

# JOURNAL OF MALTESE STUDIES

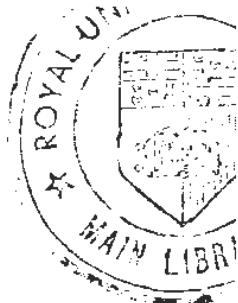
Royal University of Malta

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## EDITORIAL

### ON MALTA AND LIBYA

ON May 5th Malta Television showed our Prime Minister, Dr. G. Borg Olivier, and the Maltese delegation that accompanied him in the company of the Prime Minister and other high officials in Libya. The two Prime Ministers expressed interest in the mutual wellbeing of the countries represented by them and expressed the hope and wish that the friendly relations between our two countries would prove fruitful not only in commercial agreements, but also in cultural collaboration. Though Malta's civilisation is mainly European and Christian, yet we speak a language that is basically Semitic with more morphological and syntactic agreements and correspondences with the Arabic spoken in Libya than with Italian or English. These are both Malta's main cultural languages, the latter being also an official language with Maltese in the Constitution of an independent Malta except that, thanks to a *fait accompli* difficult to undo now, presented by the outgoing colonial administration under the last naval Governor Admiral Sir Guy Grantham, English is the only official language of the university, an anomaly that is now offensively discordant with the official status of Maltese as the primary official language of Independent Malta.

This is a humiliating anomaly that must raise the eyebrows in painful surprise of those who have a more comprehensive concept of National independence and dignity. In one of the television shots, we saw the premises of the Maltese Embassy in Libya with the name in English only. Why not also, *L-Ambaxxata ta' Malta* together with the English version 'The Embassy of Malta'? Must we continue to give the false impression abroad that we are an independent nation without a language of our own? I do not think the people of Libya and other independent countries who shake hands with us as they congratulate us on our independence can help feeling that the Maltese concept of independence is still muddle-headed and tied to the apron strings of Neo-Colonialism. This feeling is not entirely unfounded. Some of our public leaders are mentally still mid-

way between independence and dependence. Like Hamlet they have not yet made up their mind whether to finish the job or leave it half finished with disastrous results. Malta's independence is still partly servile.

The new commercial ties of Malta with Libya inevitably stress the need for the intensive teaching of Arabic in Malta even for commercial purposes. The Arabs are more proudly conscious of their linguistic nationality than some of our muddle-headed government officials whose linguistic personality can be described as undefined and distressingly schizophrenic.

Arabic is taught in our university as a background subsidiary language for a B.A. Honours degree in Maltese. But that is hardly enough even for the purely commercial purposes that the new Arabo-Maltese relations will inevitably entail in the coming years of business and cultural relations not only with Libya but also with the other Arab States. Arabic was taught in our university as an independent language from 1796 to 1889 when it was discontinued.

The growth and development of this university is still largely dependent on the advice that the R.U.M. Commission (English with only one Maltese member) makes to the Malta government which renews its appointment from year to year by a unanimous or majority vote in the House of Representatives. The editor of this Journal insisted several times on the need for his Chair to include the teaching of Arabic Language and History in our university, mentioning among other reasons that Malta as a Semitic speaking country with a European civilisation is in a privileged position for the promotion of Arabic and Islamic Studies even much more than English universities or any other university in Europe. The English response was always politely negative. The case made out was good; but the answer was an apologetic 'No'. There was no money for the proposed lectureship or Chair. However, in 1965 I succeeded in securing a lecturer in Arabic and thus the discontinued tradition which I had personally revived single-handed from 1940 to 1964 has been resumed and continued ever since. The university has an important role to play in the promotion of national interests. One such interest is the expansion of the Department of Maltese and Oriental Studies to include a course of Arabic Language, History and Civilisation, such as exists in several British and continental universities, amongst them the University of Palermo which I visited recently as a member of the Malta University delegation.

May we hope that the Malta Foreign Office and the representative of the government of Libya will shortly tackle the problem of cultural collaboration between Malta and Libya in the University of Malta as a first step in order to add another bridge of mutual understanding and collaboration between our two friendly peoples? Both Malta and Libya need men of imagination. We present our proposal to men of imagination in Libya and Malta. The ball is at their feet. Who is going to kick it off first?