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HISTORY OF THE MALTESE BIBLE

The Maltese translation of the Bible is the product of literary and religious factors and, to a certain extent, private enterprise. For many long centuries, i.e. until the closing years of the eighteenth century, the Maltese language was never used for literary purposes, the languages of education being Latin and Italian. The earlier Maltese writers found an enormous difficulty to reduce to some sort of Latin script a Semitic language which had many sounds that were absent in Romance languages. Moreover up to the beginning of the nineteenth century the education of the population was very poor. In the year 1836 there were only three Government Elementary schools: one in Valletta, the capital, another in Senglea and the third, very poorly attended, in Gozo, the sister Island, in all of which the instruction was of a meagre and wretched character¹. As there were very few who could write and read Maltese, the need of a Maltese translation of the Bible was not yet felt.

But a great change was brought about towards the close of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth. Through the efforts of M.A. Vassalli, the first and the greatest Maltese scholar and author of a Maltese Grammar² and Dictionary³, Maltese began gradually to assert its rights as a literary language. Vassalli himself published a collection of Maltese proverbs and a translation of the story of Cyrus⁴. Moreover after the occupation of the Island by the English the Protestant Missionary Society, who used the Bible as the most powerful means for the propagation of its doctrines, needed a Maltese translation of the Bible, or at least the New Testament, which they could disseminate among the people. It was thus that the first Maltese translation of the Bible sprang up, and it was under the combined influence of the same literary and religious factors that later translations were produced.

¹ P. Debono, *A brief compendium of the History of Malta*, Malta, 1903, p. 95.

² *Mylsen Phaenico-Punicum sive Grammatica Melitensis*, Rome, 1791.

³ *Lexicon Melitense-Latino-Italum*, Rome, 1796.

⁴ For a complete biography of M.A. Vassalli see A. Cremona, *Vassalli and his Times*, Malta, 1940.

The history of the Maltese translation of the Bible falls into three periods. The first period extends from the beginning of the nineteenth century or, more precisely, from the year 1822 to the year 1847. Its characteristics are: literary development of Maltese and Protestant Missionary work. Translations: The New Testament and the Psalms. The second period extends more or less from 1847 to 1917. Its characteristics are: a greater development of Maltese and a weaker Protestant activity, and the first attempts to introduce the Bible into the teaching of the Maltese Catholics. Translations: No new translations, but only Catholic adaptations of portions of existing translations. The third period goes from about 1917 to modern times. It is characterized by a still greater literary development of the language and private enterprise. Translations: independent partial translations including the whole of the New Testament and most of the Old Testament, and a complete translation of the whole Bible from the original tongues.

FIRST PERIOD: 1822-1847

The Gospel of St John. The earliest biblical translation in Maltese is that of the Gospel of St John, *Il Vangelo di Nostro Signore Gesù Cristo secondo S. Giovanni tradotto in lingua italiana e maltese secondo la Volgata*, Londra, R. Watts, 1822. The translator's name is not given, but on information furnished by C.F. Schlien⁵, who was for a long time Director of the Malta Press of the Church Missionary Society, and George Percy Badger⁶ who spent his early years in Malta, we can beyond all doubt, ascribe the work to J. CANOLO, who has written other books in Maltese which, however, were never published.

The translation, as it is said in the title, is made from the Latin Vulgate to which it adheres rather slavishly. Thus 3,29 *hena jithenna – gaudio gaudet*; 4,47 *kien qiegħed jibda jmut – incipiebat enim mori*; 5,38 *u l-kelma tiegħu ma għandkomx tghammar fikom – et verbum eius non habetis in vobis manens*; 8,51 *meut ma jarax għal dejjem – mortem non videbit in aeternum*. Occasionally, however, the translation has been made to conform to the Italian translation printed side by side with it. These are some instances: *meta kien qorob lejn id-dar – quando era già verso casa*, Latin *iam autem eo descendente*; 6,52 *għas-saħħa tad-dinja – per la salute del mondo*, Latin *pro mundi vita*; 16,27 *hriġt mill-Missier – sono uscito dal Padre*, Latin *a Deo exivi*; 10,41 *minn kemm għal Guanni – in quanto a Giovanni*, Latin *quā Joānes*⁷. But such

⁵ *Views on the improvement of the Maltese language and its use for the purpose of education and literature*, Malta, 1838, p. 40.

⁶ *Sullo stato della pubblica educazione in Malta*, Malta, 1839, p. 13.

⁷ One may add also 1,10 *għalib – per lui*, Latin *per ipsum*. The preposition *per*

agreements with the Italian translation are neither so numerous nor so weighty as to suggest an Italian origin for the Maltese translation.

The literary merit of this translation considered in its entirety hardly rises above plain mediocrity. The translator's chief aim seems to have been that of reproducing the Latin text as faithfully and as plainly and simply as possible, without caring much for the fineries of style. Very often a slight change, such as transposition of words, substitution of a word for another, suppression of a superfluous word, addition of a particle would have greatly added to the elegance of style without impairing the accuracy of the translation. But in order not to underestimate the merit of the translation, it must, in all fairness, be recognized that the translator at times breaks the monotony of his style by giving the construction a genuinely Semitic turn, especially by the frequent use of the construct case. In this respect Canolo's translation sometimes excels that of his contemporary and better translator M.A. Vassalli. Thus 3,4 *Kif jista' jitwieled il-bniedem, u hu xiħ?* Note particularly the use of the conjunction *u* introducing a circumstantial clause. Vassalli gives the construction another form more easily intelligible, but less artistic and less vigorous: *Kif qatt bniedem jista' jitwieled, meta huwa xiħ?* Compare also 1,4 *dawl il-bnedmin*, Vass. *dawl tal-bnedmin*; 1,23 *triq il-Mulej*, Vass. *it-triq ta' Mulejna*; 3,29 *leħen il-għarus*, Vass. *-il-leħen tal-għarus*; 6,48 *jiena hu ħobż il-ħajja* which is far better than Vass. *jiena jien il-ħobż tal-ħajja*.

This Semitic or, more precisely, Arabic colour of this version is rendered deeper by the use of certain words and forms which belong rather to Arabic than to Maltese. Thus the preposition *bi* used in the sense of *fi*: 1,4 *bib* – *in ipso*; 6,54 *bikom* – *in vobis*; 8,31 *bi kliemi* – *in sermone meo*; the verb *ħad* 'he took', which drops the final *d* in the perfect tense, third person, singular, masculine and in the imperfect tense, singular and in the Imperative singular, maintains the *d* throughout the whole conjugation; so *ħad* 'he took', *jiħud* 'he takes', *ħud* 'take'. Likewise the verb *mar* 'he went', which in Maltese partakes of the nature of two classes of verbs – deaf and hollow verbs, – follows always the conjunction of deaf verbs and consequently the reduplication of *r* in all its forms; so *marr* 'he went', *imurr* 'he goes', *murr* 'go'. The plural form *benin* 'sons' is Arabic, not Maltese. So is also the compound preposition *minn baġħad* 'after', the Maltese equivalent being *imbagħad* which means

in Latin denotes the instrument or the agent, but in Italian it denotes both the agent and the person in whose favour an action is performed. The Maltese translator chose the latter sense and, accordingly, translated *għalih* instead of *bib*. Vassalli, who probably depends on Canolo, translates also *għalih* but the edition of 1847 had, correctly, *bib*.

'then'. Note also the following Arabisms: 3,11 *qabel* 'he received'; 10,33.36 *kafar, kafra* 'he blasphemed, a blasphemy'; 19,12.15 *hadu jghajitu* 'they cried'.

The Four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles. Canolo's translation was followed, seven years later, by the Gospels and Acts translated from Latin: *Quatuor Evangelia et Actus Apostolorum iuxta Vulgatam Romae A.D. MDXCII editam: necnon eorumdem versio melitenses*, Londini, R. Watts, 1829. Like the preceding one it is anonymous, but it is commonly held to be the work of the great Maltese scholar M.A. VASSALLI. Besides the authority of Schlienzen and Badger, who lived in Malta in Vassalli's time, we have a stronger documentary evidence in the correspondence between the Malta Missionaries and the London Headquarters of the Missionary Society. From letters written between 1823 and 1828 it appears that M.A. Vassalli, author of the Maltese Lexicon and other literary works and the best translator in the Island, both for ability and for fame, was, during this time, engaged in a Maltese translation of the Gospels and Acts which was printed in small pica type by Watts in London soon after June 1828. The odd characters, which Vassalli had introduced in the Maltese alphabet, necessitated a font of sixteen punches, which, through the earnest solicitation of Rev. W. Jowett, were eventually secured⁸. All these circumstances together with the fact that no other Maltese version of the Gospels and Acts is known, except those made by Catholics in much later times, point unmistakably to the anonymous translation published by R. Watts in London in the year 1829 as the work achieved by the learned Vassalli under the direction of the Rev. W. Jowett for the Church Missionary Society.

Vassalli's translation combines the two chief qualities of a good translation, namely, fidelity and perspicuity of expression. The sense is always fully grasped and beautifully expressed in a clear, easy and elegant style. The Latin text is always firmly adhered to and faithfully reproduced with all its minute details and, mostly, with the same sequence of words. This constant aim at fidelity makes the translator sometimes adhere somewhat slavishly to the Latin text, thus sacrificing the exigencies of Maltese style and impairing the freshness and vigour of a genuinely Maltese construction. To quote some examples: Mt. 12,11: *Min ikun minnkom il-bniedem li jkollu nagħga, u jekk dina tiġi taqa' f'hojra nbar ta' sibte, jaqaw ma jaqbadx fiba u jerfagħha?* The awkwardness of this construction is easily removed by a very slight change: *Min*

⁸I am indebted for this information to the kindness of Mr A. Cremona and the late Rev. C.L. Dessoulavy of London who purposely searched the archives of the Church Missionary Society.

sa jkun fostkom li jkollu nagħġa u, jekk taqa' f'hojra nbar ta' sibt, ma jaqbadhiex u jerfaġġha? So also Mk 1,26: *U r-ruħ l-imniġġsa hija u tħabbtu u tgħajjat b'leġen għali, ħarġet minnu* would be greatly improved if rendered thus: *U ħareġ minnu r-ruħ l-imniġġes, iħabbtu u jgħajjat għali*⁹.

This strict adherence to the Latin text did not prevent the translator from giving the translation a fluent, graceful and vigorous form of expression. The construction is generally skillfully built according to the strict rules of Semitic style. Viewed from this literary standpoint Vassalli's translation has seldom, if ever, been surpassed, and even now, after more than a hundred years, it is read with profit and delight by all lovers of Maltese literature.

Looking more closely into the linguistic features of the translation we notice that tenses are always rendered according to a fixed scheme, that is: *għamel* past tense, *jaġmel* present and future, *kien jaġmel* imperfect, *kien għamel* pluperfect; thus Mt. 2,9 *audissent* 'kienu semgħu', *viderant* 'kienu raw', *antecedebat* 'kienet tisboq'; 2,13 *apparuit* 'deher'; etc. The present participle is translated in a variety of ways, thus Mt. 2,3 *audiens* 'filli sema'; 2,8 *mittens* 'huwa u jibgħathom'; 2,14 *consurgens* 'hekkif qam'; 2,16 *videns* 'x'hin ra'; 2,21 *consurgens* 'malli qam'; 2,23 *veniens* 'imbagħhad mar'; 8,18 *videns* 'billi ra'. Pronominal suffixes, instead of the looser connection with the particle *ta'*, are largely made use of. So is also the construct case. The adjective takes the article when it qualifies a determinate noun. A plural subject often takes a singular verb in the feminine gender, so Mt. 21,15 *it-tfal kienet tgħajjat*; cp. also Mt. 3,5; 4,16; 8,1; 20,31; etc. The subject very often follows the verb, but in many instances, where the Latin has better preserved the Semitic construction underlying the Latin Gospels, the translator could not escape the influence of Italian with which he is deeply imbued, and has, accordingly, conformed the construction to the requirements of an utterly different language; thus Mt. 4,23 *U Gesù kien idur* would have been better translated *U kien idur Gesù*; so also the Latin *et circuibat Jesus*. Cp. also Mt. 9,25.35; 10,21; 11,7; 12,1; etc. Mk 1,25; 5,13.24; 6,18; etc. Lk 1,6.13.21.34.41.47; etc. Jn 1,29.32.40.45.46; etc. Acts 1,20; 2,7.12.26; 4,25.33; etc.

Another characteristic feature of Vassalli's translation is the exuberant richness of its vocabulary. Many old and obsolete words are constantly met with in every page, stems of words are skillfully developed into derivatives having different shades of meaning, words are even sometimes reduced to their original meaning; briefly, the translation

⁹ Vassalli seems to ignore the difference of gender and, consequently, of meaning of the word *ruħ*, which, according to Arabic usage, is masculine when it means 'spirit' and feminine when it means 'soul'.

reveals everywhere the rare competence and the high standard of scholarship of our first and best lexicographer. To pick a few examples out of many: *aġar* 'alms', *darr* 'he damaged', *dirra* 'abhorrence', *fad* 'he abounded', *ħaf* 'he was afraid', *ħan* 'he betrayed', *ħewwa* 'love', *kies* 'cup', *itka* 'he sat at table', *mana* 'he prohibited', *għarir* 'a foreigner', *qasgħa* 'a dish', *san* 'he designed', *xeha* 'he desired', *ženbaq* 'Ily', *mħawwfn* 'frightened' from the verb *ħaf* 'he was afraid', *ħawwef* 'he frightened', *baxxar* 'he gave good news' from *bxara* 'good news', *baqqa* 'he left' from *baqa* 'he remained', *ħammed* 'he made calm' from *ħemed* 'he was calm', *ġebel* 'mountain' contrary to usage which gives it the meaning 'stone', *ħaddiem* 'a servant' but commonly 'a workman', *borg* 'a tower' but in current use 'a heap (of stones)'.

It has been deemed necessary to dwell at some length on these literary points inasmuch as they exhibit the characteristic traits of Vassalli's works which began to wane away soon after his death until they almost entirely disappeared in modern literature.

The New Testament. Vassalli's translation, although published by a Protestant Society and in the interests of the Protestant Church, may, in some sense, be considered as a Catholic work inasmuch as it reproduces, as faithfully as possible, the same text which the Catholic Church reads in her teaching and in her liturgy. I pass over the reason which moved the Church Missionary Society to adopt such a translation which is only slightly different from that which is read in the English Church. But anyhow these differences were removed in the translation of the whole New Testament which appeared a few years later under the title *Il-Għaqda il-Ġdida ta' Sidna Ġesù Kristu*, Malta, 1847. In connexion with this translation two questions call for discussion: (1) Is it a fresh translation or a revised edition of Vassalli's translation? (2) Who is the author of this translation or revision and, if it is a revision, who is the translator of the Epistles and the Apocalypse which are wanting in Vassalli's edition?

A comparison between Vassalli's translation and the New Testament translation of 1847¹⁰ in the parts common to both reveals at once a close similarity, very often a verbal identity between the two to such a degree that at first sight NT seems to be but a slight revision of V. The differences are of three kinds: (i) lexical changes: obsolete words are replaced by more current ones; thus Mt. 2,2 V *xruq* – NT *lvant*, 2,6 V *mdebber* – NT *ħakem*, 5,5 V *jitgħażżew* – NT *ikunu mfarrġin*, 5,24 V *mbiba* – NT *għatja*, 14,11 V *qadaħ* – NT *dixx*, 23,14 V *lula* – NT *ħazin*,

¹⁰ For the sake of brevity these two translations will henceforth be designated by V and NT respectively.

26,3 V *qasgħa* – NT *zingħla*; Mk 2,17 V *mehmumin* – NT *morda*, 6,13 V *jdbnu* – NT *jidilku*, 13,32 V *jigħlem* – NT *jaf*; Lk. 7,14 V *xebb* – NT *zagħzugħ*, 9,21 V *taħar* NT *widdeb*, 14,2 V *mtarbag* – NT *minfuħ bl-ilma*, 16,15 V *huwa dirra* – NT *ma jinħamelx*, 21,9 V *tithawufux* – NT *tithexzghux*; Jn 4,12 V *għanem* – NT *mrieħel*, 8,56 V *theggeg* – NT *qabez bil-ferħ*, 18,16 V *bewwieba* – NT *mara tal-bieb*, 19,39 V *sabbâr* – NT *alwe*; Acts 4,15 V *milqgħa* – NT *laqqgħa*, 8,33 V *qada* – NT *għamil il-ħaqq*, 11,5 V *sehwiem* – NT *f'debwa*, 15,3 V *imdebbrin* – NT *imwasslin*, 21,34 V *fn-naxar* – NT *għewwa s-sur*, 27,24 V *ħiebek* – NT *tak*, and many others. Sometimes, however, NT has a more literary word for a more common one in V; thus V *profjeta* – NT *bassâr*, V *artal* – NT *mid-baħ*, V *perglu* (Ital. *pergamo*) – NT *manbar*, V *tiggustifika* – NT *issed-daq*. (ii) grammatical and stylistic changes, tenses being frequently translated against the rules laid down by Vassalli and sentences constructed in a different way; thus Mt. 13,26 V *kienet kibret* – NT *kiber*, 17,24 V *kien daħal* – NT *daħal*; Mk 1,22 V *kienu jistagħgħbu* – NT *staghgħbu*; Lk. 4,42 V *kienu jzommub* – NT *zammieub*, 10,18 V *kont nara* – NT *rajt*; Jn 11,43 V *kien qal* – NT *qal*. The following grammatical forms and constructions are also worth noticing: Mt. 24,48 V *il-qaddej il-ħazin* – NT *il-qaddej ħazin*, Mk 6,9 V *libsteyn* – NT *zewg ilbiesi*, Lk. 12,42 V *it-temmiegħ il-ħorr u l-mogħqal* – NT *ir-ragel tad-dar sewwa u għaqel*, Acts 15,29 V *mill-laħam il-maħnuq* – NT *mill-ħwejjeg maħnuqa*. (iii) textual changes: there are in NT words and sentences that are absent in V. Thus Mt. 5,44 NT adds *bierku lil dawħ li jisħtukom*; Mt. 6,13 NT adds *għaliex tiegħek hi s-saltna u l-qawwa u s-sebħ għala dejjem*; Mt. 6,25 NT adds *jew x'tixorbu*; Mt. 20,7 NT adds *u tieħdu dak li jigi minnu*; Mt. 25,13 NT adds *li fiba bin il-bniedem jigi*; and many others.

This additional matter helps us to trace the origin of NT. In fact it is an exclusive characteristic of that form of the Greek text of the New Testament which alone held sway during the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries. From this current text these additions found their way into the Protestant translations where they are still religiously maintained even after the critical editions of the nineteenth century had deprived their older rival of its undeserved supremacy. NT is therefore connected with a Greek or with a Protestant source. But a close examination of the translation as well as the consideration of the circumstances under which it came out point to the English Bible as the immediate origin of NT. Even in minor details NT agrees with the Revised Version; thus Mt. 26, 40 NT *jigi...isib...igħid* 'he cometh...and findeth...and saith' against V *gie...sab...qal*; Mt. 26,50 NT *ħadub* 'they took him', V *zammieub*; Mk 10, 34 NT *isawwutub u jobzqu għalih* 'they shall scourge him and shall spit upon him', V *jobzqu għalih u jsawwutub*; Lk 7,47 NT *dnubietħa li huma*

bosta 'her sins which are many', V *bosta dnuviet*¹¹. The conclusion, therefore, which imposes itself is that NT is a revised edition of V, worked on literary and textual grounds so as to agree completely with the text read in the English Church. This conclusion is borne out by the evidence furnished by the S.P.C.K. which in a report for the year 1845 has declared that the Gospels and the Acts in Maltese have been already *revised* for publication¹².

We can now proceed further to trace the origin of the rest of NT, that is, the Epistles and the Apocalypse. It may be said at the outset that it follows very closely the Revised Version. But is it a fresh translation or rather a revision of some unpublished translation of Vassalli? Both C.F. Schlienz¹³ and G.P. Badger¹⁴ are of opinion that Vassalli translated also the rest of the New Testament, which, however, was never published. This is very doubtful. In the records of the Church Missionary Society Vassalli is always spoken of as the translator of the Gospels and the Acts and down to the month of June 1828¹⁵ not the least mention occurs of his having translated any other part of the Bible. This silence is very significant. Indeed, had Vassalli translated also the Epistles and the Apocalypse, it is hardly conceivable that this translation would have remained unpublished when the Protestant Societies were striving to their utmost to have the Scriptures translated into the Maltese tongue.

Internal evidence can hardly be invoked in favour of either view. For the translation, if it is not an original work, has been so thoroughly revised as to obliterate the work of the original translator. It bears everywhere the same literary marks that have been noticed above in the Gospels and Acts, that is, an easy and fluent style, disagreement with Vassalli's way of rendering the tenses and a strict adherence to the Revised Version in all its peculiarities¹⁶. On the other hand we notice here and there a connecting link between the translation and the Latin Vulgate which seems to betray the hand of the translator of the Gospels; thus for ex. Rom. 9,1 *is-sewwa ngħid fi Kristu* agrees with Latin 'veritatem dico in Christo' against English 'I say the truth in Christ'; 1 Cor. 16,2 *biex mbux meta nigi jsiru l-gemghat* 'ut non cum venero tunc collectae fiant', while

¹¹ One may also add the proper names which in NT follow invariably the Revised Version, whereas in V they agree with the Latin. Suffice it to mention the proper name Kafamahum which in NT is always spelt Kapamahum.

¹² On information furnished by Mr A. Cremona and the late Rev. C.L. Dessoulavy.

¹³ *Views* etc. p. 40.

¹⁴ *Sullo stato* etc. p. 132.

¹⁵ That is only a few months before Vassalli's death which occurred on the 12th January 1829.

¹⁶ It reproduces even the additional historical notes appended at the end of each of the Epistles of St Paul.

the English is 'that there be no gatherings when I come'. The translator could have written as well *ngħid is-sewwa fi Kristu and biex ma jsirux il-gemgħat meta nigi*. This adherence to Latin would at least seem to suggest that the relation of our translation to the Revised Version is due to a revision of a translation made directly from Latin. And Vassalli is the only translator of the Bible from Latin.

Summing up the results of this enquiry we may conclude: it is at least probable that Vassalli translated also the Epistles and the Apocalypse, but his translation was only published in a revised form in 1847. Arguments are drawn from the authority of C.F. Schlienz and G.P. Badger and from the Latin affinities of the translation. The contrary view is based on the lack of contemporary documentary evidence and on the literary characteristics of the translation. The former class of arguments seems to outweigh the latter.

We have so far established that the Gospels and the Acts and, probably, the Epistles and the Apocalypse published in 1847 are not an original translation but a revision of another translation. And so we pass to the second question: Who is the author of this revision? The answer will be given in the next paragraph.

X The Book of Common Prayer and Psalms. The translation of the Book of Common Prayer *Ktieb it-Talb ta' Għalenija* (Malta, R. Weiss) was published in 1845 by the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge. Although this is not a biblical translation, it is reckoned with the translations of the Scriptures not only for the biblical matter which it contains but also because it helps us to solve literary problems in connexion with the New Testament translation of 1847. We shall first investigate the origin of the translation of the biblical portions and then inquire into the problem of the author of the translation.

All the biblical matter drawn up from the New Testament agrees verbally with the translation of 1847. The two represent really one translation. This verbal agreement extends also to the citations from the Psalms which are obviously taken from the Book of Common Prayer. It must therefore be concluded that the translation or revision of NT, although published in 1847, was already completed in 1845 and made use of in a manuscript form by the translator of BCP. This conclusion is borne out by the Reports of the S.P.C.K. in which it is recorded that in the year 1845, when the Maltese translation of the BCP was completed and printed, the Gospels and Acts in NT were already revised for publication¹⁷. It is not unlikely that the revision of NT was commenced as early as 1844 before, or simultaneously with, the translation of the BCP. All this leads

¹⁷ I owe this information to Mr A. Cremona and the late Rev. C.L. Dessoulavy.

us to suppose that both NT and BCP come from the same hand.

This supposition receives strong confirmation from the fact that both NT and BCP have the same style and both agree in translating the same words against V. Thus, for example, the word *propheta* or *prophet* is always rendered by V *profjeta*, but in NT and BCP it is invariably rendered *bassâr*. So also *iustitia* and derivatives are *ħaqq* or *sewwa* in V, *sedq* in NT and BCP; *iudicium* is *ħaqq* in V, *ghamil il-ħaqq* in NT and BCP; *idola* is *xbibat* in V, *swawar* in NT and BCP; *iniquitas* is *tagħwiġ* in V, *ħżunija* in NT and BCP. This conformity in two translations that are almost contemporary can in no way be accounted for as the effect of mere chance, but proves beyond all doubt that both versions are the work of one and the same author.

The author's name would have remained long ignored if the late Rev. C.L. Dessoulavy, who was so keenly interested in our literary problems, had not undertaken the painstaking task of scanning the archives of the C.M.S. and the S.P.C.K. Through his obliging courtesy we learn that the Bishop of Gibraltar had engaged a native (i.e. Maltese) priest, who had recently conformed to the English Church, to translate the Prayer Book into the Maltese language. So far the Report of the S.P.C.K. for the year 1844, which nowhere mentions the translator's name. But we need no more to find it out. In fact the history of our Church in that period is aware of no other name of a Catholic priest having deserted his faith but that of Rev. M.A. Camilleri of Birgu. Camilleri is therefore the translator of BCP and the reviser or translator of NT published in 1847.

The Psalms, that are printed at the end of the Book of Common Prayer, are translated directly from Hebrew. It is a servile translation marked by inconsistencies of expression, uncouthness of style, meaningless connexion of words that are due to a misconception of literality or else to an inadequate knowledge of Hebrew. Thus Ps. 50,23 the words $\text{וְשִׁם תְּרַבֵּן יְיָ}$ $\text{אֶתְּרַבֵּן יְיָ אֱלֹהִים}$ are literally rendered *u min iqiegħed triq nurib b'ħelsien Alla* which makes no sense. The Hebrew imperfect tense preceded by the conjunction ו is retained in the translation against the rules of Hebrew Grammar. The translator prefers also those Maltese words that are most similar in sound to their Hebrew equivalents, even when such words do not convey the exact meaning of the original; thus 38,2 Hebr. תִּסְרַנֵּי *t^ejassereni* 'chasten me', Maltese *tjassami*, but Maltese *jassar* means 'to enslave' not 'to punish'. Occasionally, however, the Maltese translator turns to the English text to find the meaning of a difficult word or to give a more fluent diction to an obscure and involved Hebrew construction thus Ps. 32,4b should be translated *my moisture has been changed as if by the drought of summer*, but Malt. has *l-indewwa tiegħi*

sejgħet libbiena tas-sajf in agreement with English *my moisture is like the drought of summer*. Here the Maltese translator stands self-accused, because the word *indewwa* corresponds to the word *moisture* in the sense of *damp*, but not in the sense required by the context. To the translator's credit let it be remarked that in some cases the sense is better expressed in Maltese than in English; thus Ps. 66,3 Engl. translates literally and equi vocally *thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee*, but Malt. catches the metaphorical meaning required by the context for the Hebr. verb כָּחַשׁ (*kaħax*) and translates better *jittaħtulek l-għedewwa tiegħek*, that is, *thine enemies shall be found inferior in strength to thee* or *shall be subdued unto thee*.

Later editions. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark, John, the Acts of the Apostles of the 1847 edition of the New Testament and the Psalms of the Book of Common Prayer have been revised according to popular taste and re-issued in modern dress by the British and Foreign Bible Society.

SECOND PERIOD: 1847-1917

During this period Protestant missionary activity grew weaker and no fresh translation of any book of the Bible was made. Catholics were very slow to make the Bible accessible to the people, although the Maltese language was becoming every day more pliable and more suitable for literary purposes. The first timid attempt to place the Bible into the hands of the people was made by R. TAYLOR who published in the year 1846 a poetical paraphrasis of the Psalms and Canticles, *Ktieb is-Salmi tas-Sultan David u l-Kantiċi*, Malta, 1846, pp. 432, xii. The paraphrasis is based on the Latin Vulgate, which is printed side by side with it, with occasional agreements with the translation of the Book of Common Prayer. Thus in 2,1 both BCP and Taylor read *għaliex qamu l-ġnus xewwiexa*; in 11,4 both read *bi lsienna nagħilbu* which agrees with Hebr. against Vulg. *linguam nostram magnificabimus*; 17,12 *eduxit me in latitudinem* is rendered by both versions *ħariġni f'misraħ*. These and many other verbal agreements prove most clearly that Taylor made extensive use of the translation of the Book of Common Prayer which had been published the year before.

A few years later Taylor published a translation of the Office of the Holy Week *Offizzju tal-Ġimgħa l-Kbira, Latin u Malti*, Malta, 1849, 5th reimpression 1904. The Psalms are those of the Book of Common Prayer with slight changes; the portions of the New Testament are taken over from the translation of 1847; the portions of the Old Testament that are read in the Book of Common Prayer are taken also from this translation; the rest is translated by the author. This book may rightly be considered

as a real adaptation of Protestant translations to the needs of Catholics.

Another very slight revision of the first forty Psalms of the Book of Common Prayer, accompanied with short annotations, was published in the Weekly paper *IL-Habib* (13 March 1917 and subsequent numbers).

THIRD PERIOD: 1917-

It is during this period that the Bible really became the book of the people. This was due mainly to the impulse given to Maltese literature by literary societies, to the spread of education as well as to private enterprise. Both writers with a name in the field of literature and scholars who made the Bible their special study have turned to the Bible and endeavoured to make its hidden treasures easily accessible to the masses of the people. The result was many partial and independent translations of several books of the Old and New Testament and a translation of the whole Bible which is nearing completion. We shall review them in a chronological order, conveniently starting from an even earlier date.

1895-1924. The Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles translated by Jos. Muscat Azzopardi. Mr Muscat Azzopardi was one of our best writers especially as a novelist, but he was neither a biblical scholar nor a theologian. He translated the Gospel of St Matthew (Malta, 1895, pp. 228; 2nd ed. 1914, pp. lxiv, 245); the Gospel of St Mark (Malta, 1915, pp. 110); the Gospel of St Luke (Malta, 1916, pp. 310); the Gospel of St John (Malta, 1917, pp. 333); the Acts of the Apostles (Malta, 1924, pp. xxiv, 397). These translations are made from the Vulgate with notes from the Italian commentaries of Martini and Curci. In the introduction of the Gospel of St Matthew Mr Muscat Azzopardi disclaims any relation with Vassalli's translation (p. x). But in reality Muscat Azzopardi ignores only Vassalli's translation of 1829, but not the New Testament of 1847 on which he occasionally depends. Thus in Mt. 5, 44 *pro persequentibus et calumniantibus vos* Muscat Azzopardi inverts the two participles according to NT (1847) and the Revised Version against the Latin Vulgate. These agreements with NT are more numerous in the second edition of Matthew (1914) than in the first (1895), and it appears that the second edition was revised on NT. Thus in Mt. 2, 22 for *pro Herode* Muscat Azzopardi has *flok Erodi* in the first edition and *ghal Erodi* in the second edition, together with NT. Cp. also Mt. 2, 22 *secessit* - *baqa'* first, *tuarrab* second and NT; 3, 14 *prohibebat eum* - *habat jirruftab* first, *ma riedx iħallib* second and NT; 4, 8 *montem* - *gholja* first, *gebel* second and NT; 5, 9 *pacifici* - *twajba* first, *li jgibu s-sliem* second and NT. The same agreements with NT occur in the other Gospels and Acts, so Mk 6, 31 and 8, 4 *in desertum locum* - *fl imuarrab*, but in 6, 35 *uħxi* both MAzz and NT; 7, 26 *Syrophoe-*

nissa – *Sirofeniq* MAzz and NT; 9,34 and 10,31 *novissimus* – *warrani* MAzz and NT; Lk. 1,1 *ordinare narrationem* – *jinsgu l-ghajdut*; 3,5 *erunt in directa* – *ikunu msewuija* MAzz and NT; Jn 2,9 *architriclinus* – *qas-siem* MAzz and NT; 9,7 *Siloe* – *Siloha* MAzz and NT; but in Lk. 13,4 MAzz has *Silow* and NT *Siloe*; Acts 2,11 *proselyti* – *godda fid-din* MAzz and NT; 10,9 *in superiora* – *fuq il-bejt* MAzz and NT; 27,3 *curam sui agere* – *jistahja*, and many others. It must be remarked that the translation is not always correct, and this is a further proof of dependence.

In his translation of the Gospels and Acts Muscat Azzopardi is not at his best. Although he tried to be elegant, he did not venture to depart from the diction of the Latin Vulgate. Hence he is generally servile, sometimes obscure and inaccurate. The Latin ablative absolute is maintained against the rules of Maltese grammar and style. Thus Mt. 13,36 *Tunc, dimissis turbis, venit domum* is translated *Mibghutin in-nies, gie d-dar*. The Maltese construction would be *Baghat in-nies u mar id-dar*. In his effort at purism he avoids all words of foreign origin and uses words which do not always convey the original meaning. Thus *sacrificium* is wrongly translated *ibatija* which means 'suffering'; *synagoga* is not *knisja* which means 'church'; the verb *scandalizare*, which is a biblico-theological term, is translated in a variety of ways which do not always reproduce the true meaning of the original Greek; thus Mt. 13,57 *jitkazaw*, which means 'to be ashamed of, to be disgusted, to be surprised at one's actions'; Mt. 11,6 *sterr* (for *smell*) which means 'to abhor'.

1924. The book of Ruth translated from Hebrew by Mgr C. Cortis, *Il Libro di Ruth trascritto e tradotto dall'Ebraico con note*, Malta, 1924, pp. lix.

This is the first attempt in recent years to go straight to the original text. But the author's knowledge of Hebrew seems to have been very inadequate, and the translation is probably made from another translation made directly from Hebrew. The transcription is very faulty. The *qames-batus* is very often written *a*, so 2,14 *wajjizbat*; see also 1,16; 3,12.15; 4,6. Note also 2,10 *wattiffol*; also 3,4.15.

The translator prefers those Maltese words which have the same radicals as the corresponding Hebrew words, although the meaning may not always be the same. Thus 1,9 קולן (qolan) 'their voice' is rendered *qawlhom* which means *their proverb or saying*; 1,20 לא תקראני 'do not read me' is not the exact equivalent of Hebr. אל תקרא לי (al tiqrenah li) 'do not call me'; 2,1 בַּיִל (bajil) is 'riches' not *hila* 'power, strength'; 2,14 קָלִי (qali) is 'roasted grain' not Malt. *qali* 'fried meat'; 2,15 לֹא תִכְלַמְהָ (lo taklimuha) 'do not reproach her' does not correspond to Maltese *la tkellmubix* 'do not speak to her'.

1926-1932. Several books of the Old Testament and the whole of the New Testament translated by Rev. P.P. Grima. This is the list of the books translated by Grima: *The book of Lamentations* (1926); *The book of Esther* (1928); *The book of Judith and the book of Jonah* (1928); *the book of Judges* (1929); *the books of Esdra and Nehemiah* (1929); *the book of Daniel* (1929); *the Minor Prophets* (1932); *the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles* (1930); *the Epistles and Apocalypse* (n. d.).

These are popular translations made directly from the Latin Vulgate without any attempt at literary elegance or scientific accuracy. The translator's aim seems to have been that of giving the people good reading without caring much for the form. The following are a few inaccurate renderings: Hos. 1,4 *quiescere faciam* is *negred* 'I will destroy' not *nagħti mistrieħ* 'I will give rest'; 2,2 *uxor...vir* is *mara...żeuġ*, 'wife... husband', not *għarusa...għarus* 'bride...bridegroom'; Jn 1,4 *Dominus autem misit ventum magnum in mare* are omitted perhaps inadvertently; Rom. 1,12 *consolari* is *nitfarrag* not *nissabbar*; 2 Cor. 1,6 is obscure, inaccurate, incomplete: it omits *pro vestra consolatione, sive exhortamur*; 2 Cor. 3,7-11 obscure in Latin, unintelligible in Maltese; Hebr. 9,2 *panis propositionis* is rendered *ħobż tal-uegħda* 'votive bread'; and others. It is to be noticed that the author writes always *tigriř* 'falling' for *tigriř* 'proof, temptation'.

1926-32. Several books of the Old Testament translated by Alph. M. Galea. These are the books translated by Galea: *The book of Proverbs* (1926); *The book of Ecclesiastes and the book of Wisdom* (1927); *the book of Tobit* (1927); *the book of Ecclesiasticus and the Song of Songs* (1928); *the book of Psalms* (1929); *the book of Job* (1929); *the books of Maccabees* (1929); *the book of Isaiah* (1930); *the books of Samuel* (1930); *the books of Kings* (1930); *the books of Chronicles* (1931); *the book of Ezekiel* (1931); *the book of Jeremiah* (1932); *the book of Baruch* (1932).

These too are popular translations made either from the Latin Vulgate or from some modern translation made from Hebrew. The translator is a good writer with an easy and fluent style, but the style of his translation is rather heavy, difficult, unattractive.

1939-1950. The four Gospels translated by Fr G. Paris O.P. The Gospel of St John was printed in Palermo in 1939 and reprinted in Malta in 1952. The translation is made directly from the Latin Vulgate and other modern translations, especially Martini's translation and the Douay Version. The translator, a distinguished theologian, has no claims whatever in the field of Maltese literature, hence the translation has no literary merit at all. The language is the colloquial Maltese used in towns; many Italianisms could be easily avoided and the translation would have

gained in literary value, without losing anything of its merit as a translation. So he writes *sacerdot* for *qassis*, *inferjuri* for *anqas*, *irrisponda* for *wiegeb*, *issegwini* for *tigi warajja*, *irritomaw* for *regghu lura*, *Olivet* for *Żebbug*, *multiplikazzjoni* for *taktir*, etc. No writer aiming at a composition of any literary value can afford to use such language.

1929-1952, 1954-. The Old Testament complete and the New Testament nearing completion through the efforts of the present writer. This is the first and only complete translation of the Bible from the original tongue. Of the New Testament only the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Catholic Epistles and the Apocalypse are still in preparation, but it is hoped that they will be out by next year. The principles governing the translation are accuracy and elegance. I have constantly endeavoured to discover the exact meaning of words with the aid of modern Hebrew lexicographical studies. I have also tried to be elegant without being either servile or paraphrastic. To what extent I have been successful I leave it to competent judges to decide.*

P.P. SAYDON

* For critical reviews see C.L. Dessoulavy, *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, various issues from 1930 to 1949; A. Vaccari, *Biblica* 20 (1939) 435; Edward P. Arbez, *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 12 (1953) 135-8 and *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 16 (1954) 451 f; Carmel Sant, *Melita Theologica*, various issues from 1947 to 1957.

(Editor's Note)