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Editor: Professor J. Aquilina

All enquiries should be addressed to the Editor
c/o The Royal University of Malta,
Msida,
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NEW OPPORTUNITIES FOR NEW PLANNING

THE University of Malta is a small University from the point of view of size, staff and student population. But the smallness is more physical than moral. The advantage is continued personal contact with our students and no student unrest. A University that has recently celebrated its bi-centenary can take its pride of place among larger and wealthier, so far anyhow but much younger, Universities such as are those in the U.S.A. and in the British Commonwealth with the exception of the older U.K. Universities.

Our University has also an older tradition than several of the newly built U.K. Redbrick Universities which have yet to create their own tradition for the future out of the debris of our fussy technological era. We are not writing this in a boasting mood or to distract attention from our physical smallness; we simply want to stress the importance of the role that our University with its long tradition and well-established association with European Universities, can play in the development of Mediterranean civilization not in isolation, but in collaboration with the Universities of other Mediterranean countries with which we share the heritage of common civilization based on Roman Law and Christianity. In a previous leader we wrote about the role of the University of Malta as a social and cultural bridge between Europe and Africa. No other institution could satisfy the role of Euro-African studies better than Malta.

Our University will not only keep, but possibly also strengthen, our connection with the British academic world whose traditions have influenced our University set-up and orientation in many ways.

There is a paradox in Anglo-Maltese University traditions. While the new University at *Tal-Qroqq* is what one might describe as the gift of the British tax-payer to the people of Malta G.C., academic contacts and collaboration of a personal nature at the higher levels, are by far much less significant than one could have expected them to be after 150 years

of British rule. One important instance of collaboration between our University and a British University is the Dialectal Survey which is being conducted in Malta jointly by the Head of the Department of Maltese and Oriental Languages, who is also the editor of this review, and Dr. J.B. Isserlin, who is the Head of the Department of Semitic Languages and Literature of the University at Leeds.

We have now started looking towards Europe and especially the Mediterranean countries more closely. Last year saw the beginning of academic collaboration between the University of Malta and that of Palermo. As a result of this new experiment, professors from the University of Palermo lectured in the Departments of Maltese, History and Classics and the Heads of these Departments gave public lectures in the University of Palermo. That was the beginning, and a very good one too. But is it going to be another flash in the pan? We hope not. Indeed, we wish to see the net cast even wider, not only in Sicily but also in Italy and other Mediterranean countries, France, for instance. This is not the wild dream of an unrealistic academic; it is a very real opportunity which should engage the attention of our University authorities.

We can go much farther together, staff and administration, if we shall all start thinking 'bigger' and agree more readily to obvious reforms and improvements in conditions of work without recourse to those subtle delay tactics which hold up progress, undermine mutual confidence and waste everybody's time, than we have done so in the past. With our surplus energy so needed for the extra work continually sapped and exhausted by tedious and repetitive, too long Committee meetings, there is often very little more time and energy left for large-scale planning.

Time is always an important factor for planning and building. Success or failure is a matter of taking seriously to heart the warning of the Latin saying that *Praetor non curat de minimis*. A mind too long garrously engaged in trifles becomes inevitably trivial. Let us think 'bigger' and move forward together to wider social and academic horizons. Let's get our pants off the sticky chairs of the fussy Committee rooms!

THE EDITOR

~~The Editor of the Journal~~

AN ARAB HUMORIST

AL-JĀHĪZ AND 'THE BOOK OF MISERS'

By DAVID R. MARSHALL

BEFORE the advent of Islam and the subsequent collection into one volume of those formal utterances which Muhammad accepted as being divinely inspired, the Koran, there was no prose literature in Arabic. Poetry, however, — and poetry of a high standard — had made its appearance by the 5th century of our era, and, apart from a temporary setback during the early days of Islam when poets came into a certain disrepute since they were regarded as being inspired by jinn, it was to progress steadily, finding new themes and new styles.

Although for some time the Koran remained the sole example of Arabic prose literature, it was soon to be followed by other prose literature, and its influence on this latter was to be tremendous. It was due to the flexibility given to it by the Koran that 'Arabīya (High Arabic) could be quickly developed and adapted to different literary needs.

The earliest succeeding prose works were all of a factual nature, almost entirely connected with religion, in the form of commentaries on the Koran, and its ancillary disciplines of jurisprudence and the science of Tradition, the latter two leading to the study of history. Unfortunately, not a great deal of this early prose literature remains, partly because the Arabic script of that time was deficient and oral transmission was still a dominant habit, and there may also have been a certain reluctance to putting into writing anything except the Koran.

But prose was still in its infancy as a literary medium, and it was not until the 8th century that it matured. Foreign influences, especially that of Hellenism, came to play their part under the cosmopolitan empire of the Abbasids, and Arabic literature suddenly came quickly to its Golden Age. A clear, precise and fluent Arabic literary prose developed, and this was the final product of the coalescing of the activities of the different schools of scholarship — of the secretaries, philologists, lawyers and Traditionists. Their various amalgamated products laid the foundations of a discursive and argumentative prose.

During the early Abbasid period, the greater part of the large amount of literature produced had a religious significance, much of it centring on the various religious controversies of the time. That part of the literature, however, that was purely secular was faced, at the beginning of the 9th century, with a problem. How could the Arabic humanities be brought out