

The Morisco and Hispano-Arabic culture and Malta. Some highlights on late medieval and early modern links

Thomas FRELLER y Stephan HERGET

BIBLID [0544-408X]. (1999) 48; 105-120

Resumen: El siglo XVI fue testigo de una política de represión e intimidación que llevó a la total expulsión de los descendientes de los arabófonos convertidos; de hecho, un intento importante para erradicar la identidad de este, aún sospechoso, grupo étnico fue una pragmática dictada por el rey Felipe II, según la cual les estaba prohibido hablar y escribir en su propia lengua. En conexión con este proceso, la lengua maltesa y su historia fueron objeto de análisis por parte de los estudiosos hispano-árabes. El presente trabajo abre un nuevo campo de investigación.

Abstract: In Spain the 16th century finally witnessed a policy of repression and deterrence which led to the complete expulsion of the christianized descendants from the Arabic occupation. One important attempt to erase the identity of this still suspicious ethnic group was a 'prematica' of King Philip II which prohibited to speak and write their own Arabic language. In connection with this development, also the Semitic Maltese language and its history was touched and observed by Hispano-Arabic scholars. This subject opens up a new field of investigation.

Palabras clave: Relaciones hispano-árabes con Malta. Lengua maltesa. Orden de S. Juan.

Key words: Maltese and Hispano-Arabic culture. Maltese Language. Order of St John.

In general it is believed that it was the impact of the Great Siege (1565) coupled with the 'gloire' of the regime of the Knights of St John and the so-called economic *desicilianismo* policies of French Grand Masters La Cassiere and Loubenx de Verdalle in the 1570s and the 1580s¹ that put the Maltese islands on the

1. Both grand masters promoted an economic policy which sought new trade relationships in addition to those with the Spanish-ruled Kingdom of Sicily. For a case study of the English side cf. V.

European map. If one views the hundreds of historical, geographical, political or theological works and the innumerable travelogues of the late 16th, 17th and 18th centuries which deal with Malta and the Order's state, one grasps the meaning of this perspective. Central and North European travellers who visited Malta before the Great Siege and wrote in greater detail about its culture and social situation, were André Thevet (1549), Nicolas de Nicolay (1551) or Fuerer von Haimendorf (1564)², who may be regarded as exceptions.

As up to 1530 the Maltese islands were under the dominion of the crown of Aragon, and following 1530 when Malta was granted to the Knights of St. John as a fief through the Spanish king and emperor of the Holy German Empire Charles V, the Maltese islands and their specific cultural heritage had achieved a wider development from the Hispanic world. Many of the characters of Spanish 16th and early 17th century autobiographic literature have the Mediterranean as the setting or background of their exploits and adventures. Many of them have ample references to Malta and the knights. With the exception of the biography of the soldier of fortune Alonso de Contreras who later became a knight of the Order himself³, these writings are totally neglected by Maltese scholars. Ironically Contreras was only a mediocre author and much more gifted writers dealt with Malta. The contemporary Ordoñez de Cevallos, who even travelled to America, used Malta only briefly as the background of his bloody revenge story of an Andalusian lady⁴, while the Duque de Estrada, one of the most famous heroes of the time, gives more details about his various visits to the island and his prestigious receptions by the old *bon vivant* Grand Master Antoine de Paule⁵. Another interesting author who started his *Vida* in the course of his service as a soldier in Malta in 1612 was the Castillian Miguel de Castro⁶.

Mallia-Milanes. "English Merchants' initial contacts with Malta: A Reconsideration". *Melita Historica*, VI, 4 (1975), pp. 342-361 and A. P. Vella. *An Elizabethan-Ottoman Conspiracy*. Malta, 1972.

2. The quoted dates indicate the year when these travellers and authors visited Malta. For further details regarding these persons or their stay at Malta see the monograph by Th. Freller. *The life and adventures of Michael Heberer von Bretten*. Malta, 1997.

3. See Contreras' autobiography. *The Life of Captain Alonso de Contreras. Knight of the Military Order of St John*. Translated from the Spanish by Catherine Alison Philips. London, n.y.

4. Pedro Ordoñez de Cevallos. *Viage del mundo*. Madrid, 1614.

5. Cf. Diego Duque de Estrada. "Comentarios del desengañado, ó sea vida de D. Diego Duque de Estrada". *Memorial Histórico Espanol: Coleccion de Documentos, Opùsculos y Antigüedades, que publica la Real Academia de la Historia*, XII, (1860), p. 267.

6. Cf. Miguel de Castro. "Libro que comenzo en Malta (...), de su nacimiento y demas razones

This automatically leads to a comparison with a genre of literature then enjoying widespread popularity: the Spanish *picaro* novels which embrace elements of travel literature, chivalric novel, biography, as well as farce. The semi-fictional characters of these novels are motivated to see the foreign world by a search for adventure, fame, money, and, most of all, *honra* (reputation). The heroes of the books by Cervantes, Quevedo, Lope de Vega, Gongora, or else in the autobiographies of adventurers like Alonso de Contreras or Miguel de Castro, set out for the foreign world on a journey in a struggle for *honra*, personal success, and wealth. Rich in experience, they returned home years later, disillusioned and tempered. Many of them close their writings by indicating the utility of their reports for the education and the instruction of others. In this the Duque de Estrada's work does not differ much from the contemporary autobiographical notes of the members of the lower strata as the Madrileño Alonso de Contreras, a friend of Lope de Vega's, or the Castilian soldier Miguel de Castro. Their works make interesting reading especially for their contribution to Maltese literature studies. However they will not form the gist of this paper.

Primarily, this essay investigates the awareness which may have been shaped by the inherent ethnological and political circumstances of late medieval and 16th century Spain. Secondly, this exercise exposes how fruitful a deeper investigation of the Spanish archives -apart from obvious political aspects- would be to gain a wider illuminating insight into the cultural and especially linguistic patrimony of 15th and 16th century Malta.

These last two or three decades have witnessed an intense investigation into the subject of the Maltese language, and especially through the works of Godfrey

de su familia, según la tenía y una memorias que llevó a España". *Biblioteca de Autores Españoles*. vol. XC, pp. 487-627.

MEAH, SECCIÓN ÁRABE-ISLAM 48 (1999), 105-120

Wettinger and Michael Fsadni⁷, Arnold Cassola⁸, Joseph M. Brincat⁹, Joseph Aquilina¹⁰, Thomas Freller and Albert Friggieri¹¹, the origins, roots and development of written Maltese and the further shaping of this Semitic language by way of an admixture of Italian, French, Spanish, and Greek influences gained more transparency. Up to 1968, the six-page word list presented by the German scholar and 'Ordinariarius historiographicus' Hieronymus Megiser in his 'Propugnaculum Europae' (first edition Leipzig, 1606)¹² was thought to be the first written specimen of the Maltese language¹³. Then, it was Godfrey Wettinger and Michael Fsadni who came across the 'cantilena' of the Maltese Pietro Caxaro written around 1450¹⁴.

The latter example leads us to the period when Malta was under the dominion of the Crown of Aragon (1284-1530)¹⁵. The status of the Maltese islands and their

7. Cf. G. Wettinger, M. Fsadni. *Peter Caxaro's Cantilena. A Poem in Medieval Maltese*. Malta, 1968. Cf. also F. Kabazi. "Ulteriori considerazioni linguistiche sulla Cantilena di Pietro Caxaro". *Journal of Maltese Studies*, 19-20, (1989-1990), pp. 42-45 and for a connection with the Iberian peninsula see Th. Bonnici. "Galician-Portuguese traits in Caxaro's Cantilena". *JMS*, 19-20, (1989-1990), pp. 46-51. Essential to this topic is still the *ET's* Article on Malta written by Rossi, Isserlin and Vanhove.

8. Cf. A. Cassola. *Regole per la lingua maltese. The 'Nobile, pio, cavalier francese Thezan' and his long-lost manuscript recovered*. Malta, 1988 and by the same author "Un'edizione diversa della lista di voci maltesi del seicento di Hieronymus Megiser". *Incontri Siculo-Maltesi*. Ed. by G. Brincat (= *Journal of Maltese Studies*, 17-18) (1987-1988), pp. 72-86.

9. Cf. J. M. Brincat. "Language and demography in Malta: The social foundations of the symbiosis between Semitic and Romance in standard Maltese". *Malta. A Case Study in International Cross-Currents*. Ed. by Stanley Fiorini and Victor Mallia-Milanes. Malta, 1991, pp. 91-110.

10. Cf. J. Aquilina. "Maltese Christian Words of Arabic Origin". *Maltese Linguistic Surveys*. Malta, 1976, pp. 19-24.

11. Cf. on the book on Malta (1588/1606) of the linguist and scholar Hieronymus Megiser, A. Friggieri, Th. Freller. *Malta. The Bulwark of Malta*. Malta, 1998.

12. Cf. Hieronymus Megiser. *Propugnaculum Europae*. Leipzig, 1606, pp. 9-14. Later editions of Megiser's book were published 1610 in Leipzig and 1611 and 1612 in Cracau. This German scholar visited Malta in October 1588.

13. The historian Giacomo Bosio in his famous history of the Order of St. John, referring to the projected erection of the 'città nuova' (Valletta), quotes a Maltese proverb:

*'Legi zimen en fel uardie,
Col sceber raba iesu vquie'*

Giacomo Bosio. *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill. ma Militia di San Giovanni Gerosolimitano*. Rome, 1602, Vol. III, p. 746.

14. Cf. supra footnote 7.

15. The best survey of this period to date is presented by A. T. Luttrell. "Approaches to Medieval Malta". A. T. Luttrell (Ed.). *Medieval Malta. Studies on Malta before the knights*. London, 1975, pp. 1-70. In fact the change of dynasty in 1412 when Fernando de Antequera, a prince of Castille, was

part in the sphere of the powerful Aragonese empire can be defined as an eastern frontier and naval base¹⁶, as well as an intersection of commercial exchange between the western and eastern Mediterranean¹⁷. The role of Malta engulfed between the Aragonese -later Castille-Aragonese empire- and the western Mediterranean 'common market', were never limited only to aspects related to politics, strategic and economical interests, but also embraced a special cultural relationship borne out by artistic implications¹⁸. Although the social, economic, as well as political ties lay firmly with Sicily, the specific development and shaping of late medieval Spain could not have left the Maltese islands untouched¹⁹. Up to the late 15th century and beyond, the Iberian peninsula was marked by a heterogeneous mixture of Christian, Arabic and Jewish cultures. When, on the 2nd of January 1492, the last Moorish ruler of Granada Boabdil surrendered the city to the 'reyes catolicos' Isabella and Fernando, the so-called 'Reconquista' had come to an end in Spain²⁰. The problems of integration and

chosen King of Aragon made no deep difference to the relationship of Malta to the Aragon country. Fernando de Antequera and his successors ruled the Aragonese confederation much as their ancestors of the House of Catalonia-Aragon had done. Still useful to consult is also P. De Jove y Hevia. *Indagaciones acerca de la dominación de España en Malta de 1285 a 1530*. Madrid, 1863.

16. This idea of Malta as a naval base was already mentioned in the 'Liber de fine' of the famous author and religious visionary from Mallorca Ramon Lull. Lull wrote his visions about the concept and spirit of the Christian Crusade at the end of the 13th century. For the reference to Malta cf. "Raymondi Lulli Libellus de fine". Ed. by A. Gottron. "Ramon Lulls Kreuzzugsdeen". *Abhandlungen zur Mittleren und Neueren Geschichte*, Vol. 39 (Berlin-Leipzig, 1912), here p 86. In the course of his various travels through the western and central Mediterranean which led him also to Sicily and Tunisia, Lull might have visited also the Maltese islands.

17. One should also not forget that the Aragonese crown, had for a time, strong ambitions of conquering parts of the Morea and the Greek islands.

18. Cf. A. Florensa. "L'architettura di Spagna a Malta". *Atti del XI Congresso di Storia dell' Architettura*. Rome, 1970 and G. Mathew. "Schools of Painting in Medieval Malta". *Journal of the Faculty of Arts; Royal University of Malta*, VI, 1, (1974).

19. That Malta, prior to the complete Christian conquest of Spain was somehow put into the context of the Southern and Western Ibero-Muslim sphere is indicated by the Arabic author and geographer Al Qazmini who wrote in the second part of the 13th century. When mentioning Malta in his 'âthâr-al-bilâd' Al-Qazmini locates this 'prosperous' (sic) island near Andalusia! Here quoted from Al-Qazmini, *âthâr-al-bilâd* (Goettingen, 1848), p 373. For the possibility of a mix-up of the island of Galite (Hâlita, respectively Gâlita), north of Cape Serrat, Tunisia, with Malta (Malita) cf J. M. Brincat. *Malta 870 - 1054. Al-Himyari' s account and its linguistic implications*. Malta, 1995, pp. 41 seq.

20. The fact that all Spain was conquered and christianized did not signify the end of the plan of the 'Reconquista'. The intention of the 'Reconquista' was also to claim big parts of the North African coast where the Spanish tried to reoccupy the territories supposed to have formerly belonged to the Visigoths.

identity of the remaining Moorish communities in Spain -especially in the country of Andalusia and the region of Valencia- remained unsolved, even more so during the following decades when the Spanish Empire was ruled by Carlos I -after his election to emperor of the Holy German Empire as Charles V- and his son Philip II, the situation of the Moriscos²¹, as the newly christianized Muslims living in Spain became known, created conflicts and tension. This in turn, gave way to a period fraught with psychological undertones, fear and enmity. As several recent studies have made clear, a person recognised as 'Morisco' at the height of this obsession with 'limpieza di sangre' (= 'purity of blood') during the second half of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th century, meant the exclusion from all military and many of the religious orders, from the prime positions within the state bureaucracy and from all university colleges²².

It is interesting to note however that some noble families of Moorish descent were able to integrate themselves into the Spanish nobility and consequently figure among the leading classes of Andalusia. Especially noteworthy is a member of this class of Andalusian nobility who left a deep impact on Maltese history too. It was Juan de Venegas, whose original ancestors -Venegas de Cordoba- hailed from Granada, and who between 1599 and 1622 played a key role in the exceptional revival of the Pauline cult in Malta centred around St. Paul's Grotto at Rabat. Whilst in Malta, during the first decades of the 17th century, he became known as 'Fra. Giovanni della Grotta di San Paolo'²³. The motives for his coming to Malta and his dedication to the cult of St Paul are not clear, although they may be rooted in the exceptionally strong devotion to the Apostle of the Gentiles in the

21. The term 'Moorish' would not only incorporate the descendants from the Arabo-Spanish stock but would also include North-African people. The term 'Moriscos' actually defines those christianized descendants from the Arabic occupation of the Iberian peninsula.

22. Contemporary works which give an idea of the Christian point of view of the time, as well as the relevant mentality and spiritual background of Spain in the 'Siglo de Oro', are presented by Pedro Aznar Cardona. *Expulsion iustificada de los moriscos espanoles y suma de las excellencias de (...) Filipe (...) Tercero*. Saragossa, 1612, Fr. Marcos Guadalajara y Xavier. *Prodicion y destierro de los moriscos de Castilla hasta el valle de Ricote con las disensiones de los hermanos Xarifes y presa en Berberia de la fuerza y puerto de Alarache*. Pamplona, 1614 and Blas Verdu. *Engaños y desengaños del tiempo, con un discurso de la expulsion de los moriscos de España*. Barcelona, 1612.

23. Cf. National Library of Malta; Liber Bullarum AOM, Vol. 455 f.292v. Italianized Juan de Venegas appears in many documents as 'Giovanni de Benegos'. For 'Fra Giovanni de Benegas, Spagnuolo da Cordova (sic), denominato di S. Paolo' and his activities in Malta, see Padre Pelagio, 'Relazione intera e distinta della Santità Culto Venerazione e progressi della Ven. Grotta di San Paolo Apostolo...' Mdina, Cathedral Archives, ACM Misc. 263, ff. 83-125.

Morisco culture of Andalusia in the sixteenth century. In fact, it was his Moorish ancestry which prevented Venegas from being accepted as a full Knight within the Order of St. John when he first arrived at Malta. He later achieved his ambition and was received as a Knight of Obedience²⁴ through papal dispensation by Paul V.

However, this successful assimilation into the Christian Spanish society as shown by the case of the Venegas de Cordoba family cannot be considered as typical of the Moriscos in general. In a further attempt to erase the identity of the still extant suspicious ethnic group, Philip II promulgated a 'pragmática'²⁵ on 17th November 1566, which prohibited all Moors in his empire -even though more than two generations had been baptized- to speak and write their own Arabic language. The protests against this prohibition were strong and widespread and finally led to a Moorish insurrection²⁶.

From the Maltese point of view, especially in considering a number of petitions and 'memoires' against the king's decision, one is of particular interest as it not only reflects how well aware the Spanish were of the situation then prevailing at Malta, but also gives an insight into the use of the Maltese language as found in the 'memoria' of the Morisco and knight Francisco Nuñez Muley²⁷. The scholar Nuñez Muley wrote a vigorous and elaborate defence in favour of the Arabic language, which can be tentatively dated to late 1566 or 1567. The situation of Malta partially figured as a decisive role in this 'contra' thesis to the 'pragmática'. For Nuñez Muley and his Morisco compatriots the situation was uncompromisingly clear. Although Malta was given to the Order of St. John as

24. Cf. NLM, Liber Bullarum, AOM, Vol. 459 f. 367r, f. 422. For the Moorish descent of the Venegas family see L. P. Harvey. "Yuse Banegas. Un moro noble en Granada bajo los Reyes Catolicos". *Al-Andalus*, Vol. XXI (1956), pp. 297-302, and P. Cabanelas. "Pedro Venegas de Cordoba; embajador de Felipe II. en Marruecos". *Boletín de la Universidad de Granada*, Vol. XXII (1973), pp 129-144. The biography and activities of Juan de Venegas have been partially studied by Canon John Azzopardi in various editions of '*Il-Festa Taghna*'. Malta.

25. For this 'pragmática' and its consequences see the works listed supra.

26. This policy of repression and deterrence finally led to the complete expulsion of the Moriscos in 1609. Its consequences for the Spanish economy, culture and science were disastrous.

27. There are two manuscripts of this 'memoria' in existence, both are preserved in the 'Biblioteca Nacional de Madrid' under the codes P. V. fol. Caj. 25; No. 41 respectively R. 29; ff. 321-341. The latter one seems to be Nuñez Muley's own handwriting. It was published in *Revue Hispanique*, Sixieme Année, (Paris, 1899), pp. 205-239. For Nuñez Muley and his role in the Moorish insurrection see also K. Garrand, "The original memorial of Don Francisco Nuñez Muley". *Atlante*, Vol. 2, 2, (October 1954), pp. 199-226.

a fief in March 1530, the Maltese islands were still politically part of the Aragonese Crown²⁸. But then, how could the following politico-linguistic anachronism be tolerated? Nuñez Muley declared that no one forbade the Maltese to speak 'their' Arabic language. The Granadine scholar, in fact, stressed the point declaring that a kind of Arabic was the spoken tongue native to all Maltese, even by their nobility: '*...esto es muy notorio, dize mas cerca ques la ysla de malta donde ay los catolicos cristianos hijos de algo ansi mesmo hablan aravigo...*'²⁹. Even more interesting is the declaration of this 'cavallero morisco'³⁰, of how well-known ('*muy notorio*') in Spain or at least in Andalusia was the fact that the Maltese also wrote 'Arabic' ('*escriven aravigo*'³¹) and use it for Mass and liturgical rites ('*...hablan aravigo y escriven aravigo la que toca a la santa fe catolica y la demas de cristianos.*'³²). The message and intention of Nuñez Muley's writing are clear: he strictly strove to separate the questions of language from religion. In so far as there might be an element of exaggeration to lay more weight to the authors' claim to protect Arabic writing, or if there was in fact a recognition of written Maltese in Andalusia in the middle of the 16th century, the question remains wide open for a thorough investigation. It would be especially interesting to find out if Nuñez Muley has actually examined those examples of written 'Maltese' Arabic forms.

Although speaking an 'Arabic' tongue, just a few months prior to the 'memoria' of the Morisco knight, the Maltese had proved to be faithful Christians in the course of the Great Siege endured against the Turks³³. But Nuñez Muley

28. For the most recent and comprehensive collection of essays about the Order's rule in Malta see V. Mallia-Milanes (Ed.). *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798. Studies on Early Modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem*. Malta, 1993.

29. Nuñez Muley, 1899, p. 232.

30. Nuñez Muley, 1899, p. 205.

31. Nuñez Muley, 1899, p. 232.

32. Nuñez Muley, 1899, p. 232.

33. It is obvious that the numerous books and pamphlets about the Great Siege published immediately after the momentous event to immortalise Christian prestige, more or less paid tribute to the bravery of the Knights. Well-known and often quoted by modern scholars is the Spanish version of Balbi de Correggio's eyewitness account *La verdadera Relacion de todo lo que este año de 1565 ha succedido en la Isla de Malta*. Alcalá, 1567 (further editions were printed in 1588 and 1598 in Barcelona) and Pietro Gentile's. *El successo de la guerra de la potentissima armada del gran Tyrano Turco, Ottoman Solyman, venida sobre la Isla de Malta: en la qual se cuenta particularmente lo que en ella passo, en la victoria que los christianos huvieron en ella*. Barcelona, 1566. For a contemporary description in Latin of the Great Siege then available in Spain cf. Conte Gironimo Alessandrini. *De acerrimo ac omnium difficillimo Turcarum Bello in Insulam Melitam gesto, anno*

also points out the 'technical' side and consequences of the edict by Philip II. As the local people in Malta ('esta ysla') and those in Andalusia and the other Spanish dominions, many of the Moriscos would not know how to speak and write another language if not their 'own' Arabic strain: '*...y creo que dizen las misas en muchas partes susodichas como en esta ysla en aravigo en no saben hablar ni escribir castellano los unos ni los otros*'³⁴. It was the contemporary scholar and traveller from Granada Luis del Marmol Carvajal who in his description of the Morisco insurrection presents a short conclusion of the 'memoria' of his Granadine fellow citizen Francisco Nuñez Muley. The passage relevant to the linguistic aspects here dealt with reads as follows: '*Pues vamos a la lengua Arabiga, que es el mayor inconveniente de todos, como se a de quitar a las gentes su lengua natural con que nacieron y se criaron? Los Egepcios, Surianos, Malteses y otras gentes Christianas, en Arabigo hablan, leen, y escriven, y son Christianos como nosotros, y aun no se hallara que en este reyno se aya hecho escritura, contrato, ni testamento en le tra Arabiga desde que se convirtio*'³⁵.

Unfortunately, lack of sources does not allow us to have a fuller knowledge of Francisco Nuñez Muley's biography or his exact social and educational 'milieu'. Likewise, we do not have a detailed insight of the sources which Nuñez Muley consulted when he referred to the linguistic and cultural situation related to Malta in those times. He was certainly familiar with one or two of the numerous pamphlets describing the Great Siege of Malta (1565) published in his own time. But none of these accounts deal with the use of the Maltese language.

1565. Venice, 1566.

Today, less known Spanish descriptions of what happened in 1565 in Malta are Pedro de Salazar's. *Hispania Victrix. Historia en la qual se cuenta muchas guerras sucedidas entre Christianos y infieles assi en mar como en tierra desde el ano de mil y quinientos y quarenta y seys hasta el de sesenta y cinco*. Madrid, 1570, cf. especially pp 156 seq. or Diego de Santisteban Osorio. *Primera y segunda parte de las guerras de Malta y toma de Rodas*. Madrid, 1599. For the raid on Gozo and the attack carried out on Malta in 1551 cf. Pedro de Salazar. *Hystoria de la Guerra y presa de Africa. Con la destrycion de la villa de Monazter, y ysla del Gozo, y perdida de Tripol di Berberia, con otras muy nuevas cosas*. Naples, 1552. It is most likely that the learned Francisco Nuñez Muley knew about the publications of Balbi, Alessandrini or Gentile. For another contemporary scholar and traveller from Granada who wrote about Malta see Luis del Marmol Carvajal. *Descripcion General de Africa*. Madrid, 1953, (fac. edn.), for Malta see vol. I, f. 276 et seq. Marmol Carvajal's historiographical work was published for the first time in 1573 in Granada.

34. Nuñez Muley, 1899, p. 232.

35. Luis del Marmol Carvajal. *Historia de Rebelion y Castigo del los Moriscos de Reyno Granada*. Malaga, 1600, p. 40.

To understand better this leading figure in Morisco politics we have to take a look at the broader political and social context of the times. Growing fear of Turkish penetration in the western Mediterranean in the 1560s and the ever present danger posed by the Turks who aspired after expansion, or the possibility of a Morisco rebellion which would have turned Andalusia and the south east-coast of Spain into a bridgehead leading to a Mohammedan invasion of the entire Iberian peninsula, led the Spanish crown to an ostracizing policy against the Moriscos' which left no space for any compromise. In fact many Moriscos' of the old kingdom of Granada still had relatives living in Tetuán, who had emigrated after the Christian conquest of Granada in 1492³⁶.

That Malta soon became involved in the events of Andalusia and Spain in general, became obvious when a certain Morisco was tortured by the Inquisition in Summer 1565 (the Great Siege of Malta was still in progress) and had revealed that the Moriscos' were ready to seize the main ports along the Granadine coastline should the Turks succeed in capturing Malta³⁷. However, not all Morisco spies sent to Malta seem to have passed incognito. In fact Grand Master de Valette seemed to have been so well informed about the likeliness of a great Morisco upheaval in Spain, that he warned Philip II of Spain through a letter about this oncoming danger. The 16th century historian of the Order of St John, Giacomo Bosio writes '*che l'G. Maestro con Corriera a posta mandati haveva a S. Maesta; facendo le sapere, che per mezo di fedelissime Spie, ch' egli teneva in Constantinopoli, haveva penetrato, & era stato certificato, che i Moreschi del Regno di Granata, erano risoluti di sollevarsi, e di ribellarsi contra di fei; e che per tal effetto havevano mandato secretamente a chiedere aiuto a Selim, Gran-Turco; pregandolo, che mandar dovesse L'Armata sua in Ponente; offerendosi co'l braccio, e co'l favor di quella, di farlo in breve Padrone di quel Regno, e d'altre Provincie della Spagna*'³⁸. To anticipate the possibility of a Morisco

36. It is interesting to note that it was the prominent Morisco Don Alonso de Granada Venegas, a relative of the above mentioned Juan de Venegas ('Fra Giovanni de la Grotta di S. Paolo'), who sent a report to the Spanish King Philip II, protesting against the intrigues between Granada and Tetuán. Cf. Archivo de Simancas; Guerra Antigua 1-202.

37. Raymond de Beccarie de Pavie, Sieur de Fourquevaux. *Dépeches de M. De Fourquevaux, ambassadeur du roi Charles IX en Espagne (1565-1572)*. 2 Vols. Paris, 1896, Vol. 1, letter to Charles IX, November 5th 1565.

38. Giacomo Bosio. *Dell'Istoria della Sacra Religione et Ill. ma Militia di San Giovanni Gierosolimitano*. Second imp. Naples, 1684, Vol. III, p. 800.

rebellion or the threat of a Turkish invasion the Spanish rulers laid out plans for the formation of a municipal militia throughout Andalusia; moreover, in Granada all staunch old Christian households³⁹ were ordered to furnish themselves with arms. Spain's Archivo de Simancas hosts documents dating from that time which show that through a direct Turkish order, Morisco spies were sent to Malta to collect as much information as possible about the Spanish naval strength in the Mediterranean⁴⁰. It is quite certain that Francisco Nuñez Muley was well aware of the existence of these Morisco spies who had connections with Malta, and may consequently have had first hand information related to linguistic and cultural aspects related to Malta.

Another possible link which still waits for a proper investigation is the role of the Maltese and the Morisco's as spearheads for catholic missionary work in North Africa. It is known that Ignatio of Loyola in the 1550s turned his eyes to both Maltese and Morisco's seeing them as an invaluable potential whence Arabic-speaking solid Christians could be recruited for missionary activity among Moslems in North Africa and the Oriental countries⁴¹. This was even more boosted when the sheikh of Tagiora in Barbary requested Jesuit missionaries to preach Christianity there in Arabic. Already in 1553 the Maltese bishop Cubelles had tried to establish contact to the Jesuit Order. He also tried to promote the advantages of the Maltese language: '*Dominicus Cubelles Episcopus Melitensis Romae instanter agebat cum P. Ignatio ut aliquos de Societate daret ut collegium in illa insula, quae arabica utitur lingua, inchoare posset*'⁴². In 1554 Ignatius intended to install a Jesuit college in Malta⁴³. As this did not work out, a special college ("colegito arabe") was founded in Monreale in Sicily. There is enough early evidence of recruitment from Malta⁴⁴.

As in the case of Francisco Nuñez Muley, knowledge about the life, fate and

39. Meaning households which were entirely of Christian origin and which had no Moorish or Jewish ancestry.

40. Archivo de Simancas; Estado 149-14.

41. Cf. Francisco de Borja de Medina. "La compañía de Jesús y la minoría morisca (1545-1614)". *Archivum Historicum Societas Iesu*, LVII (1988), pp. 3-136, here p. 62.

42. *Monumenta Historica Societatis Iesu*, Vol. V, pp. 490-491, letter No. 3758 (18.IX.1553) to P. Hieronimus Domenecchi.

43. The Jesuits came to Malta in 1592. Cf. in detail P. Pecchiai. "Il Collegio die Gesuiti in Malta" *Archivio Storico di Malta*, vol. IX (1938), pp. 129-202, 273-325.

44. Cf. Francisco de Borja de Medina, 1988, p. 62 or P. J. Fejer. *Defuncti Primi Saeculi Societatis Iesu: 1540-1640*. Rome, 1982, vol. 1, p. 2.

activities of an earlier Hispano-Arabic author may be of further interest in shedding some light in the development of the Maltese language which up to now is far from complete and satisfying. Fray Anselm Turmeda, born (ca. 1355) in the Aragonese island of Mallorca⁴⁵, was a Franciscan brother ('de la Orden de los Frailes Menores'⁴⁶) who engaged himself in a wide field of theological, natural, medical and literary studies⁴⁷. It was here that Turmeda first got interested in oriental disciplines and the Koran. In the late 1380s he finally travelled to Tunis, then capital of the mighty empire of the Hafsids. His voyage first led him to Sicily, from whence he might have travelled on to the Maltese islands⁴⁸. That Turmeda was not the first man of letters from Aragon who might have travelled to the Maltese islands is reflected by the fate of the Aragonese-Jewish cabbalist scholar Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia. Between 1285 and 1288 this scholar is reported to have lived in exile on the little island of Comino near Malta. It was here that he wrote his 'Sefer ha-Ot' ('The book of the Sign'⁴⁹). Presumably, Turmeda found shelter within a Franciscan convent in Tunis⁵⁰, some time later practising as a physician to sultan Abu al-Abbas Ahmed. Around 1390 Turmeda must have abjured his Christian faith for the Muslim religion, consequently adopting his new name 'Abdallâh ben Abdallâh al-Taryumân al-Mayûrqi al Muhtadi'⁵¹.

Lack of space prevents us from expanding further upon the extensive activities

45. The biographers of Turmeda give different dates. Augustin Calvet speaks of 1352 whereas Mikel de Epalza indicates '*hacia 1355*' as the real date. Cf. A. Calvet. *Fray Anselmo Turmeda, heterodoxo espanol*. Barcelona, 1914 and M. de Epalza. "Nuevas aportaciones a la biografia de fray Anselmo Turmeda (Abdallah al-Tarchuman)". *Analecta Sacra Tarraconensia*, 38 (1965), pp 87-158. For another short biography see J. M. Miret y Sans. "Vie de Fray Anselmo Turmeda". *Revue Hispanique*, 24 (1911), pp. 261-296.

46. Cf. a testament dated 1377 preserved in the 'Archivo de Notarios de Palma de Mallorca' and published by E. K. Aguilo in '*Museo Balear*', 2^a época, Vol. 1 (1884), p. 130.

47. Ambitions and abilities which also led him to study at the University of Bologna. Cf. in detail M. de Epalza, 1965, pp. 117 et seq.

48. About this voyage see in more detail M. de Epalza, 1965, pp. 95-99.

49. Cf. *Jewish Encyclopedia*. New York, 1901, vol. I, pp. 141 et seq., cf. also J. Galea. "Kemmuna". *Mageos. Organ of the Malta Geographical Society*, 1, 1 (Spring 1947), pp. 25 et seq.

50. A Franciscan convent at Tunis is documented at the beginning of the 14th century. It belonged to the province of Catalonia. Cf. P. Sanahuja. *Historia de la serafica provincia de Cataluña*. Barcelona, 1959, p. 65.

51. Which literally means 'Abdallah the translator, the Mallorcan, the good guide'. For further details regarding the origin of this name see M. de Epalza, 1965, pp. 136.

and writings by 'Frare Anselm Turmeda, ilamado también Abdallâh'⁵². What is certain is that henceforth he carried out his studies in Tunisia⁵³. His profound studies in literature, natural science, astrology and poetry soon became known throughout the entire Western Mediterranean, and in 1402 the Aragonese viceroy of Mallorca, Roger de Moncada, had promised to issue a safe conduct for Turmeda should he ever return to Mallorca and reconvert to the Christian faith⁵⁴. In 1412 the same guarantee for a safe passage in favour of Turmeda, should he reconcile himself to Christianity, was endorsed in a bull by Pope Benedict XIII⁵⁵. In both instances Turmeda refused. Up to that time, Turmeda had carried out his writings in Catalan. Around 1420 he finally completed his major 'oeuvre' - the 'Tuhfat al-adib fi al-radd ala ahl al-salih' - entirely in Arabic. This, presumably, was his last work before his death a few years later⁵⁶.

According to some passages in a recently published study by Mikel de Epalza⁵⁷, this anti-Christian's writing might contain the first hitherto known references to written Maltese⁵⁸. The Maltese Language, so far as its Semitic

52. Turmeda was referred to in this manner in a letter by the Aragonese king Alfonso el Magnanimo. Cf. A. Calvet 1914 pp. 52 et seq.

53. Turmeda was referred to in this manner in a letter by the Aragonese king Alfonso el Magnanimo. Cf. A. Calvet 1914 pp. 52 et seq.

54. Published by E. Sans. "Fra. Anselm Turmeda en 1402". *Estudis Universitaris Catalans*, Vol. III (Barcelona, 1936), pp. 405-408.

55. This bull was published by J. M. Pou y Marti. "Sobre fray Anselmo Turmeda". *Boletín de la Real Academia de Buenas Letras de Barcelona*, 7 (1914), pp. 465-472.

56. The exact date is not known. Turmeda's modern biographers point to a period between 1425 and 1430 as the time of his death. Cf. the works mentioned, supra. Cf. also J. M. Miret y Sans. "Una visita al tomba del escriptor catalan Fra Anselm en la ciudad de Tunis". *Bulletin de Centro Excursionista de Catalunya*, (Barcelona, 1910). For a 19th century British traveller touching upon this subject cf. N. Davis. *Tunis or selections from a journal during a residence in that Regency*. Malta, 1841, pp. 6 et seq.

57. Cf. M. de Epalza. *Fray Anselm Turmeda (Abdallah Al-Taryuman) y su polémica islamo-cristiana. Edición, traducción y estudio de la Tuhfa*. Madrid, 1994. This book is the enlarged and revised version of the first edition which in 1971 was published in Rome.

58. De Epalza touches upon this subject briefly. As he was not familiar with the history and the shaping of the Maltese language he did not recognise the importance of his findings. This unfamiliarity is shown when he claims that there is no proof of written Maltese before the 17th century '...pero el maltés, lengua viva, no ha tenido literatura escrita hasta el siglo XVII...'. M. de Epalza, 1994, p 164. In fact in ca. 1450 the Maltese nobleman Pietro Caxaro wrote a 'Cantilena' in the Maltese language. In 1588 the Swabian 'Ordinarius Historiographicus' Hieronymus Megiser had visited Malta and had collected Maltese words and phrases. He finally published parts of this 'collection' in 1603 in his *Thesaurus Polyglottus vel, Dictionarium Multilingue*. Frankfurt a. M., 1603 and in his well known *Propugnaculum Europae*. Leipzig, 1606, 1609 and 1610, also published in Cracow, 1612.

element is concerned, is made up of two strata. The lower stratum was formed during the Arabic domination of Malta; the upper one, which came from North Africa, was formed during the Norman period in the 12th century and during later years owing to the closer commercial intercourse between Malta and the North African coast⁵⁹. Documents referring to Malta in the 13th and 14th century confirm that the social and cultural set-up in Malta was nearly identical to that obtaining in Sicily at the time: the upper class in Malta gave themselves troubadouric and Christian names like Tristano, Rinaldo, Ruggero or Andrea and Paolo⁶⁰. The spoken language, originally Semitic, therefore must have been influenced by the Romance languages, particularly Sicilian and Italian, and to a lesser extent Catalan. This Romance influence was not limited to the vocabulary alone, but involved also phonological, syntactical and morphological aspects.

When referring to Christian rites and liturgy Turmeda's text uses words and phrases which seem clearly separated from the Arabic then spoken and written in the Maghreb⁶¹. That Turmeda could hardly derive those words out of his own Tunisian environment is due to the non-existence of autochthonous Christian communities in the Maghreb, absent for a long time⁶². One of the most striking examples is the word '*kansīya*' (church) which is frequently used in the '*Tuhfa*'⁶³. This word cannot be normally found in Arabic or in any derivative dialect of Arabic then spoken in Tunisia⁶⁴. It appears to be an old form of the modern Maltese word '*knisja*'. Again, an old Maltese expression seems to be the phrase

Most of the information about Maltese linguistics was derived by de Epalza from J. Aquilinas's article "Maltese as a mixed Language. *Journal of Semitic Studies*, 3 (1958), a work which is superseded by modern research. All in all, however de Epalaza's study of the '*Tuhfa*' is a very well researched and highly evaluated work.

59. Cf. in more detail G. Mangion, *Studi Italo Maltesi*. Malta, 1992, pp. 146 et seq. For culture and history of Muslim Malta cf. also the article 'Malta' by E. Rossi, B. S. I. Isserlin, M. Vanhove. *Enciclopedia del Islam*², vol. VI, pp. 280-288.

60. Cf. H. Bresc. "Malta dopo il Vespro Siciliano". *Melita Historica*, (1974), pp. 313-321.

61. A comparative study of the development of Maltese and Maghrebin dialects was carried out recently by R. Kontzi. "Maltesisch-Maghrebinischer Sprachvergleich anhand von Bibelübersetzungen". *Miscellanea arabica et islamica. Dissertationes in Academia Ultrajectiana proletae anno MCMXC* (Orientalia Lovaniensa Analecta), 52 1993, pp. 3-21. Cf by the same author "El maltés, una lengua nacida del contacto arabo-romanico". *Estudios J. Martinez Ruiz* (n. y.), pp. 89-103.

62. In a few scattered localities Christianity in North Africa survived to around the 11th century.

63. The text here referred to is the edition by M. de Epalza, 1994, here quoted as '*Tuhfa*', 1994.

64. Where generally the term '*kanisa*' is used.

'*safâfi al-kansîya*'⁶⁵ (benches in the church). Similarly, when referring to the consecration '*hâdâ yismi*'⁶⁶ (this is my body) it appears to be different from the 'normal' North African Arabic and should thus be derived from a Christian arabophonic tongue. These words seemed to have not existed in early 15th century Tunisia but only in the nearby Maltese islands. There can be hardly any doubt that Islam was the religion of the absolute majority of the Maltese inhabitants from the 10th century down to the Norman conquest (1091/1127). This is testified by references dating to the early Norman rule. The numerous 12th and 13th century Muslim tombs found in Malta and Gozo also indicate that the revival and growth of the Christian population was a very gradual process. Furthermore, in 1175, the Bishop Burchard of Strassburg, who touched Malta on his way to Egypt, was then currently writing about an island named '*Maltha, distans a Sicilia per viginti miliaria (...) Sarracenis inhabitata, et (...) sub dominio regis Sicilie*'⁶⁷, which proved that the inhabitants had definitely kept their 'Saracenic' culture and Arabic character⁶⁸. When in 1224 and 1249 Emperor Frederick II. of Hohenstaufen expelled the Muslims from Malta and Sicily this was not an act of ethnic cleansing but solely a religious and political affair. To escape expulsion, in all probability, a substantial amount of the local population had accepted formal baptism. From here onwards we may then consider an adoption and assimilation of Christian liturgical words and phrases⁶⁹.

65. Cf. "Tuhfa", 1994, p. 355. '*Cuando se han reunido los cristianos para las oraciones y han ocupado las hileras de la iglesia el sacerdote echa un poco de vino de la botella en la copa de plata y trae el pan ácimo en un lienzo limpio. Despues se pone delante de las hileras, dirigiendose hacia Oriente...*' Spanish translation of the Arabic by Mikel de Epalza. Epalza also prints the Arabic original version of the "Tuhfa".

66. "Tuhfa", 1994, p. 350. In one instance it is used as '*hâdâ yasadi*'. Cf. p. 356. The German historian Hieronymus Megiser who came in contact with Maltese in 1588 notes '*Essem*' for body. Cf. Megiser 1606, p. 10.

67. Burchardus of Strassburg. "Relatio de itinere in Terram Sanctam". *Monumenta Germaniae Historica Scriptores*, XXI, (Hannover, 1869), p 236.

68. For the linguistic aspects see also J. Cremona. "The survival of Arabic in Malta". In M. M. Parry, W. V. Davies, R. A. M. Temple (Eds.). *Papers in honour of Professor Glanville Price*. Cardiff, 1994, pp. 281-294.

69. For the expulsion cf. A. T. Luttrell, 1975, pp. 37 et seq. See also G. Wettinger. "The Arabs in Malta". *Mid-Med Bank Limited. Report and Accounts*, 1984, pp. 22-37, here p 32. For the roots of the language spoken at the time in Malta cf. the closing statement by Joseph M. Brincat which reflects the present trend of modern research: '*As to the Maltese language its roots must be sought in Sicilian Arabic as it was spoken just before and during the Norman period*'. J. M. Brincat. *Malta 870-1054. Al-Himyari's Account*. Malta, 1991, p 9. For a short contemporary description of a 'Christian'

In general, the language spoken in Malta contemporary to Anselm de Turmeda, with the exception of those 'Christian' phrases, could not be too distant from the Arabic then spoken in Tunisia. Owing to the importance of these passages dealing with Christian liturgy and rites Turmeda must then have consulted 'un cristiano arabofono', perhaps a Maltese⁷⁰. This source also opens up a new field of investigation for other words contained in the 'Tuhfa', not current in Arabic, as the formula for baptism '*ana nugattisuka*' or the word '*sabâg*'⁷¹ (soutane).

There is obviously room for further speculations and interpretations of Turmeda's 'Tuhfa' and its 'Maltese' references. This work definitely deserves further study from linguists who may interpret more precise connotations and conclusions. What is also interesting is that a deeper study of the Arabic caliphates in Spain, the Mozarabic culture and the later interactions of the Spanish Moriscos' with their Mediterranean contacts would most probably unearth further precious information about late medieval and early modern Maltese culture and linguistic origins⁷².

Conclusión

In the 15th and 16th century the Mediterranean witnessed the transformation of their medieval patterns against the background of the permanent clash between Christian and Muslim powers. Spain and the island of Malta directly and deeply became involved in these events. Situated right between the European and the Semitic cultural areas historical developments since the high middle ages have more or less integrated Malta within European Mediterranean culture although linguistically it belongs to the Arab world. Both Spains and Malta's frontier position has resulted in a blend of cultural and political phenomena, with a

Malta cf. the travelogue of the pilgrim Nicolas Martoni who visited Malta in 1394. Nicolas Martoni. "Liber peregrinationis ad Loca Sancta". *Revue de L'Orient Latin*, 3, (1895), here p 578 et seq. The presence of a bishopric in Malta in the middle of the 14th century is mentioned by the German cleric Ludolph of Suchem, who visited the island several times between 1336 and 1341. Cf. *Ludolphi, Rectoris ecclesiae parochialis in Suchem, de Itinere Terrae Sanctae Liber*. Ed. by Ferdinand Deycks. Stuttgart, 1851, pp. 17, 22.

70. Which is also confirmed by M. de Epalza, 1994, p 163 et seq.

71. "Tuhfa", 1994, p. 355.

72. The authors would like to thank Mr. Stephen Degiorgio, Dott. Gerard Bugeja and Dr. Carmel Vassalo for most kind advice and support.

southern Roman Catholic culture dominating since late medieval times. In Malta this culture was implemented by the Aragonese (1283-1530), with strong influences from nearby Sicily, and by the Order of St John (1530-1798). In this period the 'Reconquista' of the Iberian peninsula came to an end and all Spain was conquered and christianized. The 16th century finally witnessed a policy of repression and deterrence which led to the complete expulsion of the christianized descendants from the Arabic occupation. One important attempt to erase the identity of this still suspicious ethnic group was a 'prematica' of King Philip II. which prohibited to speak and write their own Arabic language. In connection with this development, also the Maltese language and its history was touched and observed by Hispano-Arabic scholars. As the example of Fray Anselm Turmeda seems to show the interest in Maltese had started already a longer time ago. Up to now about the development of early Maltese as well as about these Hispano-Arabic relations with Malta next to nothing is known. This subject opens up a new field of investigation and furthermore might present precious information about late medieval and early modern Maltese culture and linguistic origins.