

# The Genesis of Tertiary Education in Gozo

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*Speech delivered on the occasion of the inauguration of two new lecture halls at the University of Malta Gozo Campus – 17 March 2011.*

## Introduction

The official inauguration of the Malta University Gozo Campus on 4 May 1996 by the Prime Minister Dr Eddie Fenech Adami signalled the fulfillment of what has been mere wishful thinking for close to four hundred years.

## A Missed Opportunity

The first initiative for the establishment of an institution to cater for tertiary education in Gozo dates back to 1618 and the person behind the venture was Nicola-Angelo Macanuzio, also known as Mahnuq, a nobleman of Gozitan extraction living in Valletta.

On 4 September 1618, Macanuzio registered his will in the acts of Giovanni Simone di Lucia.<sup>1</sup> He left the lion's share of his movable and immovable property – a large portion of which was along the whole length of the Xewkija side of Mġarr ix-Xini Valley – to the *Collegium Melitense* of the Society of Jesus in Valletta.

The establishment of this *Collegium* had been authorized through

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<sup>1</sup> Nicola-Angelo Macanuzio [Mahnuq], *Will* (4 Sep 1618) : Giovanni Simone di Lucia, NAM 784/13, 7–8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 8.



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a Brief of Pope Clement VIII addressed to Grandmaster Hughes Loubens de Verdalle (1582-1595) on 28 March 1592. It was a school of Grammar and Humanities and provided for the teaching of Philosophy and Theology. The deed for the actual erection of the *Collegium* was signed at the Magisterial Palace on 12 November 1592. It is considered the predecessor of the University of Malta, the foundation of which was authorized by the *Breve Sedula Romani Pontificis* of Pope Clement XIV dated 20 October 1769. The University was eventually founded through a magisterial degree of Grandmaster Emanuel Pinto da Fonseca (1741-1773) on 22 November 1769 (Bezzina, 2002: 145-147; Vella, 1969: 7-10).

The bequest by Macanuzio to the *Collegium* was made with a very specific condition – a truly give-and-take donation for the benefit of the youths of Gozo. The Society of Jesus, accepting the donation, would be obliged to open a permanent residence and college on the island of Gozo for the benefit of the inhabitants of that island.<sup>2</sup> He was so anxious to promote the well-being

of Gozo and the Gozitans that, in another clause, he set aside further property lest the income from the original bequest was not sufficient for the up-keep of the residence and college. In still another clause, he decreed that if the Jesuits did not accept the bequest, it should be passed on to the Order of Preachers, the Dominican Friars, with the same conditions attached.

The Society of Jesus initially accepted the legacy and sent two Jesuit Fathers to Gozo to seek proper premises for the setting up

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*Nicola-Angelo Macanuzio or Mahnuq, a nobleman of Gozitan extraction living in Valletta, who laboured for the opening of a branch of the Collegium Melitense, the forerunner of the University, in Gozo. (Photo courtesy: Cathedral Museum-Gozo).*



of a residence and a college in Gozo. The ensuing report has seemingly gone lost. It is however certain that the two Society members that came to Gozo were probably taken aback by the state of affairs of the island of Gozo at that time. So much so that, all of a sudden, they gave up the bequest. The Dominicans showed little or no interest in the undertaking.

The attempt of Nicola-Angelo Macanuzio to set up a Gozo Campus of the *Collegium Melitense* failed.

### **A University for Gozo**

A second attempt vis-à-vis tertiary education in Gozo was made by the British Colonial Office. It was the same Colonial Office that later on was to give strict orders to their representatives in Malta to be as thrifty as possible with the island, lest expenditure exceeded income.

A short time after Malta and Gozo were recognized as a British Crown Colony, the Colonial Office in London was deliberating the opening of a University in Gozo. The proposal was first made by Henry E. Bunbury, Under-Secretary of State, on behalf of Earl Bathurst, Secretary of State for War and the Colonies, to Sir Thomas Maitland, the first British Governor of Malta, in a despatch of 12 February 1815.<sup>3</sup>

He suggested the setting up in Gozo of “a considerable university which may attract the young men of the most enterprising Greek and Italian families and become at the same time a lasting instrument for the extension of our [British] moral influence through the Levant and at least the south of Italy.”<sup>4</sup> He dwelt at length on other benefits that would accrue. The university was first

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<sup>3</sup> Henry E. Bunbury, Under Secretary of State on behalf of Lord Bathurst, to Thomas Maitland (12 Feb 1815) : NAM, National Archives Malta, CO to Gov, 6, 8.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

and foremost conceived as a hub for the diffusion of Colonial propaganda towards the expansion of the British Empire, rather than a centre for the enhancement of education in Gozo. Just the same, were the idea to materialize, it would have certainly upgraded the standard of education on the island.

It was not to be. Governor Maitland was not a person to promote projects that were not his brainchild and he paid little or no attention to the suggestion. One might assume that Bunbury's proposal was a fantastic suggestion – a University on a remote unknown island in the middle of the Mediterranean – but time proved that it was not far-fetched at all.

By that time, it was being recognized that Gozo did nurture intelligent people. To try to make it easier for promising Gozitans to pursue tertiary education in Malta, Thaddeus O'Malley, Rector of the University between 1841 and 1842, suggested the building of a hostel in Valletta for gifted Gozitan students.<sup>5</sup> Such a suggestion naturally fell on deaf ears.

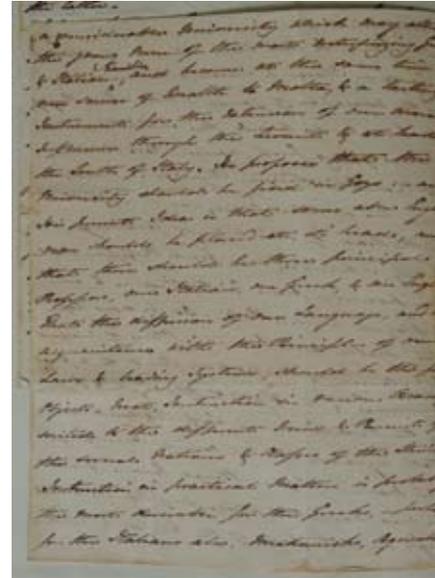
At the time, three factors militated against the diffusion of education in Gozo: the Government's low vote, the language problem, and the little interest shown by the majority. No wonder that up to 1842, the year of the first British census, the Gozitans were still wallowing in ignorance and the number of literate persons was little more than one per cent. In fact, of the boys and girls between the age of seven and twenty living in Gozo at that time, only thirteen per thousand, or 1.3% were receiving some schooling.

### **Tertiary Education at the Seminary**

Nonetheless, the proposal made by Henry E. Bunbury in 1815 was not far-fetched, as many might imagine. So much so that

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<sup>5</sup> House of Commons, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1843–XXIII–567, 28.



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The suggestion of Henry E. Bunbury to Sir Thomas Maitland, the first British Governor of Malta, to open a University in Gozo (12 February 1815). (Photo courtesy: National Archives, Malta).

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fifty-one years later, when the Gozo Seminary opened its doors as a secondary boarder and day-school for boys under the able direction of the Jesuit Fathers, a number of distinguished Sicilian families did send their sons to Gozo.

The Gozo Seminary was inaugurated on 4 November 1866. It was the brainchild of Monsignor Pietro Pace, then Vicar General for Gozo, and a future bishop of Gozo and archbishop of Malta. Pietro Pace, together with Sir Adrian Dingli, Crown Advocate for Malta, were the main promoters of the establishment of the diocese of Gozo (Bezzina, 1985: 225-231).

These promoters were fully conscious of the urgent necessity of upgrading education on the island. One reason why they were pressing for a diocese was precisely because they rightly hoped that its establishment would bring about the opening of a seminary together with a secondary school. The provision for such an institution was indispensable.

The idea of opening a Seminary in Gozo was indeed a daring project in the middle of the nineteenth century. In the 1860s, around three quarters of the population of 16,000 were directly or indirectly engaged in agriculture. Analphabetism was rife and hardly any secondary education worthy of mention was imparted on the island.

The Bull *Singulari Amore*, that established the diocese of Gozo, stipulated the foundation of the Seminary within the former Saint Julian Hospital and the transfer of all its legacies to the new foundation.<sup>6</sup>

The Seminary was instrumental in enhancing the standard of education in Gozo and the reputation of the school spread far

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*Monsignor Pietro Pace, Vicar General for Gozo, the person behind the opening of the Seminary and the beginning of tertiary education in Gozo. (Photo courtesy: Cathedral Museum-Gozo).*



and wide. From the very first year, the sons of the best families in Gozo and many intellectually talented boys from Malta attended the Jesuit-run institution. The Jesuits even succeeded to attract a number of students from Sicily, their island home. In the seminary's secondary school or Minor Seminary, boys were prepared for the University of Malta Matriculation Examination, and many were those who obtained brilliant results. The faculty of Philosophy and Theology or Major Seminary made a very good name for itself for the seriousness and high standard of its studies and for the number of holy and zealous priests it turned out.<sup>7</sup>

In line with their policy, the Jesuits did not cater only for the intellectual and spiritual advancement of their students. They also sought to widen their cultural interests. In a few years, the Seminary became the centre of the major cultural activities of the diocese and of the whole island of Gozo. The Jesuits held meetings of all sorts for priests, gave public lectures and talks, organized large-scale exhibitions on a variety of subjects, and produced dramatic shows for people at large. Many even crossed over from Malta to participate and enjoy these activities.

It was at the Sacred Heart Seminary, as the institution was called from 1881, that tertiary education was first imparted on the island. Students preparing for the priesthood followed the course of the Scienze Sacre studying Dogmatic and Moral Theology, Sacred Scripture, History of the Church, and Canon Law. Several attempts to obtain the authorization from Rome to confer first degrees failed not because of a lack of intelligent students and knowledgeable professors but as some quarters in Malta were afraid of competition from the smaller island (Bezzina, 1991).

The Seminary was to remain the only seat of tertiary education in Gozo for one hundred and twenty five years.

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<sup>6</sup> Pope Pius IX, Bull *Singulari Amore* (16 Sep 1864) 11r-v : ACG [Archivum Cathedralis Gaudisiensis, the Citadel-Gozo], Misc.

<sup>7</sup> *Catalogus Provinciae Siculae Societatis Iesu*, Panormi 1867 onwards.

## University of the Air

In the late 1960s – in the post-Independence years – the youths of Gozo became more and more aware of the necessity of tertiary education. The costs involved were however beyond the means of the majority. Well-meaning Gozitans began to nurture the idea of requesting the University to hold some courses in Gozo to make it easier for Gozitans to upgrade their studies. At that time, the number of Gozitans at the University never surpassed thirty.

The proposal was put forward to Sixth Form students at the Gozo Lyceum early in 1968. It was Mr George Cassar, the master of Maltese and a man fully dedicated to the common good of Gozo, who launched the idea and invited students to write a petition to the University outlining such a request. As a student, I was one of the promoters of the petition.

This request was linked with an appeal to the University to stop what was considered its discriminatory action against Gozitan students by compelling them to travel to Valletta to sit for the Matriculation examinations. At that time, both Oxford and London Universities had an examination centre in Gozo to cater for Gozitan students, but not the Malta University. The University at long last acceded to this request.

The holding of University courses in Gozo was a harder nut to crack. The proposal was eventually taken up by the now defunct Gozo Civic Council, a regional government for Gozo. By 1970, two possibilities were being put forward.

The first was to request the University to impart the Bachelor of Arts and the Bachelor of Science courses to Gozitan students in Gozo. The suggestion was immediately shot down; it was impracticable for members of the Departments concerned to commute frenziedly to Gozo and, besides, there was no library in Gozo to cater for specialized research.



*The leader of the Times of Malta (18 March 1970) supporting the idea of the University of the Air. (Photo courtesy: Public Library-Gozo).*

The second was the setting up of a University of the Air, a project that was being launched in Great Britain around the same time. Through a sort of closed-circuit radio, students sitting in a lecture-room in Gozo could listen to lectures being imparted at the Valletta University campus with the facility to make questions and participate directly in the debate.

It was Professor Guzè Aquilina, Gozitan and, at the time, vice-Rector of the University of Malta, who seemingly first aired this idea to Dr Anton Tabone, President of the Gozo Civic Council. In the sitting of 19 February 1970, the Council unanimously endorsed the proposal<sup>8</sup> and, on 26 February, it formally tendered the request to Professor Edwin Borg-Costanzi, the University Rector.<sup>9</sup>

Professor Aquilina put his full weight behind this second proposal “for the benefit of those who, for one reason or another, cannot settle in Malta to read for a degree” (Jaquil, 1970: 15; Aquilina, 1970: 14). He considered the provision of University facilities for Gozitan students by the adaptation of the British idea to the local situation as the only plausible solution.

Professor Aquilina backed the Gozitan request when it came up for discussion at the University Council. Yet, as often happens, the concept was not pursued further.

### **University of Malta Gozo Campus - A Reality**

Anton Tabone, son of Dr Anton Tabone and first Minister for Gozo, took up the idea of an institution of tertiary education in Gozo soon after the establishment of the Ministry for Gozo on 14 May 1987 (Bezzina, 1997: 430-431).

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<sup>8</sup> Gozo Civic Council, *Minutes* (19 Feb 1970): NAG-National Archives Gozo Section, CC/01/04 under date.

<sup>9</sup> The reference given to the relative correspondence (probably lost) in the Gozo Civic Council, *Minutes* (19 Feb 1970): NAG-National Archives Gozo Section, CC/01/04 under date, is GCC 2/70 (Doc 39).

The Minister found collaboration both on the part of the University, especially from the Reverend Professor Peter Serracino-Inglott, the Rector, as well as from his colleagues within the Government’s cabinet. Innumerable obstacles had to be overcome before the dream could come true. In the meantime, Professor Lino Briguglio was roped in by the Ministry to promote this foundation. It was not an easy task to convince the University Council and Senate to set up a Campus in Gozo.

The University of Malta Gozo Centre was finally established in October 1992 and courses were inaugurated on Saturday, 6 February 1993 during a ceremony at the Exhibition Hall of the Ministry for Gozo. Lectures were initially imparted at the premises of the Sixth Form in Rabat, Gozo. The new centre in Xewkija began to function from October 1996.

The Centre, now rightly called Campus, is governed by a board chaired by the University Rector and administered by a director, a post that has been held from the beginning – with shining results – by Professor Lino Briguglio.

Throughout the fifteen years of its existence, the Campus served not only for the organization of courses and for research, but also for the promotion of culture. It began by the organization of a five-year part-time course leading to a BA degree and proceeded throughout the years with an innumerable number of courses. The University also uses the Gozo Campus for specialized research on atmospheric and climate change in collaboration with foreign institutions. Besides this, through the Gozo Campus, the University has embarked on a number of research projects concerning Gozo, such as the lace-making industry, agriculture, and tourism.

Mr. Anton Tabone, the former Minister for Gozo and the principal promoter of the whole project, considers the campus as a dream come true. He is also certain that the involvement of the University

in Gozitan affairs was another step towards the emancipation of this island region in national affairs (Cauchi, 2002).

Dr Anton Refalo, Parliamentary Secretary for Gozo between 1996 and 1998, gave his full support to the Campus. In September 1998, with the re-establishment of the Ministry for Gozo, the Honourable Govanna Debono, the new Minister for Gozo, declared her interest in increasing and widening the scope of the Campus from day one. She has never ceased to give the Campus her full support.

On 4 May 1996, during the inauguration of the Malta University Gozo Campus, Prime Minister Dr Eddie Fenech-Adami affirmed that “when the idea of the Gozo Centre was first raised, many thought it was just a nice dream and not practical. But the idea has become a reality because over the recent years we have come to appreciate two things: the importance of university education, and the opportunities for education in Gozo.”

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The plaque commemorating the inauguration of the University Gozo Centre Premises.