

THE RE-OPENING OF THE UNIVERSITY IN 1800

By J. CASSAR PULLICINO

With the rising of the Maltese against the French on the 2nd September, 1798, Napoleon's plans for the reform of higher education in Malta were indefinitely postponed and later had to be abandoned altogether. On the 18th June Bonaparte had decreed that the University was to be replaced by a Central School, to which the Malta Library, the Cabinet of Antiquities and the Observatory were to be attached, together with a Natural History Museum and a Botanical Garden covering thirty acres. The School was to have eight chairs, viz. (1) Arithmetic and Stereotomy, (2) Algebra and Stereotomy, (3) Geometry and Astronomy, (4) Mechanics and Physics, (5) Chemistry, (6) Oriental Languages, (7) Navigation and (8) a Librarian entrusted with the Geography course. In addition, courses in Anatomy, Medicine and Midwifery were to be held at the Hospital.

Napoleon thus aimed at shifting the bias of studies in Malta to the science and technical subjects. To implement his reforms he wrote on the same date to the Directory in Paris asking them to select from the *École Polytechnique* three students to teach in Malta. One of them was to teach Arithmetic and Descriptive Geography, another Algebra and the third Mechanics and Physics. For the sons of the well-to-do his scheme was to select, from among the richest Maltese families, sixty youths between the ages of nine and fourteen, and send them to Paris to be educated in the colleges of the Republic¹.

These plans of educational reform receded into the background when the Maltese took up arms and successfully besieged Valletta, with its French garrison under General Vaubois, and its civilian population, which soon created formidable problems for the French Authorities. For two years while the Blockade lasted, all teaching at the University was suspended, but with the capitulation of the French on the 5th September, 1800 it was possible to start thinking again of re-opening the University. True, long before the capitulation, John Alexander Ball had already turned his attention to the need of re-starting education in the country outside Valletta and on the 5th June, 1800 he had appointed Canon F.S. Caruana, one of the leaders of the Maltese, Inspector General and Director of Sciences and Arts.

¹ SCICLUNA, Hannibal P., *Actes et Documents pour servir à l'Histoire de l'Occupation Française de Malte pendant les années 1798-1800*. Malta, 1923, pp. 7, 99, 151.

A copy of this letter of appointment is incorporated in the official *Acta Academiae Melitensis ab anno 1798 usque ad Ann. [1809] Preside ac Rectore Revmo. Canonico D. Xaverio Caruana* preserved in the Archives of the Royal University of Malta. As far as is known, this document has escaped the attention of historians². In view of its importance as a first step leading to the resumption of educational facilities in Malta under the British Protectorate, the letter is reproduced here in the original:

Il Capo di Malta e Gozo

Avendo non solo per informazioni avute da diverse onesti persone, ma anche per averlo Noi stessi osservato, conosciuto appieno il grande spirito e particolari talenti che avete Voi, Canonico D. Saverio Caruana, non solo per le Scienze ma anche per dirigere le ma....., volendo far ciò conoscere a questa fedele popolazione, e nel tempo stesso farne sentire a quest'Isola i possibili vantaggi. In vigor di queste Lettere patenti vi creamo Ispettore Generale e Direttore delle Scienze tutte, e di tutte le Arti, accordandovi le necessarie autorità per potere esercitare tale carica, volendo che dalla unica vostra direzione dipendano tutte le funzioni, operazioni ed esercizi pubblici che riguardano le Scienze tutte e tutte le Arti.

Dato in S. Antonio, nostra Residenza, il 5 giugno, 1800.

Sottoscritto ALESSANDRO GIOVANNI BALL

It is doubtful whether Caruana had any chance of exercising his office with visible results between June and September, 1800. One thing, however, is certain. Ball had a very good opinion of Caruana and he believed that Caruana's learning and good will marked him out as the ideal person to assume the direction of the reinstated University of Studies and Academy. We know from another MS in the University Archives, entitled *Acta Academiae Melitensis 1800-1832*, that it was precisely these qualities

² Most of the contents of the MS are incorporated in the more comprehensive *Acta Academiae Melitensis 1800-1832*, mentioned later on in this article. The earlier manuscript includes a brief survey of events between 1798 and 1800 which is missing from the 1800-1832 *Acta*. Unfortunately this part of the MS has been extensively damaged by bookworms and is quite illegible in parts. This might explain why the above document escaped the attention of the late Sir Temi Zammit, who makes no reference to it in his oration *L'Università di Malta: origine e sviluppo* (1913).

that led Ball to appoint Caruana Inspector General and Director. Small wonder, therefore, that on the 28th October, 1800 Canon Caruana received, in addition, the appointment of Rector of the University. The following is a translation of his letter of appointment³:

The Governor of Malta and Gozo

It being Our wish to give you, Canon Dr Saverio Caruana, a further proof of Our recognition of your merits and of the valuable services rendered by you to your Country during the peasant insurrection, at great personal risk and sacrifice, and it being also Our wish to benefit this Island by employing your abilities, being well assured of your talents and energy and good will, We create and appoint you Rector, Head and Director of the University and of Studies of this Island and also of the College of Jesus, granting to you all the honour and emoluments, appertaining thereto, and charging you with all the burthens and duties annexed to this office.

Given at the Palace — Valletta,

This 28th day of October in the year 1800,

(Sd) JOHN ALEXANDER BALL

In this letter the words 'a further proof of Our recognition of your merits' gain added significance if they are read in conjunction with Caruana's previous appointment as Inspector General.

Caruana's first care as Rector was to find suitable persons to fill the several Chairs. After various discussions with Ball the University was re-opened on the 6th November, 1800 with the following Teaching Staff:

³In the *Acta* we read that Ball '*cognito Revmi. D. Xaverii Caruana Stae. Cathedralis Ecclesiae Canonici in Scientiis omnibus mirifice exculso ingenio, perspectaque illius ad disciplinas artesque fovendas ardentissima voluntate (cuius rei causa Artium omnium Scientiarumque Inspectorem generalem ac Praesidem jamdudum creaverat) ipsum Studiorum Universitatis Rectorem, praesidem et Caput constituit...*'

The translation of the appointment given here follows that published as Document II in the historical introduction to the Royal University of Malta Calender, 1956. The only change is in the actual designation of Caruana's office which is given as *Rector of the University of Studies of this Island* but which should more accurately be rendered *Rector, Head and Director of the University and of Studies of this Island*.

CLASS	SUBJECT	TEACHER	HONORARIUM
I	Italian & Latin	D. (Rev.) Vincenzo Pisani	150 scudi ⁴
II	Italian & Latin	D. Paolo Busuttil	150 scudi
III	Italian & Latin	D. Michel Angelo Farrugia	150 scudi
IV	Italian & Latin	D. Pietro Mallia	150 scudi
V	Humanities & Rhetoric	D. Silvestro Cutajar	200 scudi
VI	Logic & Metaphysics	D. Salvatore Montebello	200 scudi
VII	Mathematics & Physics	Dr Carlo Azzopardi	200 scudi
VIII	Civil Law	Comm. Fr Antonio Micallef	200 scudi
IX	Canon Law	D. Filippo Pullicino	200 scudi
X	Dogmatic Theology	Fra Bonaventura Chircop	200 scudi
XI	Moral Theology	Fra Vincenzo Thei	200 scudi
XII	Medicine	Dr Ludovico Abela	200 scudi
XIII	Handwriting & Arithmetic	Vincenzo Allegrini	150 scudi
XIV	Drawing	Michele Busuttil	200 scudi

In addition to the above, the *Prefetto del Corridore* received 100 *scudi* a year; the Porter, who was responsible for the cleanliness of the place and was expected to keep one or two cats, received 120 *scudi*, while 30 *scudi* went to an attendant in charge of the University clock. The Under-Secretary received 106 *Scudi* and 120 *scudi* went to the Sacristan of the Church of the College of Jesus. At first there was no Secretary, but soon after the re-opening of the University Caruana appointed Rev. Francesco Agius, of Valletta, 'a man conspicuous for his learning and for his probity of manners', to fill the post of Secretary 'for the better ordering of University studies'.

The Rector was responsible for the management of the University building, which included the Church annexed to it as far as temporal matters were concerned, and he could authorise expenditure connected with teaching and maintenance. As Rector he was not entitled to receive any salary, but as Director of Sciences and Arts he was in receipt of 350 *scudi*

⁴ The *skud* (scudo), which is the equivalent of 1/8 in English money, is still used in agricultural and fishing transactions, but has long since been replaced by £ s d in salary calculations.

The salaries given above are higher than those approved in respect of the same Chairs in 1773, when Ximenes effected drastic economies and reduced the number of Chairs to nine. In 1773 the Lecturers in Theology, Philosophy, Mathematics, Rhetoric and Humanities received 180 *Scudi* each, the Grammar teacher received 120 *scudi*, while two teachers in the lower forms received 90 *scudi* each. Vide R.M.L. Arch. Mss 577, f. 210-220.

annually for the upkeep of a *calesse* which Government was bound to provide him with for carrying out his manifold duties.

Personal emoluments thus amounted to 3,026 *scudi* annually (approximately £252). It seems that even in those days the financial position of the University was so precarious that Government accepted the obligation to make good any balance of expenditure that the University Accountant, (*l'Economo dell'Università*) could not meet out of University funds.

The programme of studies followed more or less the main lines laid down by Costaguti's *Constitutioni* approved by Pinto in 1771⁵. Holy Scripture, Ecclesiastical History and Building Construction, however, were not included in the 1800 curriculum, possibly due to the lack of suitable teachers in Malta. Surgery was likewise left out of the syllabus, but it is possible that the School of Anatomy and Surgery established by Grand Master Cotoner in 1674 continued to function unofficially at the Hospital during this period until a Chair of Surgery was set up in 1824⁶.

Caruana introduced the study of Drawing, which presumably included Painting as later on in the same *Acta* the Drawing Class is referred to as *Schola Pictoriae*. Caruana's interest in the Arts dated from his younger days, when he had set up two weaving looms, at Zebbug and at Rabat, which produced various specimens of fine artistic workmanship. The

⁵ LAURENZA, V., *Il Primo Rettore e i primi Statuti dell'Università di Malta*, 1934, p. 17.

⁶ The first Professor of Surgery and Anatomy under British Rule was Gavino Patrizio Portelli. The University Calendar gives his period of office as 1824-38. This is evidently incorrect, because Portelli's appointment as Professor of Surgery and Anatomy was gazetted on the 28th November, 1822. Vide *Proclamations, Minutes and other Official Notices* published by the Government of the Island of Malta ... 1821-22, p. 63.

In the same Government Notice we read that the Lieutenant Governor had accepted Caruana's resignation from the office of Rector of the University. Caruana had requested permission to resign 'in consequence of the additional duties now entrusted to him as Archdeacon of this Diocese'. The Rev. Fra Girolamo Inglott, whose appointment as Professor of Philosophy appeared in the same Notice, was nominated to act as Rector 'for the present until further orders'.

Maitland immediately set up a Committee of five to report on University studies. For two years this Committee also managed the day-to-day affairs of the University. In or about March, 1824 Giovanni Andreotti, Antonio Muscat and Michele Borg, who had been in practice for some time, graduated in Medicine *Apollinea laurea donati fuere*. Portelli, who had not received his doctorate when he was appointed Professor of Surgery in 1822, took his degree in May, 1824. Vide *Acta Academica Melitensia* 1800-32, anno 1824.

The late Professor P.P. Debono, to whom I owe this information and who was making a special study of Medical studies in Malta, interprets this as a tacit recognition of the studies previously carried on unofficially at the School of Anatomy, at the same time marking the official incorporation of the School in the system of University teaching.

School of Painting opened in 1800 and proved such a success that in 1803 a second Teacher, Giorgio Busuttil, of Valletta, had to be appointed owing to the ever-increasing number of students. The impetus which Caruana gave as Rector to the study of the Arts was later extended to Sculpture and Architecture resulting in the formation of a fine school of local artists who flourished in the first half of the nineteenth Century⁷.

The system of studies re-organized by Caruana resembled closely the set-up of the educational organization introduced by Costaguti in 1771⁸. The University establishment in 1800 provided also for a measure of elementary instruction and for secondary education. The first four classes were devoted to the teaching of Italian and Latin at elementary and secondary school level. Lessons took up four hours a day. In Class I reading and writing in the two languages were taught; in Class II pupils were introduced to declension of nouns, conjugation of verbs and the rudiments of grammar. Grammar and translation of easy books from Latin into Italian formed the syllabus of Class III, while in Class IV Grammar was continued, more difficult translations into Italian were attempted, together with some translation from Italian into Latin.

University studies proper started in Class V. Classes V to VII formed a sort of Preparatory Course consisting of Humanities and Rhetoric, Logic and Metaphysics, Mathematics and Physics, leading to higher studies in Laws, Theology and Medicine in Classes VIII to XII. Handwriting and Drawing formed a sort of Fine Arts Course in Classes XIII and XIV.

On the 5th November 1800 the newly appointed Professors called on the

⁷ BONNICI CALI, R., *Monsignor Francis Xavier Caruana: Maecenas of Fine Arts*, in *Scientia*, vol. xiv (1948) No. 1, pp. 33-41.

⁸ LAURENZA, V., *op. cit.* pp. 12-17. In 1773 Grand Master Ximenes ordered that teachers and lecturers were to be Maltese and he reduced the number of Chairs to nine, viz:

<i>Teologia Scolastica</i>	Lettore Fra Francesco Bonnici, O.F.M. Conv.
<i>Teologia Morale</i>	Lettore Fra Francesco Sammut, Agost.
<i>Filosofia</i>	Lettore Don Giuseppe Xerri, della Valletta
<i>Matematica</i>	Lettore Dr Fisico Carlo Azzupardo
<i>Rettorica ed Umanità</i>	Chierico Samuele Caruana
<i>Grammatica</i>	Maestro D. Giuseppe Cachia, della Senglea
<i>Leggere, Scrivere e prime regole della Grammatica</i>	Maestro Fra Maurizio Livreri, Cappellano d'Obbedienza
<i>Ben Scrivere ed Aritmetica</i>	Maestro Fra Matteo Gili, Cappellano d'Obbedienza

Apart from these economic measures Ximenes retained more or less the basic set-up worked out by Costaguti. Besides the schools for higher studies these were the *Scuole delle Umane Lettere*, the *Scuola della Grammatica*, the *Scuola del Conteggio* and the *Scuola Infima*. For details governing the teaching, the time-tables and the administration of these schools vide R.M.L. Arch. Ms 577, f. 210-220.

Rector at his home to thank him for their appointments. Caruana received them most kindly and they all proceeded to the Palace of the Archbishop, Mgr Vincenzo Labini, who then administered to them the oath of office in accordance with the custom of the land.

On the following day Professors, students and members of the better educated classes assembled in the University Hall, where the Augustinian Fr Vincenzo Thei delivered a solemn oration for the success of the new studies, this oration was received with great applause. The Governor Ball, honoured the occasion with his presence.

Lectures started a week later. On the 13th November, 1800 after the solemn intonation of the hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* in the University Church, each Professor went to his classroom, mounted the rostrum and gave a public lecture.

The above details in the *Acta* concerning the ceremonial followed on such occasions form a connecting link between the earlier practice under the Knights and that followed on similar occasions nowadays. Some modifications or omissions are noticeable. New teachers no longer take their oath of office at the hands of the Archbishop, except those in the Faculty of Theology.

The inaugural lecture now forms part of the Opening Day Ceremony in the University Church, and is not delivered, as in 1800, in the University Hall seven days before the Opening Day. As Chancellor the Governor still presides at official ceremonies in the Church of the University.