absolute silence observed by St. Thomas, there has really been some kind of change, at least in the way of expressing himself on such a delicate and profound problem; which diversity has afforded a foundation both to Cajetan and his successors, as well as to Capreolus and his predecessors, on which to build their interpretation.

The text of the *Summa Theologiae* being posterior to the Commentary on the Sentences, must also be regarded as St. Thomas's final word on the subject. Without denying the assertion that the *Summa Theologiae* did not render useless the Commentary on the Sentences, we can nevertheless conclude that the *Summa* is by far superior to the Commentary and consequently we accept Cajetan's interpretation as the best and most faithful expression of St. Thomas's mind. The divine person in God is therefore constituted, according to St. Thomas, by the relation as divine relation. The divine essence is only included extrinsically, that is, radically.

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**THE ORIGIN OF THE MALTESE LANGUAGE AND ITS BEARING ON ORTHOGRAPHY**

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Since the days of Canon Agius de Soldanis the Maltese Language has often, if not continuously, been the object of keen studies, not only among Maltese Scholars, but also among foreigners. Many and various were the problems discussed about its origin, its orthography, its morphology and its syntax. We cannot embrace all these problems in one lecture, and it is for this reason that I have limited my lecture to the first problem, namely the origin of the Maltese Language.

Some may think that the question of the origin of the Maltese Language is an idle question: whether Maltese be classified as a Semitic or an Aryan Language, Phoenician, Punic or Arabic, it does not change in the least the nature of the Maltese tongue which is a living language, and must, therefore, be studied on the lips of those who speak it as well as from its literature, however scanty and recent it may be.

I beg to differ on this subject; because I am convinced that the origin of the Maltese Language may and should influence its orthography, its morphology and its syntax: and, therefore, it is not an idle question to determine its origin, but, on the contrary, it is of paramount importance in the study of the Maltese Language to know whether, in order to explain an orthographical or a morphological rule or difficulty, one must have recourse to similar rules or difficulties in an Aryan or in a Semitic Language, and whether one should prefer an explanation from an analogy found in the Phoenician or Punic Language rather than that which may be offered by Arabic. I, therefore, think that in this great revival of the Maltese Language, the
study of its origin must not be put aside: we cannot be agnostics on this subject; and in order to prove my assumption I propose to examine the various opinions about the origin of the Maltese Language, outline a probable solution of the problem, and show the importance of the chosen opinion in its application to orthography; since, as I have already stated, it is not possible to deal also in one lecture with grammar and syntax. This is why I have proposed as title to my lecture: The Origin of the Maltese Language and its bearing on Orthography.

The controversy about the origin of the Maltese Language is as old as the earliest scholars who wrote its first grammar and even older. In fact, Canon Agius de Soldanis, who wrote the first grammar of the Maltese Language, published in Rome in 1750, speaks already of a great variety of opinions on this subject: some think that Maltese is Arabic, others maintain that it is Carthaginian, Hebrew, Phoenician, Greek, Punic, Samaritan or even Syriac! (1) I do not think that a historical survey of these opinions would be out of place in this lecture, but I am afraid that a similar review of opinions would take much of our time, and as it has already been the object of more than one book, I prefer to limit myself to modern writers, because they have the privilege to be better equipped with scientific methods of comparative philology, and, therefore, are more reliable in their conclusions. I do not mean to say that all modern writers who wrote about the Maltese Language were in fact real scholars of comparative philology. Indeed even recently we have seen writers who claimed that the Maltese Language derives from the Persian (2), whereas others would like to link the language of Malta with that of Sicily or even to derive it from that of Italy! Such opinions do not even deserve the honour to be discussed and refuted. I, therefore, limit myself to those opinions which are really scientific, that is, which are based on some sort of scientific arguments. These writers may easily be classified and divided into two groups: those who maintain that Maltese derives from the Phoenician branch of Semitic Languages, and those who think that it derives from the great family of the Arabic Language or dialects.

Among the first group of writers we find Michael Anthony Vassalli (3), Hannibal Preca (4), Anthony Emanuel Caruana (5), Canon Vincent Caruana Gatto (6), Sir Themistocles Zammit (7) and several others. To the second group belong many foreign writers, such as Gesenius (8), Broeckelmann (9), Stumm (10) and many Maltese, such as the historians Abela (11), Ciantar (12), and John Anthony Vassallo (13) and Philologists, such as A. Cremona (14), and Phot. J. Aquilina (15).

(3) M. A. VASSALI, Mylsen Phoenico-Punicum sine Grammatica Maltesis, Roma 1791, p. 4.13.
(4) A. A. ABBE, Saggio introdotto alla Lingua Maltese come affine dell'Ebraica, Malta 1880. - Malta Canariensi ossia indagini filologiche e etimologiche nel Linguaggio Maltese, Malta 1904.
(6) C. A. CARUANA GATTO, Monografia critica della Lingua Maltese, Malta 1906.
(8) GESENIUS, Scripturae Linguarum Phoenicicarum Monumenta quotquot supersunt, quoted by E. MANARA, La Lingua di Malta traverso i secoli, Napoli 1886, p. 131.
(9) K. BROECKELMANN, Grundriss der Vergleichenden Grammatik der semitischen Sprachen, I, p. 28.
(10) H. STUMME, Maltesische Studien, Leipzig 1904.
(12) G. A. CANTAR, Malta illustrata, p. 584.
(13) G. A. VASALLO, Storia di Malta, p. 56.
(14) A. CREMONA, Xinku l-Malti Sofi, Malta 1925, p. 18, writes of a A. E. Caruana, "Il bies tassar l'huwraz xoglu, li ma iktun jiwa bjifex jifex f'miq li ma tintef gh'hal jomke, nissel il kell Malti mil-Luudi u mitiss Sirjan, bhala ilga l-iżdid qreb tal-Fenick" (1), See p. 26 c.
(15) G. AOULINA, in many of his writings implies that Maltese is similar to the Arabic of Northern Africa. Thus in his book The Maltese Language, Malta 1940, p. 13, he affirms categorically: "Phonetically, morphologically, and to a less extent syntactically, Maltese is Semitic (dialectical N. Afr. Arabic)".

(2) L. F. Mizzi, What is the Maltese Language, Malta 1923.
The writers of one and the same group are not exactly of the same opinion, because both the Phoenician and the Arabic group of languages embrace various forms: thus the Canaanitic group comprehends the old Phoenician (found in the glosses of the Tell-el-Amarna tablets), Phoenician, Hebrew (Biblical and Post-Biblical), Moabitic and Punic; and the Arabic group is also divided into Northern and Southern Arabic. The Northern Arabic group, with which we are only concerned, comprises the classical Arabic language of the Quran and the other classical writers. From this language derive the modern Arabic dialects spoken in Arabia, Iraq, Syria and Palestine, Egypt and Northern Africa, which constitute five principal different dialects of the same language.

Those who classify Maltese among the Canaanitic languages derive it either from the Phoenician or from the Punic. I do not think that those, like Preca, who speak of Hebrew really think that Maltese derive from the language of the Jews; but they only mean that because the Hebrew language is definitely of the Canaanitic group and is the best preserved because of its literature, especially because of the books of the Old Testament, whereas Phoenician and Punic are hardly known, except for a few inscriptions, Hebrew presents a very good element of comparison.

Those who classify the Maltese language among the Arabic group derive it either from the Arabic dialect of Palestine and Syria or from that of Northern Africa.

The various views possess a kernel of truth, both because they are based on the historical relation of the Maltese with the people whose language was Phoenician or Punic or Arabic in the form used either in Syria and Palestine or in Northern Africa, and because there are several philological similarities between Maltese and those languages.

Which is the method which could lead us to some probable solution of this debated problem?
is to draw a comparison between the Phoenician and the other languages of the Canaanitic group, especially Hebrew, on one side and the Arabic Language on the other. This comparison will lead us to detect the peculiarities of each language: which are then compared to the present form of the Maltese Language. If Maltese possesses the peculiarities of the Phoenician Language it most clearly belongs to the Canaanitic group of the Semitic Languages; but if on the contrary, the Maltese Language has the same peculiarities of the Arabic Language, then it must be definitely classified among the group of the Arabic Languages.

Phoenician, therefore, or better the languages belonging to the Canaanitic branch of the Semitic tongues, is the first element of our comparison; the other is the Arabic language. With regard to the latter one must note that it has come down to us in two rigorously distinguishable forms: namely the literary or classical form of Arabic, and that form used by the people in ordinary and familiar life or vulgar Arabic. Vulgar Arabic, as we have already stated above, is to-day divided into five principal dialects, of which that spoken in Arabia is the nearest to classical Arabic, which is that of the Coreishite tribe, brought to its perfection by Mahomet and his successors, and held as the sacred language of Islam, because it is the language in which was written the Qur'an and in which it is publicly read in the Mosques. This form of Arabic is the purest because all the other four dialects were more or less mixed with foreign elements. All the Arabic dialects contain essentially the Arabic language, because this has been imposed by the followers of Islam on peoples who already had their own language. When that other language was Semitic the assimilation was much easier: and so nearly not one Semitic language survived after the Islamic invasion; but when the language was foreign the assimilation was more difficult. Thus, in Spain, the Spanish Language survived after the long Islamic invasion, though it bears the scars of its past captivity until the present day.

When Arabic absorbed and assimilated the language previously used by the people, it received from the subjugated language a certain number of new words and forms which are peculiar to each one of the modern Arabic dialects and by which are distinguished from each other. Of the five principal Arabic dialects there are two which have a greater import on our study, namely the vulgar Arabic spoken in Palestine and Syria, and that of Northern Africa. These two forms of Arabic dialects are nearer to the present form of the Maltese Language. History furnishes the fundamental reason of this similarity, because Syria and Palestine are the home of the Canaanitic branch of Semitic languages, and Northern Africa is the place where Punic was born and bred. The Arabic dialects spoken to-day in these regions retain various elements of the previous language, namely Phoenician or Punic, just as the present Maltese language contains pre-Arabic elements, because when the Arabs first occupied these Islands, the Maltese Language was definitely either Phoenician or Punic (16).

The differences between classical Arabic and its various dialects vary with each one of the dialects, especially with regard to the vocabulary and the peculiar grammatical forms and phrases of each dialect: but some of the differences are more or less common to all the dialects, in as much as they follow a general rule, however, in different manner. Thus, it is of common knowledge that the vowels in classical Arabic are only three: A, I, U. In the dialects the vowels become five. The short vowels A and I are often pronounced as short E; and short U often becomes O. Similarly the diphthong AI gives a long E and AU a long O. While therefore in classical Arabic there are only three-

(16) Phoenician and Punic are etymologically one and the same name; but not ethnologically. Phoenician means the inhabitant of Phoenicia. Punic indicates those of Carthage or Carthaginians. The root is pnc, ph being the equivalent of p.
vowels, which may be either long or short: in the various Arabic dialects there are five long and five short vowels. Moreover, the classical Arabic Language jealously preserves all the vowels both in the middle and at the end of the grammatical forms of the words, which are so well determined and fixed, that one can easily read classical Arabic without the aid of the vowel-signs. On the contrary in the various dialects many vowels are omitted both in the middle and at the end of the grammatical forms of the words, and though also in the dialects the vowel-signs may not be used in the writing, it becomes more difficult to read a text without the vowel-signs. Thus in the classical Arabic we write and read: Qataiwa, Qataiwa, Qataiwa etc., these forms become in the dialects: Qate, Qatit, Qtit etc. Needless to add that in the various dialects the vowels are also different. Similarly the case endings, found in the classical Arabic Language, are dropped in the various dialects, in which the case is either known from the function of the noun in the phrase, or by means of prepositions. The case-endings have invariably disappeared in the various dialects. Thus for the various forms of classical Arabic: Kalbun, Kalbin, Kalban, the dialects preserved invariably the single form Kelb.

It is very interesting to note here that, apart from the vocabulary and the peculiar grammatical forms and phrases, when these latter are not mere vowel changes, there is no other difference between the classical Arabic Language and the dialects in the written vowelless text: hence one and the same text may be read either with the vowel-system of the classical language or according to that of the dialects.

Another remark of still greater importance for our purpose is that the vowel-system of the Arabic dialects is much nearer to that of the Hebrew system as found in the Books of the Old Testament, than to that of classical Arabic as found in the Quran. From this fact it follows that the Jewish scholars who fixed the vowel-system of the Bible seem to have "phonographed" the reading of the Bible according to the traditional reading used in the Synagogues which was one and the same with the vowel-system of the common language used by the people of Canaan in that time.

Hence, the difference between the Arabic dialects and the languages of the Canaanitic group of languages becomes lessrecognisable and, consequently, it is not easy to determine whether a given word or form comes from classical Arabic or from a language of the Canaanitic group.

It is a well known fact that the system of writing, known as the Alphabet, is a Semitic invention. Though the common believe that the Alphabet was invented by the Phoenicians was the subject of controversy, as many other similar legends of the past, it remains certain that the names of the letters Alpha, Beta, Gamma etc., as transmitted to us by the Greek classical writers, are unmistakably Semitic and derive from Aleph, Beth, Gimel etc. which are definitely words found in the various languages of the Canaanitic group. Moreover, in Greek mythology the origin of the letters is attributed to Cadmus. The name Cadmus is also Semitic Qadan, and means the Oriental. Therefore, it seems that the letters of the Alphabet were received by the Greeks from the Orientalis, who are certainly the first Semites to make contact with the western people, and who gave the name to the western continent, being Europe a Semitic name Gharab, the Western or Occidental. The same name was in times nearer to us given by the Arabs to the North-Western part of Africa, called Moghreb, the name of place from the same root Gharab. If, therefore, the Phoenicians were not the actual inventors of the letters of the Alphabet, they were certainly those who propagated that art to many other peoples, especially the Greeks and through the Greeks to the other European nations. We can therefore assume that the Phoenician form of the Alphabet is the oldest form of that art of writing. As languages have their
own peculiarities when the Alphabet was accepted and introduced into another language, be it Semitic or Aryan, it had to undergo many changes in order to fit better the nature of the language into which it was introduced. The letters of the Alphabet in Hebrew, for example, are only twenty-two, and they are common to the other languages of the Canaanitic group of languages. When the alphabet was introduced into Arabic new signs were added to express the peculiarities of the Arabic language: thus the sound Ḥeth and Ghain were doubled, and other signs, not found in the Canaanitic group of languages, were introduced such as ẓā and ẓāh, with the result that the Arabic Alphabet, used both in classical Arabic and in the various forms of the Arabic dialects, contains twenty-nine letters. Similarly when the Alphabet was accepted by the Greeks many sounds, proper to the Semitic languages were dropped, and new signs, such as theta, ksi, phi, chi, psi and the vowel-letters, were introduced.

Though each language to-day claims a proper Alphabet, they all derive it from the Phoenician Alphabet, to which each language has either added its proper signs or from which it has subtracted those letters that are of no use in its pronunciation. The most striking difference in the Alphabet between the Semitic and the Aryan languages is the absence of the vowel signs in the form of the Alphabet used by the Semites. In the Phoenician Alphabet there are three letters which, besides being real consonants, perform the function of the vowels, these are Aleph, Yod, and Waw, which afford another proof that the primitive and fundamental vowels are only three A, I and U. The vowel system was introduced into the various Semitic languages at a much later date. Thus Syriac took its vowel-system from the Greeks; whereas the Hebrews and the Arabs, who made various attempts before arriving at the present fix form of a vowel-system, invented their own signs. All the vowel-systems used by the Semites, with the exception of the Ethiopian, are definitely separated from the Alphabet; and generally speaking, with the exception of the sacred books of the Hebrews and the Quran, they are not used except in the grammar and in the text-books for the study of the language. The reason is because the semi-vowel letters A, I and U, are often sufficient for the purpose of reading, and because the grammatical forms in the Semitic languages are so strictly determined and fix that one can easily supplement the missing vowel sounds according to the grammatical form of the words.

The difference in the Alphabet between the Arabic and the Canaanitic group of languages is more difficult, because they are more similar to each other.

I have already mentioned above that the Arabic language has an improved form of Alphabet when compared to the primitive Phoenician Alphabet and comprehends nine letters which are not used in the Canaanitic group of languages. Other differences would have been available, had the languages of the Canaanitic group remained a living language. With the exception of Hebrew, which, as I have already said above, was "phonographed" by the Jewish doctors during the sixth century A.D. and afterwards according to the current reading of the sacred text in the Synagogues, we hardly know anything about the pronunciation of those dead languages. Hence the comparison of those languages with the living Arabic language becomes most difficult.

A peculiar feature of Hebrew, and most probably common to the other languages of the Canaanitic group, is the use of the so called Dagesh lene, by means of which five letters, besides their hard sound, receive a soft one: thus beth has two sounds corresponding to b and v, Gimel has two sounds, hard g and the Greek sound in chi, Daleth has the sound of d and dh, Kaph has the sound k and kh, and finally Phi has also the sound of p and f. It is important to note that while this double sound has been preserved for us only through the Jewish diacritical signs added to the
sacred text, the double sound of the letter S (Sin and Shin) is found in the Alphabet itself because these two letters are enumerated separately in the Alphabet and they are found also in all the other Semitic languages. Notwithstanding these evidences we know that the sign for Sin and Shin is graphically one and the same for both letters, and that it is used as one sign for the numerical value of the letters. This seems to point out that the letter S was originally one, but it was pronounced in two different ways in the various dialects. This view finds an excellent confirmation in the Book of Judges where we read that when the men of Galaad wanted to find whether any man in their ranks was an Ephraimite, “they asked him: Say then, Shibboleth, which is interpreted: an ear of corn (17). But he answered Sibboleth, not being able to express an ear of corn by the same letter. Then presently they took him and killed him in the very passage of the Jordan. And there fell at that time of Ephraim two and forty thousand” (Jud., xii, 6). This fact clearly shows that while the people of Galaad pronounced Sin, those of Ephraim pronounced Shin in the same word; and, therefore, the different sound of this one and the same letter is not etymological, but only phonetical, and varies in the various dialects of one and the same language.

This recalls to us a similar letter which, though etymologically one, is pronounced in two different ways, namely Kaph, which is pronounced either as k or as ch. This fact can easily be observed not only in the Semitic, but also in the Indo-Germanic languages: thus we find in English the word Kirk along with Church, and in German the word Kirche: they are evidently the same word and the letter k is pronounced either as soft Ch or as hard k. Similarly in French we find the words Chien, Chambre, Chemise, which words are also found in Italian, Cane, Camera, Camice: chien and cane are etymologically one

the same word, but while in chien the letter k has a soft sound, in cane the same letter has a hard one. And similarly for the other words. In the same way in the Arabic dialects of Palestine and Syria as well as in that of Northern Africa the word Keib and Kana are pronounced with a hard k, but in the dialect of Iraq they take a soft k, Cheib and Ghan. I am not able to state definitely whether the soft sound of Kaf was in use in the Canaanitic group of languages, but since Kaf is one of the five letters which receive the Dagesh lene, I am inclined to think that such a sound was not unknown to the people of Canaan.

Similarly the letter Gimel or g, like the letter k, may take a twofold sound, either soft or hard. This may be observed also in the Indo-Germanic languages: thus where Greek has only the hard sound of Gamma, the Latin, at least as preserved in the Romance languages, admits also the soft sound of g, often found in Italian, French, Spanish etc. The same can be observed in the Arabic dialects, thus where the Palestinians say ġej, ġidi, the Egyptians say gej, gidi. The letter Gimel is also one of those which admit the Dagesh lene, and I am inclined to think that alongside with the hard sound, the letter Gimel had also the sound of a soft ġ, which has been preserved in the present form of the Arabic dialect spoken to-day in Palestine.

Having examined the principal differences of the Alphabet, as used in the Arabic language and in the languages of the Canaanitic group, it is high time to pass to the Maltese Alphabet.

In the study of the Maltese language the alphabet has always been reckoned among the most difficult problems and a real stumbling block to many systems of writing Maltese. The reason lies in the fact that Maltese is a Semitic tongue and in the first centuries of the Christian era it was written in the Phoenician Alphabet, inherited together with the Phoenician language by the Carthaginians, which also succeeded to the Phoenicians as rulers of
these Islands. A small number of inscriptions, published in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Semiticarum*, found here in Malta, bears witness to the writing of the language of Malta as written in those days in the Phoenician Alphabet. Zellig S. Harris, in his *Grammar of the Phoenician Language*, writes: “By far the largest number of Phoenician inscriptions come from the colonies in the Western Mediterranean; they are more properly called Punic. There are a number of differences between these inscriptions and those from the home country. The Punic script had become more cursive, though it remains true to the Phoenician epigraphic style” (p.2).

During the Arabic domination, the Phoenician Alphabet was replaced by that of the Arabs, and a greater number of Arabic inscriptions was found in Malta, many of which contain texts taken from the *Qoran*, and used as funeral slabs or ornaments.

Since Count Roger the Norman expelled the Arabs from these Islands, Malta was never again subject to any Semitic power and all the Western rulers of the Island used the Latin Alphabet; hence when in recent years the Maltese language was put in writing the Latin Alphabet was invariably used. In 1856 Baron Vincent Azzopardi published anonymously a *Piccolo Dizionario Maltese-Italiano-Inglese*, in the Preface of which he states that the writing of Maltese is according to the Italian Alphabet, like that of another dictionary published in 1853, and further down he states that the Maltese Language may well be written and read in that Alphabet without any pretended difficulty and without the aid of any other alphabet. He, however, does not pretend that his work is perfect and invites other scholars to find a better alphabetical system, provided no other system is used than the Italian alphabet. The reason for this insistence on the Italian alphabet is to be found in the fact that several Maltese writers had previously introduced into the Maltese Alphabet many strange signs in order to express the sounds which are not found in the Italian Alphabet. In fact the same Baron Azzopardi gives a comparative list of no less than fifteen different alphabetical systems proposed by various writers or Maltese Philological Societies. To these fifteen different alphabetical systems are added which were composed after the publication of Baron Azzopardi's Dictionary, such as that of the *Xirka Xemja* (1882) and that of the *Ghaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* (1921). The latter is the most important, not only because it is to-day accepted by nearly all the writers of the Maltese Language, but also because it has been officially accepted and used by the Government. I, therefore, deem it necessary to say a few words on this system, especially with regard to its scientific value. I feel it is my duty to declare that I have no intention of opposing in any way the *Ghaqda* and its splendid work, which I have always admired, and if I pass any remark on its alphabetical system I only do it in a purely academical spirit.

The *Ghaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* held its first meeting on 14 November 1920 and chose for its first President the late Chev. G. Muscat Azzopardi, L.P.; in the same sitting a Sub-Committee of five members was formed having as terms of reference a Report upon the Orthography of the Maltese Language. The Sub-Committee met for seventeen times and prepared a draft of an Alphabet and a Maltese Grammar. The Report on the Maltese Alphabet was printed in 1921 and circulated to all the members. It was discussed in another sitting of the Members of the *Ghaqda*, held on 18 December 1921. The result was that the Alphabet proposed by the Sub-Committee was approved with the exception of two letters, g and u with a hiven upon them, which were replaced by a simple g and w. This new system consists of 29 letters and is strictly phonetic, that is each letter stands for one definite sound. The Parliament of Malta accepted to bear the expenses for the printing of the grammar, and thus the Maltese Grammar of the *Ghaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti*
was published by the Government Printing Press in 1924. In January 1925 appeared the first number of a quarterly review: *Il-Malti*, which has just completed its 20 years of ever progressive existence. Of all the works of the *Ghaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti* we are only concerned here with its alphabetical system or with its orthography.

In the first number of the review *Il-Malti* we find an article-programme written by the President of the *Ghaqda*, the late Chev. G. Muscat Azzopardi. In this programme we read that all those who wish to collaborate in the writing of the review must follow one and the same alphabet, namely that accepted by the *Ghaqda* which is nothing but the Italian Alphabet with the addition of seven letters deemed necessary to express those sounds which are not found in the Italian language, but which are indispensable for the writing of Maltese words: these signs are č, ĝ, h, k, q, ŋ and gh. Thus, this new Alphabet is essentially the Italian Alphabet with the new necessary sounds proper to Maltese, and, like in the Semitic Alphabets, each letter has one definite sound and no sound is expressed with more than one single letter. Though the *Ghain* (gh) may seem an exception, it is understood that the two letters are merely conventional, and must be considered for all purposes as a single letter.

The *Ghaqda* must be congratulated on this first and great achievement. The Alphabet proposed by the *Ghaqda* is, in fact, at least as far as the number of letters is concerned, good enough to express all the essential sounds of the Maltese Language: and, after an experience of a quarter of a century, we may be sure that no important letter has been excluded, nor any superfluous one has been included in that system.

Having secured a basic alphabet for the writing of the Maltese language, let us now pass to compare this alphabet with that of the Canaanitic group of languages on one side and with that of the Arabic language on the other.

The Maltese Alphabet of the *Ghaqda* is based on the Italian Alphabet and consists of twenty-nine letters, five of which are vowels, and the other twenty-four are consonants.

To a scholar of Semitic languages this is not exact. We have seen above that the letters A, I and U are consonants, though they may also perform the function of vowels. This fact is not unknown to those who composed the Alphabet of the *Ghaqda* who also provided a different letter for I and U when they are used as consonants, namely J and W: but they failed to find a sign for A when used as consonant; which sign is still lacking to-day in the Alphabet of the *Ghaqda*.

From this consideration it follows that the consonants of the Maltese alphabet should be twenty-five and not twenty-four, that is we must add to the twenty-four consonants of the *Ghaqda* the A-consonant, *Alif*, *Hamza*.

Among these twenty-four consonants we find that the consonants which can take a soft and a hard sound, namely c and g are enumerated as two different letters: if, therefore, c and g are counted once only, the total number of consonants in the Maltese Alphabet would be twenty-three. Moreover, b and v, p and f, may be considered as one letter, which reduces the number of consonants to twenty-one. S and x must be kept as two letters, because they are counted as such in all the other Semitic languages. And similarly ŋ and ŋ are two different letters and have their correspondent in the other Semitic languages. In fact, the Maltese ŋ is *zain*, and ŋ may correspond either to *sade* or to *samek*, found both in Hebrew and in Arabic.

From this it follows that the letters of the Alphabet are twenty-nine in Arabic, twenty-two in the Canaanitic group of languages, and twenty-one in Maltese. The only letter lacking in Maltese is the emphatic T (Teth): all the other letters are found in the Canaanitic group of languages, as well as in Arabic; but it remains clear that
the Maltese Alphabet is nearer to the Canaanitic group of languages, of which it lacks only one letter, than to the Arabic, which has eight more letters than the Maltese alphabet (18).

But are the letters of the Maltese Alphabet all derived from its Semitic kindred letters? Very recently Prof. G. Aquilina, in his book L-Ilisien Malti, affirmed that the letters p, c and v of the Maltese Alphabet are not derived from its Semitic kindred letter. I beg to differ; because I am convinced that these letters belong to the Maltese Semitic Alphabet; first, because they are found in the Canaanitic group of languages, as we have already seen above; and secondly, because we find Maltese words, not derived from the Romance languages, formed exactly by these letters: this statement can be proved in the most convincing way by the onomatopoeic words, such as čerčer, čaqqaq, čaqqeb, for c; perper, parpar, pespes for p; and for v venven, and, last but not least, the most common affirmative interjunction ira. There is no doubt that none of these words derives from a Romance language, and that they were never pronounced otherwise being their sound the natural imitation of the thing expressed by their meaning.

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The alphabet affords the essential elements of orthography, but it is not orthography. Orthography is the art of writing properly a language. It must have its own fixed rules which are different in the various languages. There are peculiar differences in the Canaanitic group of languages which can easily be distinguished from those of the Arabic language. It is now, therefore, our main concern to find the peculiar differences between the orthography of the Canaanitic group of languages and that of the Arabic and then to enquire whether the Maltese orthography resembles more to the orthography of the Canaanitic group of languages rather than to that of the Arabic language.

I have already said, that all the Semitic Alphabets, with the exception of the Ethiopian, are vowelless. Moreover, the old scribes were not accustomed to write each word of the phrase separately, and in Hebrew we still find five letters which take a different form at the end of the word than at the beginning or in the middle, for the purpose of facilitating the division of a series of letters into words. Finally not all the Semitic languages have a cursive or running writing: thus the Hebrews write each letter separately and by itself, whereas the Arabs use the running writing: thus the greater part of the letters in Arabic have three slightly different forms according to the position of the letter at the beginning, in the middle or at the end of the word. Maltese having discarded the Semitic form of writing and adopted the Latin Alphabet, the differences enumerated above do not at all affect the writing of Maltese.

The grammarians of the Semitic languages, instead of eight or nine parts of speech, commonly admitted by the grammarians of the Indo-Germanic languages, prefer the division of speech into three parts: the name (which comprehends the noun, the adjective, the pronoun and the article), the action, that is the verb, and the particles (prepositions, adverbs, conjunctions and interjunctions). The nouns and the verbs are the two principal parts of speech, written always separately from each other; but the particles, especially when formed only of one or two letters, are often attached to the noun or to the verb that follows. This happens in the Canaanitic group of languages and less frequently in Arabic. The same thing is observed with the article. Other particles and the possessive pronouns are also attached to the end of either nouns or verbs. This blending of words introduces a certain change in the
vowels of the particles and sometimes also of the noun and of the verb: but the consonant letters remain always fixed. Hence, in the vowelless writing the consonant letters are not affected by the addition of particles to the words, whether nouns or verbs. In Maltese we use the Latin Alphabet, in which the vowel-system is part and parcel of the whole system of writing, and, consequently, the addition of particles to the nouns and to the verbs brings about many changes. As this fact is primarily due to the system of writing Maltese in the Latin Alphabet, I do not dwell on this point as it is equally different both from the orthography of the Canaanitic group of languages and from that of the Arabic language. One must note, however, that in the orthography of the Ghaqda a great step forward has been made in order to express the Semitic way of writing also in the Maltese orthography. This improvement is either totally or at least in part unknown to the previous writers of Maltese. The authors, who are responsible for the orthography of the Ghaqda, have certainly followed in the formulation of their rules either Maltese phonetics or perhaps Arabic grammarians; and it would be most unfair to make use of this orthography in order to prove that Maltese is more like Arabic in its orthography than like the Canaanitic group of languages.

This is most clear in the case of Hamza, exclusively peculiar to Arabic, which corresponds to the Aliph-consonant of the other Semitic languages. The grammarians of the Arabic language distinguish two sorts of Hamza: the one is Hamza l-Wasli, and performs the function of uniting the preceding word to the following by suppressing the vowel of the hamza which is then pronounced according to the ending vowel of the previous word; the other is Hamza l-qati', which for grammatical reasons cannot lose its vowel and is always pronounced according to its own vowel, even if the preceding word ends in a vowel.

The authors of the orthography of the Ghaqda seem to have had in view the rules of the Arab grammarians when they fixed their rules for the using of the vowels in Maltese. But they seem to have completely ignored the Hamza l-qati', because according to them in no case can a vowel be followed by another vowel. In fact if a word ends in a vowel and is followed immediately by a word beginning with a vowel, this vowel is either changed in its homogeneous consonant letter that is u into u, and t into j, or it is simply suppressed. These fixed rules exclude from the Maltese writing all kinds of diphthongs, except when the two vowels are really only one long vowel.

All Maltese writers were unaware of the existence of these rules until they were invented for the orthography of the Ghaqda, that is until 1921. Even if these rules, are not an arbitrary imitation of Arabic, and based exclusively on Maltese phonetics, to my mind, they should not be followed at the expense of the original and etymological root of the word. Etymology must prevail over phonetics.

On the whole, therefore, the writing of Maltese, if one ignores the new rules introduced by the Ghaqda, is more simple and akin to the orthography of the Canaanitic group of languages than to Arabic; and this conclusion is coherent with the alphabetical system, which, as we have seen above, is also more similar to the Canaanitic than to the Arabic system.

This conclusion would be further confirmed by the comparison of the Maltese vocabulary, morphology and syntax; but, as I have said at the beginning of this lecture, time does not allow me to deal with these subjects on this present occasion.

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I therefore conclude this lecture by saying that the verdict of history, namely that the inhabitants of these Islands from prehistoric days down to the Arabic invasion in the IX. century A.D. spoke either Phoenician or Punic, is not only correct for that period, but it can still be proved by the present form of the Maltese language. Though
the Arabic domination has certainly left its mark on the Maltese language, it has not deleted the Phoenician and Punic marks of its origin. This fact is very clear, as I think I have already proved, with regard to the Maltese Alphabet and to the Maltese orthography, previous to that introduced by the Ghaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti. I hope to be able to continue one day the same demonstration from the Maltese vocabulary, morphology and syntax.

From all this it follows that those Maltese writers who defend the Phoenician or Punic origin of the Maltese language may have been induced to do so by sentimental reasons, but I am sure that there is something more than sentiment in this opinion. There is also a historical and a philological basis, which is of the utmost importance for the study of comparative philology of the Semitic languages. Hence it is not correct to refer all Maltese philology to Arabic: this leads to transform Maltese into the last and the least important dialect of that language. On the contrary if we try to bring into the limelight what has survived in the present Maltese from its pre-Arabic character, we would improve the knowledge of the Canaanitic branch of languages and give to the Maltese language that importance which is due to it and which perhaps is not enough appreciated neither by many of the Maltese writers nor by the foreign scholars of the Semitic languages.

BOOK REVIEW

ANTON BUTTIGIEG, Mili-Gallarja ta' Zghożti, Damma ta' Poeżiżi, Lux Press, Malta 1945, pp. 124.

Having reviewed the clever poetical works of promising Maltese poets such as Chetcuti and Vassallo, “Scientia” has now the pleasure of giving its verdict on a new publication of yet another promising young poet. Dr. Anton Buttigieg has presented the Maltese reading public with a new literary work which does credit not only to his poetic genius and originality but also to the language, the beauty of which transpires in every poem.

It is a book of 124 pages containing 81 poems. All the poems are classified into four books, each book dealing with the various aspects of all that is true and beautiful as seen by the author from “the Balcony of his Youth”. It would be difficult to give a general impression on the entire work of the writer, for a double reason. First of all, there is no comparison between the first two books and the latter two. “Il-Ghanja Natura” and “Il-Ghanja ta’ Hālti” excel by far the two remaining classifications, both in originality and richness of thought and sentiment. Secondly, as the author himself states in his foreword, the poems are not classified according to the time in which they were written, and consequently, all throughout the book one keeps coming across poems of more or less merit, and richer or poorer experience.

This does not imply that it was not a good idea on the part of the poet to divide his work according to the different aspects of his poetical visions, irrespective of the time when he composed his verses. The poet lives in a complete atmosphere of freedom, and even the indispensable limitation of Time, in whatever aspect it might appear, is unpleasant to the harmony of his poetical mind.

While reading the poetry of Anton Buttigieg the reader cannot but feel proud of the far-reaching strides