

## Phonological changes in Maltese: Evidence from onomastics

The present paper looks into the onomastic evidence for some of the phonological changes in the history of Maltese. The analysis is based on a rich corpus of surnames (Wettinger 1968 and 1969, Cassar 2005), nicknames (Wettinger 1971, Camenzuli 2002), and place-names (Abela 1647, Dessoulavy 1957, Aquilina 1961, Wettinger 1983 and 2000), recorded between early 15<sup>th</sup> century and late 18<sup>th</sup> century.

Maltese onomastics provides valuable insights into the so-called “sporadic” voicing of \**k* (Cohen 1966 and 1967), the merger of \**x* and \**ħ*, the merger of \**ġ* and \**‘*, the evolution of \**h*, the evolution of short vowels in pre-stressed position (cf. also Cowan 1964), and *imāla* (cf. also Cowan 1975, Borg 1976). Onomastics also sheds light on the emergence of some of the phonological rules typical of Modern Maltese, such as obstruent devoicing in word-final position and voicing assimilation (Borg 1975 and 1997).

Finally, it is shown that evidence from onomastics appears to disconfirm some previous claims (Cantineau 1960, Cohen 1966 and 1967, Krier 1976, Agius 1996, Borg 1997) regarding the nature and chronology of some phonological changes in Maltese.

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