

## *Saydon Translation Studies, 1*

### *Ruth 1,1*

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#### *Preliminaries*

In this series of studies we shall concentrate on Mgr Prof Peter Paul Saydon's efforts at translating the text of the Hebrew Bible as found in the Standard Edition of the time, and especially the text of the Book of Ruth which Saydon finished translating on the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 1931<sup>1</sup> and published for the first time in 1932. Each study in this series will include an in depth reading of the Hebrew text, a redactional history of Saydon's translation,<sup>2</sup> an analysis of Saydon's rendering of the Hebrew

1. This according to a handwritten note on p. 10 of the manuscript of the translation. Cf. *Inventarju tad-Dokumenti ta' Mons P.P. Saydon* p. 5. This inventory was compiled by the present writer together with Mr Carmel Borg for the Societas Doctrinae Christianae, which now hosts the documents, and Mr Joseph Mifsud who represented the family of the deceased professor. Rev Dr Anthony Abela who wrote the document represented His Grace Mgr Joseph Mercieca, the then Archbishop of Malta, and the Malta Bible Society who took care to bring the manuscripts from the Pontifical Biblical Institute in Rome some years before. This text was then published together with the Book of Judges in 1932 as *Ktieb l-Imħallfin u Ktieb Rut*, Il-Kotba Mqaddsa bil-Malti, 7; The Empire Press, Malta 1932, 43-50.
2. There exist these editions of this translation: a manuscript edition that has been brought from Rome with the permission of the Archbishop of Malta (cf. the Notarial Act at the hands of Dr Gerard Spiteri Maempel LLD Notary Public and Commissioner for Oaths of the 7<sup>th</sup> January 2002); a first edition in pamphlet format published during the period from the year 1929 till 1959; a second edition of this translation was published as *Bibbja Saydon* by the Societas Doctrinae Christianae in three elegant volumes in 1977.1982.1990. The Book of Ruth was published in the second volume. On this second edition one may consult Carmel Bezzina, *Saydon Bibliista u Studjuż tal-Malti*, Publikazzjoni Preca, Malta2006,315-324. This second edition was presumably done following a list of corrections that Saydon himself is presumed to have prepared (cf. Bezzina, *Saydon*,321 note17). Some of the corrections appear already in the MSS as can now be seen in that of the Book of Ruth. But there exists also what we are calling a 'Third Edition' of Prof Saydon's translation, published again by the Societas Doctrinae Christianae as *Il-Bibbja*. Maqlub mill-ilsna originali minn Monsinjur Professur P.P.Saydon, Malta1995. In the Forward by the Kummissjoni Bibbja Saydon it is said that the text of the translation remained the same as that of the second edition "b'reviżjoni minima ta' xi kelmiet 'l hawn u 'l hinn" [with a minimum of revision of some words here and there] (p.vii). These various editions as they concern the Book of Ruth will be referred to as Saydon MSS, Saydon I(1932), Saydon II(1982), and Saydon III(1995).

text, and the insertion of Saydon's text within the Bible Translation Tradition in Maltese.<sup>3</sup>An alternative translation will be finally proposed

### *The Hebrew Text of Ruth 1,1: General Considerations*

Ruth 1,1 forms part of what biblical narratologists call the 'exposition'<sup>4</sup> of the narrative which is the entire Book of Ruth; in our text the exposition is formed of 1,1-5 wherein the narrator describes the life situation before the narrative proper starts. The opening verse consists of an adverbial phrase introduced by verbal וַיְהִי and two *wayyiqtol* clauses. The temporal adverbial phrase וַיְהִי בַיָּמֵי שֹׁפֵט הַשְּׁפִטִים 'and it happened in the days the judges judged' has been described as having 'unique syntax'<sup>5</sup> when it is taken as ushering in the two *wayyiqtol* clauses as a sequence. A few comments are in order:

- a) Three readings are possible of this adverbial syntactical structure at the beginning of the narrative: the narrator is possibly hinting that the new narrative is the continuation of another book<sup>6</sup>, that of Judges; or that וַיְהִי is meant to signal "that a new scene or episode is subsequent to a previously mentioned scene, and that this scene is part of the mainstream of larger episode or narrative<sup>7</sup>; or, again, that the narrator means to create "a very general time reference."<sup>8</sup> One should notice that while one Jewish tradition understood this temporal clause as a literal reference to the Book of Judges, and thus set the book of Ruth just next to that of Judges, another tradition opted to understand the above phrase as a general wide time reference, and relegated the Book of Ruth to the *Ketubim* section of the Hebrew canon.<sup>9</sup>

3. For this concept of 'translation tradition' cfr. Carlo Buzzetti, *Traduzione e Tradizione. La via dell'uso-confronto(oltre il biblico 'traduttore traditore')*, Edizioni Messaggero, Padova2001.
4. Shimon Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art in the Bible*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield1989, 111-121; Jean Louis Ska, "Our Fathers Have Told Us". *Introduction to the Analysis of Hebrew Narratives*, Subsidia Biblica, 13; Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 1990,21-25 for this concept coming from biblical narratology.
5. Edward E. Campbell Jr, *Ruth*, AB 7; Doubleday, Garden City, New York 1975, 49.
6. Cf. Paul Joüon, *Ruth. Commentaire Philologique et Exégétique*, Subsidia Biblica, 9; Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 1924.1993, 31.
7. Christo H.J. van der Merwe & Jackie A. Naudé & Jan H. Kroeze, *A Biblical Hebrew Reference Grammar*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1999, 332.
8. Campbell, *Ruth*, 49.
9. For discussions on where the Book of Ruth should be in the Hebrew canon cf. Roger Beckwith, *The Old Testament Canon of the New Testament Church*, SPCK, London 1985, 158-159. 253-256. 304-306.

- b) The verbal cluster **וַיְהִי** has been described by some grammarians as a ‘macrosyntactic sign’<sup>10</sup> meant to mark the beginning of a new narrative.<sup>11</sup> At the same time, it is used by the narrator<sup>12</sup> to establish a narrative thread. One should note that the first occurrence of the cluster **וַיְהִי** in verse 1, which is to differentiate from the second occurrence which has **רַעַב** for subject, has no lexicalized subject.
- c) One may ask whether the adverbial phrase introduced by the first **וַיְהִי** is qualifying only the first wayyiqtol clause or the two clauses of verse 1. Although syntactically the two clauses are on an equal footing, semantically the second clause seems to carry heavier narrative weight. The narrator appears to be mostly interested not so much in the famine that raged in Judah, which with verse 6 we hear of it no longer, but that Elimelech and his family journeyed to the land of Moab and settled there as *gerim*, that is, as protected foreigners. This is borne out by the narrator’s postponing the full identification of the **אִשׁוֹ**’s family to the end of the second clause, “he and his wife and his two sons, all subjects of the verb **וַיֵּלֶךְ**.” These are part of the narrative’s cast; but as the first verse of the chapter does not exhaust the exposition, so the man, his wife, and his two sons, all still without a name, are not the only characters that shall appear in the narrative.

### *Saydon’s translation of Ruth 1,1 and its Redaction History*

- a) The text: “Ġara fi žmien il-hakma tal-imħallfin li kien hemm hemm l-ghaks fil-pajjiż, u mar raġel minn Betlehem ta’ Ġuda jghammar għarib fl-inhawi ta’ Mowab, hu u martu, u ž-żewġ uliedu.”
- b) While in Saydon MSS and Saydon I (1932) the local phrase **בְּשָׂרֵי מוֹאָב** is rendered “fl-inhawi ta’ Mowab” ‘in the territories of Moab’, the translator himself corrected *fl-inhawi ta’ Mowab* into *fir-raba’ ta’ Mowab*, ‘in the fields

10. Bruce K. Waltke & M. O’Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*, Eisenbrauns, Wanona Lake, Indiana 1990, §3:3:4d.

11. Cf. A.E. Cowley, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, Clarendon Press, Oxford<sup>2</sup>1910.1980, §111f-h; Alviero Nicacci, *Lettura Sintattica della Prosa Ebraico-Biblica. Principi e Applicazioni*, Franciscan Printing Press, Jerusalem 1991, 17.

12. In the narratological sense where the ‘narrator’ is not necessarily the historical writer of the narrative. Cf. Bar-Efrat, *Narrative Art*, 13-46.

of Moab', a correction that appeared then in the subsequent Saydon 1982 and Saydon 1995. The question that crops up could be as to whether the translator improved his text by resorting to a more literal rendering of the cluster. The present writer believes that Saydon has not improved his 1932 rendering by this correction. We shall proceed with our discussion by stages in both linguistic and translational, as well as exegetical directions of research:

- i) **Basic vocabulary mentioned** The lexeme 'inhawi' in Maltese is the plural of *naha*, a well known and commonly used lexeme in Modern Maltese, its basic meaning being 'side' (*minn naha waħda*, from one side) but by extension it can also mean 'neighbourhood' (*jghix in-naha tagħna*, he lives in our neighbourhood).<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, the lexeme *raba'*, from radicals R.B.Gh, carries the meanings of 'fields, country, farmland' (*nies tar-raba'* people working in the fields, farmers; *ir-raba' dis-sena m'ghamilx*, 'the fields this year did not yield a good crop').<sup>14</sup>
- ii) **The Hebrew cluster** כַּשְׂדִי consists of the preposition כּ with the locative meaning 'in', and the masculine nominal plural שָׂדִים in the construct state of the nominal שָׂדֵה which normally means 'fields, countryside, and pasture' while its feminine plural form שָׂדוֹת signifies 'individual fields, farms, property'.<sup>15</sup> In its plural masculine form the word carries also the meaning of 'territory of a tribe, or of a people' (Gen 32,4; Num 21,20; Rt 2,6; Hos 12,13).<sup>16</sup> The meaning in Ruth 1,1 seems to be 'territory, country of Moab' as in this verse the narrator contrasts the phrase שְׂדֵי מוֹאָב governed by the preposition כּ, 'in', to the phrase בֵּית לַחֶם, Bethlehem, which is being taken as a place name, governed by the preposition מִן, of/from; the two prepositions govern geographical areas and therefore the concept *inhawi* is to be preferred to that that could be represented by the nominal *r-raba'*. Saydon's revision of his text therefore has rendered it more literal but not more precise. Perhaps he opted to follow LXX (ἐν ἀγροῦ Μωαβ) though not the Vulgate (in regione moabitude).
- c) **An evaluation:** This translation of Ruth 1,1 is a literal, formal rendering of the Hebrew text, dynamic in some aspects, quite wooden in others. Some details:

13. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, vol II, Midsea Books, Malta 1990, 882.

14. *Ibid.*, 1168.

15. HAL,III, 1307-1309.

16. *Ibid.*, 1308. Cf. BDB,961.

i) Saydon interprets, together with the majority of exegetes the word chain **וְהָיָה וְאִשְׁתּוֹ וְשְׁנֵי בָנָיו** postponed to the end of the second *wayyiqtol* clause, and standing in asyndeton, as being in apposition in the broad sense to the nominal **אִישׁ**, the subject of the clause just as we find, for instance, in Genesis 13,1.<sup>17</sup> The pronoun **הוא** plays in Hebrew a resumptive role referring back to the subject **אִישׁ** and is taken to be as necessary as the two other co-subjects, ‘his wife’ and ‘his two sons’ that are included into the narrative’s text by the narrator.<sup>18</sup> The initial pronoun in this word chain is to be considered as somehow marked as it is the furthest away in the clause from the sentence’s predicate **וַיֵּלֶךְ**.<sup>19</sup>

The problem for the translator regards the way this markedness will be rendered into the syntax of the receptor language. Translation tradition often resorted either to the replica of the Hebrew syntax onto the receptor language (LXX, Saydon, NRSV, MBS) or to a simple transformation of the Hebrew sentence structure as on the model of the Vulgate and of several modern translations where ‘his wife’ and ‘his two sons’ are raised to the level of **אִישׁ** in the sentence as co-subjects through an ‘*and* of accompaniment’: “... abiitque homo de Bethlehem Iuda ut peregrinaretur in regione moabitide *cum* uxore sua ac duobus liberis”(Vulgate); “Un homme de Beth-Léhem de Juda partit, *avec* sa femme et ses deux fils, pour séjourner en immigré au pays de Moab”(NBS); “... and a man from Bethlehem in Judah, *together with* his wife and the two sons, went to live for a while in the country of Moab”(NIV); “... a man from Bethlehem in Judah went *with* his wife and two sons to live in Moabite territory”(REB;<sup>20</sup> cf. NJPS; BJ). With the exception of NIV and NJPS, in their restructuring, most versions cited maintain the ‘man’ as the sole subject of the verb ‘to go’; but one should notice how in NIV ‘the wife’ and ‘the sons’ are also the grammatical subjects of the verb ‘went’.<sup>21</sup>

17. Cf. Paul Joüon & T.Muraoka, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, Subsidia Biblica 27; Editrice Pontificio Istituto Biblico, Rome 2006, §146c note 2.

18. Ibid., nos 3 & 4; cf. T. Muraoka, *Emphatic Words and Structures in Biblical Hebrew*, The Magnes Press, Jerusalem & Brill, Leiden 1985, 61-66.

19. Cf. van der Werwe et alii, *Reference Grammar*, 324.

20. REB’s rendering ‘and two sons’ gives the impression that Elimelech had other sons besides Mahlon and Chilion unless the phrase is elliptical.

21. “וְהָיָה: L’addition du pronom est nécessaire. Quand à un sujet nominal, on ajoute après un mot faisant separation, un second sujet, il faut un pronom de reprise... *Lui et* about it pratiquement au sens de *avec*,” Joüon, *Ruth*, 32. The author refers to Judg 11,38; 1Kgs 20,12. Cfr. Joüon, *Ruth*, 34.

- ii) **מבית לחם**: Is this an adjectival phrase qualifying the nominal **איש** which is the explicit subject of the Hebrew clause, or an adverbial cluster qualifying the predicate **וילך** telling us from where the subject travelled as he journeyed towards the land of Moab? The samples from translation tradition that we have listed above, all parse the phrase **מבית לחם** as adjectival, a phrase amassing further information about the subject. And this is syntactically possible as Jdgs 12,8;13, 2; 17,1.7; 1Sam 1,1;9,1;2Sam 23,20.30; Amos 1,1; etc attest.<sup>22</sup> But we find in the text two clear indications that for the narrator the phrase is adverbial rather than adjectival: first, the opposition already mentioned between the prepositions **מן** in **מבית לחם** and **ב** **בשרי**;<sup>23</sup> second, the explicit qualification in verse 2 of the family as ‘Ephrathites from Bethlehem of Judah’ which would be pointless had the narrator intended **מבית לחם** as fulfilling the same narrative function within so short textual extension. Saydon’s rendering of **מבית לחם** is to say the least ambiguous just as its Hebrew source text is: *u mar raġel minn Betlehem ta’ Guda* which may be parsed in the same way as the Hebrew original. But this sentence brings us to another issue, a linguistic one. Word order in Standard Maltese is subject initial even if other options are possible.<sup>24</sup> Prof Saydon made of his translation a strictly formal equivalent of the source text by copying into his rendering its predicate initial structure even though this feature is not predominant in Standard Maltese.<sup>25</sup> The positioning of *u*<sup>26</sup> *mar* ‘and he went’ as clause initial is also not a normal syntactic feature

22. Cf. BDB79b.

23. Cf. Marjo Korpel, *The Structure of the Book of Ruth*, Koninklijke Van Gorcum, Assen2001, 54.

24. Cf. Albert Borg, *Ilsienna. Studju Grammatikali*, Malta 1988,114-148.

25. Cf. Anthony Abela, “Word Order in the Narrative Sections in P.P. Saydon’s Bible Translation in Maltese,” *Melita Theologica*, LIII/1-2(2002)3-26.107-131. According to Prof Carmel Sant in his appreciation of Mgr’ Saydon’s contribution to Bible translation in Maltese, this was the ethos in the translator’s days and Saydon could do very little about it: “Mgr P.P. Saydon’s Contribution in the History of Bible Translation in Maltese. An Appreciation” reproduced in Sant1992:148. In Saydon’s days, Bible translation had to be formal though new orientations were in view. Cf. for instance, Eugene Nida & Charles R. Taber, *The Theory and Practice of Translation*, Brill, Leiden 1969; Jean-Claude Margot, *Traduire sans Trahir*, Editions L’Age d’Homme, Lausanne 1979.

26. The inclusion of the connecting conjunction *u* just as in Hebrew is also foreign to Maltese as sentence initial. In Hebrew the conjunction **ו** is not simply a linking feature. The verbal system in Maltese is not a replica of the Hebrew system. As we shall see, Maltese has not the *wayyiqtol* system as Saydon’s construction suggests. On this *wayyiqtol* narrative system of verbal forms one may consult the collection of papers given at the 1996 Tilburg Conference that was gathered and edited by Ellen van Wolde in *Narrative Syntax & the Hebrew Bible*, Brill, Leiden 1997. The reader may also find useful in this regard the monograph of Alviero Nicacci, *Lettura Sintattica della Prosa Ebraica Biblica* (see note 11 of this essay).

of literary Maltese though it may be found in oral performances.<sup>27</sup> Putting the predicate *u mar* at the beginning of the clause, Saydon reproduced as well the ambiguity of the Hebrew original in the phrasal *minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda*.

- iii) **לגור בשני** Saydon's translation of this purpose construction made up of the preposition ל, the infinitive construct of the verb גור I,<sup>28</sup> and the adverbial phrase of place בשני is precise, economical, and formally equivalent: *jghammar gharib*. The Hebrew syntagma לגור I together with the preposition ב carries the meaning of residing in a place as a resident alien.<sup>29</sup> With Waltke & O'Connor we may describe both the Hebrew ב לגור as well as Saydon's translation of the Hebrew construction by *jghammar fi* 'to live in' as "serving the role of verbal complement."<sup>30</sup> Saydon's verbal phrase consists of the headword, that is, the verb *jghammar*, 'to dwell', and the rather obsolete nominal *gharib* that means 'stranger, foreigner'.<sup>31</sup> The adverbial qualification is necessary in Maltese as the verb *jghammar* carries only the meaning 'to reside' but not the technical meaning 'as a protected alien' as with the case of the Hebrew verb גור I. Within the phrasal structure, this lexeme *gharib* plays the role of a qualifying adverbial phrase: 'to live as a foreigner'.<sup>32</sup> The 'man' mentioned by the narrator as the

27. Cf. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, Midsea Books, Malta 1990, 1492-1493

28. For this verbal construction cf. Waltke & O'Connor, *Syntax*, §36.2.3d (pp. 606-607).

29. Cf. BDB 157-158; DCH, II, 335-336; HAL, I, 184; D. Kellermann, 'גור' in C. Johannes Botterweck & Helmer Ringgren (eds.), *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, II, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids, Michigan 1975. 1999, 439-449. For the sociological implications of being a resident alien the reader may consult also Jack M. Sasson, *Ruth. A New Translation with a Philological Commentary and a Formalist Folklorist Interpretation*, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1989, 16.

30. Waltke & O'Connor, *Syntax*, 606.

31. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 977.

32. Very probably here Saydon allowed himself to be influenced either by Hebrew diction so that we find in this phrase a case of what Paul Joüon in his Hebrew grammar called "l'accusatif indirect," *Grammaire de l'Hébreu Biblique*, Institut Biblique Pontifical, Rome 1923, §126, or directly by a Maltese predecessor of Saydon, Carlo Cortis who in 1924 had published a translation of the Book of Ruth: *Il Libro di Ruth*, Trascritto e Tradotto dall'Ebraico, Tipografia Giovanni Muscat, Malta 1924); this gentleman translated the Hebrew verbal phrase לגור ב by *biex ighix ġar fi*, 'to live as a neighbour' (for the term *ġar* as 'neighbour' cf. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, Midsea Books, Malta 1987, 378). Saydon would accept the syntactical structure suggested by Cortis, but avoided his vocabulary because he found it, and correctly so, inadequate to render the Hebrew phrase. In his choice of the vocabulary, Cortis was probably influenced by the fact the Hebrew גור and the Maltese nominal *ġar* (*jār*) carry similar if not perfectly identical phonetics, and for him that probably meant semantic equivalence. Ferdinand de Saussure in

subject of both the main verb  $\text{לָלַךְ}$  and of the infinitive construct  $\text{לָלַךְ}$  governed by the preposition  $\text{לְ}$  travelled to Moab to live there for a while (the time quantum is not defined though it is tacitly taken to be of limited duration (cf. Gen 12,10) as a protected foreigner.<sup>33</sup>

The term *gh̄arib* is rather rarely used in modern spoken Maltese, if at all. Aquilina cites two examples of written instances of the word, both coming from Maltese toponymy: *Qabar il-gh̄arib*, ‘the foreigner’s tomb’, indicated by G.F. Abela in his descriptive work *Della Descrizione di Malta, isola nel Mare Siciliano, con le sue Antichità ed altre Notizie*<sup>34</sup> as referring to two fortified localities, one in the neighbourhood of *Ghar Hasan*, in the south of the Island, the other near ‘Dragut Point’ in the north. Richard Taylor, author of the first translation of the Psalter in Maltese,<sup>35</sup> has another instance of the use of the term *gh̄arib* in the singular: *Ma jkollokx Alla iehor barrani anqas tqimu 'l Alla gh̄arib* (you will not have another God who is foreign nor will you worship a foreign God).<sup>36</sup> In the case of the nominal *gh̄arib* we may say that Saydon attempted to give life back to this term, and to popularize it by using it in his translation on several occasions, in both its singular and plural forms (*gh̄arib*, *gh̄orba*) (cf. 1Pt 1,1; Heb 13,2).<sup>37</sup> But his attempts seem to have failed as *gh̄arib* remains

his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, Pyot, Paris 1915 would warn us against making such short circuits. The Maltese nominal *ġar* has chosen only the meaning of ‘neighbour’ from the number of semantic components of its Arabic phoneme *jār* which means also refugee, protégé, charge J.M. Cowan (ed.), *The Arabic-English Dictionary*. The Hans Wher Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, Spoken Language Services, Ithaca, New York 1976, 147h. These other meanings make the Hebrew word much closer in semantic range to the Arabic lexeme than to the Maltese word *ġar* meaning ‘neighbour’.

33. “In the OT, the *ger* occupies an intermediate position between a native (*ezrach*) and a foreigner (*nokhrif*). He lives among people who are not his blood relatives, and thus he lacks the protection and the privileges which usually come from blood relationship and place of birth. His status and his privileges are dependent on the hospitality that has played an important role in ancient Near East ever since ancient times...” Kellermann, ‘ $\text{גֵר}$ ’, *Theological Dictionary*, 443.
34. Malta 1647, 20.60-61.
35. Cf. Carmel Sant “Guzè Muscat Azzopardi, Translator of the Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles: 1895-1924” in *Bible Translation and Language*, Melita Theologica Supplementary Series, 2; Malta 1992, 112.
36. Salmi LXX.LXXX stanza 8, in *Ktieb is-Salmi tas-Sultan David u Il-Cantici*. Miġburin fil Lsien Malti, Malta 1846, 189. One should notice here the use by Taylor of parallelism in his translation in order to illustrate the real meaning of obsolete *gh̄arib* which is put in parallel to the more commonly used lexeme *barrani* with the same significance.
37. In Hebrews 13.8 Saydon makes an adjectival use of the nominal: *La tinġibidx minn tagħlim iehor u gh̄arib* (do not be allured by a different and foreign teaching).



perceived by the standard speaker of Maltese as being obsolete or at least as a not well known word, even though the term in its plural morphological form hailed from an ancient Maltese Church text of practical catechesis as shows the phrase *'ilqgħu l-għorba'* (Aquilina): *'Give hospitality/refuge to foreigners'* which probably had the Letter to the Hebrew (13,2) and/or other NT texts as its ultimate source.

## 2

### *Saydon versus Cortis*

Now has come the moment for evaluating the relationship of Saydon's translation of Ruth 1,1 to that of Carlo Cortis and other translators of the Book of Ruth in Maltese; since Cortis's was chronologically anterior, Cortis had the advantage of time over Saydon especially in the choice of vocabulary, syntax, and literary features; but Saydon had the advantage of better scholarship and translation tools and in Cortis he had a translation model which he could emulate or criticise, and improve. In this evaluation we shall not take account of differences in orthography, in personal names and toponyms, and some other details; we shall concentrate on the translators' contribution to Maltese linguistics and to exegesis.

Saydon could in no way ignore the contribution of Carlo Cortis who published his translation of Ruth in bookform just five years before Saydon published his own translation of Genesis in 1929 thus inaugurating his translation project which was to keep him engaged for over thirty years till 1959 when he published his translation of Revelation; besides, in the title page of his booklet, Cortis presents himself as the previous examiner of Sacred Scripture and of the Hebrew Language at the University of Malta and at the Seminary, the two institutions where Saydon had just started teaching Sacred Scripture and Biblical languages; and then there was the formal and political move by Cortis to publicly dedicating his work to the Archbishop of Malta of the time. This translation could only appear to Saydon and to his contemporaries as a defiant show of force, and he needed somehow to respond if he meant to establish himself as the authority in his fields of expertise.

**Text:** Cortis: *U ġaragħ, f'jiem għamil il-ħaqq ta' li mħalfin, li waqa' l-ġûħ f' l' art (ta' Israel): u telaq raġel minn Bethlehem taġħ Juda, biex iġhix ġar fin-naħa ta' Moab, hu u martu u ż-żewġ uliedu.*

**Text:** Saydon: *Gara' fi żmien il-ħakma tal-imħallfin li kien hemm il-għaks fil-pajjiż,*

*u mar raġel minn Bethlehem ta' Ġuda jgħammar għarib fl-inħawi ta' Mowab, hu u martu u ż-żewġ uliedu.*

**Commentary:** a) Generally speaking, one may describe Cortis' rendering as more literal than that of Saydon. This may be seen in various parts of the translations, but the present writer will stop with the rendering of the verbal phrase **הַשְּׂפָטִים בְּיָמֵי שְׂפָט** within the introductory time phrase of the entire narrative of Ruth. Cortis rendered this phrase 'in the days of the acts of judging of the judges' which is woodenly literal.<sup>38</sup> The Hebrew phrase used by the narrator **יָמֵי שְׂפָט הַשְּׂפָטִים** 'the days of the judging of the judges' actually says nothing about what the real activity of the 'judges' had been. What interested the biblical narrator was establishing a general historical context for his narrative in the Book of Ruth. Actually, he makes no other references to this context which thus remains 'out' of the story proper.

Cortis follows the narrator faithfully though his phrase *għamil il-ħaaq*, 'acts of justice', giving the impression that he interprets the figure of 'judge', *imħallef*, as it sounds in Maltese and in modern languages as some kind of leader whose role in the Israelite society of the premonarchical period(s) of ancient Israel was mainly the administration of justice. But the data coming from both Near Eastern cultures as well as the Hebrew Bible attest to the movement of the *šōpētîm*'s role from one as judicial administrator to that of political leader, ruler. "The OT shows that the premonarchical rulers (*šōpētîm*) conducted military campaigns (Judges 2,16;3,10), governed the state (Judg10,3;12,7), and administered justice (Judg 4,4). The root *špṭ* is therefore multifarious in meaning in both the Akkadian and the OT. The best meaning of the term in every usage is determined only by paying close attention to the context in which *špṭ* is used."<sup>39</sup> The term in Ruth 1,1 seems to refer to the 'judges' in the Book of Judges, and there the rulers of the people are political figures rather than judicial officers, though the administration of justice formed also part of their responsibilities as it did of any ruling leader of any kind.<sup>40</sup>

Saydon's translation favours the political understanding of the *šōpētîm*, reading the acts of judging' as 'acts of ruling': *fi żmien il-ħakma tal-imħallfin* 'in

38.

39. Temba L.J. Mañico, "Judge, Judging" in David Noel Freedman (ed.), *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, III, Doubleday, New York 1992, 1104-1106, specifically p.1106

40. Ibid., 1105

the time of the judges' rule' which is probably more in line with modern exegetical thought.<sup>41</sup>

b) *The translation of the main verb* וַיֵּלֶךְ Cortis's translation of this verb which constitutes the predicate of the sentence where וַיֵּלֶךְ is the subject is potentially superior to that of Saydon. Cortis renders the verb 'u *telaq*' while Saydon translates it as *u mar*. The verb *telaq* carries several meanings among which 'to leave a place, to go away from a place.'<sup>42</sup> Aquilina cites the expressions: *aħjar nitilqu* 'it is time for us to leave'; *telaq 'il barra* 'he went out'.<sup>43</sup> This nuance in *telaq* makes it fit better to render וַיֵּלֶךְ in our text than the verb *mar* 'he went'<sup>44</sup> because it suits better the idea that the man was beginning his journey from Bethlehem towards the land of Moab.

c) The syntax after the main verb in the two translations is almost identical; in both, the predicate is followed by a final clause though in Cortis the finality nature of the clause is rendered explicit by the conjunction *biex* while Saydon opted to leave the nature of the second clause become clear through the contextual relationship between the main verb *mar* and the verb in the final clause *jgħammad*. The result in the two syntactical structures is the same though Saydon's is probably stylistically superior.

d) Both Cortis and Saydon misunderstood the *waw* in וַיֵּלֶךְ; they both parsed it as the independent conjunction ו in Hebrew and rendered it in Maltese separately from the verb: *u telaq, u mar* respectively. This has been a serious misunderstanding by modern Hebrew grammar standards. First of all, the *waw* was part and parcel of the Hebrew verb form called *wayyiqtol*.<sup>45</sup> Since the time of Saydon when he worked on this translation, Hebrew studies have isolated as a separate morphological form the so-called '*wayyiqtol* narrative form'. "*Wayyiqtol* is the narrative verb form *par*

41. Besides the short bibliography offered by Mafico in her ABD article (cfr. note 39 above); on the 'judges' one may also consult Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel. Its Life and Institutions*, Darton, Longman & Todd, London 1961,92-93; Robert G. Boling, *Judges*, Anchor Bible 6A, Doubleday, New York 1975,3-50; Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh, The Sociology of the Religion of Liberated Israel 1250-1050BCE*, Maryknoll, New York 1979.

42. Cfr. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 1417.

43. *Ibid.*

44. *Ibid.*, 783.

45. Alviero Nicacci, "Basic facts and Theory of the Biblival Hebrew Verb System in Prose" in Ellen van Wolde(ed.), *Narrative Syntax & the Hebrew Bible*, Brill, Leiden1997,167 note 1.

*excellence* because it is the only one indicating the main line of communication.... This *wayyiqtol* marks the beginning of the main line of narrative... be repeated in the receptor language in the most natural way of saying it. First-placed verb form constitutes a plain, unmarked sentence where the verb is the predicate, as expected."<sup>46</sup> Notwithstanding its partially semitic origin and structure, unlike Hebrew, Maltese does not possess this 'narrative verb form' and hence its reproduction in Maltese by the conjunction *u* + the perfect form of the verb sounds unnatural in this language and does not constitute a good translation of the Hebrew equivalent. All this boils down to saying that the renderings by Cortis and Saydon of the verbal form וַיֵּלֶךְ in Ruth 1,1 in the above cited translations leave much to be desired; both pretended to reproduce the Hebrew text, but they have not translated it. Translation implies that the translator says the contents of the source text in the receptor language which has its own strategies to say the same things. The art of translating consists in discovering what these strategies are so that what was worth repeating in the source text may said in the way which is most natural for the receptor language.

e) *Biex ighix ġar ...* This is how Cortis rendered the final clause לָגוּר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב: 'he went to live as neighbour'. Saydon rendered the clause differently: including the main verb *mar* his text reads *mar jghammar għarib*, 'he went to live as a foreigner'. What are the implications of these different renderings? As said above, in his translation work Cortis was drawn to show the parallels between Hebrew and Maltese, and of course he must have noticed the phonetic parallels between the Hebrew verbal לָגוּר and the Maltese nominal *ġar*, 'neighbour'. He understood the final clause לָגוּר בְּשָׂדֵי מוֹאָב as meaning 'to live as neighbour in the territory of Moab' in other words, 'to settle in Moab' to live as the neighbour of the Moabites. Comments: 1) We have already shown that the Hebrew לָגוּר and the Maltese *ġar* are to be considered as linguistic 'false friends' as they do not cover identical semantic fields notwithstanding the fact that they share a number of phonetic elements. Hebrew לָגוּר is rather much wider than the Maltese *ġar* which strictly speaking means 'neighbour' or in verbal configurations 'to live as neighbour/s'. Hebrew לָגוּר is nowadays taken to imply the following nuances, especially in the light of the various traditions which speak of the dangers to their integrity of Hebrew families who had to emigrate and settle in the territory of other neighbouring people:<sup>47</sup> settling in a place only for

46. *Ibid.*, 167-178.

47. To remain within the Books of Genesis and Exodus: 12,10-20; 20,1-18; 26,1-24; 47,4-Book of Exodus 15.

a while, never for good; the place and its people are complexively perceived to be hostile towards the settling community, and hence the settling community had somehow to be protected by the authority of the receiving community; the protection of the settling community was never clearly defined beforehand, and hence divine protection as a guarantee for the community immigrating into the new country is always marked in these narratives.

One may also presume that the narrator of Ruth was fully cognizant of this nuances complex attached to the word גֵּר so that his choice of the verb at Ruth 1,1 did not happen by chance. On the other hand, the narrator was thereby discretely interpreting the story of Ruth as a foundational narrative, as the story of one of their matriarchs,<sup>48</sup> in the same way that Gen 12,10-20 told of the dangers that the matriarch Sarah underwent when the clan had to temporarily move into a new territory because of greater dangers in its own land (12,10).

This further exegetical analysis of Ruth 1,1 would render the translation of Cortis and his backing exegesis rather fragile. In his translation through the rather unusual syntactical construction he employed, Cortis laid stress on the idea of neighbourly mutuality between Naomi's family and the Moabites among whom they were to settle. This however constitutes a complete misunderstanding of the גֵּר (*gēr*) institution which we are defining with Kellermann as a 'protected alien'.<sup>49</sup> The *gēr* never meant to integrate with the hosting society just as some contemporary 'illegal immigrants' keep refusing any legal status our hosting society offers them, for reasons we do not understand completely.<sup>50</sup> The protected alien would remain in the hosting society only for a definite period, perhaps till the situation in his own home country ameliorates (Ruth1,6). In this context, Saydon's translation improved that of Cortis in that it stands on better exegesis. The translation of מוֹרֵב לְגוֹר בְּשָׂרַי by *jghammar gharib fl-inħawi ta' Moab* 'to live as a foreigner in the territory of Moab' as we find it in Saydon Mss and Saydon I is exegetically correct even though the nominal *gharib* may raise a methodological issue in that it is not as well known as one would wish especially when he/she is aware that translation is expected to employ vocabulary that is really accessible to the translator's 'target

48. This intention of the narrator becomes quite clear towards the end of the narrative when he links the story of Ruth and Boaz to a genealogy of King David in 4,17-22.

49. See above note 33.

50. See *Times of Malta*. Of course one should allow for the different time context between the two events.

audience', in Saydon's case, the average speaker of Maltese. It would appear that eligibility of a lexeme to be used in Saydon's register was that it could be found in some written document: that would be taken that the word was available to whomsoever wanted to speak Maltese. But if translation is today considered to be an act of communication,<sup>51</sup> and therefore the vocabulary employed has to be available to the average speaker of the language; vocabulary that is researched and rare, if not obsolete, will render a translation inadequate for its target audience. This seems to have been case of *gharib* although not everyone would vow that it is obsolete or rare.

### 3

#### *Saydon versus Karm Zammit*

In the second half of the twenty first century there appeared what one may consider as the last Protestant sponsored Bible in Maltese. It belongs to the same Translation Tradition as Saydon's because, as we shall show, it is heavily dependent on Saydon's contribution. The Malta Bible Society was working on the final touches of its translation, and within Maltese society there was perceived a deep need of a Bible in Maltese. The promoters of Karm Zammit's translation used this gap in the market to introduce this Bible and to push it as an adequate commodity notwithstanding its Protestant background and the lack of professional training of the translator. The translator did not hide the Protestant underpinnings of his work: in the forward he acknowledged that his models were the earliest translations in Maltese whose work had been sponsored by foreign Protestant institutions (Giuseppe Canolo, Mikiel Anton Vassalli, and Mikiel Anġ. Camilleri), his foreign 'support translations' were that of the French Louis Segond and the Italian Giovanni Luzzi, and, of course, he was translating the English Authorised Version. But some Catholic priests closed their eyes to these avowals of Protestant background and promoted this translation even if 'their' translation was just ready for the market. This is how this 'Protestant' Bible became one of the most widely used Bible within a Catholic majority readership, although it was never recognised as the Bible of the Catholic Church.

51.

**Text: Saydon:** *Ġara fi żmien il-ħakma tal-imħallfin li kien hemm il-ġħaks fil-pajjiż, u mar raġel minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda jgħammar għarib fl-inħawi ta' Mowab, hu u martu u ż-żewġ uliedu.*

**Text: Karm Zammit:** *Issa ġara, fi żmien li kienu jaħkmu l-imħallfin, illi kien hemm il-ġħaks fil-pajjiż. U wiehed raġel minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda mar jgħammar għarib fl-art ta' Mowab, hu, martu, u ż-żewġ uliedu subjien.*

**Text: Authorised English Version:** *Now it came to pass in the days when the judges ruled that there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem-judah went to sojourn in the country of Moab, he, and his wife, and his two sons.*

**Commentary:** a) The inclusion of the King James Version in this study has been deemed necessary since the author of this translation acknowledged in the forward that he has used it as his source text. We have to include it also as having exercised some influence on Zammit's rendering of the text. Karm Zammit in no part of his Bibbja mentions which edition of the Authorised Version he employed for his translation work. For our study we have reproduced the text of the Authorised Version (AV) from *The Holy Bible, Standard Text Edition*, Cambridge University Press, Oxford 1985 (the date is not given in the publication) which is a *cum privilegio* edition. b) Three features are clearly direct influences from the AV. 1) *Now it came to pass* One such influence is seen in the rendering of the opening time phrase 'Now it came to pass in the days....' which Zammit rendered erroneously *Issa ġara...* which is a literal translation of the English but which does not suit the Maltese setting of a traditional narrative, especially the initial *issa* 'now'. Saydon's strategy of starting the narrative with the verb *ġara*, 'it happened' fits this tradition context better. 2) *His two sons* Zammit is more precise than Saydon (and Cortis for this) in translating שְׁנֵי בָנָיו, following the AV, 'his two sons'. Saydon rendered the phrase by *ż-żewġ uliedu* 'his two children' relying upon the text to reinterpret and to subsequently correct this undertranslation. Actually, this undertranslation is corrected with verse 2 where we are told that the two children of Elimelech were in fact two 'sons'. 3) *A certain man* Zammit reproduced also the translation of אִישׁ in the AV with the indefinite 'a certain man' by *wiehed raġel*, 'a certain man' which is much less idiomatic in Maltese than Saydon's *raġel*. Zammit's translation is more woodenly English. In modern Maltese, probably under the influence of English, Maltese has constructed an adjectival use of the indefinite pronoun *wiehed*: 'wiehed raġel'; this is the use Zammit makes of the word. 4) *Sentence Structure* The sentence structure of Zammit seems to have followed the AV rather than that of Saydon. The AV and

Zammit divided the text into two independent sentences where the semantic link between the two is not that clear: the two events of the famine in Elimelech's land, and the emigration of the family do not seem to have been connected; they were two events that happened in the same time frame; the narrator in the Hebrew text, though, was implying that the emigration of Elimelech and his family to the east was occasioned by the famine in their ארצו, country, *pajjiž*. This has been a flaw on the part of the exegesis in AV, a flaw which Zammit introduced into his own translation by adopting the same division of the text as his source text. He made this mistake notwithstanding that he was closely consulting Saydon's translation; in this Saydon followed the Hebrew text where the *wayyiqtol* clause introduced by the second וַיְהִי that establishes the narrative thread is closely followed by the second *wayyiqtol* clause ushered in by וַיֵּלֶךְ.

The sentence sequence in Hebrew tie the two clauses together and gives the impression that the two events were inter-related. Some translations resort to subordinating one of the clauses in order to render this inter-relatedness more clear: "Once, in the time of the Judges, when there was a famine in the land, a man from Bethlehem in Judah, went with his wife and his two sons to live in Moabite territory" (REB).<sup>52</sup> Here the first *wayyiqtol* clause is subordinated to the second *wayyiqtol* clause which is the וַיֵּלֶךְ and which becomes then the main clause; technically speaking, in Hebrew both clauses are main clauses. But in the REB rendering the Elimelech family travels east to the land of the Moabites only because the famine made the situation in Bethlehem of Judah life threatening. Otherwise they would never have taken that option.

For all the rest, the translation of Karm Zammit is a carbon copy of Saydon's translation: exegesis (*fiž-žmien li kienu jaħkmu l-imħallfin*), vocabulary (*għarib*), the micro-Clause structure (*jgħammar għarib*). One may identify his contribution to this text tradition in that he corrected the slight mistake in Saydon (*ž-žewg uliedu=ž-žewg uliedu subjien*). In recompense, Saydon's is far superior idiomatically, for the 'colour' of its language. Karm Zammit's many borrowings from Saydon's raises the issue which is nowadays raised when it comes to publish a new translation; were all the efforts involved in the translation, and publishing, not to mention financing, worth the candle? And one has to take into consideration the fact that by the time

52. For the inter-relatedness of famine in a place and the consequent emigration of groups to a neighbouring country cf. Gen 12,10; 20,1-2.



this strong imitation of Saydon's translation was published at a time when there were strong rumours that a second edition of Saydon's translation was in the offing.<sup>53</sup>

### 3

#### *Carmel Sant versus Saydon*

In 1984 the Malta Bible Society published its first edition of *Il-Bibbja jew Il-Kotba Mqaddsa bil-Malti* which became the first official Bible Translation of the Catholic Church on the Island. It was considered by many as a publishing event (cfr. the Preface by Professor Carmel Sant, the editor general). Within the Translation Tradition in Maltese it brought several innovations: it had a clearly defined 'target audience': '*traduzzjoni ġdida għal idejn kulhadd għall-użu publiku u privat*' (preface, p.x) [a new translation for the general public and for public and private use]. Marrying public and private use, this publication was preceded by the translation of the biblical texts to be used in the liturgy of the Catholic Church for both Sunday and daily readings; this helped the translators to keep their translation efforts strictly 'target audience orientated'. Besides, this translation was the fruit not of a single scholar but that of a team made up of writers and biblical scholars, even though Professor Sant's contribution seems to have excelled that of the other members of the team that worked with him (one may arrive to this conclusion from the list of those who worked on the first draft of each biblical book (cf. preface p.xi). Sant wrote the first draft of the greater part of the biblical books; and continued to refine the text till the very end of the editorial work. The present writer hopes to be able to study one day this redactional work more closely in order to trace the growth of the translation till its cristallization in the 1984 text. Sant says that the first draft passed through several individual and communal revisions by the members of the team. Concerning the Book of Ruth, Sant himself wrote the first draft and we may presume that he was therefore responsible for the greater part of the present text as we find it in the 1984 and subsequent editions of *Il-Bibbja*. We have to keep in mind that this Bible had four other editions, the Second (1996), the Third (2004), and the Fourth (2007 still in print). The Second edition done was under the general editorship of Rev Dr Anthony Abela, the Translation Consultant of the United Bible Societies for the Malta Bible Society. In 2004, the Malta Bible Society founded within its daughter organization, the Institute for Biblical Culture, which is responsible today for the teaching activities of the MBS, the *Kummissjoni*

53. Bezzina, *Saydon: Biblista u Studjuż tal-Malti*, 315-324; Sant 1992:139-152.

*Biblika Permanenti* (the Permanent Biblical Commission) in order to monitor the development of the text of its Bible in view of the ever evolving biblical research and in view of requests from time to time for changes in the text. The principle adopted by the Commission is that unless the text is proven mistaken, it *stet*. The Commission is made up of professional biblical scholars and it is convened every three to four months under the chairmanship of the present writer. No changes in the 1984 text of the Book of Ruth have been made by the Commission so far. This explains why we stopped with the first edition of the Bible (1984), and why we are focusing upon the contribution of Professor Carmel Sant notwithstanding there were always others who somehow helped Sant in his translation and redactional work on the book.

**Text: Saydon:** *Ġara fi żmien il-ħakma tal-inħallfin li kien hemm il-ġhaks fil-pajjiż, u mar raġel minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda jgħammar għarib fl-inħawi ta' Mowab, hu, u martu, u ż-żewġ uliedu.*

**Text: Sant:** *Fi żmien meta kienu jaħkmu l-inħallfin, kien hemm il-ġhaks fil-pajjiż. Kien hemm raġel minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda li mar joqgħod fl-inħawi ta' Mowab, hu, martu, u ż-żewġ uliedu.*

**Commentary a)** As one would expect, the two translations are quite similar, though there are a few differences which ought to be noted: the most significant concerns the sentence structure. Saydon follows the Hebrew text closely and almost repeat the two *wayyiqtol* clauses perhaps thinking that these are reproducible in the Maltese *u +the* perfect tense of the verb. We have seen that this is not the case. Maltese does not have the Hebrew verb form *wayyiqtol* and therefore the contents contained in the verb form of the Hebrew text has to be reproduced otherwise in Maltese. Sant's rendering offers a valid alternative in this regard. He renders the Hebrew verbal system by a cluster of short clauses, some main some secondary; the two ויחי's are translated as main clauses: *kien hemm*, 'there was' the first having רעב as subject: 'In the time when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land'. The next sentence in the translation is the rendering of the other ויחי clause this time the nominal ואל, *raġel*, being the subject. This means that there is another small though significant difference between Sant and his mentor Saydon: the latter parsed ויחי as part of the time phrase of the opening (v.1a), as a 'macrosyntactic sign' as Waltke and O'Connor defined it,<sup>54</sup> and hence not necessarily translatable;

54. Cf. page 3 note 10 of this paper.

Sant parsed it as the first of the *wayyiqtol* chain of verbs in the narrative, the first *wayyiqtol* that establishes the narrative thread: according to Sant ‘all started with the famine in Bethlehem’, while Saydon’s exegesis would comment ‘all started with Elimelek’s emigration to Moab’. Both appear to be correct because both events took place, though the first glance the text seems to favour Sant’s parsing and exegesis (the narrator’s putting the adverbial time phrase **כְּמִי שֶׁפָּטַח הַשָּׂפָטִים** between the verb and the subject creates a space which is rather too wide between the verb **וַיֵּחַד** and its presumed subject of the clause, **רַעֲב**; besides, the presumed grammatical relationship between the two elements has to pass through the other **וַיֵּחַד**, which makes this relationship ungrammatical. The problem with Sant’s parsing and exegesis therefore is that, as noticed before, the nominal **רַעֲב** cannot be, technically speaking, the subject of the first **וַיֵּחַד** in the text, and therefore Sant’s parsing is faulty and his exegesis as well as his translation need to be revisited. b) Sant’s reformulation of the text in Maltese involved giving pride of place to the verb (the second) **וַיֵּחַד** (*kien hemm*), and reducing in Maltese the Hebrew **וַיֵּלֶךְ**, which is the main verb in the Hebrew cluster, to a mere auxiliary *mar* in sustenance of the verb *joqgħod*, *mar joqgħod*, ‘went to live/reside.’<sup>55</sup> The problem with this verb *qagħad* in Maltese is that it does not *per se* carry the qualifying elements which, we have seen before, are entailed by the Hebrew verb **גָּר**. Sant has perhaps perceived the difficulties in the use of the nominal *għarib* of Saydon and simply dropped it without replacing it by an alternative which he could have done. In this regard, Sant’s rendering constitutes an undertranslation.<sup>56</sup> c) Sant improved the style of Saydon’s resumptive *hu, u martu, u ż-żewġ uliedu*, by dropping the conjunction before the second element, *martu*, his wife. Sant, like Saydon, relied on the further evolvment of the narrative to correct the slight undertranslation of **בְּנָיו** ‘his two sons’ by *iz-żewġ uliedu* ‘his two children’ who were males.

## 4

*A proposal for a new translation*

In this last paragraph the present writer offers his own proposal for a translation

55. For this meaning of the verb *qagħad* cfr. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 1122-1123.
56. As are many international translations who render **גָּר** by ‘reside’ ‘live’, ‘stay’ ‘sojourn’ (AV, which is slightly better in that it implies that the residing in the new place is not meant to be permanent but only for a limited time span.

in Maltese of Ruth 1,1 in the light of the best expressions of the translation tradition that has been exposed above.

**Cortis** (1924): *U ġaragħ, f'jiem għamil il-ħaqq ta' li mħalfin, li waqa' ġuħ f'l'art (ta Israel): u telaq raġel minn Bethlehem tagħ Juda, biex jgħix ġar fin-naħa ta' Moab, hu u martu u żewġ uliedu.*

**Saydon** (1932): *Ġara fi żmien il-ħakma tal-imħallfin li kien hemm il-għaks fil-pajjiż, u mar raġel minn Bethlehem ta' Ġuda, jgħammar għarib fl-inħawi ta' Mowab, hu u martu u ż-żewġ uliedu.*

**Zammit** (1982): *Issa ġara, fi żmien li kienu jaħkmu l-imħallfin, illi kien hemm il-għaks fil-pajjiż. U wiehed raġel minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda, mar jgħammar għarib fl-art ta' Mowab, hu, u martu, u ż-żewġ uliedu subjien.*

**Sant** (1984): *Fi żmien meta kienu jaħkmu l-imħallfin, kien hemm il-għaks fil-pajjiż. Kien hemm raġel minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda li mar joqgħod fl-inħawi ta' Mowab, hu, martu u ż-żewġ uliedu.*

In what follows the present writer hopes to offer a revised edition of Sant's version which today constitutes the official edition of the Bible in Maltese in the hope it will be considered worthy to replace the current text of Ruth 1,1. This revision does not mean to offer a completely original version of the text in Maltese; the revision being presented here takes the above translation tradition in its various expressions very seriously borrowing from them what the present writer deems to have been the best. Each part of the new edition will be followed by a commentary where this is necessary.

\**Fi żmien meta kienu jaħkmu l-Imħallfin* [at the time when the Judges ruled].

This is a definite time frame wherein which the narrator sets his narrative of Ruth. The period of the Judges is being considered here as a definite historical period<sup>57</sup> for which reason the first letter of the word for 'judges', *Imħallfin*, is capitalised.

\**Wiehed raġel siefer flimkien ma' martu u ż-żewġ uliedu subjien minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda biex imur jgħix ta' barrani fl-art ta' Mowab billi waqa' l-għaks fil-pajjiż*

57. Hubbard, *The Book of Ruth*, 83

*ta' Israel* 'A certain man emigrated together with his wife and his two sons from Bethlehem of Judah in order to go and settle as a foreigner in the land of Moab since there was a famine in the land of Israel'

Commentary:

**a) *Wieħed raġel siefer flimkien ma' martu u ż-żewġ uliedu subjien***

Indefiniteness in Maltese is not necessarily lexicalised as it is here. *Wieħed* literally means 'one' but it functions also as an indefinite pronoun.<sup>58</sup> Together with *raġel* it translates the Hebrew **אִישׁ**. The verb *siefer* is technical for 'to emigrate' which neither Sant nor Saydon employed in this text perhaps because the distance involved from Bethlehem to the territories of Moab was not too large.<sup>59</sup> The narrator insists that Elimelech travels away from his land with his family to settle somewhere in the Maobite territory for some time even if not for good, and hence one may speak of emigration. The verb *siefer* is the third form of the verb from the root *safar* found in this morphological form only as a noun.<sup>60</sup> In the context it is translating the main verb **יָלַד**. As in Hebrew the postposition (see above) underlines the accompaniment of Elimelech by his family, so here the phrase *flimkien ma' martu u ż-żewġ uliedu* comes just after the verb and before the adverbial phrase of place from *minn Betleħem ta' Guda* which would be normally more natural to put just after the verb of motion. The present writer has accepted the correction in Saydon and Sant introduced by Zammit and qualified the term *ulied* by *subjien* even though the tacit argument by the two scholars that the narrative by itself would have interpreted and corrected *ulied* for **בָּנָיו** is also taken to have been valid. Literally speaking, the translator may drop the general term *ulied* and include only *subjien* in the text: *u ż-żewġ subjien tiegħu* 'his two boys' because in Maltese this entailed that they were his own sons.

**b) *minn Betleħem tq' Guda***

We have already shown that in Hebrew this phrase is ambiguous in that it may be interpreted both as adverbial phrase qualifying the verb **יָלַד** telling us from where the journey of Elimelech started, and as an adjectival phrase telling the place

58. Aquilina, *Maltese –English Dictionary*, II, 1531.

59. For the topography involved see Campbell, *Ruth*, 50-51.

60. Joseph Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 1250.

of origin of Elimelech: he was a Bethlehemite. We have seen that most translations opted for this latter exegesis. This was constant also in the Maltese translation tradition we have so far studied. In our initial exegesis though we have shown that it is more probable that the narrator understood the phrase as adverbial and it is this option that may be read in the translation offered above. *Minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda* is qualifying *siefer* notwithstanding the rather large distance between the verb and the adverbial phrase; this distance has been created by insertion of the accompaniment phrase which mentions the various members of Elimelech that accompanied 'him' on his journey. We have seen that the Hebrew text gives these other subjects of the verb וְיִלְדָּי great importance by including them in a phrase that is postponed to the end of the sentence. In Maltese we could not adopt this syntactical strategy to achieve the same effect. Instead we brought the phrase to just after the verb and transformed the phrase to one of accompaniment. In this way the phrase is given greater syntactical prominence, just as the narrator wanted when he postponed it to the end of the sentence in Hebrew. Unfortunately, our strategy has the negative effect of distancing the adverbial phrase *minn Betlehem ta' Ġuda* from the main verb *siefer* though, in recompense, the phrase is no longer ambiguous as it is in Hebrew and in Saydon's translation which follows the Hebrew source text very closely.

c)...*billi waqa' l-ghaks fil-pajjiż ta' Izrael*

Two strategies have been adopted in translating the first *wayyiqtol* clause בְּאֵרֶץ רַעֲב וַיְהִי רָעֵב; the clause is reduced to a secondary clause in the service of the main clause that narrates the emigration of Elimelech with all his family members to Moab and it is explicitly redefined as a causal clause; this explains better the motivation of Elimelech in moving to the Moabite territory. Besides, the clause is transferred in the text structure to after the main clause and is linked to it by the conjunction *billi*.<sup>61</sup> This further strengthened the relationship between the main clause and this secondary clause. For the translation of the verb וַיְהִי the present writer preferred Cortis's *waqa'* attached to the subject *il-ġuħ/il-ghaks* to *kien hemm* chosen by all other translators. Cortis though rendered רַעֲב by *ġuħ* while the present writer opted for *ghaks*. Probably both are possible though there exists a fine difference between the two. The former is used rather for physical hunger (*miniex bil-ġuħ*, 'I am not hungry'; *bil-ġuħ li ghandi qed nara l-kwiekeb*, 'I am so hungry, I can't stand any longer'.<sup>62</sup> The nominal *ghaks* refers more though not exclusively to the state of

61. See Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, I, 123 for this conjunction.

62. *Ibid.*, 413.

depression in a country after a period of drought or some other natural disaster. We have the expression, at times used by politicians on the local scene, *l-ghaks tal-pajjiż* ‘the oppression of the country’; *ghex fl-ghaks u t-tbatija* ‘he was brought up in great poverty and misery.’<sup>63</sup> In view of these uses, *ghaks* is being preferred to *guħ*. Strictly speaking *fil-pajjiż ta’ Izrael* makes explicit what in the text is only implicit; the text reads בְּאֶרֶץ ‘in the land’ which for the original target audience would have been a clear reference to ‘the land of Canaan’ or the ‘land of Israel’<sup>64</sup>, but not necessarily so for the reader of the translation.

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63. See Aquilina, *Maltese-English Dictionary*, II, 949. One may find of some use the discussion Albert W. Agius, *It-Teżawru. Ġabra ta’ Sinonimi u Tifsiriet jixxiehbu Maltin*, Book Distribution Ltd., Malta 2000, 70.77.

64. Cfr BDB, 76; DCH, I, 386. As we have seen, the narrator may be linking the story of Ruth to the patriarchal narratives in Genesis, and hence the verbal and syntactical parallels with Gen 12,10 should not go unnoticed. Of course, the original listener to the story would know that Bethlehem formed part of ‘the land of Israel’. But for the reader of the translation, this may not be included among the facts of life to be necessarily known. This explains the specification ‘of Israel’ in the translation.