Prof. Francesco 'Napuljun' Tagliaferro

(1843-1915)

Francesco Tagliaferro twieled fis-17 t'Awwissu 1843 fil-Birgu. Missieru kien il-Kaptan Stefano Tagliaferro u ommu Teresa, imwielda Depasquale. Iżda Francesco, sa mill-ewwel ġranet skolastiċi u aktar tard, dejjem kien magħruf bl-isem ta' 'Napuljun' li oriġina minn sħabu l-istudenti kollegi għall-intelliġenza kbira tiegħu.

Missieru miet meta Napuljun kien ġħadu żagħżugħ, u peress li kien l-uniku raġel fil-familja, kellu jieħu ħsieb ta' ommu u ta' l-erba' ħutu bniet. Aktar tard Napuljun Tagliaferro żżewweġ lil Marrietta Grech Mifsud, imma ma kellhomx tfal.

L-ewwel xogħol tiegħu kien bħala Assistent Surmast tal-Matematika fil-Liċeo fl-età tenera ta' 15-il sena, wara li kien diġà ggradwa fil-Matematika u l-Fiżika fl-Università ta' Malta!

Aktar tard kien intbagħat mill-Gvern ta' dak iż-żmien biex ikompli l-istudji tiegħu ġewwa l-Università ta' Sorbonne f'Pariġi. Napuljun wera interess kbir f'ħafna suġġetti oħra, fosthom il-lingwi (partikolarment il-Malti) u l-arkeoloġija. Infatti f'ħafna pubblikazzjonijiet insibu dokumentat tajjeb ħafna l-kontribut tiegħu għall-Malti kif Mitkellem u Miktub.

Fl-arkeoloġija ħadem qrib ħafna ma' Sir Temi Zammit, li aktar tard kien responsabbli għall-passi kbar li ġħamel fl-iżvilupp ta' l-istudji arkeoloġiċi tal-Ġżejjer Maltin. F'Ġunju 1897, il-Prof. Tagliaferro kien maħtur bħala Direttur ta' l-Edukazzjoni u kien fdat bid-direzzjoni ta' l-Università ta' Malta, tal-Liċeo ta' Malta u ta' l-Iskejjel Sekondarji.

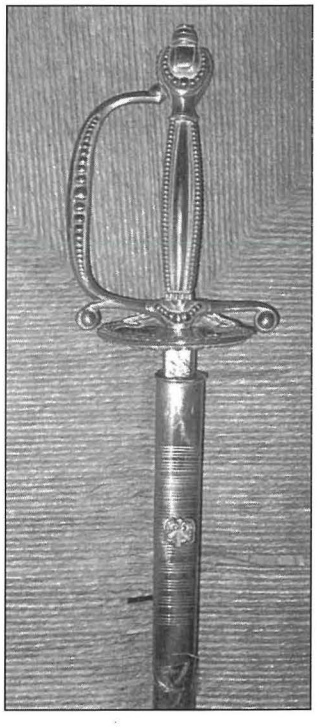
Il-libsa li kien iħobb jilbes il-Prof. Napuljun Tagliaferro.

Fl-1869 Napuljun Tagliaferro nħatar bħala l-ewwel President ta' "IL-BANDA TAL-MOSTA" - li inċidentalment kienet ukoll "l-ewwel Soċjetà fil-Mosta" li fl-1879 biddel isimha għal "SOĊJETÀ FILARMONIKA NICOLÒ ISOUARD". Huwa dam fil-kariga ta' President ta' din is-Soċjetà 19-il sena, jiġifieri sa l-1888, meta imbagħad laħaq is-sur Ġużè Chetcuti.

Napuljun Tagliaferro kien ukoll President tal-*Casino Maltese* fil-Belt Valletta fl-1909. Huwa miet fit-3 t'Ottubru 1915 fil-ġħomor ta' 72 sena u kien midfun fiċ-Ċimiterju ta' Marija Addolorata f'Ħal Tarxien.

Minħħajr dubju, Napuljun Tagliaferro ħalla patrimonju sinjur lill-art twelidu u verament jisthoqqlu ir-rispett kbir li ġħadu jgawdi sal-ġurnata ta' llum.

Ħajr lill-Kurunell Stephen Samut-Tagliaferro.



Ix-xabla li tant kienet għal qalb il-Prof. Napuljun Tagliaferro.

TIMES OF MALTA, TUESDAY, DECEMBER 13, 1977 5

GALLERY OF DISTINGUISHED MALTESE

NAPULJUN TAGLIAFERRO (1843-1915)

By Professor J. Aquilina

Napuljun Tagliaferro, born in Vittoriosa, was one of the most versatile Rectors of the University, the 19th one in the list (1897-1904). He was an accomplished man of many parts whose interests spread over a number of subjects mainly mathematics, science in general, archaeology and the Maltese language. Very sadly may lack depth but in this case it certainly has brilliance. Had he found an opportunity for specializing in one of his favourite subjects of research, he could have attained that high degree of authority which one associates with specialised scholarship. Nonetheless, he achieved a certain amount of depth in some of his intellectual pursuits.

In 1878, at the Congress of the French Association held in Paris he read a scientific paper entitled *Sur des Nouvelles Fonctions Numeriques Transcendentes*. At an International Congress held in Cairo, he read a paper on *Hal Saflieni* which was recorded in the archaeological and anthropological annals of the University of Liverpool Vol. III, June 1910. He was a widely read man enjoying the advantages of a French education in mathematics and the sciences (in 1860 Government sent him to Paris for a proficiency course in mathematics and the sciences). He was the first one to open a course in Mathematics, Physics, Geometry and Mechanics in the Lyceum. He filled the post of Assistant Director of Education and in 1897 he was appointed Director of Education.

VERSATILE SCHOLAR

In 1892-93 he contributed several learned contributions to "The Mediterranean Naturalists" on ornithology, zoology and agriculture. In a country lacking specialists such versatile scholars fill the gaps caused by the absence of specialisation in single subjects. Though, as I have already said, one can hardly attain authority by spreading over a wide area, yet in this way the versatile scholar fills many a gap in the inadequate educational structure of the country.

Tagliaferro somehow reminds me of Sir Temi Zammit, also a brilliant man of science, who found time to promote the study of the Maltese language and actually use it as a literary medium. Tagliaferro was greatly interested in the scientific study of the Maltese language and his philological works betray a disciplined, scientific mind.

His best linguistic publication was *L'Elemento Neo Latino nel Lessico Maltese* (1915). In this brief linguistic essay, he established basic principles which govern the behaviour of loan-words in Maltese. It is a historically and linguistically useful pioneer publication which one can associate with Nina Cremona's linguistic essay *X'inhu il-Malti Sofi?* These two scholars cleared the ground of many philological absurdities indulged in by the advocates of *Malti Sofi* (pure Maltese); both found and established a scientific claim for the many loan-words from Sicilian and Italian which have enriched the inadequate stock of Semitic Maltese.

His scholarship was officially appreciated by his appointment as Honorary Member of the British School of Rome. Those who knew him said that he continued to show interest in the study of the Maltese language and the sciences even in his old age when he became physically very weak.

He was in a way a versatile Napoleonic scholar intent on the conquest of several areas of human knowledge. But though, in fact, he is known as Napuljun Tagliaferro, his baptismal name was Francesco — two names of two great personalities at the antipodes, one Napoleon, the incarnation of human pride and the other St. Francis the incarnation of divine humility.

How is it then that our versatile scholar came to be known as Napuljun? The story is that he was so intelligent, so outstanding amongst less brilliant schoolmates that he was nicknamed Napoleone, out of admiration for his brains and the nickname eventually became his first name and as it remained to the very end of his life.

LIST OF PUBLICATIONS

Onefarous Cones and Fissures in the Maltese Islands (Malta and Gibraltar Illustrated, pp. 183-185); *Sur de Nouvelles Fonctions Numerique Transcendentes* (Istituto Ons. *Ist pottery lately found at Hagar Qim and Mnajdra* ("Archivium Melitense", I, 1910, pp. 61-64); *Prehistoric Burials in a cave at Bur Meghez near Mqabba* (Op. cit. I, 1911, pp. 143-150); *The Prehistoric Pottery found in Hypogeum at Hassafieni* "Bulletin Institute of Archaeology, Liverpool" 1910); *Id-Dubbiena tal-Laring* (1893); *Il-Biedja* (1894); *Il-Smaġħ* (1895); *Sugli Elementi Costitutivi del Linguaggio Maltese* ("Archivium Melitense", I, 1910, pp. 9-14); *L'Elemento Neo Latino nel Lessico Maltese* (1915); *On the Similarity between certain names of places in Western Palestine and in Malta* (OP. CIT. I, 1912, pp. 229-234); *On the Occurrence of a new gigantic land tortoise at Cirradino, Malta* (op. cit. II, 1913, pp. 76-79); *Kelmejn tal-Professur N. Tagliaferro* ("Kollezjoni tal-Mogħdija tas-sniem" n.130, pp. 55-56); *Colubra di Parete da Camera* (Il Naturalista Maltese I, 1, 1890, p. 9); *Il-Gherien ta' Hal Saflieni* (R. Habib, 15.2.1912, p.1); *Fuq ir-Radam tal-Bisi b'ħaqar ħelu* (op. cit. 14.3.1912 p.2).

Artiklu tal-Prof. J. Aquilina meħud mill-gazzetta 'Times of Malta' tat-Tlieta, 13 ta' Diċembru 1977.