

Mediaevalia

APPOINTMENT OF A SCHOOL MASTER IN 1470

By E.R. LEOPARDI

We are publishing hereunder a document concerning the appointment of a new School Master for the city of Notabile (Mdina), which is transcribed from manuscript No. 11 of the *Universitas* and kept in the Royal Malta Library.

In the late Middle Ages Malta had its own school the Masters for which were either selected from suitable local talent or brought over from Sicily. Unfortunately not all the records of the *Universitas* have been conserved. Many of these documents were scattered and lost and, except for a few privileges, the collection of records available date no earlier than 1450. It is therefore from the year 1450 that we can trace entries referring either to the appointment of new school masters or a discussion about emoluments for the same (1). These entries do not throw any light on the curriculum of the school nor are there any references to give us information regarding scale of attendance by the boys of the city. Neither do these records mention fees to be paid by scholars. However, it is known that Pope Alexander III in the Third Lateran Council (1179), prescribed that in each diocese a master should be appointed to teach poor scholars *gratis*, and that no charge should be levied on the master for the licence to teach (2).

The school, which was well organized and kept under the control of the government, must have been of a standard which today we call the grammar school. Such schools, which were "obligatory in every cathedral city and frequently met with elsewhere . . . held the key to the gateway of knowledge, Latin Grammar. Because of this, they are fundamental to the educational history of the Middle Ages" (3).

In the year 1470, our school was without a master and the government of the day took steps to find a suitable person to fill the post. Such a person, they decided, was Father Giovanni, a monk of the order of the Friars Minor and a Sicilian. The *Consiglio Popolare* met to discuss the question and decide

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- (1) Vide R. VALENTINI: Scuole, Seminario e Collegio dei Gesuiti in Malta (1467-1591), in Archivio Storico di Malta, Roma, 1936-37, Fasc. I pp. 18-32.
 (2) Z. N. BROOKE: A History of Europe from 911 to 1198. London, 1947. P. 381.
 (3) CAMBRIDGE MEDIAEVAL HISTORY, Vol. VIII, Chapter XXIII. Education in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Century. Cambridge, 1936.

finally whether or not to bring him to Malta and, if so, the term of office and what emoluments should be granted to him for his work. In this interesting document we read how the council met on the 12th of November, 1470, and, as was the custom, the debate opened by the Captain of the Rod, who proposed that the Master be asked to teach at the school for as many years as possible and would receive a salary of $4\frac{1}{2}$ *uncias*. This honorarium would be drawn yearly from the following sources, i.e., one *uncia* out of the funds of the government, one *uncia* from the income of the Bishop, one *uncia* from the property of the Cathedral, another *uncia* from the income of the Monastery of St. Augustine of Rabat, and half an *uncia* from the income of the Monastery of the *Nunciata*.

As can be seen from the debate of the council, which is published below, other members proposed that the hospital should also contribute a sum towards the salary of the master. The hospital of the city, referred to as *hospitale* was Santo Spirito Hospital (4), which has continued to function as a government hospital up to this day.

This debate is also important because it throws some light on the presence of Monasteries on the Island in that period. And when we come to study the intellectual life of this age we must surely take into consideration the existence of Monasteries in Malta. The Augustinians, who were asked to contribute towards the payment of the salary of the new master, had their monastery and church near the Sakkaja and facing the open space just outside the main gate of the city. This open space is sometimes referred to in documents of the period as: *planicie santi Augustine*.

The other monastery asked to make a contribution towards the salary of the school master was that of the *Nunciata*. This is the Carmelite Monastery of the Annunciation. In 1470 their monastery and church stood in the open country about two miles away from the city overlooking a picturesque valley. The remains of the monastery and church can still be seen, and the locality has retained the name of *tal-Lunziata*.

Two other Orders existed in Malta at that time, but were not requested to contribute a sum of money for the school. They were the Dominicans and the Franciscans (Conventuals). The Dominicans had just become established in Malta, having obtained from the government the small chapel known as *Santa Maria della Grucca*, in Rabat, on the way to Buskett. The Franciscans though established for long in Malta were probably not in a financial position to make an annual contribution towards the school. Their monastery and church were near the hospital of Santo Spirito.

Another important feature of this document is that the new Master of the school was a member of the Friars Minor (*Ordinis Minorum*), an Order

(4) Vide MS No. 11, fol. 295 v.

.....Et super facto creandi Procuratoris hospitalis Sanctus Spiritus, Rabbati.
(1474)

... established in Malta in the year 1470. It was after 1492 that
... of this Order was founded in Malta.

... debate, as was customary, was closed by the Jurats. As seen from
... document, the last four members to speak, i.e., Petrus de Caxaro, Paolus
... Biglera, Nicolaus Manfredi de Caxaro and Franciscus de Allegritto were
... the four Jurats nominated for the year 1470.

The document in question has been transcribed from MS No. 11. The opening part of the document is found registered on folio 219 recto and verso, and the concluding part on Folio 194 recto. Through negligence of the binder the pages relating to each other were not bound in sequence. The evidence that both these parts form together a single document is based on the colour of the ink which is identical on both sheets of paper. Then there is the handwriting which leaves no doubt that the same hand penned both pages. Incidentally it is a peculiar hand and not found on any other part of the whole volume. The quality and colour of the two pages agree in detail, and as a final proof there is the sequence of the subject which leaves no doubt that, though bound apart, the two pages form the documented debate on the appointment of the School Master and the salary attached to the post.

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XII Novembrjs IIII Indictione

Consilium congregatum super facto Venerandi Fratris Johannis Ordinjs Minorum ad effectum ut conducatur pro magistro scholarum in hac civitate.

Nobilis Georgius de la Habica Capitaneus laudat quod conducatur prefatus Frater Johannes pro magistro scholarum per quantis annjs fiunt possibile ad rationem di unci quatuor cum dimidia per quolibet anno videlicet in hunc modum: uncia una de redivibus Universitatis, alia uncia de redivibus Domini Episcopi, alia de redivibus Sancti Pauli et alia de redivibus Sancti Agustinj et dimidia de redivibus Conventus Nunciatae huius insule.

Magnificus Johannes de Kjvara laudat quod habeat duas uncias de redivibus Sancti Pauli et unam de redivibus Domini Episcopi et alias duas de redivibus Universitatis et aliam unciam de redivibus hospitali per duobus vel tribus annjs et quolibet anno habeat unciam.

Nobiles Johannes de la Habica laudat ut proximus et si possibile est quod Episcopus det duas uncias liberetur hospitale.

Nobiles Angelus de Vaccaro laudat quod conducatur per quantis annjs fiunt possibile et habeat unam unciam cum dimidia de redivibus Universitati, aliam unciam dimidiam de redivibus Sancti Pauli et aliam unciam et dimidiam de redivibus Domini Episcopi, aliam de redivibus hospitali et dimidiam de redivibus Sancti Agustinj et sic habeat uncias sex per anno.

Nobiles Gofridus Desguanes laudat quod conducatur et habeat per annum unciam unam de redivibus Universitatis, alias duas uncias de redivibus Sancti

Pauli et alias duas uncias de redivibus Domini Episcopi et dimidiam de redivibus hospitali.

Egregius Notarius Lucas de Sillato quod conducatur per duobus annis et quod habeat uncias sex, videlicet: unam de redivibus Universitatis, alias duas de redivibus Sancti Pauli et alias duas uncias de redivibus Domini Episcopi et aliam unciam de hospitali.

Magnificus Tristainus ut Gofridus de Sguanes.

Johannes de Pignano ut Magnificus Johannes de Kjvara.

Egregius Matheus de Manuele laudat quod habeat uncias quinque, videlicet: uncias duas de redivibus Sancti Pauli et alias duas de redivibus Universitatis et aliam unciam de redivibus Domini Episcopi et si non potest conveniri per uncias quinque habeat aliam unciam de hospitale.

Notarius Paulus de Bonello laudat quod habeat uncias sex, videlicet: uncias duas de redivibus Universitati et alias uncias duas de redivibus Sancti Pauli, aliam unciam de redivibus Domini Episcopi et aliam de redivibus hospitali.

Nobiles Nardus Calava ut proximus.

Honorabilis Ottavianus de Ravello ut proximus.

Nobiles Petrus de Vaccaro ut Matheus de Manuele.

Nobiles Stephanus de perera ut proximus.

Honorabilis Nicolaus de Caxaro ut Johannes de Kjvara.

Honorabilis Franciscus de Calabachio laudat quod habeat uncias sex, videlicet: uncias duas de redivibus Universitatis, alias duas de redivibus Sancti Pauli et alias duas de redivibus Domini Episcopi.

Honorabilis Dancius Frendu ut Johannes de Kjvara.

Honorabilis Nicolaus Cafranno (?) ut Franciscus de Calabachio.

Honorabilis Ingomes de Brancato ut Notarius Paulus.

Egregius Notarius Petrus de Caxaro laudat quod habeat uncias sex, videlicet: de redivibus Sancti Pauli uncias tres, de redivibus Universitatis unciam unam et alias duas uncias de redivibus Domini Episcopi.

Notarius Paulus de Biglera ut proximus.

Egregius Nicolaus Manfredi de Caxaro ut proximus.

Nobiles Franciscus de Allegritto ut proximus.