

A NOTE ON EVIDENCE FOR LL > DD IN MALTESE ONOMASTICS

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During the conference *Malta–Sicilia: Contiguità Linguistica e Culturale* held in Malta in April 1986,¹ G. Brincat read a paper showing how the Maltese *dundjan* (turkey), derived from *gallu Ndjan* via *gaddu Ndjan*, is quite a unique occurrence in the Maltese language of the linguistic phenomenon ll > dd, common in neighbouring Sicily. In the ensuing discussion, the possible existence of further evidence for ll > dd from Maltese onomastics was brought up. The object of this note is to substantiate claims made then, exhibiting chronologically what evidence has been gleaned to date from Maltese documentation, and indicating, from the admittedly scanty material, how reactions to this phenomenon varied with time.

Perhaps the earliest instance that should be cited concerns the personal name Gaddu itself, encountered in Sicily at the time,² which is first documented in Malta in 1374: Gaddus Cuskieri (Melitensis) was the Secretus for that year.³ In the early 1400s, the name is fairly common. Out of a total of 1609 Christian names occurring in the Militia List of 1419–20,⁴ the following seven are encountered: at Capella Santa Dominica, Gaddu Bartolu (f. 1^v); at Casali Calleya et Musta, Gaddu Calleja (f. 8); at Casali Axac, Gaddu Dejf (f. 19); at Casali Sigeui, Gaddu Garuf (f. 27); at Casali Zebugi, Gaddu Percopu (f. 32^v); at Rabat, Jogaddu Fartasi (f. 35); and at Civitas, Gaddu Rafacanu (f. 40). No instance of the use of Gallu for Gaddu can be quoted from this time, whereas Gaddu remained in use during the first half of the century.⁵ In the latter half however, there was both a marked decrease in popularity of the name as well as the earliest noted occurrence of the form Gallu/Gallo used contemporaneously with and for Gaddu/Gaddo. In the Angara List of ca. 1480,⁶ out of a total of 1466 Christian names only the following four were named Gaddu: at Rabat, Gaddu Saura (f. 1^v) and Gaddu Zammit (f. 12^v); at Luca, Gaddu Camilleri (f. 8); and at Chitati, M^{ru} Gaddu Bayada (f. 20^v). It is of interest that at this time a person is referred to, in different contexts, both as Gallo and as Gaddo: The parish priest of Siggiewi Don Gaddo Cuschieri (1474–1494)⁷ is also referred to in the minutes of the town council in 1474⁸ as Cappellano Donno Gallo. Also at this time another instance of Gallo for Gaddo appears.⁹ The name Gaddo continued to decline in the sixteenth century. In the decanal tithes list of 1536,¹⁰ there were only two occurrences out of 753 entries, and none are to be found in the corresponding list of 1601¹¹ out of 1113 names. In Malta, the corresponding surname, not encountered pre-1500, is invariably written Gallo from the sixteenth century onwards.¹²

This evidence alone is already symptomatic of an increased resistance in Malta at the turn of the century to the Sicilian dialectal manifestation, a resistance that does not seem to be in evidence a century earlier. Later documents tend to confirm this. Following the massive depopulation of Gozo in 1551 by Barbary corsairs, an equally massive immigration into the island gathered momentum, reaching a peak in the 1570s.¹³ A substantial number of these émigrés were Sicilians, whose activities are amply documented in notarial records. Particular interest attaches to three surnames, originally manifest as Canteda, Metaddo and Reveddu.¹⁴ Within

the space of only a couple of years, the first two revert to the non-dialectal Cantella and Metallo¹⁵ in the foreign Gozitan environment; although Reveddu/Revellu did not take root in Gozo, in earlier records the surname is encountered as Revellu/Ravellu.¹⁶ This is positive evidence of how social pressure can be brought to bear on and mould the language, naturally suppressing elements that are deemed foreign. It should be remarked that by this time, half a century after the arrival of the knights of St. John, the transition of the official language from an admixture of Latin and Sicilian to Italian was well-nigh complete.

A century later, one comes across another sporadic instance of ll > dd in the place-name “*clausure dette el habel ta’ Ciuaddu*”,¹⁷ still existent to-day as “*il-hbula ta’ Ġjovaddu*”,¹⁸ near t’Alla w Ommu. The nineteenth century Naxxar nickname Cifaddu¹⁹ is probably to be associated with this toponym. But by then the separation from Sicily was so much a thing of the past that it mattered little whether Civaddu was dialectal or not to be accepted. The same can be said of the twentieth century nickname *ta’ Bedda*.²⁰

In evaluating this evidence one must question the genuinness of this phenomenon as a “Maltese” phenomenon. In each of the examples exhibited, and indeed also in the case of *dundjan*, one must ask whether the transition from -ll- to -dd- actually took place in Malta or was it rather the case that the change came about in Sicily and only later the words and names were imported into Malta in their -dd- form. Not enough evidence exists to decide either way. What can be asserted is that around 1500 a certain resistance to forms in -dd- can be detected which appears to be absent both earlier and later. Some caution is indicated here as well. The evidence presented is written (as opposed to aural) evidence, so that it reflects rather the literate scribe’s or notary’s attitudes to this matter and records what he deems should be written which may be far removed from actually spoken Maltese. Even so, one cannot exclude the possibility that the people in general and the name-bearer in particular may have been influenced by these attitudes.

Acknowledgement

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1 G. Brincat, “Un esempio di -LL->-DD- nel Maltese”, *Incontri Siculo-Maltesi* (G. Brincat, ed.) (1988) 27–31.

2 I. Peri, *La Sicilia dopo il Vespro* (1982) 114,291: In 1322–1337, at Palermo, Gallo Alafranco Genovese. P. Collura, *Le Più Antiche Carte dell’Archivio Capitolare di Agrigento* (Palermo, 1960) 270: At Agrigento (27.ii.1318) Gaddus Marronus iudex; *ibid.* 265: Gaddus Gallus iudex (19.vii.1309).

3 Archivio di Stato Palermo, Cancelleria 4 (9.v.1374) 138^{r/v}; *ibid.* 5 (8.vii.1374) 114, text in H. Bressc, “The ‘Secrezia’ and the Royal Patrimony in Malta: 1240–1450”, *Medieval Malta* (A. Luttrell, ed.) (London, 1975) 157–158.

4 Text in G. Wettinger, “The Militia List of 1419–20”, *Melita Historica* 5(2) (1969) 80–106.

5 Notarial Archives Valletta, Not. P. Bonello Ms. 588 (25.iv.1467) 20^v: “Testis Gaddus Butigeg”.

6 Cathedral Museum Mdina (MCM), Cathedral Archives (ACM) Misc. 437 No. 7.

7 A. Ferris, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo* (Malta, 1866) 403.

8 National Library, Malta (NLM) Univ(ersità) 11 (4.ix.1474) 302.

9 *Ibid.* (8.x.1474) 307^v: “Gallo Sapia[n]”.

- 10 MCM ACM Prebende 5 (Decime Decanali 1536) 12: “Gaddu Casha (Civitatis)”; *ibid.* f. 25: “Gaddu Cauchi (Casalis Musta)”.
- 11 *Ibid.* Prebende 7 (Decime Decanali 1601).
- 12 NLM Univ. 13 (16.ii.1536) 102^v: “Antonius Gallo”. MCM ACM Misc. 441 [1561] 119: “Marco Gallo (Civitatis)”. Episcopal Archives Gozo, Liber Bapt. I (28.viii.1558) 2^v: “Domenico Gallo (Gaudisii)”.
- 13 S. Fiorini, “The Resettlement of Gozo after 1551”, *Melita Historica* 9(3) (1986) 203–244.
- 14 ANV Not. Th. Gauci R287/5(I) (25.vi.1569) 338: “Antonius Reveddu Siculus de civitate Modice Regni Sicilie”; *Ibid.* R287/6 (8.ii.1572) 300: “Santorus Canteda Siculus”; *Ibid.* Not. F. Ciappara R185/2 (5.x.1575) 35: “Marianus Metaddo de terra Mohac”.
- 15 *Ibid.* Not. Th. Gauci R287/7 (20.iv.1573) 533^v: “Santoro Cantella Siculo”; *Ibid.* R287/9(I) (6.ii.1578) 113: “Marianus Metallo”.
- 16 MCM ACM Misc. 437 No. 7 (ca. 1480) 18: “Ala chitati: Optavianu de Revellu”.
- 17 NLM Treas. A. I (14.ix.1668) 191^v.
- 18 1:2500 Map of Malta (1971) (Survey Sheets): 494/762.
- 19 S. Fiorini, “A Survey of Maltese Nicknames, I: The Nicknames of Naxxar, 1832”, *Journal of Maltese Studies* 16 (1986). 78,86.
- 20 Electoral Register (1939): “Paolo Muscat Bedda, at Sannat”.