Charles Savona Ventura

Early Medical Literature in Maltese during the XIX and XX Century

The first decades of the twentieth century found the Maltese enjoying a very low cultural maturity particularly in health matters. The reasons for this were multifactorial and were partly related to the generally low level of education and limited availability of educational material in the vernacular language. At the turn of the twentieth century, the working class population was reported to be seemingly aware of the value of education and suitable facilities for the pursuit of a comprehensive education had been made available. However because of the overpowering circumstances that the majority of the working class population had to yield to, illiteracy was still much more widely prevalent than supposed. During 1911-12, the average daily attendance in the Government Elementary and Infant Schools amounted to 15,657 students. The average daily attendance in the Secondary Schools and Lyceum amounted to only 616 students while the average daily attendance to University courses amounted to 138 students. The figures suggest that only about 4-5% of children attending primary education completed their studies and progressed to a Secondary level. The Maltese language was taught in the primary classes, but English and Italian reading was only commenced at Standard III, when many of the children would have already been withdrawn from the educational system.

In 1921 the Hon. W. Bruce studied the prevalent system of education and pointed out the need for a radical revision and expansion of the primary school curriculum. Political instability in the second decade of the twentieth century postponed a 1924 Education Bill set to reform elementary instruction. Instead of the Education Bill, a Compulsory Attendance Act was passed enforcing school attendance until the age of 12 years. Further efforts to reform and update elementary education were made in the subsequent years, however the educational standards remained generally low. By 1948, 32 per cent of males aged 10 years and over, and 35 per cent of females were completely illiterate. Furthermore, half of the population had only a primary standard of education and over a quarter had only completed or left school at pre-primary level.

The poor standard of education was further complemented by a general dearth of suitable practical literature in the vernacular language resulting from the fossilisation of the development of Maltese orthography engendered in part by the Language Question. In 1887, the Director of Education Dr. A.A. Caruana prompted the return to an Italo-Maltese alphabet and orthography for the Maltese language first proposed by the Società Filologica Maltese in 1843. This set the stage to overcome the political bigotry and academic stagnation that had mitigated strongly against the growth of a Maltese written language, that in turn led to a lack of a reading public and consequently a shortage of suitable Maltese literature.

The establishment of a definitive alphabet and orthography in the late nineteenth century encouraged a number of Maltese publishers to attempt provide publications in the vernacular intended mainly for popular readership. A number of publications in Maltese had predated 1887, but many of these were limited to grammatical, religious or political works. Newspapers in the vernacular similarly restricted their contents to political, religious, and news-event journalism. Little attention had been given to using the printed medium to educate the non-Italian/English literate working-class population, particularly in health matters; though some medical items written in Maltese had appeared in the local newspapers such as Habbar Malti, Is-Sebb and Is-Salib. In the former journal, Fabrizio Borg published a series entitled Is-Saħħa u d-dar (1879)1 and Ghajnuna fil-mard ghal Għarrieda - Fuk l’ Epidemji (1880).2 Borg also published the latter series in Is-Salib (1902) and a series entitled Is-Saħħa ta’ l-ulied in Is-Sebh (1884).3

Dr. Fabrizio Borg can be considered as the first Maltese medical journalist who undertook the initiative to educate the working-class population in health matters using the vernacular language. He was also co-editor with Themistocles Zammit of the medical journal La Rivista Medica published in the period 1890-1892.4 He republished on his own initiative two of the above-mentioned series as booklets entitled Ghajnuna fil-mard ghal Għarrieda - Fuk l’ Epidemji (1880)5 and Kelmentej fuq is-Saħħa ta’ l-ulied (1884)6. These works and his previous series entitled Is-Saħħa u d-dar were subsequently republished in

* A consultant obstetrician-gynaecologist, Dr Charles Savona Ventura has authored several contributions relating to medical history in the Maltese Islands; he has also been much interested in prehistory.
the series *Cotba tal-Moghdija taż-Żmien* (1906-1911). The theme of these publications reflects the particular needs and the main concerns of medical personnel in Malta dealing with child and infant care, environmental health and hygiene, epidemic disease, and emergency treatment.

The publication of suitable Maltese literature material including publications pertaining to health matters received a significant impetus by the initiative taken at the turn of the century by Alfons Maria Galea. During the period 1899 to 1915, Galea published 150 books in the Maltese language in the series *Cotba tal-Moghdija taż-Żmien* dealing with various aspects of literature and instruction. Before Galea's publishing enterprise, authors had to publish their own books when they had the means, so that publications were few and far between. The Government Press had also contributed towards popular medical education, through publications issued from the Department of Health.

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It appears that a significant proportion of the early vernacular medical literature dealt with infant care. The high infant mortality had long preoccupied the medical profession and the attempt at educating the population in aspects of child-care is not surprising. The infant mortality at the time was excessively high averaging 250 per 1000 live births. The rate came down only after the Second World War.\(^{31}\) At the turn of the twentieth century sometime before 1905, the *Pro Infantia Association* was founded in an effort at reducing the high infant mortality. With the object of spreading practical hygienic measures, the Association in 1907 published an informative booklet about child care entitled *It-Trobbija tat-Tfal jew Tuissjiet għall ommijiet* written by Dr. L. Manche and translated into Maltese by Lawyer E.L. Vella. The booklet dealt with marital/pregnancy problems, and infant/child care.\(^{32}\) Other medically-related publications were published by the St. John's Ambulance Brigade. First established in Malta in 1882, it was not until 1909 that the Brigade came into being.
into being thanks to the enthusiasm of Lieutenant William R. Gatt and his committee. The aim of the Brigade was to provide volunteers for Public duty primarily in First Aid and Rescue. It also set out to train individuals, generally through courses, in First Aid matters. In 1916, the Brigade published a book in Maltese entitled L’ Ewwel Ghajnuna lil min imkorri. This dealt with first aid instruction and was a translation by R.J. Sammut of the standard Brigade’s handbook by J. Caulie published in England. The original British edition of this work was prepared by Peter Shepherd in 1878. The Maltese version went through four editions, the second published in 1934 was translated by T. Zammit, while the third and fourth editions (1938-1943) were translated by R.L. Casolani. In anticipation of the advent of the Second World War, G. Galea in 1938 published a first-aid book for use during wartime L-ewwel ghajnuna lil min ikorri fi zmien ta’ ghwerra. This ran in two editions and discussed the first aid management of possible injuries from gas chemical warfare, physical injuries, and burns.

Another significant contributor to the dissemination of health matters to the working-class population was Agostino Levanzin (b. 1872, d.1955). Levanzin joined University to read medicine but became an apothecary after obtaining his BA. He subsequently joined the course of law and qualified a solicitor. He started his journalistic career in 1878. The Maltese version went through four editions, the second published in 1934 was translated by T. Zammit, while the third and fourth editions (1938-1943) were translated by R.L. Casolani. In anticipation of the advent of the Second World War, G. Galea in 1938 published a first-aid book for use during wartime L-ewwel ghajnuna lil min ikorri fi zmien ta’ ghwerra. This ran in two editions and discussed the first aid management of possible injuries from gas chemical warfare, physical injuries, and burns.

Levanzin included frequent items of medical interest written in Maltese suitable for the general population. In the series of 179 issues (September 1908 - February 1912), the newspaper carried informative items dealing with several forms of infectious disease including brucellosis, influenza, typhoid, and plague. In July 1909, he started the publication of a series of articles entitled Ghomja Famusi wherein the experiences of several famous blind individuals including some Maltese personalities were outlined and furthermore wrote a leader entitled Ghal Ghomja. He further summarised the work by Paolo Mantagazza Arte di Campar Vecchi with the title Chif tghix mitt sena; and propagated a dietary regimen by a serial entitled Il Cura ta’ s-Saum based on the articles written by Upton Sinclair in the February-March 1911 issues of the London Magazine. Other published titles included Xgħandu uieħed jaghmel biex naharbu mill-mard tal-corla; Snien Dras u Njeb; and Is-Sahha. His wife Lucija Levanzin Inglott similarly occasionally wrote about health matters in her serial column entitled Għan-Nisa. Levanzin became a very strong proponent of the 40-day dietary regimen for health, publishing in 1911 his series of articles in a booklet entitled Il-Cura ta’ s-Sawm. His interest in dietary measures stimulated his activities after his emigration to America in 1912. There he underwent a fast of 31 days for physiological studies and lectured on total fasting and gave a personal demonstration under strict medical supervision. After returning to Malta from America in 1928, he issued In-Nahla again with the title Chif tghix mitt sena; and included items of medical interest such as dieting, vaccination against smallpox, brucellosis and its transmission by goats, and enteritis. He further published a series of articles criticising Prof. J. E. Debono’s work on diabetes published in 1927. Unlike the educational articles that appeared in In-Nahla, other turn of the century newspapers in the vernacular such as Malta Taghna generally dealt only with medical matters that had news value.

The medical cultural propagation using the Maltese language was taken up by Dr. Guze Bonnici in 1938 as editor of Gabra ta’ Kitba Maltija. Guze Bonnici (b.1907 d.1940) graduated as a doctor from the University of Malta in 1931. His University years were crowned in 1931 by the founding of the Ghaqda tal-Malti (Università) by Bonnici and Ruzzar Briffa. The Gabra ta’ Kitba Maltija series saw the publication of a number of novels written by Maltese authors including il-Qawwa tal-Imħabba (1938) and Helsien (1940) by Guze Bonnici himself. The series was also planned to include plays and poetry. While being primarily a reformative novel, il-Qawwa tal-Imħabba deals also with the medical and social problems of tuberculosis before the availability of adequate therapy. In the preface of the book, Bonnici wrote that: ‘Il-mardar tas-sider hu ġerfa kerha fil-laham ħaj tal-bniedem u jmiss u jherri ghadd ta’ ħjeljaq bla qies. Hu aktar hafif biex jintrikebb milli biex jinhaleb u jitfejjaq. U l-aqwa għorfie, b’heggja u b’sabar qaddisa, ininu u jehdlu taht it-toqol ta’ l-istarrig biex jikxfu xi duwa li twaqqaf din il-herba u tnaqqas il-herba li jizra’ fil-familji.’
During the 1930s the incidence of pulmonary tuberculosis averaged 0.64 per 1000 population with a case fatality rate of about 60%. The sick were nursed at the Connaught Hospital at Mdina that was adapted for pulmonary tuberculosases cases in 1909. The management at this time was mainly supportive or surgical, besides undertaking preventive measures to control spread of infection. Effective therapy was only made available in 1944 after Waksman extracted the antibiotic streptomycin from Streptomyces griseus. Streptomycin was being used in Malta by 1947.53

Guże Bonnici also embarked on attempting popular instruction in the medical field. In 1932 he published a book about child-care entitled It-Trobbijja tat-Tfal. This was divided into three main sections dealing with the pregnant woman and delivery, with infant care, and the final section with child-care.54 This publication was followed by a series of articles Taghlim fuq is-Sahha in the vernacular newspaper Il-Berga published during November 1937 and May 1938. These articles were subsequently in 1939 collected in one publication entitled Il-Gmiel ta' Ġisimma which was the first of the series Ġabra ta' Taghlim which was to include various aspects of knowledge and trades. Il-Gmiel ta' Ġisimma is an anatomical and physiological description of the human body utilising 55 illustrations mostly copied from a standard anatomical book published in Italy [L. Calori: Tavole Anatomiche rappresentanti la struttura del corpo umano, Sassi. Bologna, 1850].55

A contemporary to Guże Bonnici was Juan Mamo (b.1886 d.1941). Born at Luqa, Mamo was well aware with the social inequalities of the rural population. This awareness promoted his wish to initiate a progressive change in Maltese mentality through cultural propagation. Because of his beliefs, Mamo became a staunch follower of Manwel Dimech and contributed regularly to Il-Bandiera tal-Maltin. He also initiated two newspapers - Il-Ljun (1922) and Il-Fqir Malti (1923) - to promote Dimech's teachings. The central theme of Mamo writings was that the Maltese population should realise its backwardness, and should embark on the road of knowledge. To enable the propagation of knowledge, Mamo established a publishing house Dar Ħruġ il-Kotba Meħtiġìn. His first publication in 1930 was the popular socio-political novel Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-'Amerca. The novel combines an educational intention with a secure literary ability, and is based on emigration as a social traditional necessity.56

Mamo subsequent publication in 1934 was an informative semi-scientific booklet entitled Ġabra ta Sigrieti: ta Xebbi is-sharrijet, ta Misteri, ta Curzita, ta Arti u Industria, u riċetti - formoli ta l' Aċbar Fliegja. This book included a number of tricks and remedies for every day problems. The final sections of this book deal with popular medical [remedies no.143-170] and veterinary [no.173-181] medications.57 Mamo's herbal knowledge can be gleaned from an episode in his novel Ulied in-Nanna Venut fl-'Amerca, wherein he describes the purgative effects of the fruit of the Squiring Cucumber.58

In 1939 Mamo published an informative book on midwifery practice Obstetricia Illustrata: Tgharrif fuq it-Twilid bil-Qabla w it-Tabib. This compendium of 64 plates contained more than 172 selected figures of modern and ancient engravers with notes in English and Maltese. The book is divided into two main sections showing illustrations from modern and ancient midwifery. Other sections include an explanation of medical terms and a translation from the Cow & Gate publication Motherhood. The reproductions were taken from a number of 16th to early twentieth century midwifery books. Seven illustrations are labelled as Lithograph Stephani - ex-librix Dr. Nicoioli Gulia. These have been identified as copied from an Italian midwifery book [F. Capuron: Corso teorico-pratico di ostetricia. Della Speranza, Firenze, 1838].59 Contemporary to Mamo's obstetric book was a booklet issued by Nestle' & Anglo Swiss Milk Products Ltd in 1939 Twissijiet Lil-Ommijiet Żghażagh which dealt with child and infant care.60 The Nestle Group started commercial activities in Cottonera around 1900 through ship chandlers and in 1905 a sales office of the newly created Nestle' & Anglo-Swiss Condensed Milk Co. was opened in Valletta. In 1913 a Nestle' subsidiary company was established in Valletta-Marina as Nestle' Milk Co. Ltd.

Further planned midwifery related publications by J. Mamo included: Illustrated Curious Offspring which was to be a book of plates showing 100 curiosities; and Midwifery seen through Illustrations: Eghlim zmien It-Tqala. Is-Sinjali tat-Tqala containing 30 selected fine plates and clear advice to the pregnant woman (64 pages). Other medically related planned publications included It-Tabib tad-Dar, Kif Tfejjaq Tnax-Il Marda, and Klief il-Fxejxex il-Jfejqu. These publications listed in Obstetricia Illustrata were never issued because of the unexpected demise of Juan Mamo in 1941. Mamo was found dead with broken ribs in the limits of Wied Babu, presumably following a fall of the cliffs while searching for medicinal plants.61
The Second World War brought about a tremendous upheaval in the social circumstances of the population with a general improvement in education. The improvements in socio-economic conditions and improvements in medical care resulted in a significant change in the disease spectrum of the population. The pioneering medical publications of the late 19th and early 20th century had brought forward a greater awareness for the need of educating the populace in basic health measures. In addition the increasing educational status of the population increased the potential readership thus creating a greater demand for vernacular medical education. This gave the impetus for the steady publication of popular medical literature in the Maltese language in the form of book, pamphlets, leaflets and journals published by individuals, associations and the Department of Health. The importance of making available simple vernacular educational material is still recognised today and this activity remains an important tool of the Department of Health Promotion.

Notes
7 F. Borg, Is-SaNha u d-Dar. This included ten sections: I. Id-Dar; II. Arja-Ventilittur; III. L' arja u 'n-nifs; IV. Taħsir ieqhor ta' arja; V. Ventilazzjoni; VI. Id-Daww; VII. Ilma, Biqt u Diar; VIII. Cauha u Shana; IX. Umdita; X. Iż-żina tad-diar.
8 F. Borg: Ghajnuna fil-mard ghal gharrieda - Fuk l'Epidemji. Included 15 sections: I. Contusioni; II. Liui, Klih u cosor; III. Feriti; IV. Il-Frux u 's-samta; V. Dhul ta xi Flaġga; VI. Il Għaxu; VII. L' Aplusplus; VIII. II Convulsioni; IX. Telf tan-nifs; X. Telf tad-demmi; XI. Veleni; XII. Rabia tal ċleb; XIII. L' Edpindemja; XIV. II-Tifur; XV. Fl-Marsutti.
9 F. Borg, Kelmtnej fuq is-sahha ta' l-ulied. Included 13 sections: I. Il-Ħlas; II. Il-Ħbies; III. Ir-Rdiq; IV. Il-Ħma; V. Ir-Ħrui; VI. Ir-Rqad; VII. IX-Xadxiha; VIII. Is-Sni; IX. Il-Titqin tal-Jidri; X. Il-loghob u ix-Xoghot; XI. Is-Swat u il Biżà; XII. Il-Taghlim; XIII. Il-Tfıl fil-Mard.
10 P. Cassar, Medical History of Malta, (London 1965), 542.
11 F. Borg, Ghajnuna fil-mard ghal-ghanrleda, (Malta 1880).
12 F. Borg, Kelmtnej fuq is-sahha ta' l-ulied, (Malta 1884).
13 Anonymous, Twissiet fuq il-Mard tal-Kollra mehrujin mill-Gvern biex jixxerdu fost in-nies, (Malta 1885).
14 Anonymous, Fuq il-mard tat-tfıl u kif nilqulu, (Malta 1885).
15 G. Caruana Scicluna, Chielmtnej fuq il-Pesta u chif yekrida, (Malta 1901).
16 A. Critien, Id-dubbien u n-nemus u qghif nikghu ruhna mill-ħsarat taghhom, (Malta 1929).
17 Anonymous, Il-Grieden, (Malta 1936).
19 S.L. Pisani, Ktieb il-Qabla, (Malta 1883). Included 16 sections: I. Fuq il-Ħsejsem u t-Tnisstit; II. Fuq il-Baira; IIA Il-Pelvi; III. Il-djij il-Ħbiela; IV. Fuq il-Tarbia; V. Id-Deni tal-Ħbiela; VI. Fuq il-Hlas; VII. Presentazzjoni tal-Wiċċ; VIII. Presentazzjoni tat-tarjat tal-Warrani; IX. Id-Deni tal-Hlas; X. Wara il-Hlas; XI. Id-Deni ta wara il-Hlas; XII. X'għanda taghmel il-qabla meta iseyyhulha ghal-mara b'ujjig tal-hlas; XIII Hlas teum; XIV. Rimi; XV Moli; XVI. Qasma tas-Sultan.
21 J.S. Galizia, Il-Ċtieb ta' L-Infermier, (Malta 1904). Had a total of 15 chapters: i: Il-gisem; I. L-Infermier; II. Il-Camera tal-Mard; III. Ventilazzjoni; IV. L-indafa tal-mard; V. L-ichel tal-mard; VI. Banji; VII. X'għandu josserva l-Infermier fil-Mard; VIII. Faxxaturi; IX. Sodod u
cmamar special; X. Antisepsi; XI. Operazzjonijiet; XII. Massage; XIII. Emergenzi; jew mard ghal ġharrieda; XIV. Dieta tal-morda.


26 F. Borg, 'Għajnuna fil-mard għal-gharrieda - Fuk l'Epidemji', in Mogħdija taż-Żmien, No.54, (Malta 1906), 33-82.

27 F. Borg, 'Is-Saħħa u d-Dar', in Mogħdija taż-Żmien, No.61, (Malta 1907).

28 F. Borg, 'Is-Saħħa ta' l-ulied', in Mogħdija taż-Żmien, No.110, (Malta 1911), 1-36.

29 L. Manche, 'Mard l-Għajnejn fit-Trabi', in Mogħdija taż-Żmien, No.110, (Malta 1911), 37-40.

30 G. Busuttil, 'Fuk il Mard ta' n-nies ta' s-snajja', in Mogħdija taż-Żmien, No.110, (Malta 1911), 41-80. Included: I. It-Żebbiegha; II. Il-Bajjada; III. Il-Ħajja; IV. Il-Scarpn; V. Il-Cunjaruti; VI. Il-Mastrudaxxi; VII. Il-Hassiela u tal-Mogħdija; VIII. Il-Furnari u l-Għaggiena; IX. Il-Raddedin; X. Ta' t-Tabacc; XI. Is-Sulfarini u il-Giġifogu; XII. In-Nissiegia; XIII. Tal-Miċċer; XIV. Is-Sahra.


32 L. Manche, 'It-Trobbija tat-Tfal jeu Tuissijet għall-ommijiet', (trans.) Dr. E. L. Vella, in Pro Infanta, (Malta 1907). Contained: I. Chelmtejn għal min jkara; II. Ztlek u reguli li ghandom icunu osservati; III. It-tkla; IV. Il-Ħlas; V. Uara il-Ħlas; VI. Irdej naturali jeu ta' l-omm ta' l-imreddgha; VII. Irdej artifiziżali jeu mill-fliżxun mill-animal; VIII. Ichch immhallat; IX. Flama; X. Iliess tat-tarbijja u tat-tfal; XI. Aria, Daul u Ilma; XII. Irkad u Eserċiżju; XIII. Ewdezzjoni tal-Moh u tal-Kalb; XIV. Chelmtejn fuk il cura fid-dar.

La Fin de l'Émigration Maltaise en Algérie: Circonstances et Causes

L’histoire de l’émigration maltaise en Algérie est maintenant sortie de l’oubli. On sait que les Maltais furent parmi les premiers à s’installer à Alger dans les semaines qui suivirent la prise de cette ville par la France, le 5 juillet 1830. Pour l’anecdote, le premier hôtel qui ouvrit alors, s’appela “hôtel de Malte”. On sait aussi que les maltais d’Algérie comptèrent jusqu’à plus de 15 000 ressortissants, constituant la plus importante communauté maltaise au monde après Malte. On sait enfin que cette émigration ne fut pratiquement plus alimentée par de nouvelles arrivées, à la charnière des XIXème et XXème siècle, et ce, au moment où venait d’entrer en vigueur la loi de 1889, attribuant automatiquement la citoyenneté française aux enfants d’étrangers, à laquelle les Maltais adhérèrent en masse, alors que la voie du refus leur était ouverte. Il convient de rechercher dans quelles circonstances, et pour quelles raisons, ce tarissement du flux migratoire vers l’Algérie est intervenu.

Il apparaît rapidement que la fin du XIXème et le tout début du XXème siècle ont été marqués, en Algérie, par une crise anti-juive, suivie d’une crise anticléricale visant l’Église catholique, alors même que, sur le plan économique, l’Algérie, après avoir subi une période récession, connaissait un brillant essor.

La crise anti-juive

Pour comprendre la portée de ce qu’il est convenu d’appeler “la crise anti-juive”, il faudrait revenir à l’époque de la Conquête de l’Algérie, puis suivre l’évolution des différentes composantes des communautés dites “indigènes”, parmi lesquelles figurent les israélites locaux, mais cela nous entraînerait hors du cadre de notre étude.

Pierre Dimech

La Fin de l’Émigration Maltaise en Algérie: Circonstances et Causes

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Pierre Dimech, a lawyer and author of Maltese descent who, with thousands of others like him, was born and raised in Algeria - but had to leave it forcibly in the early 1960s – has been editor of the journal ‘’algerianiste’’, and, together with a group of pieds-noir, he has participated in the University of Malta’s migration studies course at the Gozo Centre in Xewkija.

An English synopsis of Pierre Dimech’s article, together with the Editor’s comments on it, are found on page 112.