



Malta
Classics
Association

MELITA CLASSICA

Vol. I

2014

*Journal of the
Malta Classics Association*

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From the Editor

Four years ago, the Malta Classics Association was founded with the aim of disseminating and furthering Classical Studies, and especially, the Greek and Latin languages – a daunting task, indeed, considering that the Classics Studies were only limited to University courses, and stood completely outside the curriculum of pre-tertiary education. Ever since its inception in 2010, the Association has successfully striven and has been instrumental in raising awareness of such an important aspect of Education, and its efforts are now bearing fruit. Moreover, the general public's response has been encouraging – membership has steadily increased, the web-site frequently accessed, Classical Studies introduced as a new subject in post-secondary education at the Junior College of the University of Malta, Naxxar Higher Secondary School and Gozo Higher Secondary School, and the public lectures held under the auspices of the Association have always been well-attended.

Inspired by that famous Latin proverb, *verba movent, scripta manent*, the Malta Classics Association has now taken this additional initiative of publishing its own annual Journal, *Melita Classica*, in which both local and foreign Classicists can find an appropriate forum wherein the fruit of their literary endeavours and their researches can be published. In this wise, no constraints are being made on contributors, save that the material submitted pertains generally to Classical Studies and Languages. Contributors are thus most welcome and are encouraged to submit original articles or material for future publications – writing guidelines are printed at the end of this journal.

On behalf of the Editorial Board, I wish to thank all the contributors to this first issue of *Melita Classica*, and earnestly hope that our readers would find the studies offered profitable and enjoyable.

Fra Alan Joseph Adami O.P.

Editor

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Properzju: Elegiji

Tr. H.C.R. Vella

Accademia Properziana del Subasio, Assisi 2012

pp. xviii + 107.

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Until very recently, those Maltese students and the public in general, who may have lacked a sound knowledge and fluency of the original Classical languages yet whose hearts yearned for the ‘realms of gold’, had to be content with translations in other foreign tongues – a process which to a native population with its own established language still had to be once more mentally transposed. Whether this situation arose because the Maltese language was thought incapable of expressing other languages, especially literary oeuvres, based upon the supposition of a limiting vocabulary and word-forms, or whether because it was thought too demeaning to express the literary genres on account of political or socio-cultural bias, is still a matter of debate and difficult to ascertain. But the scholarly efforts of Fr Victor Xuereb in his ground-breaking translations of both Homer’s epics and lately Carmel Serracino’s Aristotle’s *Art of Poetics* from the original Greek have dismissed this mythical notion of the Maltese language’s incapability to express Classical literary works, and have once and for all firmly laid down to rest such a hypothesis.

That even Latin literature could be rendered into Maltese with the same fluency and success can now also be witnessed by Professor Horace Roger Caesar Vella’s present translation of all four books of Propertius’ elegies. For although Propertius’ Latin is not so laborious for Latin students to comprehend, yet the conciseness and deft brush-strokes of this Augustan poet’s vignettes can often lead to incomplete comprehension, thus minimising the spontaneous joy of his elegies. Notwithstanding, Vella’s mastery and scholarship of the Latin language and his ability as a translator have managed to reduce these obscurities, while still managing to bring out the attractiveness and

the elegance of Propertius – attributes which even Ancient Rome had recognised in him at an early stage. The attractiveness and the elegance by which Propertius weaved his verses, whose subjects ranged from his obsessive love for Cynthia through a multitude of topics, inclusive of mythological and national themes, finds correspondence in Vella's rendering in the Maltese tongue.

It may be argued that Prof. Vella's literal translation and rendering into prose of this Roman Callimachus, at whose hands Roman elegy soared to new heights, might seem to minimise the grandeur of the poetry; but it is not completely so. For, although the rhythm of the elegiac verses might have suffered loss in musicality (for translations do take their toll) yet throughout the whole translation, Propertius still manages to excel in those epithets of *blandus* and *facundus* which Ovid (*Trist.* 2.465) and Martial (14.189) had of long ascribed to him.

To my mind, a major fault in this publication that cries out for remedial action is the absence of a glossary for Proper names and places. Considering that Propertius mentions over seven hundred of such *nomina*, often repeatedly, and oftentimes of obscure persons and places, whom even accomplished readers may have difficulty to place and identify, coupled with the translator's adoption of a self-developed formula for rendering such names in Maltese, the reader might sometimes feel lost in this maze of names, feeling constrained to seek enlightenment in other publications. With more emphasis on quality rather than on a quantitative quest for translating Propertius into as many languages as possible, the *Accademia Properziana del Subasio* of Assisi could easily have remedied this omission so as to have a complete all-inclusive one volume publication of Propertius' Elegies in Maltese. Knowing Vella's meticulousness in his publications, I cannot but feel that such a glossary was not in his brief; yet it's sorely missed.

Victor Bonnici