Vowel sequences in Maltese verbs

Generally speaking, studies of Maltese make three observations on the vowel sequences of Form 1 verbs, focusing overwhelmingly on sound verbs (CvCvC).

First, there are six sequences in the perfect, as shown in the table below.

Sound CvCvC		
a-a	*ħarab*	to escape
a-e	*qaleb*	to turn
e-a	*feraħ*	to rejoice
o-o	*ħolom*	to dream
i-e	*żifen*	to dance
e-e	*qered*	to destroy

Second, in the imperfect some vowel patterns remain unchanged (*ħarab*, *jaħrab* 'to escape'), while others change (*naxar*, *jonxor* 'to hang washing'). The range of vowel sequences is greater in the imperfect, with sequences such as *i-o* (*daħal*, *jidħol* 'to enter') and *i-a* (*feraħ*, *jifraħ* 'to rejoice'), which are not available in the perfect (cf. Aquilina 1959: 254–255; Brame 1972; Puech 1978; Hume 1991, 1996).

Third, some studies observe that vowel quality may be conditioned by the adjacent root consonants (cf. Sutcliffe 1936: 71-74; Cremona 1973: 45; van Putten 2020: 83–85). Hoberman (2007: 268) observes, for example, that the sequences *a-e*, *e-e*, and *e-a* in Form I "occur only in the neighborhood of the gutturals *għ, ħ, h, q*", while the *o-o* sequence "occurs almost exclusively with gutturals."

Extending this earlier work, the present paper offers a comprehensive systematisation of the patterns of vowel correspondences in Maltese perfect and imperfect Form 1 verbs of all types (i.e. sound, geminate, weak-initial, weak-medial, and weak-final), based on an exhaustive list drawn from Aquilina's (1987-1990) dictionary. In addition, building on the initial work by van Putten (2020), it traces the phonological and analogical evolution of this system from that of earlier Arabic (as analysed by Guerssel & Lowenstamm 1996), through

analysis of a database consisting of the aforementioned list of Maltese verbs, together with their cognates in Classical and Tunisian Arabic.