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THE MALTESE TRANSLATION OF THE BIBLE*

Bibliography: E.P. ARBEZ, *Modern translations of the Old Testament*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 16(1954) 201-209, 343-347; 450-457; 17(1955) 76-87; 456-485; *The New Catholic Translation of the Old Testament*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 14(1952) 237-254. J. SCHMID, *Moderne Bibelübersetzungen* with a paragraph on the Maltese translations of the Bible by P.P. Saydon; an off-print from *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*, 82(1960). P.H. VOGEL and others, *Bibelübersetzungen*, Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart, 3rd ed. Bd. I, 1193-1223. A.R. HULST, *Old Testament translation problems*, Leiden, 1960; P.P. SAYDON, *History of the Maltese Bible*, Melita Theologica, 10(1957) 1-15; ID. *Philological and textual notes to the Maltese translation of the Old Testament*, Catholic Biblical Quarterly, 23(1961) 249-257; and many recent commentaries and articles in leading periodicals.

THERE is hardly anyone in the whole island, with the exception of some political orator, who ignores the existence of a Maltese Bible. And yet that Bible exists and has begun to exist since the year 1929 attaining its full growth in the year 1959, 4 years ago. And during all this time the Maltese Bible has been read and studied by hundreds and thousands of our countrymen who have found in it rich nourishment for their spiritual life and literary equipment.

Everyone knows of the existence of a Maltese Bible, but very few, if any, can realize the immense amount of work that has gone into its production. A translation may appear to be a comparatively easy task. A fair knowledge of the language from and of the language into together with the help of a dictionary is considered to be all that is required for the work. But we all know from our personal experience that translation is not always quite so easy. We all remember the strenuous and painstaking efforts, which we, in our school days, used to do to make a satisfactory translation and the teachers' severe reprehension of our mistakes. Something more than an ordinary knowledge of two languages is required for a good translation of the Bible. In the 4th century St. Augustine complained that many Latin translations of the Bible were made by people who

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had only a scanty knowledge of Greek and Latin. If this is true in the case of modern spoken languages still more true it is for languages which have long ago ceased to be spoken, as it is the case of ancient Hebrew and Greek. Besides this difficulty inherent in their own nature, there are many other difficulties arising from their transmission and phonetic development. The Bible, until the 15th century, has come down to us in a manuscript form. There are hundreds and thousands of biblical manuscripts, whether complete or fragmentary, written on parchment and papyrus. Now it is a generally recognized fact that every single manuscript copy carries with it some mistake or some change, sometimes a very slight one, due to human frailty or to the desire to improve the original supposed to be defective. The original text may be either misread or misunderstood, hence it is corrected according to the copyist's linguistic standards. The fact must also be stressed that owing to the continuous development of the language, the pronunciation may change, and with the pronunciation the spelling too and the meaning may change, and so old meanings may fall into oblivion, and new meanings crop up. Thus for example, as the sound of *għbrajn*, which once existed in Hebrew, has been lost and assimilated with that of *għajjn*, the *għbrajn* has been changed into *għajjn* thus giving rise to a new word with a meaning different from that intended by the original writer. Thus in Hos. 5, 12 the word *gash*, usually translated 'moth' is in reality *gath* which means 'purulent matter'. There are then in Hebrew two different nouns: '*ash* 'pus', '*ash* 'moth', to which we may add a third one: '*ash* 'a bird's nest'. So also an initial *j* in Hebrew sometimes represents an original *w* as the verb *jalad* represents an original *walad* (Maltese *wiled*). Now it sometimes happens that the initial *j* is treated as an original *j*, while in reality it is a development of an original *w*; hence the translation is not correct. Thus the verb *jadagħ*, generally translated 'to know', sometimes stands for *wadagħ* 'to submit' and must therefore be translated accordingly. Hence in Judges 16, 9 we read in the story of Samson 'and his strength was not known' or somewhat paraphrastically 'the secret of his strength was not known'. But if we refer the verb *jadagħ* to his original form *wadagħ*, a better sense is obtained 'and his strength was not subdued'. These and many other examples show the imperative necessity of a wide and thorough knowledge of semitic languages in order to attain the writer's mind as fully as possible. Moreover, the books of the Bible were not written in that form of alphabet with which we are familiar, but in another form which is known to us from inscriptions. Similarity of form has always been a source of confusion and of misreading and mistranslations. To quote one example. In the

Song of Songs 5, 6 we read 'my soul failed as he spoke'; these are the bride's words, which are unsuitable to the context. When the bride rose up to open to her beloved, he had already turned and gone, so she could not have heard him speaking, and there was no cause for failing. Interpreters try to escape the difficulty by emending slightly the verb rendered by 'as he spoke' into 'when he ran away'. But no emendation is necessary. In the old Hebrew script the consonants *d* and *għ* were very similar in form and consequently interchangeable, the *d* having a more or less triangular form, and the *għ* having a roughly circular form. Now the Hebrew verb for 'he spoke' begins with *d*. Supposing this *d* to stand for *għ* we would obtain a verb which means 'he went away'; hence the sense is 'my soul failed as he (my beloved) went away'. And this sense which admirably fits the context, is obtained without any emendation of the text and without doing violence to the meaning of the words. Now every translator must obviously do his utmost to determine the meaning of every single word as accurately as possible and express it as clearly as possible. In many cases neither ancient versions nor modern dictionaries afford us any help, and the translator is inexorably bound to have recourse to comparative semitic philology and to all the aids of textual criticism. In order to help the translator solve his many translation problems the United Bible Societies have recently published a book entitled *Helps for translators*, Vol. I, *Old Testament Translation Problems* by A.R. Hulst (Leyden, 1960). I read the opening paragraph of the Introduction: 'Every Bible translator knows how difficult it is to deal adequately with serious problems of text and exegesis. This is especially true of problems posed by certain Old Testament passages which seem almost to defy intelligible rendering. One can obtain some help in commentaries and technical journals, but there is no place where all the principal problems have been gathered together in a single handy volume. Accordingly, the book is designed to remedy, at least in part, certain aspects of this situation and to provide practical suggestions for the solution of many textual and exegetical problems of the Old Testament'. Yet in spite of the help this book is intended to give, many translation problems are still unsolved.

In order to produce a good biblical translation two requisites are absolutely required, namely an adequate knowledge of biblical languages and a complete mastery of the language into which the Bible is being translated. The basis of a good translation is a critical edition of the text, but although there are many critical editions of the Old and New Testament, there still remain many passages for which the editions do not give the correct reading. In some cases interpreters even complain

that the text is corrupt beyond emendation. But despite these deficiencies, which fortunately are not very numerous, no serious translator can dispense with the use of a good critical edition of the biblical text.

The linguistic knowledge includes both vocabulary and grammar. The lexical knowledge is by no means restricted to printed dictionaries. The Hebrew language is expanding every day; new roots and new meanings are being daily discovered and constantly enriching the Hebrew Dictionary. A deeper study of Hebrew especially in relation to the earliest Greek version of the Bible, the comparative study of Hebrew in relation to Assyrian and Arabic, the discovery and the study of the Ugaritic tablets in 1929 and that of the Dead Sea scrolls in 1947 have yielded such a fruitful crop of new roots and meanings as to render a revision of our Hebrew Dictionaries an indispensable need. To pick out a few examples: *ahabah* means 'love'; this is the meaning given by all dictionaries, hence we read in Hos. 11, 4 of 'the bands of love' and in Cant. 3, 10 of Solomon's palanquin 'lovingly wrought'. But this word has been found in Ugarit with the meaning 'leather' corresponding to Ar. *ihabu*. Consequently the bands of love become bands of leather, and the 'palanquin worked with love' becomes 'a palanquin worked with leather'; the word 'ar or plur. 'arim is usually translated 'cities'; but in some places this meaning does not suit the context, and a different meaning seems to be required. Thus in Jer. 2, 28 and 11, 13 we read the same words 'as many as your cities are your gods'; they were even more! Now in Ugaritic the noun *gar* means 'a stone daubed with (sacrificial) blood', hence 'an object of worship', 'an idol'. Hence the sense in Jeremiah is: 'as the number of your cultic stones (that is your idols) are your gods, which makes a better sense. The same meaning must be applied to Ez. 6, 6: 'Wherever you dwell your idols (not 'cities') shall be laid waste and your high places ruined'. Hos. 11, 6: 'My sword shall rage against their idols (not 'cities')'. And Micah 5, 13: 'I will root out your Asherim (objects of worship) from among you and destroy your idols' (not 'cities'). The apparently compound word *salmawet* generally translated 'the shadow of death' is in reality one word meaning 'deep darkness'. In Is. 3, 18 we find the word *shebishim* which does not occur elsewhere and is generally translated 'caul, headbands'. Its true meaning, however, is 'sun-ornaments' made of glass or metal and worn as a pendant. In the same verse we meet the word *sabaronim*, which means 'moon-ornaments'. Both words and meanings occur in Ugaritic. Still more interesting is the appellation '*aqallaton* given to the serpent Leviathan in Is. 27, 1. The same epithet is used in Ugaritic of a creature called *ltn*, obviously the leviathan, with the meaning of the 'crooked serpent'.

Again the verb *rum* means 'to be high' but certain forms apparently related to it, are in reality related to another root *rama* 'to wish, to desire', thus in Prov. 29, 4 '*ish terumot* is not 'a man who exacts gifts' (R.S.V.), nor 'one who imposes heavy taxes' (Conf. V.) but 'a man of desires', that is 'a covetous man'.

The grammatical knowledge of Hebrew is equally important for a good translation. It is universally admitted that Hebrew lacks that variety of moods and tenses which enable the writer to express all those nuances of the action which the writer feels he must express. All these different nuances are expressed by the same verbal form, which if translated literally, misses the true meaning intended by the writer. Thus Hebrew had no special forms to express the intention of doing an action or the beginning of an action. All such modalities of action are expressed by the simple form of the imperfect *jigtol*. So in 1Kgs 6, 1 the verb *wajjiben* must be translated 'and he built'. But obviously Solomon did not build the temple in one day nor in one year; therefore the past tense must refer not to the completed action but only to its beginning, hence the sense and correct translation is 'and he began to build', so the Latin Vulgate, RSV. In the parallel passage in 2Chr. 3, 1.2 it is expressly stated that 'Solomon began to build'. In 2Kgs 9, 23 the verb *wajjanos*, which is translated 'and he fled' in RSV and other modern versions, must be translated 'and he wanted to flee' or 'he tried to flee', the imperfect being a conative imperfect denoting an effort to do something, not the action itself. As a matter-of-fact Joram did not succeed in fleeing, but he simply tried and wanted to flee. In 2Kgs 6, 4 the rendering 'they cut down trees' is not correct; the correct rendering is 'and they began to cut down trees'. Similarly in Haggai 1, 14 the correct translation is 'and they began to work' not 'and they worked'. Jer. 37, 12 it is said that Jeremiah 'went out from Jerusalem to go to the land of Benjamin'. But Jeremiah was arrested at the gate of Benjamin and was not allowed to go out of the city, so the sense is: 'Jeremiah wanted to go out of Jerusalem'. There are many other passages where grammatical considerations suggest a rendering different from the current one. In Is. 5, 4 the rendering 'Why, when I looked for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?' is ungrammatical, for in this construction the subject of the verb 'looked for' and the infinitive 'to yield' must be the same. Grammar therefore requires this translation: 'Why, when I looked to get grapes, did it get bad grapes?' In 1Macc. 8, 30 the Greek οὗτοι καὶ οὗτοι is literally rendered 'these and those', 'les uns et les autres' even by such scholars as Abel and Dhorme. But this rendering ignores the idiomatic use of the underlying

Hebrew conjunction *waw* 'and' which in this case is 'or' not 'and'. Hence the correct rendering is 'either these or those'. In the same book of Mac-cabees 10, 72 the two imperatives ἐρώτησον καὶ μάθε ask and learn', according to Hebrew syntax are not co-ordinated but subordinated the one to the other, hence the sense is: 'Ask that you may learn' or 'Ask and so you will learn'.

So far we have limited ourselves to the Old Testament, but the New Testament too provides many good illustrations of the importance and necessity of a sound linguistic knowledge. Thus, theologians of all times have been in pains to reconcile Christ's words 'Whosoever shall put away his wife except it be for fornication ...' (Matt. 19, 7) with the law of indissolubility of marriage proclaimed by Christ shortly before 'What God hath joined together, let no man put asunder' (Matt. 19, 6). A deeper study of the Rabbinic writings has brought to light the exact meaning of the Aramaic word *zenuth*, which is not simply fornication, but, and this is its technical meaning 'an unlawful marriage, such as a marriage contracted within forbidden degrees.' This meaning once established, all becomes clear. The sense of Christ's words is: Whosoever shall put away his wife, except in the case of an unlawful union ... The same word and meaning *zenuth* πορνεία recur in Act. 15, 20 where the Judaeo Christians are exhorted to abstain themselves from idolatry, fornication ... Now there was no need to exhort Christians to abstain from fornication, but they had to abstain from marriage within certain degrees of relationship. Again Paul is angry with the Corinthians because one of them was living with his father's wife, a widow who was not the man's mother (1Cor. 5, 1). Paul calls this act *porneia* - *zenuth*. Now if this act of immorality was a marriage of a man with his dead father's wife, which was a marriage against the Jewish and the Roman law and consequently an unlawful marriage, the whole story becomes perfectly clear, but if *porneia* were an ordinary sin of fornication, we see no reason why Paul should call this sin 'a sin that is not found even among pagans'. In Paul's days the Corinthians were notorious for their immoral life. In Matt. 6, 27 the word *belikia* is translated by Vulg. and some modern translators 'stature, height', so also a modern Maltese translation of the Gospel of Matthew. But the Greek word means also 'length of life, span of life', and this meaning is to be preferred in Matt. 6, 27 as it is actually preferred by most of modern translators and commentators. And there are hundreds of cases of words and constructions which cannot be correctly explained and translated without an adequate knowledge of the semitic substratum, of the Koine or Hellenistic linguistic usage, as well as the language of

the papyri, a study which since the time of Adolf Deissmann, that is since the beginning of the twentieth century has made enormous progress. Let us take a few examples. We read in the Gospel of Matthew 2, 11 that the three wise men offered to the babe Jesus as gifts: gold, frankincense and myrrh, χρυσὸν καὶ λίβανον καὶ σμύρναν. Now, to say the truth, the presence of gold among such aromatic substances as frankincense and myrrh is, to say the least, unfitting. Hence it may be doubted whether the wise men really offered gold. Now there exist in many museums several stone-altars found in South Arabia and consisting of a block of stone for burning aromatic substances and having on their four faces the names of aromatic substances inscribed. Among these names we find the word *dbb*, which, combined with the names of other aromatic substances, must naturally denote an aromatic substance. In fact *dabib* in Arabic means a drop of a sort of resinous substance secreted by certain plants. The noun *mrt*, denoting the myrrh, is also found inscribed on the altar blocks, together with the word *lbny* which means 'frankincense'. So the names of the gifts *dbb*, *lbny* and *mrt* correspond to three names of aromatic substances inscribed on the faces of the stone-altars. The noun *dbb* soon became confused with the noun *dbb* 'gold' and so gold found its way among the gifts presented by the wise men to the Babe Jesus. This confusion gave rise to another misunderstanding. The golden altar mentioned in Apoc. 8, 3; 9, 13 is in reality the altar of perfumes mentioned in Lk 1, 11. And so many other examples.

As a result of the revival of biblical studies among Catholics there has been in recent years an extraordinary crop of biblical translations in all the Catholic world. I limit myself to mention only a few of them.

You all know of the translation by Mgr. R. Knox, of which the O.T. was published in 1948, the N.T. in 1946, and the complete two-volume edition in 1955. Contrary to all modern translations it is made from the Latin Vulgate, but the translator kept constantly an eye on the Greek text. The translator was particularly interested in the style of his translation which he endeavoured to make as modern and English as possible, even at the cost of literality.

The Westminster Version of the Sacred Scriptures from the original Greek and Hebrew, undertaken with the approval of the Cardinal Archbishop and the Catholic Hierarchy has given us the N.T. complete and only a few books of the O.T.

The Catholic Biblical Association of America has given us *The Holy Bible* translated from the original languages with critical use of all the ancient sources, 1941-1955.

The English Protestants, no longer satisfied with the King James Version published in 1611, have undertaken another revision, known as The Revised Standard Version, which is an authorized revision of the American Standard Version, published in 1901.

Another Protestant translation of the Bible is *The New English Bible*, which may be described as an authoritative attempt to present the meaning of the original text, as understood by the best available scholarship, in English which is as clear and natural for the modern reader as the subject matter will allow. The translation of the New Testament after 13 years of co-operative work on the original Greek text has appeared in the year 1961. The translation of the Old Testament is still in preparation.

The old French Crampon has been revised by Fr. Bonsirven and published in 1952.

The Benedictine Fathers of Maredsous in Belgium have produced a good French translation with very brief notes.

The Letouzey Bible, a commentary rather than a mere translation, begun in 1935 and completed in 1961, gives a translation based upon an accurate and critical study of the text.

The latest and best French translation is the so-called *Bible de Jerusalem* undertaken under the direction of the Ecole Biblique of Jerusalem, published in parts during the years 1948-1954, and later in a one-volume edition. In the words of a modern critic 'French Catholics have every right to take pride in this new edition: it represents a splendid achievement, scientific and literary, well suited to bring readers to the Bible not only among those whom their calling obliges to use the Bible, but also from a much wider circle, educated persons who will enjoy the literary excellence of the version and readers who will come to it for spiritual profit.

From Italy comes *La Sacra Bibbia* tradotta dai testi originali con note a cura del Pontificio Istituto Biblico di Roma, published in 9 volumes, 1942-1958. The high standard of the translation is guaranteed by the authority of the Biblical Institute and the scholarship of the collaborators.

Other modern Italian translations are: *La Sacra Bibbia* translated by G. Bonaccorsi and others, 1959 in 5 volumes. The translation is made from the Latin Vulgate. Again: *La Sacra Bibbia* translated by G. Alberioni and others from the original languages, 1958.

In order to assess rightly the value of a biblical translation three factors or aspects must be taken into consideration: the religious, the literary and the scientific aspect. The Bible was originally translated into the people's language in order to meet the religious requirements of the

people. This was the origin of the Aramaic Targumim or paraphrases of the Bible and of the earliest translation of the O.T. known as the 'Septuagint'. The reading of the Bible was the central part of the Jewish liturgical service, but when the Jews residing outside Palestine no longer spoke and no longer understood their own national language, they felt the need of having the Bible translated into the language of their adopted country, and it was so that the first translations of the Bible sprang up. In later times when Christianity began to spread in the West, where neither Hebrew nor Greek were understood by the common people, the Bible was again translated into Latin to satisfy the religious and spiritual needs of the rising christian communities. And so in the course of centuries, with the decadence of Latin and the rising of new languages the need was again felt of having the Scriptures rendered into the new languages. So we may say that the spread of Christianity and the development of new languages went hand in hand producing new translations and continually nourishing the spiritual life of christians. This hand-in-hand movement still continues in our times and is most strongly felt in mission lands, where the missionaries themselves do their best to have at least parts of the Scriptures rendered into the language of their converts, and we can safely say that there is no language on earth that does not boast of at least a partial translation of the Bible.

The first translations of the Bible were, from a literary and scientific point of view, a very mediocre work. The Greek version called the LXX in some books hardly rises above mediocrity. St. Augustine complains that the first Latin translations were made by persons who possessed only a scanty and inadequate knowledge of Greek and Latin. But when languages began to develop on literary lines and translations became the work of cultured persons, translations began to be dressed in a more or less literary style according to the literary efficiency of the translator. St. Jerome, a good Latin writer of the silver age has striven to give his Latin translation of the Bible a classical turn of style which everyone still admires and enjoys. This effort at literary standards is one of the guiding principles of all modern translations. Among modern Latin translations we may mention the new translation of the Psalms, which has become the official Latin translation of the Roman Church. The translation of the two small books of Canticles and Ecclesiastes by Fr. now Card. Bea combining elegance of expression with scientific accuracy may be considered as the prelude of a complete modern translation to replace Jerome's work as the official text in the Catholic Church.

All modern translators are convinced of the importance of the literary standard of the translation. No one ignores the translation by Mgr. Knox, a translation, which although sometimes too paraphrastic and is made from the Vulgate not from the original languages, has won the favour of all readers having a refined literary taste. The old English versions, the authorized and the revised, no longer satisfy the literary standards of modern times, and, besides the Revised Standard Version, which is only a revision of a revision, a new translation is being prepared, of which the New Testament has already been published. Both the French translation known as the Bible de Jerusalem and the Italian La Sacra Bibbia published by the Pontifical Biblical Institute of Rome were submitted to a strict examination of their literary style and diction before going to press.

Considering the third factor, that is the scientific aspect of biblical translations, we can safely say that all modern translations are the outcome of a general effort at bringing modern biblical scholarship within reach of the ordinary reader. The progress of biblical studies achieved in recent years has been enormous, the vocabulary of the Hebrew language is daily expanding, new words and new meanings are being continually discovered and new light is being incessantly shed on many obscure passages of the Bible. The Ras Shamra tablets, the Dead Sea scrolls and comparative Semitic and Hellenic philology are the chief sources of our new linguistic knowledge. And progress is so rapid that a translation is already antiquated as soon as it is published. Hence the numerous successive revisions of standard translations. Although some new renderings are simply conjectural and ready to be ousted and replaced by better translations, the fact remains that a good many new renderings and emendations of the traditional text must be definitely accepted as certainly correct. So there is hardly any respectable translator who still clings to the old meaningless rendering of Is. 53, 9 'in his death', instead of 'his burying-place', a reading which is supported by the Isaiah manuscript of the Dead Sea.

Let us now look at our Maltese translations in the light of these factors. The earliest translations were the result of protestant propaganda. The Church Missionary Society, a Protestant institution, was very active in Malta during the first half of the 19th century and it gave us the translations of the Gospel of St. John in 1822, the four Gospels and Acts in 1829, the new Testament in 1847, the Book of Common Prayer with the Psalms in 1845. These translations continue to be printed and published

by the British and Foreign Bible Society up to the present day. Although the Catholic religion is as old in Malta as the 1st century A.D., no attempt has ever been made to render the Bible into the people's language. Indeed such an attempt would have been absolutely useless since the people could not read, and education was limited to foreign languages Italian and Latin. It was the Maltese scholar M.A. Vassalli the first to give the Maltese language a literary status by writing its Grammar and Vocabulary and insisting upon the necessity of learning one's national language before any other foreign language. And it was the same Vassalli who gave us the first translation of the Gospels. It is regrettable that the Catholic approach to the Bible remained for many years very timid and indecisive. The Bible was considered to be too holy to be touched by human hands, it was the book sealed with seven seals with no one who was able or willing to open it or look therein. During the latter half of the 19th century the Catholics contented themselves with adapting protestant translations to their needs. It was not until the 20th century that the Bible began to find a more favourable reception among Catholics, but still translations remained the result of private initiative. Thus the translations by Mr. Muscat Azzopardi, by the Revd. Grima, by A.M. Galea and my own translation are all due to private enterprise. The Church has neither expressly encouraged nor discouraged such translations, although she made use of them in her teaching.

The literary value of the earliest Maltese translation is easily gauged by the fact that it was the work of a great Maltese scholar who had previously published a Grammar and a Vocabulary of the Maltese language and was deeply versed in oriental languages. The only or the greatest defect of Vassalli's translation is its rigid stylistic stiffness which makes it perhaps somewhat disagreeable to modern tastes. Vassalli was more a scholar than a man of letters, and his special capacity is reflected in his translation in which we find the application of his grammatical rules and the words registered in his Lexicon, but not the graceful flexibility of the language, the elegance of expression, the idiomatic vividness of style which characterize other literary works. And this style, robust but uncouth, is common to all the translations of that period.

In recent times a stronger effort at elegance of form was made with results sometimes very satisfactory. Mr. J. Muscat Azzopardi, though not a biblical scholar, was one of our best writers and his translation of the Gospels betrays the hand of a refined writer. But the translation of the Revd. P.P. Grima is utterly careless and defiant of the most elementary

rules of style. He was simply intent on giving the people some good religious reading and was absolutely insensible to elegance of form and style. Equally popular in form and scope are the translations by Comm. A.M. Galea who, though the most prolific popular writer, has spoilt his style through a misconception of biblical style. Popularity in its lowest degree is the standard of the translation of the Gospels by Fr. Paris O.P.

As far back as 1928 I undertook the translation of the whole Bible from the original languages. The work was completed in 1959. A revised second edition is now being prepared. As I find it most disagreeable to speak of myself and my work and on the other hand many peculiarities of my translation are completely overlooked and unappreciated by the average reader, who may find in them a cause for adverse criticism, I limit myself here to submit some stylistic and textual peculiarities of my translation in order to give some idea of its literary standard.

In the first place I have always striven to give a purely semitic turn to the Maltese construction, avoiding at the same time, as much as possible, all foreign influences. Hence I have invariably avoided all foreign words for which there is a purely Maltese-semitic equivalent; so contrary to Fr. Paris, I have always used the word *qassis* for 'priest' and never *sacerdot*, though this word is current in daily use. So too I have never used the word *re* 'king', but always *sultan*. The only allowance to foreign words was the lack of a corresponding Maltese word or the inexact correspondence of a Maltese word to the original Hebrew word. Thus the word *għarix* does not correspond exactly to the word *tent*, hence in my revised edition the word has been changed to *tinda*, which in spite of its Italian origin, represents more accurately the meaning of the original Hebrew. So also I have used such words as *poplu* 'people', Italian *popolo*; *ligi* 'law', Ital. *legge*; *preċett* and *kmandament* 'precept' 'commandment'; *parir* 'advice' Ital. *parere*; *kamp* 'camp'; Ital. *campo*, Eng. camp, and some others.

In order to eschew as far as possible the use of words of foreign origin I have used words which, though registered in our vocabularies, are to-day obsolete, archaic, not easily comprehensible by the average reader. So *tabbaħ* 'a cook', given by Vassalli (*tebaħ* 'to cook'), Falzon, Busuttil; *ħatem*, *ħattem* 'to seal' (Vassalli, Falzon, Caruana); *susan* 'lily' (Vassalli, Falzon, Caruana, Busuttil); *deben* 'to anoint' (Vassalli, Falzon); *kies* 'cup' (Vassalli, Falzon, Busuttil). In my effort to use always a purely Maltese word I have not hesitated to form new words from existing roots; thus *emin* 'faithful' *emiēna* 'faithfulness, fidelity' from the verb *emmen*

'to trust, to believe in'; *saffel* 'to bring low' from *isfel* 'low'; *stagar* 'to hire a workman' from *aġar* 'workman's wages'; *mitraq* 'a hammer' from *mterqa* which is its feminine; *rsal*, *rsajjel* 'messenger' from *rasul* 'apostle'. All such new words are formed according to strict rules of Maltese-Arabic Grammar and have their exact equivalent in Arabic.

Owing to the lack of Maltese words expressing abstract and negative notions, every translator, I mean a serious and respectable translator, will find himself in extreme difficulties to translate such words as 'immortal', 'immortality', 'incorruption', 'perfection', 'injustice', 'justification', 'salvation', 'sincerity', 'innocence', and many others. Such words must necessarily be translated paraphrastically. If one tries to translate these words by simply transliterating them in Maltese, as 'immortali', 'immortalità', 'inkorruzjoni', etc. he will run the risk of making himself unintelligible to the common people who do not understand Italian.

Another great difficulty which faces the serious translator is this: Sometimes two words, which may be two nouns, two adjectives or two verbs are co-ordinated by the conjunction 'and'. Now it may happen that one of the two words has a Maltese equivalent, while the other has none. How is the translator to get out of the difficulty? Either by using an Italo-Maltese word for the missing Maltese word or making use of paraphrasis. Thus for example the expression 'beautiful and pleasant' is rendered *sabiħ u pjaċevoli* or *sabiħ u li joġġob*; if instead of 'pleasant' we have 'amiable', the paraphrasis would be *ta' min iħobbu*. Now all such hybrid combinations are stylistic deformities, though they may be agreeable to many writers. I have always done my best to avoid these stylistic monstrosities, but I wonder whether I have been always successful.

Other literary peculiarities are the following: The word *ġebel* means 'stones' as a collective noun. The primitive meaning 'mountain' has been occasionally preserved in a few toponomic names, thus *ġebel Ċantar*, *ġebel Majjim*, *ġebel Ghorab*, names of hills, highlands. I have invariably retained the primitive meaning, hence always *ġebel Sinaj* 'mount Sinaj' but never *il-muntanja Sinaj*. Moreover, the word *ruħ*, is feminine and used in the sense of 'soul'. But the word has in reality in Maltese and in Arabic two genders and two meanings. It is feminine when it means 'soul'; it is masculine when it means 'spirit', so *Ruħ il-Qodos* 'the Holy Spirit' is masculine. This distinction of gender and meaning has been strictly maintained.

I wonder whether such linguistic usage justifies the violent onslaught

made by some self-made critics who have accused my translation of incomprehensibility and unsuitability for the people. It is rather their limited and inadequate knowledge of Maltese the cause of the unintelligibility of a score of words in my translation. With a small effort and an adequate knowledge of the flexibility of the language and its power of shooting new forms from existing roots one will easily arrive at understanding every single word in my translation, especially in view of the fact that quite many difficult words are explained in the notes. Thus in Is. 8, 16, 17 the verb *inbattem* has in the notes as its equivalent *nissigilla*; in 18, 6 the two verbs *isajfu* and *ixittu* are explained in the notes as *igħaddu s-sajf* and *igħaddu x-xitwa*. In 41, 25 *xmiel* is 'tramuntana'. In Ps. 43, 3 *emiēna* is 'fedeltà'. In Prov. 13, 17 *emin* is 'fidil'. In the construction of sentences I have always endeavoured to follow the rules of semitic syntax. That is why my style has a strong semitic style so different from that of most Maltese writers, who are sometimes so deeply imbued in the style of foreign languages that they unconsciously shape their style after the fashion of their favourite language. This I have done every effort to avoid. One day I happened to be talking with a foreign semitic scholar who had my Maltese Bible. He told me: 'I can understand your translation better than any other book in Maltese'. And that was a great compliment to me.

The semitic style is particularly conspicuous in the poetic books in which I have endeavoured to preserve the original rhythmical structure. Under this respect the books of Job and Canticles are outstanding. I read ch 41 of the book of Job containing the description of the crocodile:

- 40, 25 Tistad int għall-kukkudrill b'sunnara,
jew b'habel tista' int torbotlu lsienu?
- 26 Tqeghidlu int qafla fi mnifsejh,
jew b'ganċ titqablu xedqu?
- 27 Sa jigilek b'xi hafna thannin
jew ikellmek bi kliem helu?
- 28 Sa jirtabat b'xi ftehimia mieghek,
biex tieħdu b'qaddej għal dejjem?
- 29 Sa tilgħab int bih bhalkieku għasfur
u torbtu għall-bnejtiet tieghek?
- 30 Sa jinnegozjawh l-ixirka fis-sajd,
jew jaqsmuh bejn il-merkanti?
- 31 Timlielu int gildu bil-vleġeġ,
u rasu bid-daqqiet tal-foxxna?

- 32 Qieghed idek fuq;
 ahseb fit-taqbida; le ma terga'!
- 41, 1 Ara kif tqarraq bih it-tama tieghu;
 malli biss jarah jintelaq.
- 2 Mhux ahrax jekk wiehed iqajjmu?
 u min hu li jista' jieqaf quddiemu?
- 3 Min habat ghalih u helisha?
 Taht is-sema kollu ma hawn hadd.
- 4 Ma noqghodx ma nghid xejn fuq gismu;
 nghid fuq il-qawwa tieghu li ma hawnx daqsha.
- 5 Min qatt fetah il-quddiem ta' libstu,
 u gol-qoxra mitnija tieghu min jista' jidhol?
- 6 Min qatt fetah il-bibien ta' halqu?
 madwar snienu hemm il-biza'.
- 7 Dahru srabat ta' tarki,
 mwahhlin bhal hatem taz-żnied.
- 8 Wahda mal-ohra marbuta,
 u nifs ma jghaddix bejniethom.
- 9 Kull wahda ma sehbitha mitbuqa,
 mghaqqdin u le ma jinfirdu.
- 10 L-ghatis tieghu jiddi bid-dawl,
 ghajnejh donnhom xfar iz-żemij.
- 11 Minn fommu johorgu ilsna ta' nar
 xrajjar ta' nar jittajjru.
- 12 Minn immifsejh johrog id-duhhan,
 bhal inhasa tbaqbaq u taghli.
- 13 Nifsu jqabbad il-gamar
 u ilsna ta' nar minn fommu johorgu.
- 14 F'ghonqu qieghda l-qawwa
 u quddiemu jaqbez il-biza'.
- 15 Il-qalba ta' lahmu maghquda
 iebsa fuq u le ma titharrek.
- 16 Qalbu iebsa bhal hagra,
 iebsa bhal hagra ta' taht tal-mithna.
- 17 Malli jqum il-qawwijin jitwerwru,
 jintilfu mibluhin bil-biza'.
- 18 Is-sejf li jilhqu le ma jzomm shih,
 anqas lanza, vlegga jew labarda.
- 19 Ghalih il-hadid bhat-tiben,
 u l-inhas bhal ghuda msewwsa.

- 20 Le ma tharrbu l-vlegga tal-qaws,
ghafien isir ghalih il-hagar imwaddab.
- 21 Tibna hi ghalih il-mazza,
u jidhak bit-tixjir tal-lanza.
- 22 Tahtu hemm xfafar ta' xaqquf,
u jifrex bhal xatba fit-tajn.
- 23 Ighalli qiegh il-bahar bhal borma,
jagħmel il-bahar bhal hwawar ibaqqu.
- 24 Ibajjad warajh il-mogħdija,
il-bahar ikun qisu sar ixjeb.
- 25 Ma hemmx fuq l-art bhalu,
magħmul li ma jibzaghx.
- 26 Fuq kull min hu mkabbar iħares;
hu sultan id-dbejjeb kburin kollha.

In order to give some idea of the scientific standard of my Translation I should like now to submit a list of passages that are translated by me differently from current and traditional translations, and sometimes even from modern translations of the highest scientific standard:

In Gen. 2, 5 the Hebrew construction is badly involved and translations are more or less awkward. The Douay Version reads thus: 'And every plant of the field before it sprung up in the earth, and every herb of the ground before it grew: for the Lord God had not rained upon the earth; and there was not a man to till the earth. But a spring rose out of the earth, watering all the surface of the earth'. The King James Version of 1611 gives more or less the same rendering. Even the Revised Standard Version does not differ substantially from the older versions. The translation by the Catholic Biblical Association of America is slightly better: 'there was not yet any field shrub on the earth nor had the plants of the field sprung up, for the Lord God had sent no rain on the earth, and there was no man to till the soil; but a mist rose from the earth and watered all the surface of the ground'. The contradiction between the lack of rain and the irrigation of the earth by a spring or mist rising out from the ground is apparent. There was no vegetation because there was no rain, but the earth was irrigated, therefore there should have been vegetation. Modern translations are generally not very successful in removing the difficulty. But the Italian translation by the Pontifical Biblical Institute has felicitously rendered; 'nessun arbusto campestre c'era ancora sulla terra ne alcuna erba germogliava ancora per la campagna, perche il Signore Iddio non aveva fatto piovere sulla terra nè c'era uomo che colti-

vasse il suolo e dalla terra facesse salir l'onda ad irrigare la superficie del suolo'. This translation agrees with that proposed by me as far back as 1936 and has now been adopted in my revised edition.

In Gen. 3, 15 the verb *shupb* makes difficulty. The verb is twice used presumably with the same meaning. Hence all such renderings as 'she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel' (Douay and American Confraternity Version) must be ruled out as incompatible with lexical exigencies. On the other hand the rendering of the verb *shupb* as 'to crush' in both occurrences, as 'he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel' would mean that the two adversaries, the woman's seed and the devil, will destroy one another, which is against the context which foretells the victory of the woman's seed and the total defeat of the devil. The difficulty is easily solved by giving the second *shupb* the meaning of a conative imperfect. The sense would be The woman's seed will crush the serpent's head, while the serpent will try (but in vain) to crush (that is, to attack, to bite) the heel of the woman's seed. This is my revised rendering of this passage.

In Lev. 4, 13. 22. 27; 5, 2. 3. 4. 17 the Latin Vulg. and the Douay omit the verb *weashemu*. The RSV translates wrongly. Other modern translations omit also the verb *ashemu*. The omission is unjustifiable as the verb gives the reason why expiation of a sin of ignorance is necessary. The sense is: If a person commits a sin through ignorance, he is really guilty, and when he becomes aware of his sin, he will have to offer a sacrifice. And the important thing to notice is that the conjunction *waw* prefixed to the verb *ashemu* is not a copulative conjunction, but a *waw apodosi* introducing the principal clause after a subordinate clause.

In Lev. 23, 36; Numb. 29, 35; Deut. 16, 8 the liturgical term *aseret* is usually translated 'assembly, meeting, convocation'. But the real meaning is 'abstention from work, vacation'. This meaning is justified by the epexegetical clause which follows the noun: 'Thou shalt do no work'.

Deut. 32, 36 the assonant expression *asur weazub* which recurs again in 1Kgs 14, 10; 21, 21; 2Kgs 9, 8; 14, 26 is generally taken to denote the whole people as divided into two opposite classes, such as slaves and freemen, those that are under age and those that are of age, protected and unprotected. I have shown elsewhere that the two assonant words denote one class of the population, the effect of the assonance being that of bringing out the fundamental meaning more emphatically. As this is that of 'powerlessness, helplessness', the meaning is: all the people even the poorest, the weakest, the most helpless of the population. This

is my translation which differs from most modern translations.

Jgs 16, 9. After Delilah's first unsuccessful attempt to discover the cause of Samson's extraordinary strength all texts and versions read 'And his strength was not known', that is the secret of his strength was not discovered. This makes good sense. But the initial *yodb* of the verb *jada* 'know' sometimes represents a primitive *waw* (cp Hebr *yalad* Malt. *wiled*). If this is the case here, instead of *yada* 'to know' we have the verb *wada* 'to subdue' and a better sense is obtained: 'And his strength was not brought to submission'.

Jgs 19, 2. Here we read the story of the levite whose wife ran away. The cause of her desertion was, according to the Hebrew text, her unfaithfulness. Many modern translators, however, adopt the LXX reading 'she became angry, she quarrelled'. So that the cause of the woman's desertion was not conjugal infidelity but only a quarrel between wife and husband, an ordinary domestic event.

In 2Kgs 9, 23 the verb *wajjanos* does not mean 'and he fled' as it is usually translated (RSV) De Vaux, Dhorme) but 'he tried to flee, he wanted to flee'. The verb is a conative imperfect, hence I have translated 'ried jahrab'. As a matter of fact King Joram was not successful in his attempt to escape, for he was killed on the spot.

IMacc. 8, 30. The Greek 'these and those' is literally rendered 'les uns et les autres' (Abel, Dhorme), 'both parties' (RSV). This rendering ignores the idiomatic use of the underlying Hebrew *waw*, which in this case means 'or', hence my translation 'wiehed jew l-iehor'.

Tob. 7, 13 The words *kai os* are generally literally translated 'and how'. But the words are the literal translation of Hebr *waken* 'and so'. The sense is: 'and so they gave her to him'.

Tob. 12, 6. The Greek text is confused and translations are more or less awkward. By retranslating the Greek into Hebrew, the following text is obtained: 'Bless God and praise him before all the living for what he has done to you. It is good to bless his name'.

Job. 6, 4. We read 'The terrors of God are arrayed against me'. This rendering is adopted by most modern translators. In 1955 Prof. G.R. Driver proposed translating 'wear me down' instead of 'are arrayed against me', a translation which I had already adopted in 1947.

Job 29, 18. Job recalling the happy days of his younger years says: 'I thought: I shall die in my nest'. The mention of the nest is here inappropriate and destroys the parallelism. The word, however, is retained by many modern translators and interpreters. Driver postulates a root *qn*

suggesting the idea of strength and translates 'I shall die in my full strength'; but this translation is unsuitable to the context unless one supposes vigour to be still fresh in old age. My translation follows the LXX: 'I shall die in my old age' which restores the parallelism with the following stich: 'I shall multiply my days as the sand'.

Cant. 1, 4. The verb *hebi'ani* is translated either as an imperative 'introduce me' or as a perfect tense 'he introduced me'. In my translation the verb is the protasis of a conditional sentence, thus 'if the king were to bring me into his chamber, we will rejoice'.

Is. 2, 16. The 'beautiful things' or 'pleasant imagery', which make no sense, have become in my translation 'beautiful ships'.

Is. 4, 5.6. Both the Hebrew text and all ancient and modern versions separate the last word of verse 5 from the first word of verse 6. In my translation the two words have been brought together so as to form an assonant combination *huppah wesukkab*, the effect of the assonance being that of emphasizing the idea of divine protection.

Is. 24, 16. The word *razi* is difficult to explain. Auvray-Steinmann translate tentatively: 'Assez! Assez!' Fischer: 'Verderben mir, Verderben mir'. Kissane with the ancient versions 'A secret, a secret have I'. Although the meaning 'secret, mystery' is common in the Qumran literature, I prefer to link up the word with Arabic *ruz* 'calamity'. Hence the meaning is 'my calamity' or 'woe to me'.

Is. 41, 14. The Hebrew text as translated by all ancient and modern versions reads thus: 'Fear not, you worm Jacob, you men of Israel'. or: 'you that are dead'. Both translations are justified by the fact that Hebr. *mete* can be referred either to the noun *metim* 'men' or to the participle *metim* 'dead'. But parallelism, which is an essential feature of Hebrew poetry, requires for 'men' or 'dead' a synonym of 'worm'. And this synonym is easily found in the Acc. *mutu* which means 'lice'; hence the correct rendering is: 'Fear not, you worm Jacob, you lice of Israel' with a perfect synonymous parallelism.

Is. 53, 9a. b. The literal rendering is that given by the Duoay Version: 'And he shall give the ungodly for his burial and the rich for his death'. The sense is beyond comprehension. The disturbing word is *bemotaw* 'in his deaths'. The verse is generally explained thus: He i.e. the Servant, the Messiah, Christ, will be destined to be buried with the wicked, but in reality he will be buried with rich and honourable people. But difficulties remain. In my translation of the book of Isaiah, published in 1951 I suspected the word *bamato* to be hidden in the word *bemotaw*, and

my suspicions came true after the publication of the Dead Sea scroll of Isaiah which reads exactly *bamato*. It has been recently shown that *bamab*, with the 3 p.s.m. suffix *bamato*, means sometimes 'funerary installation', hence 'burying-place'. Therefore my translation is: 'He was given a sepulchre with the wicked and a burying place with evil-doers'.

Is. 54, 7. The usual translation 'For a brief moment did I forsake thee, and with great mercy did I gather thee' destroys the parallelism. Parallelism is restored by giving the word *rega* the meaning 'emotion'. Hence my translation: 'With little emotion have I forsaken thee, but with great mercy will I gather thee'.

Jer, 47, 5. The word *imqam* is generally altered into *anaqim* 'the Anakim'. But the word *emeq* besides its ordinary meaning 'valley' has also in Ugaritic the meaning 'vigour'. This meaning, which occurs elsewhere in the Bible, fits here better than any emendation and has been adopted in my translation: 'the rest of their strength'.

Ez. 34, 13. 'I will pasture them on the mountains, in the valleys and in all the dwelling-places of the land'. The absurdity of this rendering is apparent. Flocks are taken to graze on mountains, in the valleys, but certainly not in inhabited places. By linking up the noun *moshab* 'dwelling place' to Arab *wasab* 'abounded with herbs', the meaning 'meadow' is easily obtained.

Dan. 10, 13. The current translation 'I remained there' or 'I was left there' disagrees with the context and cannot be correct. How could the tutelary angel of the Jews communicate his message to Daniel, if he remained with the king of Persia? And if the angel was delivered from the hands of the angel of the Persians, who tried to intercept the divine message to Daniel, how could the angel still remain there instead of continuing his way? The difficulty is avoided if instead of *notarti* 'I was left' we read *botarti* with the meaning of 'I excelled' that is 'I prevailed'. The patron-angel of the Jews prevailed over the angel of the Persians and so could carry his message to Daniel.

Os. 11, 3. 4. These two verses read so in the RSV: 'It was I who taught Ephraim to walk, I took them up in my arms; but they did not know that I healed them. I led them with cords of compassion, with the bands of love, and I became to them as one who eases the yoke on their jaws, and I bent down to them and fed them'. The difficulty is to understand what 'the cords of compassion' or 'the cords of man' and 'the bands of love' are. On the grounds of Arabic analogy the cords of compassion and the bands of love have become 'cords and bands of leather'. By reading '*ul*

'suckling' instead of 'ol 'yoke', the figure will become that of one who lifts his or her baby and takes him into his arms binding him with leather strings for greater security and bending over him to give him food.

These examples and many others are all taken from the Old Testament. But in the New Testament too recent linguistic research has shed a bright light on many an obscure and disputed passage. We have already mentioned the noun *zenuth* which does not mean 'fornication' in general but unlawful marriage. We can add other examples:

The verb *apokrinesthai* 'to answer' is very often used when no question has been asked and therefore when no answer is expected. So in Matt. 8, 8 we read that after Christ had promised to the centurion that he would heal his servant, the centurion 'answered and said'. But Christ had asked no question to the centurion, and the verb 'answered' is out of place. But the verb *apokrithe* 'he answered' is the translation of the Hebr 'anah, which means 'to answer' and 'to set speaking' and simply 'to speak, to say'. Hence the sense is simply: He (the centurion) said. All Maltese translations read incorrectly: U wiegeb.

In the same story of the healing of the centurion's servant we read the well-known words: 'Say only one word, and my servant will be healed'. All Maltese translations give the same text. But the translation is not correct. In Greek and Latin the word 'verbo, logo' is dative, not accusative of the object. Now the dative after the verb 'to say' denotes the person addressed not the words said. Hence the sense is: Say to the word or 'Say it with one word'. Moreover the verb 'to say' in Hebrew is *amar* which means also 'to command'; cp the Maltese expression '*k Alla jamar*' 'if God so commands'. There the sense is: 'Give a one-word command', or 'Just give a command'.

Matt. 26, 50. Christ's words to Judah are generally translated: 'Friend, why have you come here?' Many modern translators however give a slightly different sense to Christ's words. Christ is not asking Judah the reason of his coming to him, but he is simply expressing his astonishment at Judah's effrontery, 'Is it for this purpose, i.e. of betraying me that you are here?' It is an exclamation rather than an interrogation.

The title *vas electionis* given to Paul by God himself (Acts 9, 15) sounds strange, and still stranger is its Maltese rendering '*kejla mahtura*'. The Latin *vas* corresponds to the Greek *skeuos* which means 'a vessel' and 'an implement in general'. It is applied to the goods of the vendors in the temple, arms, sails, anchor, a ship's gear and tackle, an earthenware vessel; man too is called an earthen vessel, one's wife is one's

vessel. In this general sense Paul is called 'vessel of election' that is a chosen instrument, an instrument chosen by God to carry his name before the Gentiles and the children of Israel. Hence the orators' description of Paul as a flower-pot spreading everywhere the sweet perfume of virtues has no support in the biblical text.

I think I have succeeded in showing the difficulty of a Bible translation. I have endeavoured to bring my work abreast of modern biblical studies. Being conscious of my limited forces and the incessant progress of biblical studies I readily admit the existence of some blemishes in my translation, hence I conclude with these two verses from the Latin poet Horace:

'If you can produce something better than this,
let us know it; if not, accept and make use of my translation'.

P.P. SAYDON