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## The Vocalization of the Verb in Maltese.

### I

The vocalization of verbs as regards the choice of the second vowel in the forms *qatal*, *qatil*, *qatul* is, admittedly, one of the most complicated problems of semitic philology. Until a few years ago, the general view was that the form *qatal* denotes action, and the forms *qatil*, *qatul* denote a condition, transitory and permanent respectively (1). Later research, however, has shown that there are verbs of action having the form *qatil* or *qatul*, and that, on the contrary, there are verbs of the form *qatal* denoting a state or condition (2). The choice of the characteristic vowel, therefore, must depend on something else than the meaning. Towards the close of last century M. Lambert tried to establish the principle that the characteristic vowel of the verb in Arabic is determined not so much by the meaning of the verb as by the nature of the consonants composing the root (3). On the contrary, Père P. Joüon holds that the vocalization depended originally on the meaning, but the prevalence of the vowel *a* over the vowels *i* and *u*, as well as the prevalence of the active verbs over the less numerous stative verbs have assimilated many *qatila* and *qatula* forms to the *qatala* form (4). The problem was recently resumed by G. R. Driver whose views may be thus summarized: « Two or three influences are at work in the vocalization of the Western perfect tense, namely the meaning which the word has and the nature of the consonants adjoining the significant vowel as well as the analogy of other verbs » (5).

The Maltese verb presents a similar, and even greater, variety of vocalization ranging over the combinations *a — a*, *a — e*, *e — a*, *e — e*, *i — e*, *o — o*. The factor determining these different vocalizations is, generally, the influence of certain classes of consonants upon the neigh-

(1) C. BROCKELMANN, *Grundriss der vergleich. Grammatik der semit. Sprachen*, I, § 25.

(2) P. JOÜON, *Études de philologie sémitique*, in *Mélanges de la Faculté Orientale* (Beyrouth), tome V, 1912, pp. 356-362. ID., *Sémantique des verbes statifs de la forme qatila (qatel) en arabe, hébreu et araméen*, in *Mélanges de l'Université Saint-Joseph*, Beyrouth, tome XV, 1930-1, pp. 1-34. BAUER-LEANDER, *Historische Grammatik der hebräischen Sprache des A. T.*, I, 307.

(3) M. LAMBERT, *Observations sur la théorie des formes nominales de M. Barth*, in *Journal Asiatique*, ser. VIII, tome XV, pp. 164-179.

(4) See note 2.

(5) G. R. DRIVER, *Problems of the Hebrew Verbal System*, Edinburgh, 1936, p. 53.

bouring vowels, controlled and governed by the rules of harmony of sounds. But in some cases this influence yields to other influences, such as the meaning of the verb, its immediate Arabic origin, analogy of similar forms or assimilation to the predominant vowel of forms of a more frequent occurrence.

It is my aim in this paper to go through the whole system of vocalization of the Maltese verb in the perfect tense only. My investigation lies solely within the field of Maltese linguistic research. Verbs will be grouped together, examined and discussed in the light of the principles of Maltese philology. The investigation will be carried no further. It will be left to others to bring the results of this inquiry into the field of comparative semitic philology as a new element in the discussion of long-standing problems or as a corroborative evidence to accepted solutions.

It must be remarked at the very outset that the pronunciation of the vowels differs in the various localities of the Island. In the towns vowels have a clear, pure sound, but in the villages they assume a more or less obscure or weak sound (ɪ). In these notes I follow the town-pronunciation, as, though less scientific, it is certainly more uniform; but village-pronunciation will receive due consideration whenever it serves to explain better the reason for the choice of a vowel.

It must be remarked also that emphatic sounds have completely disappeared from Maltese, but their effect upon the adjoining vowels has been generally preserved; for example, the two words *sayf* 'summer' and *seyf* 'sword' begin with just the same *s* as far as sound is concerned, the difference in vocalization being simply due to the fact that the *s* in *sayf* represents an originally emphatic *s*, while the *s* in *seyf* is the simple *s*.

Maltese, unlike Arabic, has only two spirant *h*, a weaker one and a stronger one. The stronger sound will be distinguished by a dot placed under the *h*.

The *ghain* is represented in accordance with our accepted system of orthography, by the digraph *gh*.

The vocalic group *ie* has been retained here to represent the *imale* of the long vowel *a*.

Verbs will be divided into six classes or types according to their vocalization, namely: *qitel*, *qetal*, *qatal*, *qetal*, and *qotol*.

### I. Type *qitel*.

Maltese, as all spoken Arabic dialects, has a strong tendency to weaken the sound of the short vowel *a*. As a result of this tendency the vowel

(1) See H. STUMME, *Maltesische Studien*, Leipzig, 1904, especially pages 47-63 where examples of different pronunciations are given.

*a* in nominal forms is generally changed into *e*, as *kelb* 'dog', Ar. *kalb*; *semm* 'poison', Ar. *samm*; *lewn* 'colour', Ar. *lawn*; *mewt* 'death', Ar. *mawt*, etc. Very often the vowel *a* even changes into *i*, as *nisel* 'origin', Ar. *nasl*; *nijs* 'breath', Ar. *nafs*; *isfel* 'below', Ar. 'asfal'; *sibt* 'the Sabbath', Ar. *sabt*, etc.

In the verbal forms *qatal* etc. the first vowel *a* is, as a rule, weakened into *i*, unless other causes, phonetic or semantic, come into action to maintain it unchanged or to produce other modifications. When the first vowel has been changed into *i*, the second vowel necessarily and, so to say, automatically becomes *e* or, better, a closed *e*, which in village-pronunciation assumes the sound of an open *i* sometimes hardly distinguishable from the preceding vowel.

The following list, which is by no means exhaustive, will illustrate the rule:

<i>birek</i>	to kneel down	<i>nidem</i>	to repent
<i>bidel</i>	to change	<i>nifed</i>	to pierce
<i>difen</i>	to bury	<i>nizel</i>	to descend
<i>dilek</i>	to anoint	<i>rifed</i>	to prop
<i>dineb</i>	to sin	<i>rikeb</i>	to ride
<i>fired</i>	to separate	<i>siket</i>	to keep silent
<i>gidem</i>	to bite	<i>simen</i>	to grow fat
<i>kiber</i>	to grow	<i>tilef</i>	to loose
<i>kiser</i>	to break	<i>wiret</i>	to inherit
<i>kiteb</i>	to write	<i>wizen</i>	to weigh
<i>libes</i>	to dress	<i>zifen</i>	to dance

It appears from this list that the principle underlying the vocalization of this class of verbs is merely phonetical; it is the absence from amongst the radicals of all consonants which usually exercise an influence upon the adjoining vowels. There is none of the gutturals *h*, *gh*, nor does the palato-guttural *q* ever occur; emphatics are extremely rare and are always in a position where they can have no effect on the first vowel, as for example in the verbs *rifes* 'to trample', Ar. *rafasa*; *libet* 'to gallop', Ar. *labata*.

Apparently, the vocalization *i* — *e* depends also, at least in some cases, on the intransitive or stative meaning of the verb; thus *nidem* 'to repent', Ar. *nadima*; *simen* 'to grow fat', Ar. *samina*; *fired* 'to isolate', originally perhaps 'to be isolated', Ar. *farida*; *bired* 'to cool down', Ar. *barada* and *baruda*; *kiber* 'to grow up', Ar. *kabara* and *kabura*. It is better, however, to explain the vocalization of these verbs as due to phonetic rather than to semantic causes. As we shall see further on, the vocalization of stative verbs is *e* — *e* and *o* — *o*.

There are some verbs which call for some explanation. The verb *siber* 'to be patient' should be vocalized *sabar*, as the initial *s* is, originally,

an emphatic *s*; cp. the noun *sabar* 'patience', and the II form *sabbar* 'to exhort to patience'. The vowel *i* can hardly be the characteristic vowel of the stative form *qatila*, because, as we have just said, the vocalization of stative verbs in Maltese is *e* — *e* or *o* — *o*. Considering that this verb is used mostly in the Imperative, and in such stereotyped phrases as *isbirli yumeyn* 'have patience with me for a couple of days' (said of a debtor to his creditor), and that the corresponding form in Arabic is *'isbir*, it is very likely that this verb came into Maltese through the Imperative mood, which in course of time developed a new perfect tense on the analogy of such forms as *iktibli* 'write to me', from the perfect tense *kiteb*; *iksirli* 'break to me' from *kiser*. Thus *siber* is not derived from Ar. *ṣabara*, but is a secondary development from the Imperative *isbir*. The original vocalization *a* — *a* has been retained in the II form *sabbar* on account of its more frequent use.

[An alternative explanation is that this verb, like a few other verbs, has a double vocalization, one for the I form and another for the derived forms; compare *kiber* 'to grow up', II form *kabbar*, V form *tkabbar*; *siker* 'to get drunk', II form *sakkar*; *fired* 'to separate' II form *farrad*, V form *tfarrad*, but VII form *infired*.

*Bired* 'to cool down', and *barad* 'to file'. Both verbs correspond to the same Arabic verb *barada* (or *baruda*). How are we to account for the different vocalization? Neither the difference of meaning nor the active and stative significance affords the right explanation (1). In fact the vocalization is reduced to uniformity in the nominal forms, thus *bard* 'cold', *barrada* 'a file' and 'an earthen vessel to keep water cold'. Perhaps it would be better to refer the difference of vocalization to the varying effect of the medial *r* which, when it is not strengthened by an initial or by a final guttural or emphatic radical, may, or may not have an effect on either of the neighbouring vowels. In the following verbs the original vowels *a* — *a* are maintained: *baram* 'to twist', Ar. *barama*; *barax* (*x* = Eng. *sh*) 'to scrape', Ar. *baraxa*; *karab* 'to groan', Ar. *karaba*. But in these other verbs the *r* has lost all effect on the vowels: *birek* 'to kneel down', Ar. *baraka*; *dives* 'to tresh', Ar. *darasa*; *giref* 'to scratch', Ar. *garafa*; *wiret* 'to inherit', Ar. *warita*; *firex* 'to spread', Ar. *faraxa*.

In the intensive forms the first vowel *i* is changed into *e*: a) always, when the medial radical is a liquid, as *bired*, *berred* 'to cool'; *birek*, *berrek* 'to make to kneel'; *firex*, *ferrex* 'to scatter'; *dilek*, *dellek* 'to smear all over'; *wiled*, *welled* 'to assist (a woman) in childbirth'; *simen*, *semmen* 'to fatten'; *gimed*, *gemmed* 'to foul with soot'; \* *dines*, *dennes* 'to contaminate'; b) often, when the medial radical is a labial, as *gibed*, *gebbed* 'to pull violently or repeatedly'; *kibes*, *kebbes* 'to light up fire'; *libet*,

(1) But cp *ġera* « to run » and *ġara* « to happen » both corresponding to the same Arabic verb *ġara*.

*lebbet* 'to make (a horse) run swiftly'; *zifen, zeffen* 'to make to dance'; \**difes, deffes* 'to force into'; but *libes, libbes* 'to clothe'; *rifed, rified* 'to support'; *rifes, riffes* 'to trample'; *nifed, niffed* 'to pierce'. In some very rare instances the vowels *i* — *e* are changed into *a* — *a*, as in the above examples, *kiber, kabbar*; *siker, sakkar, fired, farrad*; *siber, sabbar*.

## II. Type *qetal*.

This class of verbs is only a phonetical modification of the first. When the last radical is *h*, *gh* or *q* and neither the initial nor the medial radical belongs to the guttural or the emphatic group of consonants, the latter vowel is invariably *a*, while the former, not being under the influence of any consonant, should be *i* according to the rules for the *qitel* type. But the vowel *i* is too far from *a* to be combined with it, hence it is changed into *e* so as to produce a vocalic combination which is in strict accordance with the laws for the harmony of sounds. Therefore the process of development of this class of verbs and their relation to the first is this: *qitel* > *qital* > *qetal*.

The following is a list of *qetal* verbs:

<i>belagh</i>	to swallow	<i>nefaq</i>	to spend
<i>bezagh</i>	to fear	<i>regagh</i>	to return
<i>bezaq</i>	to spit	<i>resaq</i>	to approach
<i>debah</i>	to slay (a victim)	<i>rezah</i>	to shiver with cold
<i>ferah</i>	to be glad	<i>sebah</i>	to dawn
<i>feraq</i>	to divide	<i>sebaq</i>	to precede
<i>jetaq</i>	to unstitch	<i>selah</i>	to skin
<i>gemagh</i>	to gather	<i>seraq</i>	to steal
<i>gerah</i>	to wound	<i>tebah</i>	to cook
<i>geragh</i>	to swallow (a drink)	<i>tebaq</i>	to close
<i>kesah</i>	to become cold	<i>telaq</i>	to start
<i>lefaq</i>	to sob	<i>xebah</i>	to resemble
<i>lemaħ</i>	to catch sight of	<i>xeraħ</i>	to cut into slices
<i>mesah</i>	to wipe out	<i>xeraq</i>	to cough
<i>nebah</i>	to bark	<i>zabah</i>	to dye
<i>nefaħ</i>	to blow	<i>zelaq</i>	to slip.

It appears from this list that the dominant consonant in this class of verbs is the last one which, through its influence upon the preceding vowel, affects to a lesser degree also the first vowel. The vocalization *e* — *a* became so characteristic of verbs with a final *h*, *gh*, *q* that occasionally we find it also in cases where an initial or a medial emphatic consonant would require the vowel *a* close to them. Thus *terah* 'to cast', Ar. *taraha*; *tebaq* 'to close', Ar. *tabaqa*; *telaq* 'to start', Ar. *talaga*; *tebah*



'to cook', Ar. *ṭabaḥa*; *bezaq* 'to spit', Ar. *baṣaqa*; *zebah* 'to dye', Ar. *sabagha*; *sebah* 'to dawn', Ar. *'asbaḥa*. These verbs followed the analogy of *e* — *a* verbs and were assimilated to them. But the meaning has no effect in determining the vocalization of this class of verbs.

### III. Type *qatal*.

The vocalization of this class of verbs depends, almost entirely, on the nature of the consonants and on their position in the root. But assimilation seems to have been a very effective factor in the choice of vowels. After comparing together all verbs of this class we arrive at these conclusions :

1. Whenever the medial radical is *ḥ. gh. q. t. s. d* (1), the vowels are *a* — *a*.

Examples :

<i>baḡhad</i>	to hate	<i>daḡaḡ</i>	to laugh
<i>baḡhat</i>	to send	<i>daḡal</i>	to enter
<i>baṣar</i>	to foresee	<i>faḡal</i>	to be left over
<i>ḥaḡhad</i>	to deny	<i>faḡas</i>	to hatch
<i>faṣad</i>	to bleed	<i>naḡab</i>	to perforate
<i>faṭam</i>	to wean	<i>naḡas</i>	to become less
<i>faṭar</i>	to have breakfast	<i>naḡax</i>	to carve
<i>ḡaḡhal</i>	to compel	<i>naṣab</i>	to lay a trap
<i>ḡaḡdar</i>	to be present (at a wedding)	<i>ḡaḡdab</i>	to be angry
<i>ḡaḡar</i>	to ill treat	<i>ḡaṣar</i>	to squeeze
<i>ḡaṣad</i>	to reap	<i>ḡaṣas</i>	to sneeze
<i>ḡaṣaf</i>	to snatch	<i>qaḡhad</i>	to stay
<i>ḡaṣar</i>	to prefer	<i>raḡdam</i>	to cover with earth
<i>laḡaḡ</i>	to reach	<i>raḡhad</i>	to thunder
<i>laḡhab</i>	to play	<i>raḡad</i>	to sleep
<i>laḡhan</i>	to curse	<i>raḡam</i>	to embellish
<i>laḡhaḡ</i>	to lick	<i>saḡan</i>	to become hot
<i>laḡat</i>	to hit	<i>saḡaḡ</i>	to pound
<i>maḡat</i>	to blow one's nose	<i>taḡan</i>	to grond
<i>maḡhad</i>	to chew	<i>taḡab</i>	to bore
<i>naḡaḡ</i>	to bray	<i>waḡaf</i>	to stop
<i>naḡar</i>	to snore	<i>wasal</i>	to arrive.

Exceptions to this rule are a few intransitive verbs of the type *qetel* and *qotol* which will be dealt with further on.

(1) *t, s, d* originally *t, ṣ, ḍ*.



2. Whenever the initial and final radicals are any two of the following : *ħ, gh, q, r, t, s, d* (r), the vowels are *a — a*.

Examples :

<i>dajjar</i>	to tress	<i>ħalaq</i>	to create
<i>ħabat</i>	to beat	<i>ħaraq</i>	to burn
<i>ghalaq</i>	to shun	<i>rabat</i>	to tie
<i>ghazaq</i>	to dig	<i>qamas</i>	to kick
<i>qabad</i>	to seize	<i>qaras</i>	to pinch

The exceptions to this rule are very few. Thus we have *rifes* 'to tread upon', Ar. *rafasa*; and a few verbs of the *qetal* and *qatel* types.

3. The remaining verbs belonging to this group cannot very easily be classified according to definite phonetic rules. In general it may be said that their vocalization does not depend upon any consonant in particular, but rather upon the combination of two or more consonants which have a preference for the vowel *a*. Thus :

a) When the middle radical is *r* and the extreme radicals are any two of these : *b, m, ġ, z, k, s*, the vowels are generally *a — a*. Examples : *baram* 'to twist'; *barax* 'to scrape', (but *birek* 'to kneel down'); *ġarab*, *ġarrab* 'to test' (cp the noun *ġarab* 'scab'), *karab* 'to groan'; *karam* 'to long for'; *zarab* 'to press'. The same takes place when the middle radical *r* is preceded by a guttural or an emphatic, or is followed by an emphatic. Ex. : *darab* 'to strike'; *ċarat*, *ċarrat* 'to tear'; *ħarab* 'to flee'; *ħarat* 'to plough'; *marad* 'to be sick'; *gharaġ* 'to know'; *qarad* 'to wash partly' (but *qered* 'to destroy'); *saram* 'to entangle'; *tarad* 'to follow'. But if the radical *r* stands between two of the weaker consonants, it has no effect on the vowels. Ex. : *ġiref* 'to scrape'; *firex* 'to spread'; *fired* 'to separate'; *girex* 'to grind coarsely'; *divres* 'to tresh'; *girez* 'to lament'; *xired*, *xerred* 'to scatter'; *wiret* 'to inherit'.

b) The vocalization *a — a* may very frequently be due to various combinations of the consonants *b, m, n, r, ġ, z*. Ex. : *ġabar* 'to collect'; *zabar* 'to prune'; *naġar* 'to hew'; *naxar* 'to spread clothes for drying'; *razan* 'to be under control'; *maxat* 'to comb'; *samat* 'to scald'. As the examples clearly show, the combination of the medial and final consonants has a stronger effect upon the whole vocalization than that of the initial and medial consonants, except in those cases in which either of the first two radicals has a decisive effect upon the vocalization; thus *naġad* 'to rinse', Ar. *naġada*; but *nifed* 'to pierce', Ar. *naġada*, *d* being stronger than *d*; *naxar* 'to spread clothes for drying' and *nixef* 'to be dry', *r* being stronger than *f*. So also *naġar* 'to hew stones' and *niġes*, *niġġes* 'to contaminate'; *darras*, *darras* 'to exasperate', Ar. *dariša*, and *divres* 'to tresh'; *samat* 'to scald', Ar. *samaġa*, but *simen* 'to grow fat'.

(1) *t, s, d* originally *t, s, d*.

In the same way are to be explained such verbs as *satar* 'to veil' and *naġar* 'to shy'.

NOTE. The verb *raqam* calls for a brief remark. Its proper vocalization is, and must be, *a* — *a*, but in Dictionaries and in literary compositions it is very frequently written *riqem* (1). This form must at any rate be considered as a secondary development of the original form *raqam*. In fact, this verb is hardly ever used in the spoken language, hence its correct pronunciation has been forgotten. It is used only in the saying *min yaġhmel xogħlu b'idu yirqmu u yzidu* 'he who does his work with his own hands, will do it beautifully and profitably'. If the verb has thus been saved from complete oblivion, the characteristic vowel of the imperfect has not been preserved. It might have been *a*, *o* or *e*. In the first two cases, the perfect would have been *raqam*, as *yiċhad* from *ċaħad* and *yigħbor* from *ġabar*. In the last case, it would have been *riqem*, as *yikteb* from *kiteb*. The latter form was chosen, and so *riqem* superseded the original pronunciation *raqam*.

#### IV. Type *qatel*.

Whenever the initial radical is any of the consonants *ħ*, *gh* and *q*, and neither of the last two is emphatic or guttural or palato-guttural, the vocalization is regularly *a* — *e*. Exceptions are very rare.

The following is a fairly complete list :

<i>ħabez</i>	to bake	<i>ħazen</i>	to store
<i>ħadem</i>	to work	<i>ghader</i>	to excuse
<i>ħafen</i>	to seize	<i>ghaġen</i>	to knead
<i>ħafer</i>	to pardon	<i>ghakes</i>	to be run down
<i>ħatef</i>	to swear	<i>ghaleb</i>	to prevail
<i>ħateġ</i>	to card cotton	<i>ghatef</i>	to feed
<i>ħareġ</i>	to come out	<i>ghamel</i>	to make
<i>ħaseb</i>	to think	<i>ghanet</i>	to make haste
<i>ħasel</i>	to wash	<i>gharek</i>	to rub
<i>ħaten</i>	to circumcise	<i>ghazel</i>	to spin
<i>qabel</i>	to fit	<i>qafel</i>	to lock
<i>qabez</i>	to jump	<i>qaleb</i>	to turn over
<i>qadeġ</i>	to row	<i>qatel</i>	to kill

To these we may add the following intensive forms which have no I form :

<i>ħabbel</i>	to entangle	<i>ghaffeġ</i>	to crush
<i>ħaddet</i>	to converse with	<i>ghaġġeb</i>	to astonish

(1) Cp M. A. VASSALLI, *Ktyb yl klym Malti*, Rome, 1796. G. B. FALZON, *Dizionario Maltese-Italiano-Inglese*, 1st edit., Malta, 1845. C. L. DESSOULAVY, *Maltese-Arabic Word-list*, London, 1938. But A. E. CARUANA, *Vocabulario della Lingua Maltese*, Malta, 1903, writes *raqam*.

<i>ħaffer</i>	to dig	<i>ghaġġel</i>	to hasten
<i>ħammeġ</i>	to dirty	<i>ghallem</i>	to teach
<i>ħarref</i>	to tell stories	<i>ghammed</i>	to baptize
<i>ħarrek</i>	to move	<i>qaċdem</i>	to make old
<i>ghaddeb</i>	to chastise	<i>qaċdes</i>	to say mass

It is not easy to account for the second *a* in the verb *ghaħas* 'to press', which should be vocalized *ghaħes*. The final *s* is not emphatic, and the labial *f*, as a rule, does never exercise any influence on the vowels; cp such verbs as *rifes* 'to tread upon'; *kifes* 'to eclipse'; *deffes* 'to force into or between'; *tniffes* 'to breathe'. All we can say is that *ghaħas* has been vocalized after the analogy of nouns like *qaħas* 'cage' (with an emphatic *s*), and *ħaħas* 'prickly heat'.

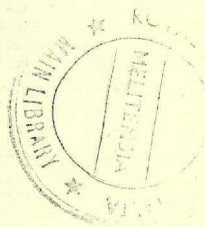
A few verbs which apparently belong to this class, follow the *e* — *e* or *o* — *o* types. These will be dealt with further on.

#### V. Type *qetel*.

This is a tiny group of verbs but with as many rules and exceptions as there are verbs. Fundamentally, it is the form characteristic of stative verbs, but there are active verbs too, transitive and intransitive, which take the same form. Sometimes the vocalization depends upon that of the corresponding Arabic verb; sometimes it is entirely independent of it. I shall try to establish the principle or principles underlying the vocalization of the group as a whole, and then to explain all discrepancies.

1. This class comprehends firstly stative verbs of the *qatila* type. Thus: *ħemer* 'to ferment', that is 'to be in a state of fermentation'; *ħeles* 'to be free' (also 'to set free'); *ħemed* 'to be silent'; *ħeber* 'to have a vague expectation'; *ħerek* 'to be prompt to act'; *qeleq* (pronounced also *qileq*) 'to be changeable'; *ghereq* 'to perspire (Ar. *gharaqa*), 'to drown' (Ar. *ghariqa*); *seħet* 'to be struck dumb' (also 'to curse'). In all these instances the stative meaning is fairly obvious, and it is the only factor to which this vocalization can be attributed. Phonetics is obviously against the combination *e* — *e*, as in all the examples there is a guttural or a palato-guttural consonant, nor can they always be referred to an original *qatila* form. So *ħemer* corresponds in form to Ar. *ħamara* or *ħamira*, in meaning to *iħtamara*; *ħeles* is Ar. *ħalaša*; *ħemed* is Ar. *ħamada* or *ħamida*; *ħeber* is Ar. *ħabara*; *qeleq* is *qaliqa*; *ħerek* is *ħaruka*.

2. Another group consists of verbs with a medial *h*. The reason why this weak spirant has such a marked preference for the vocalization *e* — *e* is not evident. In cases like *fehēm* 'to understand', Ar. *faħima*; *xehed* 'to bear witness', Ar. *xahida*; *leheġ* 'to pant', Ar. *lahiġa*; *(in)dehex* 'to be surprised', Ar. *dahixa*; *(in)dehes* 'to insinuate oneself', prob. Ar. *dahisa*, the influence of the corresponding Arabic forms is, or may



be, obvious. But there are cases for which Arabic influence offers no solution; so *deher* 'to appear', Ar. *zahara*; *xehet* 'to weep loudly', Ar. *xahara*; *zeher* 'to neigh', Ar. *sahala*; *tniehed* 'to sigh', Ar. *nahada*; to which we may add the verbs *sahar* 'to be awake by night', Ar. *sahira*, and *bahat* 'to slander', Ar. *bahita* which do not conform to their original Arabic forms.

The solution must, therefore, be sought for in another direction. If we take into consideration the fact that the spirant *h* in Maltese has weakened its sound to such a degree that it is hardly audible, and that consequently words like *fehēm* are pronounced *fem* or better *fe-em*, we can hardly help concluding that these verbs must be reckoned with those in which the radicals exercise no influence upon the vowels, that is to say, with verbs of the *qitel* type, with the vowel *i*, however, changed into *e* to be more in harmony with the weak spirant sound of *h*. Therefore verbs of the form *fahima*, when passing into Maltese, first become *fihem*, then *fehēm*.

This solution, once accepted, furnishes the clue for the right explanation of other verbs of this class. Thus *hemex* 'to pin' and *hegem* 'to devour' stand for *himez* and *hiġem* respectively (Ar. *hamaza*, *haġama*). The intensive form *herres* 'to crush' points to a simple form \**heres* (Ar. *harasa*) for *hires*. In the same way are to be explained a few verbs with a medial *gh* which, occasionally, has no effect on the vowels, as *xeghel* 'to light', Ar. *xaghala*; *ġeghel* 'to compel', Ar. *ġaghala* (1); *seghel* 'to cough' (2), Ar. *saghala*; *zeghed* 'to abound in'; *reghex* 'to be ashamed'; *regheb* 'to be covetous'; *ghemez* (3) 'to wink', Ar. *ghamaza*.

3. It is more difficult to account for the vocalization *e* — *e* in the verbs *wehel* 'to stick to' and *xehet* 'to throw'. They both have one element in common, the medial radical *h*, which occurs also in the verb *sehet* 'to be struck dumb' (see above). The verbs *wehel* and *sehet* may be easily referred to their Arabic equivalents *wahila* and *sahita*, but the verb *xehet* cannot be explained except by supposing that it has been assimilated to the stative verbs with a middle *h*.

## VI. Type *qotol*.

The same causes which have determined the vocalization *e* — *e* are also at work in this class of verbs, but their line of action is slightly different. Guttural influence plays no part; the characteristic vowel *o* assimilates the other vowel to itself. The following are the principal rules:

- (1) *ġeghel* is a duplicate pronunciation of *ġaghāl*.
- (2) This is the original pronunciation which is still preserved in villages; the town pronunciation *soġhol* is a secondary development; see further on.
- (3) Sometimes pronounced *ghamez*.

1. Stative verbs, which have the form *qatula* in Arabic, take the form *gotol* in Maltese. Ex.: *boloq* 'to be grey-haired', Ar. *baluqa*; *roħos* 'to be cheap', Ar. *raħusa*; *qorob* 'to be near', Ar. *qaruba*; *toqol* 'to be heavy', Ar. *taqula*; *horom* 'to be lustful', Ar. *ħaruma*; *kotor* 'to be numerous', Ar. *katura*; *soghob* 'to be sorry', Ar. *ṣaghuba*; *korom* 'to be generous', Ar. *karuma*.

2. After the analogy of these verbs other intransitive verbs take the same vowels, although their Arabic equivalents are vocalized in a different way. Ex.: *foroh* 'to be empty', Ar. *faragha* and *farigha*; *forok* 'to limp', Ar. (*ta*)*farraka* from I *faraka* and *farika*; *ghotob* 'to be paralytic and unable to walk', Ar. *ghatiba*; *romol* 'to become a widower' (no Arabic equivalent).

3. The tendency of stative verbs to take the vowels *o* — *o* is at its strongest in the case of verbs with a twofold vocalization, an active one and a stative one according to their meaning. Thus the root *gh* — *l* — *b* is vocalized *ghaleb* when it means 'to prevail', but it is vocalized *gholob* when it means 'to become meagre'; *ħalaq* is 'to create', but *ħoloq* is 'to grow up to the normal size'; *ħataj* is 'to seize', but *ħotof* is 'to become thin suddenly'; *ħaref* is 'to gather fruit', *ħorof* is 'to become fruitless and leafless'. But these *gotol* forms may perhaps be considered as *qutula* forms with an originally passive meaning, which, however, in course of time assumed a simply intransitive meaning. So, for example, *gholob* might have meant 'to be prevailed upon by illness, age, etc.' subsequently it came to mean 'to become thin through illness, age, etc.'

4. In a few cases the form *gotol* has been developed from nominal forms with a predominant *o* sound. Thus, there is no reason why the verb *xorob* 'to drink' should be so vocalized, were it not the vowel *o* of the noun *xorb* 'drink'. Likewise the verb *holom* 'to dream' is evidently influenced by the noun *ħolma* 'a dream' (Ar. *ħulm*) or by the imperfect *yohlom* 'he dreams'. The original pronunciation *ħalem* has survived only in the villages. The same must be said of the verb *soghol* 'to cough', which is influenced by the predominant vowel of the noun *soghla*. The verb *ghogob* 'to please' may possibly be connected with passive IV *'ughģiba* 'to be pleased', rather than be considered as a vocalic modification of *ghaģeb* (Ar. *ghaģiba*) which means 'to be astonished'.

5. There still remain a few cases to which no satisfactory explanation can be given. The two verbs *ghokos* 'to be run down (by age, illness)' and *ghorok* 'to rub' cause no serious difficulty, as they may be considered as phonetic variations of the more regular forms *ghakes* and *gharek* (see p. 175). But there seems to be nothing to justify the form *gotol* in the verbs *ghodos* 'to dive', Ar. *ghaṭasa*, and *ħotob* 'to propose marriage', Ar. *ħataba*. That *ghodos* may possibly be a secondary formation seems to

be suggested by the noun *ghadsa* which points to a verbal form *ghadas* with an imperfect *yaghdas*. It is not unlikely that, owing to the hard guttural *ghain*, which in some localities of the Island has retained its original sound, the imperfect *yaghdas* was pronounced *yoghdos* (cp. *yohlog* from *halaq*), from which a new perfect *ghodos*, with a predominant *o* sound, has been formed. This process of development *qatal* > *yaqtal* > *yogtol* > *gotol* is supported by other examples; thus *karab* 'to groan', impf. *yokrob* with a new perfect *korob*. So also the verb *harat* 'to gather the last fruits', Ar. *harata*, with its impf. *yohrot* gave rise to a new form of the perfect *horot* which superseded the former primitive one. Likewise the verb *ghazz* 'to appreciate', Ar. *ghazza*, impf. *ighozz*, developed the form of the perfect *ghozz*. Therefore on the ground of analogy, and for want of a better explanation, we may say that the vocalization of the verbs *ghodos*, *hotob* and perhaps of some of those enumerated above, is due to the predominant *o* sound of nominal or verbal forms, which, on account of their more frequent use, have displaced the original forms of the perfect or developed new ones side by side with the older ones.

#### Vocalization of Geminate Verbs and of

#### Verbs *tertiaef infirmae*.

So far the investigation has been restricted to the strong dissyllabic verb. In order to give a more comprehensive view of the whole subject, I shall now extend the investigation to the geminate verbs and the verbs *tertiaef infirmae*, which, though they follow in the main the principles laid down above, also exhibit some characteristics more markedly and so they serve to confirm the conclusions we have reached above.

#### A. Geminate Verbs.

a) When any of the radicals is *h*, *q*, *gh*, *r* or *s*, *t*, *d* corresponding etymologically to Ar. emphatic *s*, *t*, *d*, the vowel is *a*. Examples :

<i>bass</i>	to fart (Ar. <i>bassa</i> )
<i>damm</i>	to string together (Ar. <i>damma</i> )
<i>dann</i>	to suppose (Ar. <i>zanna</i> )
<i>daqq</i>	to beat, ring, sound (Ar. <i>daqqa</i> )
<i>darr</i>	to injure (Ar. <i>darra</i> )
<i>garr</i>	to carry (Ar. <i>garra</i> )
<i>garr</i>	to grumble
<i>habb</i>	to love (Ar. <i>habba</i> )
<i>hall</i>	to untie (Ar. <i>halla</i> )
<i>hakk</i>	to scratch (Ar. <i>hakka</i> )
<i>hass</i>	to feel (Ar. <i>hassa</i> )
<i>hatt</i>	to unload (Ar. <i>hatta</i> )

<i>hazz</i>	to delineate
<i>ghadd</i>	to count (Ar. <i>ghadda</i> )
<i>ghazz</i>	to appreciate (Ar. <i>ghazza</i> )
<i>radd</i>	to give back (Ar. <i>radda</i> )
<i>rass</i>	to press (Ar. <i>rassa</i> )
<i>raxx</i>	to sprinkle (Ar. <i>raxxa</i> )
<i>sarr</i>	to pack (Ar. <i>sarra</i> )
<i>xagg</i>	to cleave (Ar. <i>xagga</i> ).

b) When no one of the radicals belongs to the above-mentioned group, the vowel is *e*. Examples :

<i>bell</i>	to wet (Ar. <i>balla</i> )
<i>bexx</i>	to sprinkle
<i>feġġ</i>	to appear (Ar. <i>faġġa</i> )
<i>gezz</i>	to shear (Ar. <i>gazza</i> )
<i>hedd</i>	to wear out (Ar. <i>kadda</i> )
<i>keff</i>	to hem (Ar. <i>kaffa</i> )
<i>medd</i>	to stretch (Ar. <i>madda</i> )
<i>mell</i>	to loath (Ar. <i>malla</i> )
<i>mess</i>	to touch (Ar. <i>massa</i> )
<i>leff</i>	to wrap up (Ar. <i>laffa</i> ).
<i>senn</i>	to whet (Ar. <i>sanna</i> )
<i>xedd</i>	to put on clothes (Ar. <i>xadda</i> )
<i>zeġġ</i>	to shoot across (Ar. <i>zaġġa</i> ).

c) Stative verbs invariably take the vowel *e* and are uninfluenced by gutturals and emphatics. Examples :

<i>heff</i>	to become light
<i>henn</i>	to be merciful
<i>leħħ</i>	to be insistent
<i>leqq</i>	to be shiny
<i>reqq</i>	to become slim
<i>qell</i>	to be rude
<i>seħħ</i>	to be valid
<i>xehħ</i>	to become covetous

The vowel *e* of these verbs is the characteristic vowel of the stative *qatila* form. Against the supposition that the vowel *e* comes from the imperfect tense, which in turn derives from an Arabic imperfect in *i*, it may be urged that there is a number of Arabic imperfects in *i* with a Maltese equivalent in *o* and a perfect in *a*. Thus Malt. *ħass*, *iħoss*, but Ar. *ħass*, *yahiss*; Malt. *ħabb*, *iħobb*, Ar. *ħabb*, *yahibb*; Malt. *bass*, *iboss*, Ar. *bass*, *yabiss*.

d) Verbs with an initial *h* take the vowel *e*. This weak guttural seems to have a preference for the vowel *e* (see p. 177), so *hebb* 'to run at', Ar. *ħabba*; \**hedd*, *hedded* 'to threaten', Ar. *hadda*, *haddada*; \**hezz*, *hezzez* 'to shake', Ar. *ħazza*, *ħazzaza*.

e) The vowel *o* in the verb *ghozz* 'to appreciate' is altogether secondary, and is due to the predominant *o* sound of the imperfect *ighozz* which is of a more frequent occurrence than the perfect.

#### B. Verbs *tertiae infirmae* (1).

When no consonantal influence is in action, the vocalization is regularly *e — a*. Examples :

<i>beda</i>	to begin	<i>mexa</i>	to walk
<i>beka</i>	to weep	<i>neka</i>	to spite
<i>benā</i>	to build	<i>nesa</i>	to forget
<i>deha</i>	to be distracted	<i>seha</i>	to be distracted
<i>fedā</i>	to ransom	<i>sela</i>	to forget
<i>fela</i>	to examine	<i>sewa</i>	to be worth
<i>fena</i>	to waste away	<i>tefa</i>	to extinguish
<i>ġera</i>	to run	<i>tena</i>	to fold
<i>hera</i>	to hire	<i>tewa</i>	to fold
<i>hesa</i>	to cover	<i>xewa</i>	to roast
<i>lewa</i>	to bend	<i>wera</i>	to show
<i>mela</i>	to fill	<i>zena</i>	to fornicate.

But under the influence of a guttural or an emphatic consonant the vowels are *a — a*; thus *dagħa* 'to blaspheme'; *ħata* 'to sin'; *dara* 'to become accustomed to'; *qara* 'to read'; *ghama* 'to become blind'; *ragħa* 'to pasture'; *safa* 'to become clear'.

There are, however, a fairly good number of verbs which take the vocalization *e — a* though one of the radicals is a guttural or emphatic. Thus *heba* 'to conceal'; *ħefa* 'to wear out'; *hesa* 'to castrate'; *ħexa* 'to stuff'; *ħema* 'to bake'; *ħewa* 'to evacuate'; *ħela* 'to waste'; *qela* 'to fry'; *qeda* 'to serve'; *ghela* 'to be sorry'; *ghewa* 'to instigate'; *reħa* 'to let loose'; *reqa* 'to cure jaundice'; *seqa* 'to abbeverate. It is not easy to account for this anomalous vocalization. It is best, perhaps, to consider it as a faulty pronunciation or, at any rate, a modification of the primitive form *a — a*, which is still preserved in villages, where such verbs as *heba*, *ħela*, etc. are still pronounced *ħaba*, *ħala*, etc. in strict accordance with the general rule.

Very probably, the modification is due to assimilation to the more numerous class of verbs of the proper *e — a* form. That the vocalization *e — a* of verbs with a guttural amongst the radicals is entirely secondary is borne out by the fact that the infinitives of all these verbs have *a* as their first vowel, while, on the contrary, the infinitives of verbs of the

(1) By verbs *tertiae infirmae* we mean those verbs in which the final radical was, originally, *elij*, *waw* or *y*. Maltese makes no difference between these three classes of verbs. See E. F. SUTCLIFFE, *A Grammar of the Maltese Language*. Oxford, 1936, p. 118.



proper *e* — *a* form have *i* as their first vowel ; thus *ħabi* from *ħeba*, *ħami* from *ħema*, *ħasi* from *ħesa*, *qali* from *qela*, *qadi* from *qeda*, *ghali* from *ghela*, *ghawi* from *ghewa*, but *bini* from *bena*, *biki* from *beka*, *giri* from *ģera*, *mixi* from *mexa*, *siwi* from *sewa*, etc.

The two verbs *ghoxa* 'to faint' and *ghola* 'to become high' have a different explanation. The former simply corresponds to Ar. *ghuxiya*, which is the passive of *ghaxiya*. The latter is either a *qotol* form or a derivation from the adjective *ghali* 'high' which is commonly pronounced *gholi*.

This process of assimilation has been carried further and affected also, although in a lesser degree, the imperfect. The verbs of the *e* — *a* type are mostly transitive or active and have the imperfect ending in *i*. This form *qeta(l)*, *yaqti(l)* became so characteristic of this class of verbs, that, occasionally, it has developed new imperfects in *i* with an active meaning from intransitive verbs with an imperfect in *a*. So, for example, the verb *ghama* 'to become blind' gives *yaghma* in the imperfect when it is intransitive, but it has the *i*-ending *yaghmi* when it is transitive 'he blinds'. This transitive form of the imperfect has given rise to a new form of the perfect with the vowels *e* — *a*. So also *safa*, *yisfa* 'to become clear', but *yisfi* 'to make clear' ; *ħeħa*, *yehħa* 'to become worn out', but *yahħi* 'to wear out'. Apparently these *i*-imperfects are remnants of the IV form which is extinct in Maltese, but perhaps it is better to consider them as duplicate forms with duplicate meaning, transitive and intransitive, of originally intransitive verbs.

#### CONCLUSION.

The vocalization of the Maltese verb depends almost entirely on the nature of the consonants which form the root. The strongest influence is exercised by the gutturals *ħ* and *gh*, and by the palato-guttural or glottal plosive *q*. They both have a progressive and a regressive effect on the adjoining vowels. Emphatics come next. Their effect on the following vowel is stronger than that on the preceding one. Verbs denoting a condition are sometimes vocalized *e* — *e* and *o* — *o*. But with many stative verbs phonetics is more effective than semantics, and, consequently, they follow the vocalization of active verbs. Assimilation is an important factor, and occasionally it develops new forms which supersede the older ones or continue to exist side by side. A few cases cannot be explained except by supposing that they have followed the analogy of other verbs. Other instances must be referred to their immediate Arabic origin.

P. P. SAYDON.

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