. Indeed, this investigation has its importance in the question at issue, but it is not sufficient. We must furthermore study the formation of these words (morphology), their grammatical rules and their syntactic construction in the phrases, compare them to those of the Phoenician and Arabic Languages and then draw the conclusion about the kinship of Maltese to either the Phoenician or the Arabic Language.

The solution of this problem is not easy, because both Phoenician and Arabic are Semitic. It is true that Semitic Languages may be classified genealogically, because they present various peculiarities and differences by means of which they can be grouped in a genealogical table. But this classification is by no means easy nor certain; in fact, many scholars hold different and even opposite views on this subject. The reason is, because the Semitic Languages, once spoken by various peoples, especially in Asia, have today, with the exception of Arabic, Ethiopian, and Syriac (1), completely disappeared from the list of living languages and are known in the written documents which came down to us; thus Hebrew is known, principally, because of the Books of the Old Testament; Babylonian and Assyrian, because of the Cuneiform tablets and other Cuneiform writings; Phoenician, because of the various inscriptions, such as those of Ras Shamra, Byblos etc.; Syrian, because of the writings of the Christian authors etc. Now, with the exception of the Cuneiform system of writing, all Semitic alphabets consist of consonants only; the vowel signs are of more recent origin and completely absent in the old documents. Hence we are not absolutely certain of the way of reading or pronouncing these old languages and, as to a large extent grammar and syntax depend on the correct reading and pronunciation of the words, it follows that there are many difficulties and doubts about various points in the Semitic Languages: thus the poetical system of the Hebrews, notwithstanding the fact that many of the Books of the Old Testament are written in a poetical form, is still today an unsolved problem (2), and so, I believe, the question of the classification of the various Semitic tongues cannot be settled with absolute certainty. This, among other reasons, explains why various scholars differ so widely in the classification of the various Semitic Languages.

Many Scholars divide the Semitic Languages into two groups: The Northern group which comprehends the Assyro-Babylonian, Aramaic and Canaanite languages; and the Southern group which is formed of Arabic and Ethiopic. But this division is too generic, and other Scholars, according to more minute divergencies between the various Semitic languages, arrive at a more detailed classification, which I provisionally follow in the present paper.

The Semitic Languages are divided into five branches:

1. The Babylonian and Assyrian, preserved in the

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(1) Syriac can easily be classified as a dead language, although a sort of a Syriac Language is still spoken today by the inhabitants of Tur Ghobba, in Assyria, Kurdistan and around the Lake of Urm.
Cuneiform writings which we can today read with moral certainty. The Cuneiform System of writing is not an alphabetic system, but a syllabic one; each sign or figure does not represent a consonantal sound only, as in the alphabetic systems, but one or more consonants with a vowel sound, so that each sign or figure form a syllable. It is different also from the Ethiopian, because the Ethiopian system is really alphabetic and the vowel sound is attached to the consonants. It never happens in Ethiopian that a sign or letter of its system represents a syllable of more than one consonant, as it is the case in the Cuneiform system.

II. The Aramaic language is divided into two groups: The Western and the Eastern Aramaic.
   a) The Western Aramaic comprehends: Biblical Aramaic, Palmyrean, Nabatean, Judaic Aramaic and Samaritan.
   b) The Eastern Aramaic is formed of Babylonian Aramaic, Mandaean and Syriac.

Strictly speaking, each one of these various languages does not form a unity by itself; indeed, they are so similar to each other that they can easily be regarded as one and the same language. They are rather so classified because of the documents in which they are preserved than because of the philological differences between them. All these documents are written in an alphabetic system, consequently without vowel signs, and are read and pronounced with certain hesitations and doubts: The only exception is Syriac which in the first centuries of the Christian Era borrowed the vowel signs from the Greek and added those signs to its writing. But even in this system the vowel signs are not mingled together with the consonants, but written above the letters, thus preserving the Semitic system of writing without the vowel sounds.

III. The Canaanite Language comprehends the old Phoenician (found in the glosses of the Tell el-Amarna tablets), Phoenician, Hebrew (Biblical and Post-Biblical), Moabitic and Punic.

Also these languages are very similar to each other, and are distinguished rather because of the different documents in which they are found than because of the philological discrepancies between them.

IV. Arabic is divided into Northern and Southern Arabic:
   a) To Northern Arabic belong the inscriptions found in Northern Arabia together with the classical Arabic Language of the Qoran and the other classical Arabic writers. From this language derive the modern Arabic dialects spoken in (1) Arabia, (2) Iraq, (3) Syria and Palestine, (4) Egypt, and (5) Northern Africa.
   b) To Southern Arabic belong the Minean and Sabean Languages (Mehri).

Arabic is the best well known language of all the Semitic tongues. Its writing system is also alphabetic and at the beginning had no signs for the vowel sounds. The Arabs, like the Syrians, adopted the vowel sounds, leaving untouched their alphabetic system of writing; nay, in ordinary writing, such as in daily news-papers and other unoffical writings, they make no use of the vowel sounds. But as this language never faded and was always kept as a living language, we are most certain of its reading and pronunciation.

V. Ethiopian comprehends the language of the old Ethiopian inscriptions and the languages spoken today in Abyssinia, namely Ge'ez, Tigre, Tigrina and Amharic.

Ethiopian, like Arabic, is a living language and can be read and pronounced with absolute certainty. The Ethiopians use an alphabetic system and the consonants take additional signs by which the vowel sound is indicated (3).

Having classified the various Semitic Languages, one can easily see that although Phoenician and Arabic are both Semitic tongues, nevertheless they belong to two widely

(3) A slightly different classification of the Semitic Languages has been given by Prof. J. Aquila, in his Lecture: A Comparative Survey of Semitic Maltese, published in Scientia, IX. (1943), p.89, and more particularly p.92-94.
different branches of the Semitic family of Languages, since Phoenician belongs to the Northern group of Semitic languages and more precisely to the Canaanitic branch, whereas Arabic pertains to the Southern group. To which of these two types of languages is the present Maltese Language more akin, to Phoenician or to Arabic?

In order to solve this problem I deem it necessary to pass in review the principal differences which can be noted when Phoenician and Arabic are compared to each other.

In a previous paper: The Maltese Language: Aryan or Semitic? (4) I dealt at a certain length with the differences which are found in comparing the Aryan with the Semitic languages and concluded that Maltese is essentially a Semitic tongue. I think that the same method could be applied to our present problem; which entails a detailed comparison of the Phoenician with the Arabic Language. This task is certainly much harder: first, because the differences between the Phoenician and the Arabic language are not so clear and definite as those between the Aryan and the Semitic languages and, secondly, because Phoenician being a dead language, preserved only in a few inscriptions, is necessarily very fragmentary and consequently very imperfectly known to us, so that a real and strict comparison between Phoenician and Arabic is not an easy task, not to say that it is hardly possible. However if instead of Phoenician we are allowed to comprehend the Canaanitic branch of the Semitic Languages, in which Hebrew is also included, the task would become somewhat lighter (5).

(To be continued)

(4) Published in Scientia, IX, (1942), p. 35-44.
(5) Hebrew is also a dead language and, apart from number of inscriptions and other written documents, it has been preserved to us in the Books of the Old Testament. It is, therefore, much richer in literature than Phoenician; but even so, it is only a fragmentary language. Many words occur only once in the documents just quoted and are doubtful both with regard to their derivation and to their grammatical form. The vowel system of the Hebrew language is an addition of the VI, and the following centuries A.D., according to the traditional reading used in the Synagogues. It has, therefore, been introduced many centuries after the Hebrew language had lost its role as a spoken tongue.