

Exploring the Berber Element in Maltese

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Scholars of Maltese have long been aware of the presence of Berber lexical items derived from the common Amazigh substratum of Maghrebine Arabic (*Dārīja*, *Dērja*), a phenomenon hardly surprising in view of the important role that bilingual Berbers played in the Islamic colonization of Sicily between the ninth and eleventh centuries. Through its Arabic and Berber strata Maltese thus has a double relationship with the Afro-Asiatic family of languages. However, current research is revealing Berber elements in Maltese to be more abundant than previously suspected, and the present study reveals the existence of a body of Berber-derived vocabulary apparently unique to Maltese, i.e. not shared by Libyan, Tunisian, Algerian or Moroccan varieties of Maghrebine Arabic.

Before reflecting on the significance of this discovery, it will be useful to revisit the existing evidence of Maltese berberisms shared with North African Arabic.¹

1 A note on the transliteration of Berber and Arabic words and the spelling of Maltese ones. The author's preferred system of Latin transliteration for Arabic is that of Hans Wehr (Wehr 1961), but its full application here is precluded by the fact that one Maltese grapheme is in contradiction with it, viz. Maltese /j/ = [j] not [dʒ]/[ʒ]. Since the orthography of Maltese is both normative and official, the equivalent grapheme in Wehr's system is replaced in comparative examples (but not in transliterated proper nouns) to avoid any possibility of confusion, thus: Wehr's /j/ > /ǧ/ (and /Z/ for Maghrebine Arabic). In Arabic and Berber transliterations /y/, /θ/ and /ð/ are used in preference to Wehr's Arabic graphemes /ǧ/, /t/ and /d/ respectively. Wehr's /s/ and /y/ are retained, on the understanding that they have the same phonemic and phonetic values as Maltese /x/ (of Catalan origin) and /j/ respectively. Modern Maltese orthography is impoverished by its failure to distinguish between [h] (= Wehr's /h/) and [x] (= Wehr's [k]), which are both represented by /h/, and also between [ʃ] (= Wehr's [ʃ]) and [ʒ] (= Wehr's /ǧ/), both represented by /gh/. The second and fourth of these pronunciations until recently could be heard in conservative subdialects of western Gozo. To remedy this problem, in Maltese examples the former velar fricatives will be written respectively h = /x/ for Wehr's /k/, and gh

A brief but milestone study of Berber lexical elements in Maltese was undertaken by the French berberist Georges Colin in an article of 1957. Eighteen years later Joseph Aquilina reviewed this evidence and suggested further possibilities of contact between the two languages, though he assumed that the Berber lexical items of Maltese had all been mediated by vernacular Arabic since, “[t]he presence of a number of words of possible Berber origin does not necessarily imply Berber-speaking individuals; the Berber words could easily have come to Malta with the rest of Maghribi Arabic vocabulary and the smaller group of arabicized words of Latin origin” (Aquilina, “The Berber Element” 297). Much more recently, in 2018, Lameen Souag, of the Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique at the Sorbonne, reviewed in a lengthy article the evidence adduced by Aquilina, and identified a small number of new Berber elements in Maltese. Reference will be made to Souag’s findings throughout the present study, in which I conclude that of the 67 possible lexical links proposed by Aquilina, 36 have proved on etymological examination to be genuine berberisms, and will be examined below. These, to be examined below, are: *ajl*, *bebbux*, *buqexrem*, *dliel*, *eħ(h)e*, *eija*, *farfett*, *fekruna*, *fellus*, *ferkex*, *fidloqqom*, *garni*, *geddum*, *gendus*, *gerżuma*, *gorboğ*, *gremxula*, *ghattuqa*, *ghazzaž*, *ħuxliel*, *karfa*, *karmus*, *lellux*, *leqq*, *maqmaq*, *qajjar*, *qattus*, *quććied/kuććied*, *seff*, *teftef*, *tengħuda*, *tfief*, *werżieq*, *xantkura*, *zogħran*, *žrar*. The remaining 31 have turned out to be Classical or Maghrebine Arabic (*bahbuħa*, *bilħaaqq*, *ćanfar*, *daqs*, *forn*, *ħafur*, *hinn(i)*, *ghammem*, *qorriegħa*, *serduk*, *s(t)aqsa*, *xilla*, *žarbuna*, *želluma*,² *ženbil*); Sicilian (*buda*, *silla/sulla*, *tilliera*);³ doubtful or unlikely on phonetic and/or semantic grounds (the toponyms *Gelmus*, *Għargħur*, *Rewrew*, *Siğġiewi*, *Qattagħni*, *Xnakka*) or similarly to be excluded as universalistic childish or onomatopoeic terms that transcend phylum boundaries (*arra!*, *bexbex/pexpex*, *bumbu*, *mejxu*, *vavu*).⁴

for Wehr’s /ğ/, the latter replaced in this article by /ɣ/. Following Wehr’s transliteration scheme, the hamza occurring at the beginning of all Arabic words starting with a vowel (phonologically absent from Maltese) will not be noted (umm not ‘umm), nor will the silent tā marbūta (tawla not tawlah). Vernacular Arabic [ʔ] (the glottal stop) replacing Classical Arabic qaf [q] is written /ʔ/. The Kabyle voiceless palatal fricative pronounced [ç] is noted using its IPA symbol. Schwa-type slurred vowels, common in North African Arabic, are not distinguished in the phonetic transcription, hence Wargli ggergeb = [ggergeb]. As regards Maltese words, the tonic vowel in open syllables of paroxytones should be taken as long unless marked with a breve (not used in official spelling), cf. tara [ˈta:ra] ‘she sees’ ~ māra [ˈmarɑ] ‘woman’. Long a in polysyllabic oxytones is written /ā/, cf. langās ‘pears’ ~ lābar ‘needles’.

2 Souag (212), by contrast, considers this word to be ultimately Berber.

3 These three terms all occur in Berber languages (Souag 200) but the Maltese terms are phonetically closer to their derivatives in Sicilian.

4 Most of the links proposed by Aquilina in this lexical area (with the exception of *diddi*, see below) are inconclusive. For instance Maltese *mejxu* ‘pussy cat’ may somewhat resemble Kab. *amšiš*, Nef. *amniš*, Shw. *mušš*, Tmz. *amušš*, *mišš*, but these terms in turn recall the Levantine Arabic *mišš(mišš)*

Whatever their mode of entry into Maltese, an examination of these berberisms reveals that they agree most in form and meaning with Berber vernaculars of the Zenati (Taznatit) group, now spoken over a vast but discontinuous area from the Mزاب Valley in central-eastern Algeria to Zuwara on the Libyan coast near the border with Tunisia. The Eastern Zenati dialects, those geographically closest to Sicily and Malta, are the Shilha/Tamazight of southern Tunisia, Nafusi (spoken in the Nafusa Mountains of far north-western Libya)⁵ and the Mazigh of nearby Zuwara, a coastal town. Frustratingly for scholars of Siculo-Arabic and Maltese, these vernaculars are not only among the least perfectly known in the Berber family but among the most arabicized, with large areas of the native lexicon replaced by loanwords.⁶ No dictionary of Mazigh has ever been compiled,⁷ and lexicographical resources for Shilha are far from exhaustive. However, given the close lexical similarity of most varieties of Berber, comparisons with other members of the Zenati group, especially the Wargli (Ouargli, Teggargrent) and Mozabite (Tumzabt) of central-eastern Algeria, are often so illuminating that recourse to their vocabularies for comparative purposes is not a mere *pis aller*.⁸ It has also proved fruitful to compare the berberisms of Maltese with lexical items from other Zenati languages, the Shawiya (Tašawit) of north-eastern Algeria,

and all resemble the Sicilian *musciu* and Italian *miccio*, and in any case M. *mejxu* alternates with *pejxu*. As for M. *nanna* 'grandmother', Mozabite Berber *nanna* means 'grandmother' as well as 'older sister' and 'lady', but there is also Sicilian *nanna*, with the single meaning of 'grandmother' as in Maltese. Regarding the probable source of M. *nanna*, Schuchardt (45-6) rightly pointed out that it was Sicilian, given that Sicilian has both masculine and feminine forms (*nannu*, *nanna*), whereas Berber presents only a feminine noun. Nevertheless, as *nanna* is rare in southern continental Italy, where *nōnna* predominates (see AIS map 17), it is not beyond the realm of possibility that Arabo-Berber influence promoted *nanna* at the expense of *nōnna* in Sicily. Lameen Souag rightly denies the Berber character of most of the above words, but fails to identify certain or probable Amazigh cognates in the cases of *ajl*, *bebbux*, *fidloqqom*, *ghattuqa*, *kosksu*, *kuccied/quccied*, *lellux*, *leqq*, *lillu*, *maqmaq*, *qattus*, *saff*, *teftef*. All in all, this writer has accepted 20 of Aquilina's proposed berberisms, while rejecting the remaining 50.

- 5 Nafusi has not yet been definitely classified, and is considered to belong to Eastern Berber by some linguists, and to the Eastern Zenati group of Northern Berber by others. Ghadamsi has also been classified by certain scholars as a Zenati language.
- 6 Before 2010 there existed only Provotelle 1911, Saada 1965, a very incomplete dictionary of the Tamezret dialect (Ben Mamou 2005) and a questionnaire-based comparative vocabulary of the Chenini, Douiret and Jerba (Oursighen) dialects (Gabsi 2003). A more extensive lexical description for Jerbi is Brugnatelli 2010.
- 7 That Libyan Berber dialects have not attracted researchers is hardly surprising in view of the political situation in the country, and given that under the Ghaddafi regime the teaching and promotion of Berber were declared treasonous 'anti-Arab' activities and punishable with the death penalty.
- 8 Berber has now disappeared from most of Tunisia. The Berberophone region east of Gafsa (Sakket, Sened, Majoura/Tmagurt, Maïch) has now been completely arabicized, with residual Shilha dialects surviving precariously in the Gabès hinterland (Zraoua/Azru, Taoujout and Tamezret near Matmata (Maṭmāṭa) and, further south, Chenini/Šninni and Douiret/Eddwirat, but no longer at Guermassa), as well as in the southern half of the island of Jerba (Ajim, Guellala/Iqellalen, Oursighen, Sedouikech, El-Maï, Sedriane, Mahboubine).

the Shenwa (Haqbayliθ) spoken west of Algiers, and the Riffian Tamazight (Tarifiyt) of northern Morocco.⁹ Positive results have likewise been obtained from vetting of the vocabularies of the Kabyle (Taqbaylit) of Algeria, the Central Atlas Tamazight, Chleuh/Tashelhit (Tašelhiyt, Shilhā, Tasussit) and the Zenaga (Şanhaja, Aznag, Aznaj) of Morocco (all Northern Berber languages), as well as Ghadamsi (*awal n-‘ademas*), an Eastern Berber vernacular of Libya spoken near the southernmost point of Tunisian territory), and even Saharan Tuareg (Tamešeq, Tamahaq) varieties.¹⁰

In addition to the berberisms identified by Colin and Aquilina, the present writer has found some seven dozen more certain links,¹¹ and a small number of possible ones, bringing the total number of Amazigh lexical elements to over 100. Those previously identified will be revisited below, alongside the newer evidence.¹² The Amazigh elements in Maltese fall into two broad etymological categories, the first consisting of Berber words shared by Dērja varieties and hence all arguably transmitted indirectly to Proto-Maltese through Siculo-Arabic. This dual character of the berberisms in Maltese has also been acknowledged by Lameen Souag, who writes (191): “Berber words found in Maltese and shared with North African Arabic thus most probably reflect the Berber-Arabic contact situation in North Africa before the arrival of the Banū Hilāl, while ones not shared with North African Arabic pose a more complex problem”. It is the purpose of the present study to account, in both linguistic and historical terms, for this second and more puzzling lexical contingent.

Maltese berberisms of possible Maghrebine Arabic mediation

Within the broadly Berbero-Maghrebine vocabulary characterizing Maltese are several words denoting animals.¹³ Tunisian, Algerian and Moroccan Berber

9 However, Shenwa, spoken near the Mediterranean coast just west of Algiers, is still poorly resourced.

10 The term *Shilhā* (< Ar. *šilh* ‘bandit’, ‘Berber’) corresponds to Ar. *šelha*, Fr. *chelha*, Moroccan Shilhā Berber *tašelhiyt*, with the Moroccan ethnonym *Chleuh* deriving from *šulūh*, plural of *šilh*). Given that the languages of Southern Tunisia and Central Morocco share the glottonym *Shilhā*, this term will be applied only to the former in the present article. Its Morocco counterpart will be designated ‘Tashelhit’, with the abbreviation ‘Tshl.’.

11 32 indirect berberisms, 47 apparently direct berberisms, and 8 uncertain direct ones.

12 The following examples are culled from the dictionaries cited in the list of references. Also consulted have been the internet resources of the Berber/French dictionaries for Tamazight, Tashelhit and Kabyle now available on the Glosbe website: <https://fr.glosbe.com/kab/fr> For direct information on current Tunisian Arabic usage I am indebted to Dr Zouhir Gabsi (Deakin University, Melbourne).

13 The following abbreviations are used in this article: AA = Algerian Arabic, CA = Classical or Standard Arabic, Ghd. = Ghadamsi, Gk. = Greek, id. = idem ‘the same (meaning)’, Jerb. = Jerbi (Jerban

agenduz, *ayenduz* ‘calf’ (and less commonly ‘ox’ in Northern Morocco) are cognate with M. **gendus** ‘ox, bull’. Its closest link is *gandūz* ‘calf under two years of age’ in Southern Tunisian Arabic and *agenduz* in the Berber of Jerba (*Wortatlas* 286).¹⁴ The Maltese term for a domestic animal too young for breeding, but commonly applied to calves and lambs, is **gellux** (also *qellux*). This word ties up etymologically (in spite of its unstable first radical) with Algerian Arabic ‘*allūš* ‘lamb’ and Jerban Shilha *a’alluš*, Tamazight *a’elluš*, id.¹⁵ ‘Boar’ in Maltese is **ħalluf**, which is ultimately an arabicization of Berber *ilef*. In North Africa this word (*ħellūf*) has established itself as the ordinary term for ‘pig’, whereas Maltese retains the Arabic *ħanzīr*, which survives in Libya as well. Maltese *waddān* ‘mountain goat’ corresponds to Maghrebine Arabic *wadān*, created from the widespread Berber plural form *udaden* (singular *udad*) (DRBC 841). Another Maghribi zoonym in Maltese, **għattuqa** ‘young hen’, matches LA, TA ‘*attuqa*, cf. Jerbi *ta’attugt* ‘chick’, probably a metathetic cognate of Tashelhit *aguṭtu* ‘clucking of a brooding hen’. Maltese *daqquqa* has the four distinct meanings of ‘cuckoo’, ‘hoopoe’, ‘botfly’ and ‘itch’, all of which occur in North Africa, corresponding to Maghrebine Arabic *tekkūk*, cf. Tmz. *aḍekku*, *ṭṭikuk*, Tshl. *dikkuk*, Beni Snous *atkkuk* (Souag 204).

Maltese **fekruna** ‘tortoise’ has cognates in all varieties of Maghrebine Arabic (*fakrūna*, *fakrūn*) except Andalusian; the collective form *fekrun* represents a Berber plural noun, cf. *tifakrunin* (Jerbi), *ifekran* (Tashelhiyt), *ifkran* (Kabyle).¹⁶ Connected with the Jerbi *ašremšan*, Mozabite *azremšala*, *asremšal* (> AA *šeršmāla*), Wargli *tašimšeramt* ‘lizard’ and Tarifiyt *aḥaremšal* ‘skink’ is Maltese **gremxula**, Gozitan *dremxula* ‘lizard’. This reptile name literally means ‘land (i.e. surface) worm’ (Berber root **zrm* ‘worm’, cf. Kabyle *azrem* ‘reptile’ + *ašal* < **akal* ‘land’; DRBC 1003, 350).

Similarly widespread are the cognates of M. **bebbux** ‘snails’ (singular *bebbuxa*, *bebbuxu*), cf. Maghr. *bebbūš*, *babbūš*, *bubbūš*, from Berber *abbebuš* (Jerbi) *ababbušu* (Douiret Shilha), *ababbuš* (Kabyle).¹⁷

Berber, Kab. = Kabyle, LA = Libyan Arabic (Tripolitanian, unless otherwise indicated), Lat. = Latin, M. = Maltese, MA = Moroccan Arabic, Maghr. = Maghrebine Arabic, Maghribi, Mzb. = Mozabite, Nef. = Nefusi, ref. = in reference to, Shil. = Shilha (of Tunisia), Shnw. = Shenwa, Shw. = Shawiya, Sic. = Sicilian (dialect of Italian), Tmz. = Tamazight, Trf. = Tarifiyt, Tshl. = Tashelhit/Tašelhiyt, STA = Southern Tunisian Arabic, TA = Tunisian Arabic, Trg. = Tuareg, WLA = Western Libyan Arabic, Tripolitanian, Wrgl. = Wargli.

14 In Algerian Arabic *gandūz* occurs with the metaphoric meanings of ‘schoolboy’, ‘youngster, kid’.

15 For an interesting discussion of the complex etymology of this word, see Souag 198.

16 *Wortatlas* 378. The respective Berber singular forms are: Jerb. *tifakrunint*, Tshl.Kab. *ifker*. Classical Arabic has *sulāḥfa*, *sulḥafa*, *sahlafa*, cf. Egyptian *ziḥlifa* and Syrian *ziḥlife*.

17 *Wortatlas*, 375. This word was inherited by Sicilian as well (*babbuci*, *babbuci*, *babbaluci*). ‘Snail’ in Classical Arabic is *ḥalazūn*, *bazzāqa*. If M. *bebbux* is ultimately from Latin *babosus* lit. ‘dribbler’,

Maltese **farfett**, Tunisian and Algerian Arabic *fartet̤tu*, Libyan *far̤ūtu* and Moroccan *bufert̤tu* continue a common Berber term for 'butterfly', cf. TA *fartet̤tu* and Shilha *farfat̤tu*, *ferfet̤tu* (phonetically closest to the Maltese), Nefusi *ferfet̤tu*, Ghadamsi *afertetu* (Libya), Kabyle *afertet̤tu*, Tamazight (*a*)*fer̤it̤tu* (Haddadou 59). It is interesting that Tashelhit *ifertittu* and Tuareg *afertet̤ta* have acquired the meaning 'bat', given that the Maltese term for 'bat', *farfett il-lejl*, literally means 'night butterfly'.

The Maltese noun **zogḥràn** 'mosquito larvae, wigglers' has obviously been assimilated to *zogḥir* 'small' and comes from an earlier form **zogḥrāl*, but its cognate is Tunisian Arabic *zoylāl* 'tadpoles', the source being a Berber term, cf. Zenaga *zuylan* 'mosquito larvae', Mozabite, Kabyle *zuylaš* meaning 'tadpoles', whence Algerian Arabic *zyālš* (Aquilina II 1628). Maltese **kuććied**, **quććied** 'nits' is akin to AA *kuššād*, id. ~ Zenaga *gūšad* 'nits', Kab. *takekkuš* 'mite', Jerb. *takešša* 'worm'. The Berber root here is **kš* 'to eat; to itch'; DRBC, 336).

The few Maltese anatomical terms of Berber provenance include the nouns **gerżuma** 'throat' = LA *garżuma*, TA, AA *gerżuma*, MA *gerżuma*, *geržuṭa* ~ Kab. *ageržum*, *ageržuž*, Mzb., Tshl., Tmzgh. *ageržum*, Jerb. *agerguž*, cf. Trg. *agurzai*, Shw. *igerzi* (DRBC, 294).¹⁸ Well established in Berber but probably of ultimate Arabic origin is **dlial** 'long flowing hair; mane' ~ Trf. (Beni Snous) *eḍḍlal*, (Beni Znasen) *aḍlāl* 'plait, tress', Wrgl. *adlal* 'thick thread; pendant', cf. TA (Marazig) *dlāl el-oḥṣān* 'horse's mane', Maghr. *della* 'to hang down', CA *daldala* 'to hang down'.¹⁹

Berberisms referring to nature and agriculture are not common, but include **gūdja** 'hill' = LA (Tripoli) *kudya* 'hill', STA *kudwa* 'heap; small hill', AA *kudya* 'heap; hard ground; clod' and pl. *kwēdi* 'hill' ~ Jerb. *guḍa* 'heap', *guḍa n iżdi* 'sand dune',²⁰ Tmz. *agudiy*, Nef. *guda* 'pile, heap'; **huxlief** 'hay' ~ Shilha (Tamezret) *ḥešlāf* 'twig, sprig', Jerb. *ḥešlaf* 'dry sorghum stem', Tmz. *aḥešlaf* 'twigs, brush'; pl. *ḥešlāfen*, cf. local Arabic *ḥešlēf*, id., from the verb *ḥešlef* meaning 'to rake up' (also figuratively 'to gobble, hoe into') in Southern Tunisian and Eastern Algerian Arabic, and in Mozabite Berber 'to heap up (cut grass, dead leaves); to

it is obvious from a historical standpoint that it would have passed directly from the Vulgar Latin of North Africa into the local Berber (as in the case of L. *cattus* 'cat'), and not into the Arabic introduced there centuries later, as Souag (2018: 194-5) appears to suggest.

18 It is worthy of note here that the *-ž-* of Maltese **gerżuma** is more Berber than Maghribi.

19 That this is a Berber coinage seems confirmed by the fact that the only Arabic cognate identified to date is *mdellale* 'goat whose hair forms tufts that hang down' in Palestinian Arabic (Souag 2018: 193).

20 Jerbi has also borrowed a berberism from the regional Arabic: *elkedweθ* 'heap; low hill' and *elkedweθ n iżdi* 'sand dune' (Brugnatelli, *Essai de dictionnaire jerbi-français* 32).

pullulate'; **karfa** 'chaff' = AA *karfa* ~ Kab. *açerfa* 'siftings'; **tenghuda** 'spurge' (*Euphorbia* sp.) = TA *talayūda*, AA *telyūda* 'black cumin, great pignut' (*Bunium bulbocastanum*) ~ Trg. *taleggit* 'sedge'; **tfief** 'sow thistle' (*Sonchus arvensis*) = STA, AA *tfāf* ~ Wrgl.Kab. *tilfaf*, Shw. *ilfaf*, Trf. *tifāf*, *tilfāf*, *tiffāf* (root **ʔf*, DRBC 422); **xantkura** 'buglewood, ground pine' (*Ajuga iva*) = TA, AA, MA *šendgūra*, *šentgūra* id. ~ Kab.Shw. *šendgura*,²¹ cf.; **garni** 'friar's cowl' (*Arisarum vulgare*) = MA *yerni*, *ayerna* ~ Tam. *agerni*, *ayerni*, Trf. *irni*, id., Kab. *ayerni*, *agerni* 'arum'; **karmus** 'dry fig' = TA, AA *kermūs* 'fig' ~ Wrgl. *ikerbus* 'variety of date tree', Mzb. *akerbuš* (cf. Wrgl. *tikerbas*, Mzb. *takerbušt* 'round date of this tree'), Kab. *akurbuz* 'bad fig'.²² Derived from the same Berber root as *karmus*, i.e. **krbs*, denoting roundness, is **gorboġ** 'pigsty; hovel' = TA *gorbuj* 'mess, junk' ~ Mzb. *takerbušt*, Wrgl. *tikerbas(t)* 'domed room', the Berber word being nearer in meaning to the Maltese than the phonetically close Tunisian Arabic cognate. For the semantic transfer here compare the development of Latin *camera* 'vault of a room' > 'room'.

The small number of Berber-derived nouns referring to material culture and abstract concepts is a noteworthy feature of the Amazigh lexical component of Maltese, such a paucity being generally characteristic of a substratum. Among the few Maghrebine-mediated words in this category are **kosksu** 'couscous' = AA, STA *kusksu*, TA *kusksi* ~ Shil. (Chninni) *kisksu*, Kab. *kuskesu*, *kuskus*, Ghd. Trg. *keskesu*;²³ **fdewxa** 'vermicelli' = AA, MA *fdāweš*, Andalusian Ar. *fidāwiš*, *fidāwš* (> Spanish *fideos*, Catalan *fideus*), id. ~ Kab. *fdawš*; **bażina** 'overcooked, sticky food' = AA *bazīna* 'porridge, gruel' ~ Kab. *abazin*, *tabazint*, Trf. *bazin* 'type of porridge' (Souag 200); **burnuž** 'cow, burnoose' = TA, AA *burnūs* ~ Wrgl.Mzb. Nef.Ghd.Shw. *abernus*, Kab. *abernus*;²⁴ and (of Arabic origin but with Berber semantics) M. **lillu** 'finery' and **lewlu** 'glass beads' = AA, CA *lu'lu* 'pearls' ~ Mzb. *lullu* 'pearl', Ghd. *lullu* 'shiny, pretty things, bling', childish word). As for **madum** 'tile', matching Mozabite *madun*, *badun* 'paving stone' (< Vulgar Latin **matōne*,²⁵ which gave *matōne*, *mattōne* in Italian dialects, and *madon* in Padanian), it is

21 This form is structurally Arabic, but the root is apparently a Berber noun. The suggestion by Colin (1957: 89) of a derivation from Latin *centro cura* (like his deriving **žebbuġ** 'olives' from a Latin **acifolia*; see n. 33) can hardly be taken seriously on structural and semantic grounds.

22 Similarly, the most widespread Berber term for 'fig' (**azar**, **tazart**) can also mean 'jujube berry' or 'grape', according to dialect; see DRBC, 1015. In Kabyle the arabism *karmus* is applied to the prickly pear (*Opuntia*), a Mexican plant of relatively recent introduction to North Africa. It has been claimed (*Wortatlas* 491; Souag 196) that the Berber term is based on Ar. *karm* 'grapevine; orchard', but the *-us*, *-uš* remains unexplained and the native forms in *-rb-* suggest an independent origin. Possibly this is a hybrid noun resulting from the crossing of Amazigh and Arabic forms.

23 From the Berber root **sks* 'to riddle', cf. Tshl.Kab. *seksu* 'strainer for cooking couscous' (DRBC 772); Jerb. *keskes* 'to cook couscous'.

24 From Latin *birrus* 'cloak with a hood, hooded raincoat'.

25 Based on a Mediterranean (Pre-Latin) term **mata* 'clod'.

almost certain that this word, as a Maltese technical term (and hence not a prime candidate for substratal status), was borrowed from Sic. *maduni*, id. (of Padanian origin).²⁶ A lone abstract noun of probable Amazigh origin is M. *huri* ‘bad mood’, which connects, beyond TA, MA *būri* ‘furious tantrum (reputedly typical of black Africans)’ (Vanhoë 160),²⁷ with the Tuareg *huri* ‘fit of nerves’, and seems to be connected with a verb meaning ‘to boil’: Mzb.Wrgl.Nef.Trig. *aber*, cf. Ghd. *ubber* ‘bubbling of boiling water’ (root **br*; DRCB 044).

Maltese adjectives deriving from Berber are also very rare. Only a handful have so far been identified, examples being *furtās* ‘bald’ (cf. Sicilian *furtasu*) = Maghrebine Arabic *furtās*, *ftās* ‘mangy; bald’ ~ Wrgl.Kab.Tmz. *aferḡas*, id.,²⁸ and *čkejken* ‘little, small’, Algerian Arabic *škitun* ‘little child’ ~ Jerb. *ameškun* ‘little; young’, Wrgl. *ikšišen* (pl. of *akšiš*, ‘little; young; child’ DRBC 337), Kab. *iqšišen* (pl. of *aqšiš* ‘boy’).²⁹ Also Berber in origin is the childish term *diddi* ‘sore, painful’, agreeing with TA *diddi*, *diddu*, id. and Mzb. *diddi*.

Verbs constitute by far the largest category of berberisms in Maltese. Those with cognates in North African Arabic are: M. *berbex* ‘to pilfer’ = TA, AA *berbeš* ‘to rummage, ferret’ ~ Mzb. *berbeš*, id.; *bexxaq* ‘to be ajar’ = AA ‘to open; to draw aside’, TA *beššaq* ‘to gape, stare’ ~ Mzb. *γbešša* ‘dawn’; *gerbeb* ‘to roll’

26 The following group of Berber words of Latin origin passed into Maltese, but almost certainly through Maghrebine and Sicilian Arabic, in which they had become well established: *qattus* (= TA *qattūs* ~ Jerb. *yaṭtus*, Ghd. *ageṭtūs*) ‘cat’ (< Lat. *cattus*), *gawwija* ‘seagull’ (< Lat. *gavia*), *fellus* ‘chicken’ (< Lat. *pullus*), *čirc* (= TA *šerš*) ‘misty rain’ (< *circius*, *cērcius* ‘violent Gaulish wind’), *burdlieqa* (= TA *bentlaga*) ‘purslane’ < *portulāca*. As Latin *urnus* ‘oven’ became the general Arabic *furn*, it may be far-fetched to view M. *for*n (pl. *fran* = Ar. *afrān*) as a berberism (cf. Mzb. *furen*). Maltese *knisja* ‘church’ matches Tunisian Arabic *knisiya* (whence Jerb. *leknišyeth*) rather than the Classical Arabic *kanīsa*, ‘church; synagogue’ based on the root *kanasa* ‘to sweep’, hence ‘to gather together, to congregate’, cf. Syriac *kiništa* ‘synagogue’, Hebrew *kneset* ‘assembly’. The Tunisian form represents a crossing of CA *kanīsa* and the similar-sounding but etymologically unrelated Latin *ecclesiā* (< Gk. ἐκκλησία).

27 Were these African connections not so compelling, one would be tempted to derive the Maltese word from the Sicilian *umuri* ‘mood’. Aquilina’s derivation (I, 152) from a supposed local (Maltese) plural of Sicilian *bōria* ‘arrogance, self-conceit’ (and ‘storm’) is unconvincing on both phonological and semantic grounds (this would have produced **borji* in Maltese). Serracino-Ingloft’s alleged Sicilian *buria* (I 214) and plural *burie* (feminine plurals are in *-i* in all varieties of Sicilian) are non-existent.

28 Behnstedt and Woidich (*Wortatlas* 204) claim that this adjective goes back to CA *aftas* ‘snub-nosed’, but apart from the semantic remoteness, the short tonic vowel and the radical *r* would need to be explained in such an etymology. The Berber radicals *frqs* make it difficult to derive the word from regional Arabic, which presents *frqs*, or *fts*, arguably a reduced variant rather than the original form.

29 Berber *ikšišen* > **iškiken*; see also Souag 201-2. Although this is obviously an old word which has produced a family of derivatives in Maltese, Aquilina (I 171) repeats Beaussier’s implausible conjecture of derivation from Spanish, presumably from *chico* (I 343). Apart from the fact that the word occurs too far east to be possibly borrowed from Spanish (never a strong influence on Maltese, even during the so-called Castilian period, 1412-1530), Aquilina’s **chiqueño* (a supposed crossing of *chico* and *pequeño*) is a mere invention: the diminutive of Spanish *chico* is *chiquito*. Nor can Turkish *küçük* ‘little’ be the etymon, on chronological grounds (the earliest Turkish loanwords in Maltese belong to the early modern period) and for circumstantial reasons in regard to Malta (the Turks never ruled Malta, and their linguistic influence was indirect as well as slight).

= TA *gerbe*’, id., STA (Marazig) *garba*’ ‘to clatter, make a noise’ = Wrgl. *grurreb*, Kab. *grureb* ‘to roll’, root **grb* (DRBC, 284);³⁰ **gerfex** ‘to mess up, confuse; to rummage; to bungle’ (< **kerfex* < **ferkex*) = TA *ferkeš* ‘to rummage’, Libyan (and Egyptian) Arabic *farkaš* ‘to dishevel, tousle’ ~ Wrgl. *kkerfes* ‘to be botched’;³¹ **ghaffeg** ‘to crush’ = AA *’affež*, id. ~ Wrgl.Mzb.Trig. *effez* ‘to crunch, to crush with the teeth; to chew’; **ghazzaz**, **ghazzež** ‘to grind one’s teeth’ = AA *yazyaz*, id., also ‘to crunch under the teeth; to squeak (of shoes), MA *yezzež* ‘to gnaw, nibble’ ~ Kab. *ayzaz* ‘grinding of teeth’, Jerb. *iyezzež* ‘to bite (of scorpions)’; DRBC 287; **tertaq** ‘to smash’ = AA, MA *terteq* ‘to pop, explode’ ~ Wrgl. *tterteq* ‘to burst, explode’.

Especially interesting is the number of typically Maltese quadrilateral reduplicative verbs that turn out to be of Berber origin, though this type of formation is equally popular in Arabic. From Berber are: **bexbex** ‘to sprinkle; to dawn’ = AA *bešbeš* ‘to ooze’ ~ Mzb. *bešbeš* ‘to ooze (ref. to the eyes)’; **čerčer** ‘to gad about’ = AA *šeršer*, MA *šeršer* ‘to rush, gush (of flowing/falling water)’ ~ Kab. *šeršer* ‘to splash; to gush noisily (of a stream)’; **dardar** ‘to make murky, muddy; to nauseate’ = TA, AA *derder* ‘to make murky, muddy; to cause diarrhoea’, AA *derd* ‘murky, muddy’ ~ Jerb. *derder* ‘to diffuse (of water, dust)’, Wrgl. *dderder* ‘to be oversaturate, to ooze’, Mzb. *derder* ‘to curdle’, *derdura* ‘dregs’ (DRBC. 105);³² **gemgem** ‘to mutter; to grumble’ = AA *gemgem*, id. ~ Kab. *gemgem* ‘to stammer’; **gerger** ‘to grumble’ = TA ‘to croak’, AA ‘to grumble; to croak’ ~ Jerb. (*ž*)*gerger* ‘to purr’, Mzb. *gerger* ‘to gurgle, rumble’; **magħmagħ** ‘to mumble’ = AA *maymay*, id., TA (Marazig) *maymay* ‘to champ’ (ref. to dogs) ~ Wrgl. *mmaymay*, id.; **teftef** ‘to grope; to pilfer; to dabble’ = TA *teftef* ‘to snack, to eat this and that’, MA ‘to snack; to do general handy work’ ~ Wrgl. *tteftef* ‘to rummage; to dabble’, Mzb. *steftef* ‘to grope; to rummage’, Kab. *teftef* ‘to grope for’; **wahwah** ‘to cry out in pain’ = AA, Mzb. *wehweh*, id.; **werwer** ‘to shock, terrify’ = TA *werwer* ‘to gush (of water)’ ~ Wrgl. *wwerwer* ‘to be turbulent’; **wežwež** ‘to provoke; to sing (of skylarks)’ (Gozitan) = TA, AA *wezwez* ‘to chirp, screech’ (of insects) ~ Jerb. *wezwez* ‘to chirp’; Ghd. *wezwez*, Wrgl. *wwezwez* ‘to tickle, tingle (ref. food)’ (DRBC 891); **žanžan** ‘to buzz, hum; to use/wear for the first time, run in’ = AA *zanzan* ‘to buzz; to ring in the ears’; TA *zanzan* ‘to buzz’; STA. ‘to use/wear for the first time’³³ ~ Wrgl. *zzenzen* ‘to hum (ref. string);

30 The TA, AA synonym *gergeb* ‘to roll (down)’ is from Ar. *karkaba* ‘to throw into disorder, confuse’ (Egyptian usage) but probably contaminated by the Berber synonym.

31 M. *gerfex* (< **ferkex*) is etymologically distinct from *ferkex* (v. infra).

32 Distinct from CA *dardara* ‘to roar, rush (of water); to prattle, chatter’ (Wehr, 277).

33 Discovered in the Stax dialect by Martin Zammit (Zammit 40). The semantic connection between ‘to

to squeak (of shoes)', Mzb.,Kab. *zenzen*, Tmz. *zenzen*, *ženžen* 'to vibrate, hum'.

In the sphere of invariables one finds *ēhe*, *ehhe* 'yes' = AA *iḥ* ~ Jerb. *ihī*, Wrgl. Mzb.Kab. *iḥ*); **hekk** 'like this/that, thus' = TA *hekka*, AA *hakḏa* (a variant suffixing the Arabic demonstrative) ~ Wrgl. *hak* 'here it is; there it is'. An onomatopoeic example is the Maltese exclamation **baḥḥ** 'no more left!', an expression used with children, e.g. *baḥḥ il-helwa/iċ-ċejċa!* 'there are no more sweets!' = TA *baḥḥ el-ḥelwa!* ~ Mzb. *baḥḥ*, id.

Other terms commonly tagged as 'Berber' are in fact North African coinages based on Arabic roots or particular lexical choices by Berber speakers. The classic example is *raḥl*, an etymologically Arabic noun that bears witness to the former Berber presence in the greater Sicilian region. In Classical Arabic it could denote variously a camel saddle, saddlebags, baggage or luggage, but in North African parlance it had acquired the meaning 'stopping place, stopover' (from *raḥala* 'to depart; break camp', Wehr 331). In medieval Sicily and, later Malta, this word denoted a permanent Berber settlement, and became a usual term for 'village' (equivalent to Italian *casale*) in the regional Arabic (cf. M. *rāḥal*). This word survives in the modern Sicilian placenames *Racalmuto* (Sic. *Racalmutu*), *Ragalna*, *Regalbuto* (Sic. *Regarbutu*), *Regaleali*, *Raffadali*.

Dulliegh 'watermelons' (Maghr. *dillē*, Shil. *dullē*) was formed from the verb *dala* 'a 'to stick out one's tongue, to loll; to pamper, spoil' (Wehr 290), the reference being to a fruit considered a delicacy.³⁴ The Maltese verb 'to ask', **s(t)jaqsa** (Maghr. *s(t)jaqsa*, replacing CA *istafḥama*, *istafsara*), is from Ar. *istaqaṣā* 'to inquire, make inquiries', i.e. 'to go far/deeply into a matter', (10th form of *qaṣā*, *qaṣū* 'to go far' (Wehr, 770). A similar form is M. **stieden** 'to invite' < CA *stā'ḏana* 'to ask permission to enter; to take leave', 10th form of *aḏana* 'to permit'. Both the latter terms are typical of North African Arabic and Berber, cf. TA,AA *stēden*, Wrgl. *stāḏen*. A semantically ambivalent Maltese verb is **hēmeż**, which can mean 'to prod, poke' like its Classical Arabic etymon *hamaza*, but which also has the secondary meaning of 'to fasten', which resembles more closely the Wargli arabism *ehmez* 'to sink one's teeth into' (referring to predators) than the Algerian Arabic *hmez* 'to press with the fingers'.

Occasionally Maltese has altered the meaning of a berberism preserved in Maghrebine Arabic. Maltese **żebbuġ** denotes the cultivated olive, but in Algerian

buzz' and 'to use/wear for the first time' at first looks impossible, but both Moroccan and Algerian Arabic provide a solution to the problem: MA **zenzen** 'to sound (a tuning fork)' (Harrell & Sobelman 228; 1966) hence 'to make vibrate, to set going, to start off'); AA 'to begin to bubble (of heated liquids)' (Beaussier, 1274), whence > 'to go into action'. This acceptance of the Berber verb, which so far seems to be restricted to Southern Tunisia and Malta, would have been applied to implements first, and later to clothes.

34 In Arabic **baṭīḥ** (*aḥmar*).

and Moroccan Arabic *zabbūž*, *zanbūž* is the wild olive ('*utm* or *zaytūn al-barrī* in Arabic, and Tunisian Arabic *zeytūn δkar*, lit. 'male, i.e. non-fruited olive').³⁵ The adjective ***zaghžugh*** means 'young' in Maltese, but its Algerian Arabic cognate *zuyzūy* has the meaning 'small, short in stature'. The Berber etymon of this reduplicative form was cognate with Jerb. *agezzul*, *ayezzul*, Mzb. *agzzul*, Wrgl. *aqezzul* 'short in stature', Tmz. *igzul* 'to be short', *aguzzal* 'dwarf', Trg. *ğezzul* 'dwarf' (root **wzl*, DRCB 893).³⁶

Berber influence may also be of an indirect kind. Such is a possibility with the Maltese noun *żokra* 'navel', which is particularly problematic for the etymologist. The same term with an identical meaning occurs in Palestinian, Lebanese and Syrian Arabic (Borg 142), but in Classical Arabic *zokra* means only 'goatskin bottle, water skin; wineskin'.³⁷ To add to the confusion, *zokra* denotes a kind of reed pipe in Tunisian Arabic. It seems that the original meaning of the Arabic word, unrecorded in dictionaries, was 'belly', whence 'goatskin bottle' (the meaning preserved in Marazig *zūkra* (here Arabic *ziqq* 'skin receptacle; wineskin' becoming Maltese *żaqq* 'belly' provides a semantic parallel). From 'belly' to 'navel' (cf. colloquial English *belly button*) there is an easy and natural semantic shift, and similarly Tunisian *zokra* must have referred originally to the bagpipes, with the meaning later narrowed to denote only the reedpipe (usually fashioned from a cow's horn) attached to it. The Maltese word could thus be a Pre-Hilalian colloquialism that was never admitted into literary Arabic, and happened to survive in both Malta and Greater Syria whereas most other Arabic dialects perpetuated reflexes of CA *surra* 'navel'. On the other hand, it is possible that in Proto-Maltese **zokra* still meant 'belly' but developed its present meaning quite independently of Syrian Arabic, and under Berber influence. In this scenario M. *żokra* would be a cognate of Algerian Arabic *zokr* 'tie, tether', derived from a Berber root meaning 'cord', cf. Kabyle *iziker*, Nefusi *zucar* 'cord' (DRBC 955).

35 The Andalusian Arabic cognate *zabbūğ*, *zanbūğ* passed into Portuguese (*zambujo*, *azambuja*, *zambulha*) and Spanish (*acembuche*, *acibuche*, *zambullo*) with its original meaning of 'wild olive' (*Olea europaea* var. *sylvestris* Mill). The etymon of all these forms is an Amazigh word, cf. Trf. Kab. Shw. *azebbuž*, Nef. Gh. *azabbuž* (DRCB, 920); in most Berber languages (including Kabyle) the domestic olive is called *azemmur*, though Tuareg has the probable Latin loan *āliw* (< *olea*). According to Corriente (82) Berber *azebbuž* itself is ultimately from Yemeni Arabic *za'bağ*, *zaybağ*, name of *Olea europaea* L. subsp. *cuspidata* (DC) Ciffieri/*Olea africana* Mill. Apparently in Malta at some stage the local variety of wild olive (*Olea europaea* subsp. *oleaster*) was more common than the cultivated variety. In any case Arabic *zaytūn* 'olives' survives only in the placename *Żejtun*. By contrast, the Italian Sicilian dialect has inherited only *zaituni*, found in the Syracuse region and now restricted in meaning as the referent of *Olea europaea* L. cv. *Nocellara del Belice*; see also Piccitto V, 1255.

36 The semantic development here parallels that of *zghir* 'little, small' > 'young' (cf. *kbir* 'big' > 'old, mature').

37 Cognate with Ugaritic *dkr* (Rajki 197).

Hence from the meaning ‘umbilical cord’, **zakra* could have progressed to the meaning ‘navel’. Significantly perhaps, in most Berber languages the root **mǧ* has produced nouns meaning both ‘navel’ and ‘umbilical cord’: Wargli *tmiǧt*, Shawi *tamiǧ*, Kabyle *timiǧ*, Tamazight *timiǧǧ* (DRBC 480).

This explanation of a semantic transfer may shed some light on the etymological mystery surrounding the Maltese noun *bażwa* ‘hernia’, the more popular synonym of *ftuq*, etymologically parallel to CA *fatq* (> TA *fetq*, MA *fteq*) and *fitāq* (> LA *ftāg*). The word appears as *bazwa* in the Andalusian Arabic vocabulary compiled by Pedro de Alcalá in 1505,³⁸ and must also be the etymon of the Sicilian *básula* ‘hernia’ (Piccitto I, 396).³⁹ No classical or dialectal Arabic referent of ‘hernia’ corresponding to this form has been found, so it is (like *dghajsa* ‘boat’) a rare case of a term shared by European Arabic but not typical of present-day North African Arabic. However, in Algerian and Moroccan Arabic one finds the noun *bzu* with the meanings ‘stopper, plug, tap’ (at Sétif in north-eastern Algeria) and ‘belt buckle’ (Morocco; Lentin, 16). This masculine form would have a natural feminine form **bezwa*. A Berber origin to Maghrebine *bzu* is very probable: the root **bzǧ* ‘to be wet’, ‘to swell’ (DRBC, 067) having generated such forms as Kabyle *ebzeg* ‘to swell’, Tuareg *bezuzi* ‘to be swollen’ (of bellies), Tamazight *abzay* ‘swelling’ and *abezzuy* ‘being puffed up; pride’. Semantically then, a hernia was perceived as a swelling or a plug. Unless the term *bazwa* ‘hernia’ reached Sicily directly from Spain (perhaps as an element of medical jargon), it may have been the original Pre-Hilalian term in North Africa, later replaced by reflexes of CA *fatq* or the maghrebism *b’aǧa* (the usual term in Algeria), a nominalization of the CA verb *ba’aǧa* ‘to slit open (the belly)’.

The case for direct berberisms

The second broad—and historically more interesting—category of Berber elements in Maltese is made up of words which, insofar as they lack Tripolitanian, Tunisian, Algerian or Moroccan Arabic cognates, can be considered directly derived from an Amazigh source. Given the remote origins of Maltese in a variety

38 His *Vocabulista aravigo en letra castellana*, edited by Celestino Schiaparelli in *Vocabulista in arabico/pubblicato per la prima volta sopra un codice della Biblioteca Riccardiana di Firenze da C. Schiaparelli* (Florence: Le Monnier, 1871, p. 37).

39 Interestingly, the usual Sicilian (and Southern Italian) term for ‘hernia’, *guáddara*, is also of Arabic origin, evidently from a Siculo-Arabic **wádra* from **wudra* for CA *udra* ‘scrotal hernia’, id., adapted in Romance as **guáddara*, then hypercorrected as *guáddara* and (where retroflex *ǧd* = *ll*) *guállara*.

of Pre-Hilalian Arabic that developed in Ifriqiya, one can safely admit to this lexical cohort berberisms which appear in Moroccan Arabic (by far the most strongly berberized Maghrebine variety) but are absent from the more easterly Maghribi vernaculars. Another subcategory consists of berberisms which occur in the Arabic of central North Africa semantically altered, whereas Maltese retains the original Berber meanings of these words. Although one must prudentially admit the possibility that Eastern Maghribi cognates of these elements may be discovered in the future, on the face of current evidence Maltese words of apparent direct Berber derivation are strikingly numerous.

Some Maltese month names (especially the obsolete ones) are very likely to be of direct Berber origin, though ultimately Latin:⁴⁰ **Frar** ‘February’ (~ Jerb., Shw., Kab. *frar* ≠ Sic. *frivaru*, *frivvaru*), **Awwissu** ‘August’ (~ Jerb. *awussu* ‘August; dog days’ ≠ Sic. *agustu*, *aústu*, *aguštu*, *aúštu*),⁴¹ **Ktuber** ‘October’ (~ Jerb. *ktuber*, Shw. *ktober*, Mzb. *ṭuber*),⁴² **Imber** ‘November’ (~ Shw. *wanber*, Jerb. *numbír*, Kab. *number*) and **Ċimber** ‘December’ (~ Jerb. *dužamber*, Shw. *žamber*, Kab. *žember*). The Maltese names of January and May could be either Sicilian or Berber: *Jannàr* ~ Jerb.Shw. *yennar* ‘January; New Year’s Day’ but Sic. *jinnaru*, *jennaru*, *innaru*; *Mejju* ~ Jerb. Shw. *mayu* but Sic. *maju*. The remaining Maltese month names, including recent replacements, are unequivocally Sicilian: *Marzu*, *April*, *Ġunju*, *Lulju*, *Settembru*, *Ottubru*, *Novembru*, *Diċembru*.

The Maltese term for ‘ram’, **witwet** (also shortened to **wett**, **wott**) seems to be a reduplicative nominalization of the Berber root **wt* ‘to knock, hit’, cf. Jerb. *ewwet*, Wrgl., *ewet*, Tmz. *wet*, Kab. *ut* (DRCB, 884). **Gidi** ‘kid’ has an irregular [g], unlike Maghrebine Arabic *žedi* (< Ar. *ğadī*), which, if not simply representing an early Berber pronunciation of Arabic *jim* as [g], could be the result of a crossing of the Arabic term with its Berber counterpart, cf. Ghadamsi *yid*, Jerbi *iyið*, Tamazight, Chleuh *iyid*, Tuareg *eyeyd* (DRCB, 664). Maltese **ajl** (pl. *ajul*) ‘porcupine’ (pl. < **ajur*), hitherto unsatisfactorily explained, links plausibly through its evidently metathetic plural form with Kab.Tmz. *aruy*.⁴³

40 ‘August’ is **ayešt** in Tunisian Arabic, though Shilha *awussu* has found its way into southern dialects with the meaning ‘dog days’. The Latin etyma of Berber month names are: *januarius*, *februarius*, *martius*, *aprilis*, *majus*, *junius*, *julius*, *augustus*, *september*, *october*, *november*, *december*.

41 The Berber languages of Algeria and Morocco have instead **yušť** (also used in Moroccan Arabic).

42 Of these, **Awwissu** and **Ktuber** are the most certain, especially since the change -*st-* > -*ss-* and preservation of Latin -*ct-* are untypical of Sicilian and other Italian dialects.

43 Obsolete and now replaced by the italianism **porkuspin**. Souag (194) rejects a Berber origin for this word without citing any North African cognate.

Maltese **żring**, **żronġ** ‘frog’ does not appear to be a cognate of Maghrebine Arabic *jrāna* (< **jrāw*) ‘frog’,⁴⁴ but rather corresponds to a Berber feminine form, cf. Jerb. *tažrant* ‘little frog’ (f. of *ažru*, cf. M. *žoghṛān* above). Presumably an early form **ğrant* (< **džrant*) underwent progressive consonantal assimilation to become **ğranğ*, which was later dissimilated to **zranğ*, whence modern *żronġ* and *żring*.⁴⁵ The antecedents of Maltese **werżieq** ‘cicada’ (whence *werżaq* ‘to shriek’) are less complex, the verb being a direct cognate of *wárzaq* ‘to chatter’ in the dialect of the Marazig, a linguistically arabicized Berber tribe of Southern Tunisia (Boris, 664). Its radicals **wrzq* correspond both to Kabyle *warżigen*, *arzug* ‘cicada’, an amplification of the same onomatopoeic root **rzy* as Kab. *arż*, *arżaz* ‘wasp’ (= Shw.Trf. *irzeżzi*; DRBC, 736), and to Jerbi *waržuž* ‘cicada’ (root **wrż*).

A Berber animal name colloquially applied to humans is M. *balalu* ‘dullard, booby’, which matches the Mozabite childish term *baļaļa* ‘billy goat’ (also figuratively *tiṭṭawin n baļaļa* ‘billy-goat eyes’).

Other Berber-derived nouns in Maltese are **geddum** ‘mandible; snout’ ~ Kab. *aqadum* ‘face; frown’,⁴⁶ cf. Sic. *guddimu* (< **ghiddumu*) ‘morose, gloomy’; **żrar** ‘gravel’ (cf. Mzb.Wrgl. *zrar*, Kab. *ažrar*, id., Nefusi *azrar* ‘river pebble’, Kab. *azru* ‘stone’); **buqexrem** ‘vervain’ ~ Kab. *buqišrem* (Colin 1957: 11) ≠ TA *tronžiyya*, TA,AA *lwiza*;⁴⁷ **kxiemel** ‘bran fragments’ ~ Wrgl. *keškar* ‘fruit peelings’; and **żibeg** ‘beads’ ~ Wrgl. *azbeš*, Tmz. *izbeg*, Tshl. *azbeg* ‘bracelet’ (DRBC 927).⁴⁸ **Fidloqqom** ‘borage’ (≠ TA,AA *buhriž*, AA *Isān eθ-θūr*, *ših lebqūl*) formally matches Kabyle *fudalyem*, *fudelyem* ‘camel’s knee’, possibly a former indigenous name of this plant (cf. the Beni Snous term for ‘borage’, *ilesntfunast*, lit. ‘cow’s

44 Cf. Algerian Arabic *žrān(a)* and Moroccan *žrāna*, a word thought by Schuchardt (28-30) to be of Vulgar Latin origin (**grāna* for *rāna*, with onomatopoeic *g-*, cf. Fr. *grenouille* < **granūcula* for *ranūcula*). If this etymology is correct, the latinism would have been mediated through Arabic (given the palatal *ž*) not Berber, which retained Latin *g* as a velar stop. However, it is equally possible that the initial prosthetic consonant altering *rāna* was due to direct Berber influence, cf. Shilha (Chenini dialect) and Tmz. *ažru*, Mzb. *ağru*, Tshl. *agru* ‘frog’. Serracino-Ingloft (IX 160) connects *żring/żronġ* with the Maghribi term, but the phonetics obviously militate against such an etymology. The unrelated Classical Arabic term for ‘frog’ is *dafda’a*.

45 *Żring* is the standard Maltese term; *żronġ* (clearly the older variant) is now dialectal, and survives in the Cottonera-based variety of Maltese native to the present writer.

46 Because of the semantic distance, the relationship of Jerbi *aqađum* ‘little hoe’ is uncertain. Souag (196), in doubting the Berber origin of this noun, suggests derivation from the Maltese verb *gidem* ‘to bite’. In fact the starting point in such an etymology would have to be *giddem* ‘to bite frequently’, and its substantival derivative would, according to Maltese word building patterns, have to be *giddiem*, a form which already exists with the meaning of ‘biter’. Souag’s proposal moreover does not account for the presence of the word in Sicilian.

47 This word, also found in Maltese (*lwiza*), is modern (late eighteenth century) and derived from the Spanish *hierba luisa*, the original referent being an American species, and the eponym being María Luisa, Princess of Asturias and wife of patron of the Madrid Royal Botanical Garden.

48 A surer etymology than Arabic *sabağ* ‘jade’, even if this word can mean ‘mourning jewelry’ in Algerian Arabic (Aquilina II 1616). The Berber term could itself be a borrowing from Arabic.

tongue’);⁴⁹ Maltese **redus** ‘crottels, globular excrement of sheep, cattle and rabbits’ has no Arabic connections but matches, via the metathetic form **resud* the Shawi *rsuḍ* ‘to stink’, *areṣṣuḍ* ‘stench; rot’, Tamazight *ireṣṣuḍen* ‘stinking, rotten’ and Kabyle *aṛṣeḍ* ‘pus’ (Berber root **rsḍ*); (DRBC 715).

The Maltese adjective **żorr** (< **żurr*) ‘rough, rude; arrogant’ (from Sic. *zurru*) has never been satisfactorily etymologized.⁵⁰ It is undoubtedly a pre-Latin term, since it occurs in dialects of Southern Italy as well as in Sicily. However, it links plausibly on semantic grounds with Kabyle *uzur*, Tarifit *uzzur* ‘to be thick; to be stout, corpulent’, Tamazight *zur*, id., also ‘to be puffed up with pride, to be arrogant’ (root **zwr*, DRBC 1016) and may thus belong to a prehistoric ‘Mediterranean’ linguistic stratum common to both the Italian and North African regions. By contrast a direct Berber cognate is Maltese **xellug** ‘left (side)’ (≠ TA, AA *iṣār*, AA *šmāl*, MA *iṣer*) which corresponds with Shilha *ašelwagīt*, *ašalugīt*, f. *tašalwagīt*, *tašalugīt* (Douiret) ‘left’. A form **šellūg* identical to the Maltese, must once have been current in the Arabic of Jerba, since the modern Jewish Arabic vernacular of the island has the derived adjective *šellūgi* ‘left-handed’ = M. *xellugi*, id. (Vanhove 218). The ancestor of *xellug* arose as a hybrid form, a berberization of Tunisian Arabic *šellū* ‘left’ (from CA *šalla* ‘to wither’, hence ‘the withered/bad side’), cf. Tunisian Arabic *šellawi* ‘left-handed’; the north-eastern Algerian *šelgi* ‘left-handed’ is a similar hybrid. The original **šellūg* apparently replaced and was possibly influenced by a native synonym related to Tuareg *tizalgiwen* ‘left side’, *tahalḡe* ‘left side’, *amezelleg* ‘left-handed’ (root **zlg*; DRBC 963).

The Maltese adjective **qim** is obsolete, but has been fossilized in the toponym *Hägar Qim*, the name of the world-famous megalithic temple complex situated near Qrendi in southern Malta. It is of uncertain origin and interpreted variously as ‘worship stones’ and ‘standing stones’. However, both etymologies are problematic. Maltese *qima* ‘worship’ embodies a local semantic transfer of the Arabic noun *qima* ‘value, price’, and hence cannot be an ancient term. According to Aquilina (II 1116) and Serracino-Ingloft (VII 234-5), *qim* is a reduction of Arabic *qayyim*, but here one would expect **qajjim* in Maltese. Moreover, although the adjective now means ‘upright, perpendicular’ in some varieties of Algerian Arabic, its Arabic meaning is ‘precious, valuable’ and there is no evidence of the same semantic development in Maltese. It is more likely that the second element of this name is the Berber (Wargli, Tamazight) verb *qqim* ‘to sit, to remain’ (DRBC 666), hence ‘sitting/remaining stones’ i.e. ‘ruins’.

49 The current Kabyle term is *ššix n lebqul*, from Algerian Arabic. Souag (193) also notes that none of the present-day Berber terms for ‘borage’ correspond to the Maltese one.

50 See Aquilina II 1627 and Serracino-Ingloft IX 159 for various very tentative suggestions, none of them convincing.

Verbs that are definitely Berber but apparently not also Tripolitanian, Tunisian, Algerian or Moroccan Arabic are **benġel** 'to bruise' ~ Mzb. *benġer*, id.;⁵¹ **čeklem**, **čaqlēm** 'to amble' (cf. Wrgl. *sikel*, id., *tikli* 'walking', DRBC, 350); **feġġ** 'to break through the clouds (in ref. to the sun) ~ Mzb. *faġa* 'to clear up', Ghd. *ufeġ* 'to pass through', cf. MA *feżwa* 'patch of blue sky'; **ferfex** 'to botch, bungle' ~ Mzb. *ferfeš*, id.;⁵² **ferkex** 'to scrape the ground (ref. horses, hens)' ~ MA *ferqeš*, id.,⁵³ Trf., Beni Iznasen *aferquš* 'hoof' (> Moroccan Arabic *ferqeš*, *ferqūš*);⁵⁴ **ferkex** (< **kerfex*) 'to husk'⁵⁵ ~ Mzb. *kerfeš* 'to grate'; **gedwed** 'to gabble' ~ Wrgl. *tagedwit*, *tegedwit* 'desert partridge'; **gergex** 'to spin around, whirl' ~ Mzb. *gergeš* 'to wallow, roll about'; **gerrem** 'to gnaw, nibble' ~ Kab. Tmz. *gerrem*, id., Wrgl. *igerrem* 'to be ravenous' (DRBC 287);⁵⁶ **geżż** 'to milk (a goat)' ~ Wrgl. *eżzeg*, Kab. *zeg*, Tshl. *zeg*, id.; **gireż** 'to whine' (cf. Tmz. *graz* 'to regret', Tshl. *etgreż*, DRBC 293; perh. Mzb. *gerređ* 'to speak ill of'); **lēfaq** 'to sob' ~ Ghd. *elfey* 'to burst noisily, to burst out' (DRBC 426);⁵⁷ **lelleš** 'to glitter; to shine brightly' ~ Mzb. *lelleš*, id.;⁵⁸ **leqq** 'to shine' (Ghd. *luqq*, id.); **qajjar** 'to dry in the sun' ~ Kab. *iqor* 'to be dry', Jerb. *eqqar*, Wrgl. *qqar*, Mzb. *sqar*, Tashelhiyt *yyar* 'to dry out' (vi.);⁵⁹ **rigen** 'to bring to heel, restrain' ~ Kab. *erken* 'to stop abruptly', Trg. *erken* 'to slow down; to bring to a halt', Wrgl. *erken* 'to hit hard at, stun' (DRBC, 699); **seff** 'to suck' ~ Shilhā *seff* 'to suck; to suckle', (Sened) *sisef* 'to suckle', Mzb. *seff* 'to lick', cf. MA *seff* 'to suck';⁶⁰ **xellef** 'to nick; to blunt' ~ Kab. *šellef* 'to graze, skim', *šelef* 'to nick'; **žeġġ** 'to glint, shine; to flit about' ~ Trg. *izzaġ* 'to be clean' (DRBC 930); **žeġhel** 'to caress, fondle'

51 Cf. Ghadamsi *benger* 'to scorch (a sheepskin)'.

52 Maltese and Mozabite disagree slightly against Tunisian and Eastern Algerian Arabic *ferfeš* 'to rummage; to mess up'.

53 The secondary meaning 'to botch, bungle' is probably due to the influence of *ferfex*. The Proto-Maltese form was evidently **ferqex*. Interestingly, however, M. *gerfex* (< **kerfex*) has been assimilated semantically to this *ferkex* (< **ferqex*) and can also mean 'to scratch the ground'. Tamazight *ferkeš* is different in meaning: 'to break (bread)'.

54 Possibly from Latin *furcōsus* 'forked' (Colin 73).

55 A metathetic form to be distinguished from *ferkex* 'to scratch the ground', cf. Beni Iznasen *aferquš* 'hoof' (> Moroccan Arabic *ferqeš*, *ferqūš*), and possibly from Latin *furcōsus* 'forked' (Colin 73); see previous entry.

56 The partial similarity of CA *qarama*, id. is probably only coincidental.

57 The only surviving cognate in Wargli is *tilfay* 'callus, corn', cf. Tmz. *tilfeyt*, both having the original sense of 'eruption'.

58 Wargli presents the noun *lelluš* 'pomegranate flower', and Tunisian and Algerian Arabic have the derivative *lellūša*, a flower name meaning variously 'calendula', 'poppy', 'pomegranate flower' = M. *lelluxa* 'chrysanthemum'.

59 Dessoulavy's attempt to derive this verb from "Graeco-Sicilian *ajru*" ('air', favoured by Souag 197) is quite untenable, given that initial vowels in Romance and Greek borrowings in Maltese are not replaced by *q-* as an initial consonant.

60 CA *saffa* 'to eat dry food (camels etc.); to swallow (a medication)' is semantically distinct, but perhaps genetically related through the Afro-Asiatic family.

~ Wrgl. *zeggel*, id.; **žilem** 'to be twisted' ~ Mzb.Wrgl. *ezlem* 'to twist' (DRBC 964).⁶¹

Reduplicative verbs of this category include **baḥbaḥ** 'to rinse' ~ Wrgl. *bbehbeh* 'to be sodden'; **barbar** 'to whirr' ~ Tshl. *bberber*, Kab. *sberber*, Wrgl. *aber* 'to be boiling' (DRBC 044);⁶² **bekbek** 'to guzzle' ~ Mzb. *bekbek*, *beqbeq* 'to get wet; to gurgle', Wrgl. *bbekbek* 'to be shaken', Trg. *bekbek* 'to be emptied/drained', DRBC 021); **belbel** 'to flutter' ~ Mzb. *bbelbel* 'to dangle', Wrgl. *bbelbel* 'to rear up (ref. flames)', DRBC 026);⁶³ **dekdek** 'to pound, hash' ~ Mzb. *degdeg* 'to crush', cf. MA *degdeg* 'to smash, crush'; **fetfet** 'to scuttle' ~ Mzb. *feḥfeḥ* 'to fidget';⁶⁴ **gesges** 'to shiver' ~ Wrgl. *qqezqez*, id.; **kexkex** 'to cause to shiver; to cause to shudder' ~ Mzb. *keškeš* 'to be itchy', Wrgl. 'to fidget; to have the shakes', cf. MA *keškeš* 'to foam at the mouth' to scare off, drive away';⁶⁵ **leflef** 'to gobble up' ~ Mzb. *leḥleḥ*, id.; **legleg** 'to guzzle, quaff; to wiggle' ~ Mzb. *legleg* 'to clink, knock together; to tremble'; **maqmaq** 'to stutter; to mutter' ~ Trf. *ma'me*, id.; **pespes** 'to whisper' ~ Wrgl. *bbesbes*, id.; **serser** 'to chirp; to chatter, prattle' ~ Mzb. *serser* 'to tinkle, jingle', cf. MA *serser* 'to ring'; **webbel** 'to induce' ~ Mzb. *webben* 'to pester, importune'; **wetwet** 'to chirp, sing' ~ Wrgl. *wwetwet* 'to screech' (of bats); **žafžaf** 'to make a noise' ~ Wrgl. *zfezfe* 'to buzz; to whistle (of the the wind)';⁶⁶ **žegžeg** 'to strut' ~ Tmz. *zeg* 'to mount (a female)' (of rams), Trg. *ezeg* 'to have sex' (root *zg, DRBC 944).⁶⁷

Of non-verbal origin is M. **ejja** (imperative) 'come!' = Jerb. *eyya*, Wrgl. *iyya*, Kab. *eyya* 'come!'. In Maghrebine Arabic *eyya!* (= Arabic *hayyā!*) is the same interjection meaning 'come now! come on!' that recurs in other linguistic areas, cf. Sicilian and Calabrian *èia*, Latin *eja* and Classical Greek *εῖα*, all onomatopoeic forms parallel to the English *hey!* In spite of its crossing of phyllic boundaries, what confirms the Amazigh character of this interjection is that fact that verbalization has occurred in both Berber and Maltese, *eyya* becoming a second person singular imperative with analogical second person plural forms: M. *ejjew!* ~ Jerb. *eyyaθ!* (m.pl.), *eyyameθ!* (fpl.); Kab. *eyya!* *eyyaw!* (Brugnatelli, *Essai*

61 A Maghrebine derivative is AA, TA *zellūma* 'twisted thread' = M. *želluma*, id. CA *zullūma*, *zallūma* 'elephant's trunk' would appear to be unrelated.

62 CA *barbara* is semantically distinct, meaning 'to babble, prattle' in reference to people and crowds.

63 Distinct in meaning are TA *belbel* 'to be in heat; to rave while drunk'; MA *belbel* 'to prattle'.

64 MA *feḥfeḥ* is a variant of *ferfeḥ* 'to flutter' (Harrell & Sobelman 1966: 41).

65 The same verb but semantically more remote is TA *keškeš* 'to crackle' (of heated oil). CA *kaškaša* is also an intransitive verb and semantically distinct ('to flee; to rustle').

66 Cf. the AA, MA noun *zefzaf* 'strong, cold wind'. Possibly related, but semantically distant, is TA *zefzef* 'liar'.

67 These Berber cognates, with their sexual meanings, fit the semantics of the Maltese verb better than Ar. *zakzaka* 'to totter (of a old man)' proposed by Aquilina (II 1605).

de dictionnaire jerbi-français 79; Reesink 340).⁶⁸ Thus Maltese *ejja*, *ejjew* form together with *ġie* ‘to come’ a defective verb, and the same can be said of Jerbi variable *eyya* and *ased*. Also noteworthy is *ċiċċi beqqe!* ‘sit down and be still!’ (an expression used with children), the second element resembling Mozabite *beqqed* ‘to lie flat; to be stuck down; to hang around (pejorative, in reference to persons).’

Another subcategory to be mentioned here are Maltese verbs which do have Maghrebine Arabic cognates, but disagree with them in meaning, while agreeing semantically with their Berber counterparts. This tends to suggest direct borrowings from Berber rather than Maghribi mediation. Examples are ***tfantas*** ‘to sulk’ ~ Mzb. *fenṭez*, id. ≠ AA *fenṭez* ‘to be arrogant’; ***wedwed*** ‘to burn (ref. ears when others are talking about one)’ ~ Mzb. *wedwed* ‘to talk about someone who is absent or unable to hear’ ≠ TA *wedwed* ‘to prattle’; ***żattat*** ‘to insinuate (a thing, oneself)’ ~ Trf. *zeṭṭeṭ* ‘to suborn, bribe; to grant protection to’ ≠ MA *zaṭṭat* ‘to escort’; ***zēher*** ‘to neigh; to hoot’ ~ Jerb. *zahel*, *zennher* ‘to neigh’, Kab. *zeher* ‘to growl (ref. camels); to roar (ref. fire)’ ≠ TA, AA, MA *zher* ‘to roar; to moan’.

To the above verbs a number of less etymologically certain connections may be considered, e.g. ***beżbeż*** ‘to ruffle; to scold’ ~ Wrgl. *ebbeż* ‘to prick, stick in’; ***fellek*** ‘to steer/plough in a jagged manner; to bungle’ ~ Mzb. *felleġ* ‘to smash in; to belt, wallop’, cf. MA *felleq* ‘to hit on the head’; ***geġweġ*** ‘to mutter, mumble; to swarm; to shimmer’⁷⁰ ~ Wrgl. *ggeżgeż* ‘to hum’, cf. MA *geżgeż* ‘to swarm’; ***gerges*** ‘to disappoint’ ~ Wrgl. *ggergez* ‘to crunch under the teeth (gristle, badly cooked food)’; ***sarsar*** ‘to darn’ ~ perhaps Wrgl. *sserser* ‘to click together’; ***teptep*** ‘to blink; to twinkle’ ~ Wrgl. *ṭtebteb* ‘to slap’; ***żadd*** ‘to pack tightly’ ~ Wrgl. *ezd* ‘to be woven’.

The possible existence of Amazigh forms in the grammatical fabric of Maltese is an important question, but one which can be only briefly touched on here. A likely candidate for this category is the Maltese particle ***il-*** (to which personal endings are suffixed) with the meaning ‘for some/a long time’—always in relation to a past state or activity continuing up to the present, e.g. *il(n)i nistenna* ‘I have been waiting for a long time’—and (in the third person masculine singular form) the adverbial *ilu* ‘ago’. Never satisfactorily explained in terms of Arabic,⁷¹ *il-*

68 As noted by Aquilina (I 272) the same phenomenon is also found in Central Calabrian dialects of the zone between Pizzo and Soverato Marina (south of Catanzaro), which have evolved from *ēja* the defective verb *ejare* ‘to get moving, shake a leg, hurry up’ (Rohlf’s 248-9).

69 A possible ancient latinism based on *phantasia*.

70 Also possibly a variant of *gedwed*, above.

71 Aquilina (I 565) and Serracino-Ingloft (IV 241) both thought it connected with the dative marker *il*, hence the above phrase would mean ‘to me I wait’ (not very convincing on semantic grounds, while the unexplained disappearance of initial *l-* remains a problem). However, Serracino-Ingloft dismissed

could well be a reflex of the common Berber verb ‘to be’: *ili* in Wargli, Kabyle, Tamazight, Ghadamsi and many other varieties. This verb can be used as an auxiliary in Berber languages to form a present continuous tense (Tilmatine 107), and significantly, adverbials derived from this verb can indicate completed actions, e.g. Shawiya (NE Algeria) *illin* ‘a moment ago, just now’ (DRBC 451), Jerb. *allin* ‘previously’.

A much more certain etymology is that of the Maltese conjunction **jekk** ‘if’, which differs from CA *in (kāna)*, LA *(ku)kân, ilā, ila, elya*, TA *ida, lukēn*, AA *in, lukēn*, MA *ila, kūn*, and has so far puzzled scholars of Maltese.⁷² The obvious cognate of *jekk* is the Jerbi question marker *iyyak...?* (= Fr. *est-ce que...?*), e.g. *iyyak yemmuθ* ‘is he dead? can he be dead’, semantically not far removed from ‘I want to know if he is dead’ (Brugnatelli, *Essai de dictionnaire jerbi-français* 79).⁷³

An interesting example of a calque on Berber semantics in Maltese and Maghrebin Arabic is the verb *ghamel* (Maghr. ‘*mal*) which as well as meaning ‘to make, do’ can also mean ‘put, place’ (e.g. M. *agħmel il-ktieb fuq il-mejda* ‘put [lit. ‘make’] the book on the table’ (Tilmatine 111), a loan translation of the common Berber verb *eg* (DRBC, 299). Also Amazigh-inspired is the use of the Pre-Hilalian Arabic verb ‘to see’ (*ra’ā*), calquing the Berber prefix *aqli-* (Kab.), *aqqa-* (Trf.) ‘behold’, to form a present continuous tense, e.g. AA *rāni nākul* ‘I’m eating’ (lit. ‘behold me eating’), cf. M. *arani sejjer* ‘I’m going’, lit. ‘behold me going’ (a construction restricted to use with verbal participles in Maltese) (Reesink 345-6; Tilmatine 112).⁷⁴

In summing up the foregoing evidence, it can be stated that the cumulative body of Berber loanwords and Berberoid constructions in Maltese is culturally and historically significant, even if numerically modest, and there is every reason to believe that these elements were more abundant in the past. Contrary to what some historians have argued concerning the supposedly rapid arabicization of the Berbers in Sicily,⁷⁵ this linguistic evidence strongly suggests that Berber

the suggestion by Edmund Sutcliffe (an English Jesuit who wrote a grammar of Maltese published in 1936) that *ili, ilek, ilu* (in the past occasionally given the non-etymological spellings *hili, hilek, hilu*) was a contraction of **hin + lili, lilek, lilu* on the grounds that /h/ does not normally evolve to /h/ in Maltese.

72 Aquilina (l 599) favoured *yakūn* or *in kāna*, both unsatisfactory because of the tonic vowel, as were the various proposals reviewed by Serracino-Inglott (V, 5).

73 Probably cognate with Trg. *ku* (reinforced as *kud, kudīt*), Kab. *kku (kkud)*, Ghd. *kud*; DRBC 339.

74 **Arani niekol* would not, however, be normal in modern Maltese in the sense of ‘I am eating’ (= *qed niekol*).

75 Brett & Fentress (122): “although Berbers played an important part in the conquest of Sicily, Arabic was the chief and ultimately the only language of the colony”; Metcalfe (64): “The force of this [Brett’s] conclusion is supported by the example of Malta, where the language contains barely a trace of Berber and is clearly based on Arabic. Indeed, while both toponymic and anthroponymic evidence

varieties were spoken for a considerable time in Aghlabid Sicily, and possibly in Fatimid and Kalbid Sicily as well.

Historical considerations

A question that naturally arises concerns the immediate source of the berberisms in Maltese. Was this linguistic element already present in the North African Arabic that took root in Sicily in the tenth century, or were these berberisms absorbed in Sicily, given that Berber continued to be spoken (at least for a couple of generations) as a first language, especially in the south of the island? Of pivotal importance, then, are those Maltese berberisms which are not also typical of modern Maghrebine Arabic vernaculars. It would be foolhardy to ignore the possibility that the absence of these Berber elements from North African Arabic today is largely the result of an increased assimilation of Hilalian regional dialects to Classical Arabic and partial relexification. Yet given the size and consistency of the unique Amazigh lexical component of Maltese, it is hard to envisage a significant loss of these Berber-derived words from *all* varieties of Maghrebine Arabic, considering the continued presence of Berber speech on the continent and the vitality of Amazigh influence on particular Dērja dialects, especially those of Morocco.⁷⁶ All the foregoing examples therefore require checking against past and present Maghribi dialect forms, and for this to be done, more abundant and better data on these vernaculars will need to be produced.

If these Berber elements are indeed substratal, we now need to trace their historical trajectory and seek the precise identity of the people who introduced them into the Siculo-Arabic variety that generated Proto-Maltese. The bulk of the Aghlabid troops who invaded and conquered Byzantine Sicily from 817 were Berbers of the Hawwara or Houara tribe (Ar. *Hawwāra*, Berb. *Ihewwarem*,

supports the presence of settlers of Berber stock thinly scattered across the island, this alone is insufficient to establish the use of Berber dialects in place of, or alongside, Arabic." On the other hand Alex Metcalfe rightly states (63): "Evidence for the use of Berber in Sicily is never likely to be in abundance as its main use has been almost exclusively oral. Thus, Berber dialects could never have been in a position to challenge Latin, Greek or Arabic as written languages of the kingdom's palaces and administration." It is moreover true that "Arabic rose to a prominent position on the island because it was Arabic, not the miscellany of Berber dialects, that the conquered Sicilian Christians were adopting alongside their Italo-Greek or Greek dialects." However, the linguistic evidence provided by Maltese proves that the *vernacular* Arabic that was adopted drew on a Berber substratum, at least in southern Sicily.

76 My suspicion is that direct berberisms will be proved in many cases, e.g. M. *belbel* 'to flutter', which matches Mzb. *belbel* 'to dangle', whereas both semantically contradict the STA (Marazig) *belbel* 'to prattle'.

lheggarem) (Ibn Khaldun, *Kitāb al-‘ibar*, 11: 286-7). They originated in the Tripoli region and the Fezzan, and spoke a Zenati dialect similar to that of their western neighbours and confederates in the invasion of Sicily, the Nafusa mountaineers living near in the extreme north-western corner of present-day Libya, and the Nefzawa inhabiting the southern part of modern Tunisia around Gabès and Chott el-Djerid (the Qastiliya and Nefzawa regions, respectively north-west and south-east of the great salt lake).⁷⁷ Two centuries earlier, the superficially christianized Hawwara living under Byzantine rule had, like most other Berber tribes, opposed the invading Arabs from 642 and, even after converting to Islam, frequently rebelled against the Umayyads.

From the 720s the Berber tribes of southern Tunisia and Jebel Nafusa were converted by the Kharijites (*Hawārij*), a sect from the East preaching a puritanical and egalitarian form of Islam that especially appealed to the new Muslims of regions where Donatist ideals had once held sway in the Christian congregations they or their recent forebears had abandoned (Frend 31, 210, 331-2; Prevost 465-68).⁷⁸ These Berbers’ embracing of the Kharijite schism from mainstream Islam moreover underscored widespread resentment among native North Africans about being heavily taxed and generally treated as second-class citizens by the Arab elite whom they served in military and other capacities.⁷⁹ Kharijite southern Tunisia was therefore a major theatre of the Berber rebellion against the Umayyads that broke out in 740. Kairouan was sacked in 750 and it was not until a new Arab dynasty was established in northern Tunisia in 800, with Ibrahim ibn Aghlab as its first emir, that Berber resistance was finally quelled (Knapp 39-40).

In the mid-eighth century the Hawwara had embraced the Ibadi sect of Islam preached by missionaries from Basra. Ibadism had developed as a more moderate form of Kharijism, which it eventually absorbed throughout North Africa.⁸⁰ The Hawwara converts to Ibadism founded in 757 a Libyan-based imamate which lasted until its defeat in 772 by the Abbasids who had succeeded the Umayyads in 750. Under the leadership of ‘Abd ar-Rahmān ibn Rustam, the Hawwara Ibadites (*Ibādīyya*) then migrated far to the west in 777 and founded a new state based at Tahert (Ar. *Tāhart*, *Tiārit*) located in the Tell Atlas south-east of Oran and south-

77 From the late 11th century the Hawwara mixed with the Arabian Banu Sulaym and were eventually arabicized in speech.

78 The Djerid (Ar. *Jarīd*) or Qastiliya (*Qasfīliya*) region corresponds to the modern Tunisia governorate of Tozeur; the Nefzawa (*Nafzāwa*) is now coterminous with the Kébili (*Gbilli*) governorate.

79 “ces Berbères font un complexe de vaincus: lésés dans leur droit au butin, autant que dans leur honneur, ils cherchent à retrouver dans leurs principes religieux des raisons à la révolte et à l’insoumission: leur kharédjisme les y aide” (Louis 111; Chiarelli 5-6).

80 See especially Lewicki 1971.

west of Algiers. This Rustamid dynasty rapidly expanded its rule eastwards over a vast territory including central Algeria south of the Aurès Mountains, southern Tunisia and Tripolitania, thus uniting politically the Hawwara with the Nefzawa leadership, who also converted to Ibadism. After flourishing for over a century the Rustamid state was conquered and destroyed by the Aghlabids' Fatimid successors in 909.

What Kharijites and Ibadites had in common, and what distinguished the Rustamid rulers was their cosmopolitan outlook and their pragmatic tolerance of other forms of Islam, as well as of Christians and Jews (Entelis 14; Prevost 465). In this they contrasted with their Aghlabid neighbours, who periodically persecuted Christians and dissident Muslims, and whose social outlook was theocratic whereas the Rustamid state embraced many of the values of a meritocracy. In Byzacena (central Tunisia) and northern Tunisia Christianity gradually retreated from the inland regions under the pressure of Sunni Muslim proselytism, and African Christians took refuge in the coastal cities from which they could, and periodically did, migrate to Christian Europe, constantly thinning the ranks of native believers. The savage devastation and depopulation of Byzantine Malta by an Aghlabid force in 869-870 needs to be seen in the context of the rising Maliki movement in Aghlabid Tunisia and increasing aggression towards Christendom.

The Muslim conquest of Sicily was made possible by a temporary truce which the Rustamid head imam 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Rustam brokered in 811 between the Aghlabids and those Hawwara living in the south of their realm. Ibn Khaldun relates that six years later, when the Hawwara under their leader Zawāwa ibn Ni'ma al-Khalifa spearheaded the Aghlabid invasion of Sicily, they were joined by other Ibadite subjects of the Rustamids belonging to the Mazata of the Djerid, the Miknasa and Nefzawa of southern Tunisia and Tripolitania, and other Libyan Berbers (the Meziza, Lamaya and Madyuna), as well as the Kumiya of western Algeria and the Miknasa, Malila and Sanhaja of Morocco (Ibn Khaldun 286-7; Chiarelli 129). All of these groups spoke dialects of the Zenati group, and in Sicily became sedentary, since there was no necessity for a nomadic or even semi-nomadic way of life in a largely urbanized European region.⁸¹ Indeed Arabo-Berber settlement in both the towns and countryside of the island was facilitated by the fact that by the ninth century Sicily had suffered a certain amount of depopulation due to plagues (Chiarelli 162-4). Leonard Chiarelli (148) notes that the Berbers

81 Berber tribes of the kind that migrated to Sicily were semi-nomadic (rather than real nomads like the Saharan Tuareg), practicing agriculture when possible, and roaming and living off their herds according to the dictates of the weather. See Louis 1972: 110, n. 15.

came to the island from the region known today as Libya and southern Tunisia, and not only as warriors but as settlers, following the pattern of the Berber migrations and settlement of the time. After the initial migration of 212/827, many Berbers came apparently not as fighters of the Holy War, but as organized tribal units of several hundred families linked agnatically (a kinship system which ascribes importance only to relationship through males) into clans. It seems that a steady stream of immigrants fled the famines, civil wars and religious strife that afflicted North Africa from the 4th/9th to the late 6th/12th century.

The Berbers' Sicilian capital was Agrigento/Girgenti, which they called *Gergent*, its contemporary Arabic names being *Jirjint* and *Kirkint* for the Arabs and for the Berbers respectively. The city was taken in 828 and dominated in the following century by the Shiite Kutama from Lesser Kabylia in north-eastern Algeria. It has long been suggested that most of the Berbers who colonized Sicily took up residence in the southern half of the island, especially in the zone between Mazara and Licata (Varvaro 83-4). However, while this is largely true, there is now evidence from names in contemporary registers that Berbers were also well represented in Palermo and other northern districts (Metcalf 63-4). Toponymic evidence alone points to settlements of the Sanhaja near Salemi; of the Madyuna near Castelvetrano (Trapani province); of the Andara, Kerkuda and Wezdaja (branches of the Hawwara tribe) near Sciacca, Agrigento and Sant'Angelo Muxaro respectively; of the Miknasa near Racalmuto (Agrigento province); of the Meziza near Landro (Caltanissetta province); of the Zenata near Corleone and Mongitore; of the Kutama near Vicari; of the Egyptian Maghagha near Mortilli (Palermo province); of the Malilla near Syracuse; of the Lamaya near Mineo; and of the Kumiya near Messina (Amari 35-7). Tahertina, a long-extinct village near Cardinale north of Noto Antica, was named after the Rustamite capital of Tahert (Chiarelli 152). The names of the two now extinct villages of Raḥl Fuṭṭāsina near Corleone and Fetanasino, in Val di Noto between Ragusa and Enna, bear witness to Ibadite Zenata settlers from Fatnassa/Faṭanāsa in the Nefzawa (Maurici 80-81).⁸² Moreover, *nisba* names in twelfth-century Norman registers indicate origins in the Mزاب Valley of central Algeria (*al-Rīṭ* 'of the Mozabite Righa tribe'), the Nefzawa and Jebel Nafusa (*al-Maklāti* 'of the Maklata tribe'), all regions whose Amazigh speech yields frequent agreements with Berber lexical elements in Maltese (Amari 55).

82 This Faṭanāsa is probably to be identified with the modern town of that name (*Fatnassa* in French) situated on an eastern promontory of Chott el-Djerid, though there was also a place with the same name located north of Gabès (Chiarelli 155).

It has been noted that some of the Hawwara and other Berbers of Tripolitania who invaded Spain for the Arabs in the eighth century were Christian (Glick 30). However, given the anti-Christian climate in Aghlabid Tunisia, it would be no doubt rash to suppose that there were many professing Christians among the Berbers who attacked Byzantine Sicily a century later. It may therefore be supposed that the Berber settlements in the island bearing the names of particular tribes were the achievements of military men who had identified themselves—outwardly at least—with the cause of Islam.

Nevertheless, what is potentially significant for Maltese history is the likelihood that among the numerous Ibadite settlers in Sicily were groups of North African Christians who spoke either Berber or Romance, or both. While the rate of apostasy to Islam was growing rapidly throughout the Maghreb, Christians had generally fared much better in Rustamid territory than in Aghlabid northern and central Tunisia. There were still churches with Romance-speaking congregations in Tripolitania as late as the mid-eleventh century (See Paribeni), and the native Christian communities of Gabès (Tacapés), the Nefzawa, Djerid (Qastiliya) and Gafsa (Capsa) survived under Ibadite protection until the thirteenth century (Prevost 483).⁸³ There were also many Berber Christians living in Tahert, the Rustamid capital (Prevost 466).⁸⁴ Some were from Majjana in the Aurès; others members of a Berber tribe of Cyrenaican origin known as Barqajāna, and widely engaged in trade in the cities and towns then under Rustamid rule (Chiarelli 151; See Ben Hamadi).⁸⁵ It is possible that some of the latter, described by a contemporary Arab chronicler as '*Ajam* 'speakers of gibberish; non-Arab', were *Afāriqa* or *Rūm*, i.e. speakers of a Romance dialect (Lewicki, *Une langue romane* 424-5; Agius 95). Although the Barqajana were in the process of converting to Ibadism, there must have been among them families and individuals who remained loyal to their ancestral faith, given that the term *barqaġāna* was once current in the Maghreb as a generic term for 'Christian' (Benhima 318; See also Ben Hamadi).

The Barqajana were numerous and prominent enough in Muslim Sicily to

83 As regards Southern Tunisia after the Arab conquest, it is broadly true that the Berber- or Romance-speaking sedentary populations of the oasis towns remained Christian, while the semi-nomadic and superficially Donatist but half-pagan Berbers who had opposed both Vandal and Byzantine rule quickly succumbed to Islamic proselytism.

84 Majjana was situated in present-day Tunisia, near the Algerian border due west of Kairouan, and north-east of Tébessa (ancient Theveste), another Christian stronghold for some time after the advent of Islam. Relations between Christians and Ibadites in Tahert were so positive that around the year 900 a number of prominent local Christians were members of the Imam's council (Arbi Nsiri 3).

85 Leonard Chiarelli (136 n. 78, 81) has assumed that the name *Majjāna* was simply a scribal error for *Barqajāna*, but this strikes me as far from certain in view of the persistence of Christianity in the Aurès at the time of the Rustamid imamate.

allow Ibn Ḥawqal to make the exaggerated statement that most of the island's Berbers belonged to this group, possibly because of their presence in the towns (Metcalfe 63). It is unknown whether any of the Barqajana living in Palermo in the tenth century were still Christian (Lewis 93),⁸⁶ but there were undoubtedly other Berber Christians in contemporary Sicily, and given the traditional symbiosis of Ibadites and Christians in southern Tunisia, it is likely that both religions were represented in the heavily berberized south of the island (Chiarelli 147, 179-180). Most non-Barqajana Berber Christians in Sicily must have arrived as retainers and employees of the Ibadite leaders. Presumably, Berber Christian migration to Sicily became easier and more common after 909, when the Arab Aghlabids were succeeded in Tunisia by the Berber Fatimids, who were Shiites and took a more tolerant attitude towards non-Muslims (Prevost 464-5; Courbage & Fargues 17).

After the Fatimid defeat of the Rustamid dynasty in 933 some of the Christians of Tahert (probably the Barqajana) went into exile to Jerba and to Sicily (Chiarelli 151). By contrast, the Tahert Majjana followed the Rustamid ruling class south and settled in the oasis of Wargla (Ouargla/Wargren), in central-eastern Algeria, an area where, as in Jerba, Jebel Nafusa and Zuwara, Ibadism (but not Christianity) survives to the present day (Lewicki 299).⁸⁷ What is significant here is that lexical concordances between Wargli, Mozabite Berber and Maltese (demonstrated above) proved to be the most numerous, and these dialects are very similar to the less well documented vernaculars of southern Tunisia and western Tripolitania, the homelands of most of the Berbers who migrated to Sicily.

A century later, during and after the disastrous famine of 1004-1005, Berbers of all classes fled to Sicily from the same region (Chiarelli 149). There is a good chance, then, that consistent Berber Christian communities had taken shape in the south of Sicily by the mid-eleventh century. Then, from 1053, Sicily received a new influx of immigrants from Ifriqiya, this time fleeing the violent incursions of the Banu Hilal and Banu Sulaym, sent by the Cairo-based Fatimids to chastise their fractious Zirid vicars (*ibid.* 131). Among the North Africans who sought refuge in Sicily at this time would certainly have been numerous Christians, prime targets of these invading Arab nomads who would wipe out traditional agriculture and urban settlement in wide areas of the Maghreb and accelerate the linguistic arabization of the region.

86 Lewicki thought them all Ibadites, but given the practice of crypto-Christianity prevailing for long periods among Christian populations involved in historic mass conversions of Islam (witness the Albanians in their homeland after the fifteenth century), it is likely that at least some of the Palermo Barqajana were still Christian to varying degrees.

87 There continued to be contacts between the Christian congregations of Wargla and the Qastiliya, under the authority of whose bishops they (like the residual Christians of Theveste/Tébessa in the Aurès) remained; (see Prevost 466, 470) Most of the Ibadites in the region now inhabit the Mزاب Valley.

This hypothesis of a consistent African Christian presence in southern Sicily invites speculation about the resettlement of the Maltese archipelago after its depopulation in 870. It is known from the chronicle of Al-Ḥimyarī that the Sicilian colonists who came to Malta in 1049 were Muslims owning slaves who were apparently Christian (Brincat 20). Although by this time the Sicilian Berbers would have been Arabic-speaking, one cannot exclude the possibility that at least some of those who colonized Malta were still using Berber as their first language. The native speech of their slaves is anyone's guess, as Arabic, Greek and even Berber are all possibilities.⁸⁸ If the Maltese and Gozitan population of this period consisted merely of Muslim landowners, their retainers and slaves, it seems unlikely that the archipelago was a suitable destination for refugees from the Hilalian invasions as has been suggested, at least Christian refugees (Chiarelli 131; Zammit 45). However, in the absence of documentary information, one cannot get beyond speculation regarding such possibilities. By contrast, one would be on firmer ground in hypothesizing that an additional wave of Berber Catholic migration to Sicily took place during the period when the Normans ruled the island of Jerba (1135-1158) and were intermittently in control of Gabès (1146-1160), significantly, the century preceding the recolonization of Malta under Frederick II.⁸⁹

As regards the ancestry of the Maltese language as an offshoot of Siculo-Arabic, it cannot with any confidence be traced back to 1049 in Malta itself, because it is unknown exactly what proportion of the post-1049 Muslim population escaped deportation by converting to Christianity in the 1240s, at the height of the repression of Islam launched by Frederick II in 1220-1221. Since the evidence of the oldest-established surviving Arabic surnames in Malta presents very few unequivocally Islamic appellations, it appears that the main transmitters of what would become the Maltese language were Arabic-speaking Christian settlers who hailed from a central-southern area of Sicily around Agrigento and Enna (Hull, *The Malta Language Question* 317-27; Hull, "The Oldest Maltese Surnames" 80-91).

88 Joseph Brincat (20) excludes the possibility that these Christian slaves were Berbers, writing: "It is also unlikely that they were Berbers since the latter had been well integrated with the Arabs since the conquest of Ifriqiyah. In Sicily the Berbers had improved their position with the advent of the Fatimids (910-947)." Since we now have evidence of Berber Christian settlers in Sicily, the question that needs to be answered by historians is the extent to which Amazigh Christians had been reduced to slavery at this time, given their traditional protection by the Ibadites which, however, many not have extended to a generalized freedom from bondage.

89 A second Sicilian occupation of Jerba occurred between 1284 and 1333.

Conclusions

The foregoing evidence of significant Berber elements in Maltese leads to the conclusion that the Arabic spoken by these Christian colonists had been formed in Sicily on a Berber substratum. Dionisius Agius, in acknowledging the fact of Berber bilingualism in Aghlabid Sicily, writes that “The Arabs and Berbers communicated in an interdialectal Arabic, and with the linguistic borrowing from each other and from outside the cities, they gradually developed a language with its own particular features” (Agius 105, 136, 431). Furthermore, although the Maltese vocabulary does contain some Greek elements that also appear to belong to the substratal category,⁹⁰ these are far outnumbered by Berber elements. The ancestor of Maltese thus gives the impression of a vernacular Arabic whose basic vocabulary was partly relexified by Berber rather than by Siculo-Greek.

There are three possible conclusions to be drawn here, in the absence of documentary evidence. One is that in preference to Arabophone Christians belonging to the majority in Sicily (those whose ancestors had spoken Greek), the Hohenstaufen authorities organizing the resettlement of Malta after the expulsion of the local Muslims deliberately recruited Arabic-speaking pioneers of a Christian Berber background, perhaps because the members of this community were distinguished by a strong religiosity and were thus ideal agents of a new militant (and politically loyal) Catholicism. In North Africa religious zealotry had been a historic trait of Berber Christians, and was responsible for the Donatist schism which had seriously divided and weakened the local Church before the Arab conquest.

A second, safer, conclusion is that a majority of the new colonists spoke a berberized Arabic which was by this time so well established in southern Sicily that its speakers could have been of any of the ethnic backgrounds comprising the Sicilian melting pot: Greek, Latin, Berber or Arab.

A third and more nuanced conclusion, supported in part by onomastic evidence, reconciles the first and second hypotheses and underlines the hybrid character of the population and language of Malta and Gozo. The earliest-known Maltese surnames, all of demonstrable Sicilian origin, are known in part from texts of 1277, 1299 and 1324, and were much more comprehensively recorded in the fifteenth century (See Wettinger). The 14 most numerous and arguably ‘foundational’ surnames were, in descending order of frequency in 1419: *Vella*,

90 These will be examined in a forthcoming article by the present writer.

Zammit, Farrugia, Schembri, Micallef, Calleja, Borg, Cassar, Bartolo, Azzopardi (originally Azupardu), Axiaq, Mangion, Curmi and Bonnici (modern spellings).⁹¹ It is interesting that *Vella*, the most common surname, was Italian, whereas with the exception of *Schembri*,⁹² those ranging from the second to the seventh place were all Arabic, while of the last five, three were Italian (*Azzopardi*, *Mangion*, *Bonnici*) and only two (*Axiaq* and *Curmi*) were Arabic. Significantly, not one of the seven Arabic names is Islamic, all being attributional or *nisba* forms derived from nicknames. Hence if the evidence of these surnames is reliable, the indication is that the bearers of the Arabic names were Christians like the pioneers named *Vella*, *Skembri*, *Bartalu*, *Azupardu*, *Maniuni* and *Bunnichi*. The first identifiably Islamic surnames that follow in the next cohort of old surnames (which, however, may not go back beyond the year 1275 in Malta) are only two in number: *Cagege* and *Muhumud/i* and *Zumahac*; three if *Said* is included.⁹³ The trend of predominantly *nisba* Arabic surnames simply continues.

It was thus apparently men bearing the above surnames who founded the new Maltese population in the mid-thirteenth century, and indeed modern DNA evidence confirms onomastic matches by indicating Sicily (rather than North Africa) as the ancestral home of most Maltese males (See Capelli & Redhead *et al*). For the other, female half of the population we have no such evidence, which invites reflection on the now famous ‘*missier/omm*’ dichotomy in Maltese: the undoubtedly significant fact that the Maltese word for ‘father’ is Italian, whereas the native word for ‘mother’ is Arabic.⁹⁴ It seems logical enough to conclude that if, in the late Middle Ages, there arose in Malta the fashion of referring to one’s father with a Sicilian noun instead of the normal Arabic one (*missieri* ‘my father’ not *buja* < CA *abūya*), there was a time when in many if not most local families,

91 See Hull 2015 for the etymology of these surnames. To these can be added as long-established surnames (amid a number of contemporary Italian names most of which have not survived in Malta): *Sant* and *Grech* (recorded as *Greucus* and *Assant* respectively in 1277), *Attard* (written *Actardo* in 1299) and *Cuschieri* and *Scirha* (*Cuskerius* and *Sirha* in 1324). Of these only *Scirha* is Arabic, and is without evident Islamic associations.

92 This name, now acclimatized as *Schèmbari* and *Schèmmari* in Sicily, had been introduced from Apulia and was originally from Albania.

93 *Said* (< Ar. *Sayyid*) is only doubtfully Islamic: this name (in its general sense of ‘master’) was also assumed by Christians in the Middle East. *Cagege* was *ḥaḏāḏ* ‘frequent pilgrim’ (to Mecca, Kairouan etc.); *Muhumud(i)* is Ar. *Muḥammad*, *Muḥammad* ‘the praised one, Mohammed’.

94 Medieval Sicilian *misseri* ‘sir’ (= It. *messere*, from Old French *messire* < Vulgar Lat. MEU SENIÖRE ‘my lord’) was used as a polite title for fathers, and was a calque on Siculo-Greek κύριος ‘sir; father’ (cf. modern Calabrian Greek *čuri* ‘father’, and Modern Greek κύριος ‘master, boss; father’). Modern Sicilian *misseri* has lost this secondary meaning, but it appears to have influenced the Arabic of Jerba during the Norman and Angevin occupations of that island between the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries, cf. the Jerban Ar. appellative *sidi* ‘my father’, lit. ‘my lord’, the noun *sidi* otherwise meaning ‘grandfather’ as in many other Arabic vernaculars (*Wortatlas* I 18, 20, 26).

the mothers were Arabophones whereas the fathers, even if themselves also speakers of Arabic, represented a self-consciously Latin ancestral background.

One can now visualize a scenario of Italian pioneers in late Norman and Hohenstaufen Sicily marrying local Arabic-speaking women, a practice carried on in Malta and Gozo when these islands were recolonized. Were these women Muslims converted to Christianity or themselves Arabophone Christians? Both phenomena must have been common enough, but there is one reason to suppose that the latter was more significant in the case of Malta's demographic renewal. In his study of Muslim Sicily, Leonard Chiarelli has highlighted a socio-cultural characteristic of the island that was highly aberrant with an Islamic context: the practice of Muslim men marrying Christian women and having their daughters raised in the Christian faith while their sons were brought up as Muslims.⁹⁵

This Sicilian Berber custom obviously continued a tradition rooted in North African Amazigh society, originating among Donatists and semi-Donatists whose option for Islam was politically rather than religiously motivated—again the analogy of Albanian Christian tribes after the Turkish conquest commends itself. There must therefore have been in southern Sicily a social order in which mixed-religion families with Muslim males and Christian females were quite normal. Later, when the Hohenstaufen repression of Islam began, it was easy enough for the males of such families to convert to the religion of their womenfolk to escape persecution. And the Christian females of these Berber families would also have made suitable wives for Italian pioneers arriving from the continent. This would explain the otherwise puzzling phenomenon of early Maltese families with Italian surnames and antecedents speaking an Arabic dialect: a common situation in which Italoophone (and, given the greater Sicilian context, possibly bilingual) males married Arabophone females and had children who naturally grew up speaking their mothers' language.

As for the section of medieval Sicilian society which exported some of its Arabophones (female, male or both) to Malta, for Berber speech to have made its modest impact on southern Siculo-Arabic, the original nucleus of this linguistic community must have been North African.⁹⁶ Moreover, as old ethnic divisions

95 Chiarelli 180: "During Ibn Ḥawqal's visit to the island [Sicily] around 363/972, he mentions that Muslim men married Christian women, and they would raise their daughters as Christians and their sons following the faith of their fathers. The whole family would then live within an Arab milieu, where the Arabic language and culture would be adopted." For greater sociological accuracy, one should read 'Berber' for 'Arab' in the last sentence.

96 In this connection it is tempting to speculate whether the Maltese toponym *Robba* (Wettinger) might conceivably perpetuate the name of the Donatist saint Robba, buried at Ala Miliaria (modern Béniane, north-western Algeria), who was martyred by Catholic *traditores* in 434 and was the sister of Honoratus, Donatist bishop of Aquae Sirenses. The name may have remained popular among

broke down from the Norman period onwards, intermarriage would have ensured the transmission of some Berber ancestry to the general Sicilian population, especially through the female line. If significant North African origins were to be revealed through DNA testing of Maltese females, there will have been two channels of transmission: females of the original Sicilian Muslim population established in Malta after 1049 some of whose descendants converted to Catholicism to avoid deportation two centuries later, and females of the Arabophone Sicilian community that resettled the archipelago under Frederick II.

Hence one can conclude that the lexical and other berberisms in Maltese were certainly present in the language in the period after 1127, when Christian colonization of Malta from Sicily began (sparsely for most of the first century, but intensively after 1220) (Luttrell 52-3). They may even date back to 1049, granted that there was actually linguistic continuity from the old predominantly Muslim population to the new Christian one formed in the mid-thirteenth century.

The main 'donor area' for the Amazigh component of Maltese was undoubtedly Southern Tunisia and adjacent areas of Tripolitania, in particular the region of Gabès with its hinterland and the nearby island of Jerba. It moreover seems safe to assume that where links have been found only with Mozabite and Wargli, these same words exist, or have existed, in the imperfectly known vocabularies of Shilhā, because the Zenati Mzab-Wargla region has been closely linked with the Djerid and the Nefzawa ever since the Aghlabids annexed it to their state of Ifriqiya (Chiarelli 5).

It has recently been revealed that Maltese shares some important features with Southern Tunisian varieties of Arabic, which of course are spoken today by people whose ancestors were Berberophones.⁹⁷ Of the surviving Shilhā dialects, Jerbi is the one that presents the most numerous links with Maltese (e.g. the

Sicilian Christian Berbers after their reconciliation with the Catholic mainstream.

97 Martin Zammit (2014) has highlighted a number of features of the Sfaxi dialect which are not usual in Northern Tunisian Arabic but have Maltese counterparts, e.g. preservation of Arabic diphthongs (typical only of female and Jewish speech in the north: *zeyt* = NTA *zīt* 'oil'), retention of pretonic vowels in open syllables (*marīd* 'sick' ~ NTA *mīrīd*) and lexical items such as *dīyisa* 'type of sailing boat' = M. *dghajsa*, *y'īd* 'he says' = M. *jghīd*, *bannan* 'to caress' = M. *bennen* 'to cradle, rock', *qanzah* 'to groan under stress' = M. *tqanzah* 'to strain, force oneself', *mallah* 'to show indifference' = M. *tmellaħ* 'not to care'. From the *Wortatlas der arabischen Dialekte* one can glean the following Maltese ~ Southern Tunisian Arabic matches: M *xīh* ~ STA *šēh* 'old man' (≠ NTA *šēyib*, šībēni, map 16), *gbin* ~ *žbin* 'forehead' (≠ NTA *žebha*, 37), *minkeb* ~ Jerban Judaeo-Arabic *mankib* 'elbow' (≠ NTA *merfeq*, 53), *tgham* ~ *f'ām* 'wheat' (semantic match, 161), *berquq* ~ *bargūg* 'apricots' (≠ NTA *mišmēš*, 175); as well as the Maltese ~ Tripolitanian matches: M. *armla* ~ WLA *armla* 'widow' (≠ TA *hažžāla*, 20), *hajjāt* ~ *hayyāt* 'tailor' (≠ TA *terzi*, 35), *brungiel* ~ *badenzāl* (also Jerban) 'eggplant' (≠ TA *batinžēn*, 157). To these examples can be added *daqs* 'size' 'just like' with the cognate *tāgz* in the Hilalian dialect of the Marazig (Douz district; Boris 1958: 61) but not recorded elsewhere in the Maghreb.

cognates of *Awissu*, *Ktuber*, *Imber*, *Ċimber*, *ħuxliċ*, *gremxula*, *żring*, *farfett*, *qajjar*, *seff*, *ċkejken*, *jekk*, *eħħe* examined above). Noteworthy also is the figurative meaning ‘pregnant’ of the Maltese feminine adjective *tqila*, ordinarily ‘heavy’: this appears to be a calque on Shilha Berber, cf. *taḍkalt* (= *tafqilt*, an arabism) ‘heavy’, ‘pregnant’ in the Douiret dialect.⁹⁸

Evidence of Malta’s linguistic connection with Shilha is strengthened by a number of arabisms specific to these dialects (but especially Jerbi) which resemble Maltese forms in a particular way. This phenomenon extends beyond general dialectal agreements between the South of Tunisia and Malta, e.g. STA *lqam*, Jerb. *ilqam* ‘nickname’ = M. *lāqam* ≠ Northern Tunisian *lqob* < CA *laqab*; STA *ta’ala* ‘come!’ = M. *tala* (obsolete) ≠ NTA *iža*; STA, Chinini *kisksu*, M. *kosksu* ‘couscous’ (NTA *kusksī*). One example of a direct link is the Jerbi noun *adziriθ* ‘island’, the affricate of which implies an earlier form **agziriθ*, with the Arabic *jīm* pronounced velar, in the Berber fashion. This would explain the anomaly of the Maltese development *gżira* instead of the expected **ġżira* from Arabic *ġazira*. Furthermore, Jerbi and Maltese agree in lexical choices against Tunisian Arabic in the cases of M., Jerb. *berquq* ‘apricots’ (TA *mišmēš*), M. *kosbor*, Jerb. *elquşber* ‘coriander’ (TA *tēbil*), M. *taġen*, Jerb. *taġin* ‘frying pan’ (TA *tanżir*), M. *l-aħħar* ‘the end’, Jerb. *ilahart* (TA *nhēya*); M. *xewwex*, Jerb. *itšuššu* ‘to incite’ (cf. Nef. *šūšš*, id., Mzb. *ašewweš* ‘to be troubled’ but TA *ħarraḍ*).

Even given the limited amount of lexical data on the Berber and Arabic vernaculars in question, the consistency of the foregoing links with Maltese is impressive. In the meantime Maltese etymological studies capable of revealing the origins of the language will not progress until we have exhaustive descriptions of the lexical corpora of not only the southern varieties of Tunisian Arabic but also of the Tunisian Shilha dialects, Zuwara Mazigh and Nefusi. These are tasks for competent and committed berberists undaunted by the difficulty of researching marginalized languages, the preservation of which neither no Tunisian or Libyan government has to date been anxious to encourage.

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98 Jerbi has instead the verb *tettarew*, *tiġjaru* ‘she is pregnant’. ‘Pregnant’ in Tunisian Arabic (at least in the better-known northern variety) is *hibla* (= M. *ħobla*), whereas *θqila* means only ‘heavy’. This is one of several instances of the mainland vernaculars agreeing with Maltese against Jerbi, possibly due to subsequent lexical erosion in the latter, e.g. *ašelwagīt* ‘left’ = M. *xellug* in the dialect of Douiret but not found in Jerbi.

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