

FOCUS OF CONCERN IN IBN MAKKĪ'S *TATQĪF AL-LISĀN*:  
THE CASE OF GENDER IN THE MEDIEVAL ARABIC OF SICILY

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1. Introduction

Ibn Makkī ṣ-Ṣiqillī (d. 501/1107)'s *Tatqīf al-Lisān* aims to correct dialectisms that occur among the *ʿamma* (common people) of Muslim Sicily (213-485/827-1091). It forms part of the *lahn al-ʿamma* (Verbal Mistakes of the Common People) literary genre and is the product of the divergent regional dialects of immigrants pouring into the island of Sicily and their intimate contact with the new Sicilian converts to Islam, who were attempting with only limited success, to learn Arabic for religious and commercial purposes. I have divided the Arabic of Sicily into two categories: (a) Siculo-Lahn Arabic (=SLA)<sup>1</sup> based on the data retrieved from Ibn Makkī's *Tatqīf*, (b) Siculo-Arabic (=SA) based on documents found in the notarial and ecclesiastical archives and the numerous words and idioms used in the Sicilian dialect of Arabic origin recorded in dictionaries and word-lists. Both strata belong to the Maḡribī linguistic group. They share common phonological and morphological features with North African dialects and Hispano-Arabic. The Sicilian dialect of today reveals lexical remnants of the Siculo-Arabic in a large inventory of Material Cultural terms; furthermore, one stratum of the Siculo-Arabic lexical input comes from the nomenclature of the Norman *ḡarā'id* (registers), documents of which are located in the state and ecclesiastical archives of Sicily.

We may reconstruct through Ibn Makkī's treatise phonological and morphological rules of SLA. This paper attempts to discuss in the realm of morphology: (a) the tendency of SLA to mark for gender certain nouns which are of common gender in Classical Arabic (=CA), e.g. SLA *ʿaḡūza* (f) : CA *ʿaḡūz* (m/f) "old woman"; SLA *ʿankabūta* (f) : CA *ʿankabūt* (m/f) "spider"; (b) the evidence of Arabic feminine nouns becoming masculine in the Sicilian dialect or the post-Islamic documents of Sicily, e.g. CA *ḡumma* (f) "a skein of silk or a flock of wool" > SA *ḡummu* (m) "a tassel; tuft, flock, lock"; CA *sukkāra* (f) "wooden lock" > SA *succāri* (m) "bolt, bar".

1.1

Ibn Makkī treats the question of variation in gender in two chapters (Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 306-13). An attempt here is made to discuss some important points of common gender in CA and the marking for gender in SLA.

Two genders are distinguished in CA, masculine and feminine. The masculine possesses a zero morpheme whereas the feminine has a special morpheme the origin

<sup>1</sup> Abbreviations used: Aram Aramaic, B Berber, CA Classical Arabic, Eḡy Egyptian, Fr French, Gr Greek, It Italian, Lat Latin, Mal Maltese, Mor Moroccan, Per Persian, Port Portuguese, R Romance, SA Siculo-Arabic, SLA Siculo-Lahn Arabic, Sp Spanish.

of which belongs to a "more complex and ancient system of classes" in the Semitic area (Moscati et al. 1964:84-5)

## 2.

Arabic nouns in CA are divided into three categories: (a) masculine (b) feminine (c) masculine and feminine. Feminine nouns may be *ḥaqīqī* such as *imra'a* "woman", *nāqa* "she-camel" with a marker *tā' marbūta* and *ḡayr ḥaqīqī* such as *šams* "sun", *na'ī* "shoe", *bušrā* "good news" (Wright 1896-98:I, 177), which are unmarked. Some feminine unmarked nouns are: (a) *ma'nawī* "by meaning", such as *'arīs* "bride", *'aḡūz* "old woman", *ḥādīm* "female servant"; *rīḥ* "wind", *nār* "fire"; *katīf* "shoulder", *sāq* "leg" and (b) *lafẓī* "by form", such as *ḡanna* "garden", *ḥayā* "life" marked by a *tā' marbūta* and (those ending in 'alif maqṣūra, a servile letter) *lumā* "blade", *ḡikrā* "memory", *dunyā* "world", all unmarked and (those ending in 'alif and *hamza*) *šahrā* "desert", *kibriyā* "pride" both unmarked (Wright 1896-98:I, 178-9).

There are some thirty-one nouns which are both masculine and feminine in CA, while in dialects dual gender nouns tend to carry a definite gender, masculine or feminine. A tendency to mark unmarked feminine nouns is found in several dialects, such as Mor *'ruša* (Harrell 1962:263) < CA *'arīs* and Egy *sikkīna* (Badawi-Hinds 1986:422) < CA *sikkīn* "knife". The phenomenon of marking feminine nouns existed in SLA, such as *'arīs(a)*, *'aḡūz(a)* and *'ankabūt(a)* (Ibn Makkī, *Taṭqīf* 117-9). The three equivalents in CA are all examples of dual gender; they are grammatically *ḥaqīqī* and have two referents as opposed to nouns like *qaws* "bow", *sūr* "wall" and *qīdār* "pot" which are either masculine or feminine but are *ḡayr ḥaqīqī* and have only one referent. Although CA *'aḡūz* signifies "old person", CA *'arīs* "person about to be married", these terms appear ambiguous as to natural gender (Molan 1978:263-4); hence the strong tendency in dialects to mark the gender of the referent specifying the feminine gender, e.g. *'arīsa* "bride" and *'aḡūza* "old woman".

## 2.1

CA feminine nouns ending in 'alif maqṣūra on the pattern of *fa'lā*, such as *ḡaḏbā* "angry", *sakrā* "drunkard", *šab'ā* "sated" are non-existent in SLA; the masculine pattern *fa'lān* is applied in SLA by marking it with a *tā' marbūta*, thus *ḡaḏbāna*, *sakrāna*, *šab'āna* (Ibn Makkī, *Taṭqīf* 119). There are CA feminine nouns which possess no marker of feminine gender nor the feminine nature such as *šams* and *nār* and that the feminine gender is fixed; others have no marker but the feminine nature, such as *bint* "girl".

## 3.

An inherent element of linguistic change occurs in the grammatical gender of dialectal Arabic and such changes from feminine to masculine exist in unmarked nouns but the change from masculine to feminine gender in unmarked nouns is rather unusual. Such noun are CA *sayf* (m) > SLA (f) "sword", CA *qamar* (m) > SLA (f) "moon", CA *bāb* (m) > SLA (f) "door", CA *bayt* (m) > SLA (f) "house", CA *qalb* (m) > SLA (f) "heart" (Ibn Makkī, *Taṭqīf* 206-8). The question of gender changes has already been dealt with by Marçais (1956:334-6), Destaing (1935-45:173-88) and

Molan (1978:269-71) who found several causes for change of grammatical gender in the dialects as opposed to CA.

## 3.1

It seems, according to Marçais and Destaing, that the influence of Berber gender is a possible attraction as it was observed that words like *bēt* "house", *zēt* "oil", *mōt* "death" are all feminine in the Maġribī dialects (a statement which is not entirely true, cf Mal bejt<sup>2</sup> [m] "roof", zēt [m], mewt [f]) as opposed to the masculine in classical and eastern dialects (Marçais 1956:335; Destaing 1935-45:176). The reader is referred to Ġiġellī Arabic dialect (Marçais 1956:334-6) and Tačelhit dialect of the Člewḥs in Morocco (Destaing 1935-45:173-88). Much of the data on the inversions of gender given by Marçais and Destaing are also found in Ibn Makkī's treatise, but Molan suggests a Romance alternative of influence to assign unmarked nouns the gender opposite to what normally CA nouns are assigned with. He argues that the impact of Berber influence on the Arabic of the Mediterranean islands and upon North Africa prior to the Banī Hilāl invasion was not as large as it was made to be (Molan 1978:71-92). The Romance interference came about with the speaker speaking Arabic as a Second Language.

## 3.2

If we compare the data given by Ibn Makkī with Berber and Romance gender assignment we will find that most Romance cognates share their feminine gender with the SLA while the Berber does not (Molan 1978:267):

CA *sayf* (m) "sword", SLA *s.yf* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 206]

R - It *spada* (f), Sp *espada* (f), Fr *épée* (f), B *aħriš* (m); Mal sejif [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1286]

CA *qamar* (m) "moon", SLA *q.m.r* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 206]

R - It *luna* (f), Sp *luna* (f), Fr *lune* (f), B *ayyūr* (m); Mal qamar [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1116]

CA *maṭar* (m) "rain", SLA *m.t.r* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 207]

R - It *pioggia* (f), Sp *lluvia* (f), Fr *pluie* (f), B *anzar* (m)

Unlike SLA, Maltese corresponds with the CA gender except for *maṭar*, Maltese has xita (Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1575).

## 3.3

Other citations from Ibn Makkī point out a correspondence of both the Romance and Berber gender with the SLA (Molan 1978:272-3).

CA *bāb* (m) "door", SLA *bāb* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 207]

R - It *porta* (f), Sp *puerta* (f), Fr *porte* (f), B *tiḥtūt* (f); Mal bicb [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:I, 117]

CA *bayt* (m) "tent; house; shelter", SLA *b.yt* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 207] (SA *bāitu* [m] "a place for merchandise" [Agius 1987:273])

<sup>2</sup> The Maltese terms are underlined using the official orthographic system devised by the Ġnaqda tal-Kittieba tal-Malti in 1924.

R - It *casa* (f), Sp *casa* (f), Fr *maison* (f), B *tigenmi* (f); Mal bejt (m) "roof" Aquilina 1987-90:I, 96]

CA *ħaṣṣr* (m), "mat" SLA *ħ.s.yr* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 208]

R - It *stuoia* (f), Sp *estera* (f), Fr *matte* (f), B *tagertilt* (f); Mal ħasira [(f) Aquilina 1987-90:I, 514]

CA *sarġ* (m) "saddle", SLA *s.rġ* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 207]

R - It *sella* (f), Sp *silla* (f), Fr *selle* (f), B *tarik/tassrižt* (f); Mal sarġ [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1274]

CA *ġadīr* (m) "pool", SLA *ġ.d.yr* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 208]

R - It *pozzonghera* (f), Sp *charca* (f), Fr *étang* (m), B *tanda(te)*; Mal ġhadir [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 938]

All Maltese cognates correspond with the CA gender with the exception of ħasira (*lafzī* marked) which was possibly at one time ħasir.

### 3.4

The linguistic picture of this data is clear but in analyzing some terms one finds that the correspondence is not perfect, for example CA *ħaṣṣr* and *ġadīr* have a mixed correspondence of gender in the Romance cognates because Italian has several words for "mat" that are masculine and Spanish has *tapete* and *felpudo* that are of masculine gender; also Italian has several terms for "pool" and Spanish has *estanque* and French *étang* in the masculine gender. On the other hand the Berber gender corresponds with the SLA. One has to note that in the case of B *bīt* and *mōt* which correspond in gender with the SLA form follow the /v̄t/ rule given by Marçais (1956:335) and Destaing (1935-45:176).

### 3.5

Several parts of the body are feminine in CA but masculine in SLA (Molan 1978:277-80):

CA *qadam* (f) "foot", SLA *q.d.m* [(m) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 210]

R - It *piede* (m), Sp *pie* (m), Fr *piéd* (m), B *tabašilt* (f); Mal qadm/qadam [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1105]

CA *‘iṣba’* (f) "finger", SLA *iṣb.<sup>c</sup>* [(m) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 210]

R - It *dito* (m), Sp *dedo* (m), Fr *doigt* (m), B *šbā’* (m); Mal scba’/saba’ [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1246]

CA *sinn* (f) "tooth", SLA *sinn* [(m) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 210]

R - It *dente* (m), Sp *diente* (m), Fr *dent* (m), B *akus* (m); Mal sinna [(f) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1321]

CA *‘aqib* (f) "heel", SLA *‘.q.b* [(m) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 210]

R - It *tallone* (m), Sp *talon* (m), Fr *talon* (m), B *swerz* (m); Mal ġħarqub [(m) Aquilina 1987-90:II, 978]

Here Maltese shares the gender with SLA with the exception of sinna (*lafzī* marked; \*sinn could have existed in medieval Maltese).

### 3.6

The Romance and Berber cognates largely correspond with SLA in the masculine gender. Material Cultural terms such as SLA *b.r* (m) "well" (Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 211), *d.lw* (m) "bucket" (Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 212), *f.’s* (m) "pick-axe" (Ibn Makkī,

*Tatqīf* 226), *q.ws* (m) "bow" (Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 211) share mainly the same gender with Romance and Berber cognates. The SLA data on gender variation points to the fact that specific nouns were influenced by Romance and Berber in the West. Some dialectal interference is an underlying cultural influence that is visible in the terms selected by Ibn Makkī. Although of course not consciously chosen by the Sicilian grammarian they are definitely examples of "common mistakes" recurring in the Sicilian dialect of Arabic.

This gender variation is problematic and one of the problems is that of a specific referent, particularly with Material Cultural terms. The reader is reminded of the three-term analysis of meaning, i.e. words, concepts and things. The semantic problem as to what did such Material Cultural terms mean in the "time and space" of medieval Islamic and post-Islamic Sicily is a crucial one and the assignment of gender may depend on the meaning and use at a specific time. One good example is CA *na'l* (f) meaning "shoe, boot or sandal". What did SLA *n.l* (Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 212) actually mean? The Romance cognates have varying terms with a mixture of genders, such as Italian *sandalo* (m), *scarpa* (f), Spanish *sandalia* (f), *zapato* (m), French *sandale* (f), *sabot* (m), *soulier* (m), *chaussure* (f). The Berber cognates are also of different genders: *aduku* (m), *turzīt* (f). It is difficult to know which meaning the term *na'l* applied to in medieval Islamic Sicily. It is presumed that the primary speaker of Romance or Berber dialect could have used the term with specific referent that assigned the gender in the second language. Equally right to say how and when were the Romance cognates used at that point in time.

## 4.

With CA collective nouns '*asmā' al-ġins*, chiefly denoting animals and plants of a *nomen unitatis* they are masculine and feminine; such as *baqar* "cattle", *šaġar* "trees", *naħl* "palm-trees" (Wright 1896-98:I, 180). The Siculo-Arabic tends to assign collective nouns masculine, such as SA *ārzanu* (m) "silver fir" < CA *arz* "cedar" (Pellegrini 1972:I, 251), Mal *arżnu* (m) "pine-tree" < SA (Aquilina 1987-90:I, 45; Barbera 1939-40:I, 156), SA *cubbebbi* (m) "aromatic fruit the thickness of a pepper from an Indian tree; a kind of pepper from Java" documented in the fourteenth century < CA *kubāba* "cubeb" (Pellegrini 1972:I, 119, 189; Agius 1990:174), SA *cusurēmi* (island of Pantelleria) (m) "sour grapes" < CA *quruṣa* "sourness, acidity" (Pellegrini 1972:I, 189), Mal *grusa* "acidity; sourness" (Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1128), SA *hurrihi* (island of Pantelleria) (m) *firricu* / *furrihi* / *furrihu* < CA *hurraq* "stinging nettle" (Aquilina 1987-90:I, 554), Mor *hurraq* "nettle" (Pellegrini 1972:I, 192), Mal *hurrieq* (m) (Aquilina 1987-90:I, 554-5; Barbera 1939-40:II, 472); but some may be feminine as for example SA *fistuca* / *fastuca* (f) first documented in the fourteenth century < CA *fustuq* / *fustaq* < Per *pistah* (Freitag 1830-37:III, 346) or Gr *πιστάκη* / *πιστάκιον* (> It *pistacchio*) "pistachio (tree)" (Caracausi 1983: 227), Mal *fosdoq* / *fostoq* (m) "pod; pistachio" (Aquilina 1987-90:I, 358); SA *ġugġiulena* (f) first documented *iuliulena* - 1312 in Palermo < CA *ġulġulān* "sesame" (Caracausi 1983:261-2; Pellegrini 1972:I, 119; Agius 1990:174), Mal *ġulġlicn* / *ġulġlicn* / *ġunglicn* / *ġunglicn* / *ġinglicn* (m) "oily-grain, sesame" (Aquilina 1987-90:I, 414). In Maltese the tendency is to assign the masculine gender to names of plants and trees, such as *arżnu*, *ħorrieq*, *fosdoq* / *fostoq*, *ġulġlicn* and its variables. One may

note, that in Sicilian, names of plants of Latin origin that are feminine become masculine ending in /-u/ or /-i/ (Galante 1969:64). This may explain perhaps the tendency of Siculo-Arabic to assign masculine gender to names of plants that are of Arabic origin; but there is a number of terms that take the feminine each one of which needs careful investigation.

## 5. Conclusion

The selection of either gender is an acceptable feature in CA. Certain nouns have dual gender, such as *'iṣba'*, *'ankabūt*, *faras* "horse", *qidr* (Wright 1896-98:I, 182) but grammarians and lexicographers tend to assign definite gender to the nouns. All the terms mentioned above, for example, are generally feminine and the selection of a particular gender might well come from the grammarian or lexicographer without external interference though the linguistic and cultural environment can play an important role in defining the gender. The post-Islamic documents of Sicily give evidence of Arabic masculine nouns becoming feminine in Sicilian i.e. SA *chiunia* (f) "band, strip" first recorded *kyummias* 1279 in Palermo < CA *hām* (m) "raw material" (Caracausi 1983:191), SA *dagali* / *dāgala* (f) "sloping ground on the river banks subject to flood" first recorded *dachala* 1467 in Trapani < CA *daḡal* (m) "thicket, bush, jungle" (Caracausi 1983:199-200), SA *bbunaca* (f) "pool of water" < CA *manqa'* (m) "pool, pond" (Pellegrini 1972:I, 149, 252), Mal *mncjqa* (f) "small field" (Aquilina 1987-90:II, 807); but it is rare to find CA feminine nouns switching to masculine in Sicilian, e.g. SA *giunmu* (m) "a tassel; tuft, flock, lock" first recorded *jummi* 1511 in Catania < CA *ḡumma* (f) "a skein of silk or a flock of wool" (Caracausi 1983:257-8), SA *suččari* (m) "bolt, bar" first recorded *suqaru* 1348 in S. Martino < CA *sukkāra* (f) "wooden lock" (Caracausi 1983:352) Mal *sokra* / *sokkra* (f) "a padlock", *sakkara* / *sukkara* / *sakkiera* (f) "a bar; bolt" (Aquilina 1987-90:II, 1340).

### 5.1

Grammatical changes are an old phenomenon and change from feminine to masculine gender in unmarked nouns is common. However, the change in unmarked nouns from masculine to feminine gender, such as CA *baṭn* (m) "belly" > SLA (f) cf R - It *pancia* (f), Sp *panza* (f), Fr *pense* (f), Port *barriga* (f) (Molan 1978:266) may suggest a Romance impact on the assignment of gender in the Siculo-Laḥn Arabic; while in other instances Berber as well as Romance influence could determine the gender of SLA, e.g. CA *ḥaṣīr* (m) "mat" > SLA *ḥ.s.yr* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 208] cf R - It *stuoia* (f), Sp *estera* (f), Fr *matte* (f), B *tagertilt* (f); CA *sarḡ* (m) "saddle", SLA *s.rḡ* [(f) Ibn Makkī, *Tatqīf* 207] cf R - It *sella* (f), Sp *silla* (f), Fr *selle* (f), B *tarik/tassriḡt* (f) (Molan 1978:273). Despite the paucity of material, the data retrieved from Ibn Makkī's treatise could help us reconstructing some rules of SLA the results of which could bring some kind of patterning in the assignment of gender to the many Sicilian words of Arabic origin and those existing in the *ḡarā'id* and other documents, though a closer semantic synchronic and diachronic investigation of Romance and Berber words with Siculo-Laḥn Arabic and Siculo-Arabic is desirable.

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