Professor J. Aquilina

Malta Public Library; the famous Maltese jurist Sir Adrian Dingli and Michelangelo Refalo, and Monsignor P. Pace. What the Gozitans lack is a larger share in the benefits of civilisation independently of the selfish consideration whether the expenses incurred by the Treasury are balanced or not by the financial returns. More schools, better teachers, and the scrapping of incompetent institutions and staff. Before taking leave of my subject I’ll read you a quotation taken from Frederick Lacroix’s work *Malta and Gozo* (1806-1804) which with some obvious variation could be easily fitted to the present:—

“Habits in Gozo are less dissolute than in Malta, because Gozo was not the residence of the Knights. All that came in immediate contact with the members of the Order, has gradually suffered corruption. Gozo has enjoyed the benefits of distance.”

Well, that is Lacroix’s judgment. While agreeing that the “distance” he speaks of, has had very mixed effects morally and politically, I must admit that in my opinion the Gozitans remain on the whole less affected by the insidious influences that are gradually breaking up family life in Malta today.

A POSSIBLE NORMAN LOANWORD IN MALTESE

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The Maltese vocabulary has always shown itself singularly susceptible to foreign influences, and the number of Sicilian and Italian loanwords now in common use is very great; it is the more surprising, therefore, to discover that the Normans, who as conquerors of Sicily were overlords of Malta for just over a hundred years (roughly, the whole of the twelfth century), have apparently left no trace whatsoever of their language in the Maltese vocabulary. It is, of course, possible to argue that the Normans themselves had very little contact with Malta, and that linguistic borrowings during the Norman period would have been Sicilian rather than Norman in character; none the less, it remains curious that the Normans, whose virile influence completely revolutionized the English language, should not have bequeathed a single word to Maltese.

There is, in fact, one possible vestige of Norman influence on the vocabulary of Maltese. Falzon,* followed by Barbera,§ records a word ‘kuejru, *striscia di cuoio d’aﬃlar su il rasojo*, a strop or thong for razors’; what is presumably the same word is recorded also by Caruana† in the form *quejru*, and by Dessoulav‡ in the form *quejru*. The word is now apparently obsolete, and there is no way of determining its pronunciation; in modern orthography, the form recorded by Falzon and Barbera would be *kuejru*, while Caruana’s form would be *quejru*, the spelling actually used by Dessoulav. It is possible that Caruana’s form is drawn from

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† A. E. Caruana, *Vocabolario della Lingua Maltese* (1903).
A written source in which *qu* represented *kw*; if so, his spelling is misleading. The origin of Dessoulay's form must remain doubtful, since most of his vocabulary is admittedly from Falcon; perhaps he substituted Caruana's form for Falcon's merely for the sake of the Semitic etymology he offers for the word.

Dessoulay derives his form *qwejru* from an Arabic *quwa*; but this derivation involves serious phonological difficulties. Arabic *ā* is normally represented in Maltese by *ā* or *i*; it appears as *aj* or *ej* only when the following consonant is Arabic *j*, Maltese *f*. Thus, Arabic *sā’im* becomes Maltese *sajjem*, Arabic *dā’im* becomes *dejjem*, Arabic *sā’ir* becomes *sejjer*. Since Arabic *quwāra* does not contain the vital *j*, the *ā* should have had its normal development to *ā* or *i*. There is a further difficulty in the ending: Arabic *quwāra* is a feminine noun, while *qwejru* is presumably masculine, so that the equation would presuppose an irregular change of gender and an irregular development of final *-a* to *-u*. In fact no Maltese noun of Semitic origin ends in unstressed *-u*. For these reasons Dessoulay's Arabic etymology for *qwejru* must be rejected.

Since the other Semitic etymon is available, it is necessary to look further afield and seek a Romance etymology; and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the word must be somehow connected with Latin *corium* 'leather'. Yet the exact nature of the connection is not so easy to determine, since no living Romance language or dialect preserves a form of *corium* which will explain Maltese *kwejru* or *qwejru* completely. Barbera quotes a Sicilian *cuoiro* or *cuoîr*, and the latter is certainly very close to the Maltese form;

but it is difficult to explain how Sicilian *oi* can become Maltese *ej*. Spanish *cuero* is also close, but again exact equivalence is lacking.

To parallel the vocalism of Maltese *kwejru* or *qwejru* we must look rather at an intermediate stage between Latin *corium* and Modern French *cuir*. In Gallo-Roman, as in early Italian and Spanish, Latin short *o* standing in an open syllable was 'broken' to *uo*, and later, as in Spanish, the new diphthong was differentiated to *ue*; *r*, when followed by unstressed *i* in hiatus, became palatalized, and later developed an *epenthetic* *i* which combined with the preceding vowel or diphthong. In accordance with these rules, *corium* becomes first *cuoiro* then *cuoîr*; the earlier form, identical with the Sicilian form quoted by Barbera, is entirely prehistoric, and even the later form is normally prehistoric; with the exceptions mentioned below, the earliest French texts record only the next stage *cuir*, which remains into Modern French. The exceptions to the normal development are to be found in the Norman dialect, in which *cu-* before a vowel sometimes became *qu-*; so that *cuemight become *quel-*; and would not then undergo the development to *cuit-*.

Certainly such a form as Norman *queir* is closer to Maltese *kwejru* or *qwejru* than either Sicilian *cuoiro* or Spanish *cuero*; but even this derivation is not without its difficulties, of which the chief is the final *-u*. It is true that there was a prehistoric Old French form *cuoiro* or *cuoîr*, but it is quite out of the question that the final vowel should have survived as late as the twelfth century. In Maltese, *-u* is a common ending for words of Romance origin, and represents Sicilian *-u* or Italian *-o*; but it seems improbable.

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* Opinions differ as to the exact phonetic process; cf. E. F. Sulpit, A Grammar of the Maltese Language (1936) §35 Rem. 4 (iii) and A. Gumeniuk, Tashkim Il-Kibja Maltesa, Istituto Ric. (1950) §292 note. Probably intervocal *j* was replaced by double *ii*, with compensatory shortening to *o* or *ā* according to the nature of the surrounding consonants.

* Dessoulay suggests *corium* as a possible etymology for Arabic *quwa*, but this is phonologically very difficult.

that this ending would have been added to a foreign word which did not already have it. It is, however, possible that Norman *queir had already been 'Sicilianized' to *queiru before it reached Malta; in other words, that it was introduced into Malta, not by the Normans themselves, but by Sicilians who had adopted the word from their Norman overlords and had added the normal Sicilian ending of masculine nouns. Such an indirect borrowing is, indeed, historically more probable than direct borrowing from the Normans.

It cannot be determined with certainty whether the true Maltese form is kwejru or quejru; but the evidence, such as it is, is heavily in favour of kwejru. Falzon's evidence is the earliest by some sixty years, and his vocabulary is usually colloquial rather than literary, so that it is reasonable to conclude that the word was still current in his day; Caruana's spelling can easily be explained as due to the misunderstanding of a written form, and neither Barbera nor Dessoulay has any independent authority. If it is assumed that the true form is kwejru, it is necessary to discuss whether it is likely that Norman qu- would be represented by kw- in Maltese. Unfortunately the development of Latin and Romance initial c- in Maltese has never been thoroughly studied.

In Latin and the Romance languages the k-phoneme (in Latin usually written with c-) has two distinct allophones, a palatal sound before front vowels and a velar sound before back vowels. In Arabic, and presumably in early Maltese, the palatal k and the velar or uvular q belong to different phonemes; in early borrowings, therefore, the Latin and Romance k-phoneme is represented by k before front vowels and by q before back vowels. In modern Maltese however, as in many other dialects of Arabic, the original q-sound has been replaced by the glottal stop, and the

Latin and Romance k-phoneme is therefore represented by k in all contexts. It follows that the representation of the Latin or Romance k-phoneme before a back vowel by q or k in Maltese is a criterion of the date of adoption of a loanword; unfortunately, since it is impossible to determine the date at which q was replaced by the glottal stop in Maltese, the criterion is only relative, not absolute.

It is remarkable that although the initial group qu- is found in a number of Maltese words of Semitic origin like qwit, it is never found in words of Romance origin; Romance qu- is always represented by kw-. This is the more surprising since it would seem that the Romance k-phoneme should be unmistakeably velar when followed by the velar semi-vowel w. It is, however, possible that by a process of dissimilation the k-phoneme in the group kw became palatal; and there is some evidence to support this hypothesis. The palatal quality of the k-phoneme is attested, for instance, by the development of Latin aqua to Old French aue, Modern French eau, or of Latin aquila to French aigle; only a palatal sound can disengage an epenthetic i. If this hypothesis is correct, the Norman-Sicilian *queiru would become kwejru in Maltese irrespective of its date of adoption. In any case, on the assumption that the word passed from Norman into Sicilian and thence into Maltese, it is not necessary to assume that it entered Maltese during the Norman period; it might have lingered in Sicilian until considerably later.

It is perhaps necessary to point out that Norman-Sicilian *queiru need not necessarily have meant 'razor-strop'; it is indeed improbable that razor-strops were known during the Norman period. Etymologically, the word would mean merely 'leather', and the restriction of meaning may well have been associated with its introduction into Maltese. Maltese has its own Semitic word for 'leather', the word gid, and it is very likely that whenever razor-strops were first introduced a new word would be required

* In some dialects of Maltese the original sound is preserved, but this is not relevant to the present discussion.
to express the new idea; if they were introduced from Sicily it is easy to understand that a Sicilian word for 'leather' might be adopted for this purpose.

BOOK REVIEW

LEO BARRINGTON, The Malta Year Book 1956, with two Illustrations and a Pictorial Map of Malta, St. Michael College Publications, pages 296, Price 5s.

It is with pleasure that we present a short review of this annual publication of the Malta Year Book which, notwithstanding the inevitable changes in the life of a nation — changes which occur, one would say, more particularly at the beginning of each year — is an invaluable source of information in many respects.

The book keeps the same method as found in those of the previous three years: in the first part items of general informations are orderly set out; in the second part there are ten special articles on various subjects of interest concerning Malta and its present and past history, finally the third part is a Sports Supplement about last year's results.

The book is a mine of useful informations and indispensable to every cultured citizen.

PROFESSOR S. M. ZARB, O.P.