

TRANSACTIONS OF THE *CONSIGLIO POPOLARE* DURING THE YEAR 1478-1479

By E.R. LEOPARDI

Continuing on the theme already introduced by the "Bandi", and as complement to the same, are a series of agenda of matters discussed by the *Consiglio Popolare*. The year of this series is 1478-79.

A few brief notes on how the government was conducted at that period may help to elucidate some of the lesser known methods then in use which, with the passing of the years, became obsolete. The official year of the *Universitas* started on the first of September and terminated on the last day of August of the following year. The usual place of assembly during the 15th century was the Arcades, a sheltered place in the south-easterly part of the city of Notabile. It is recorded that on occasions the assembly held a meeting in the Cathedral Church of St. Paul, and in one of the "Capitoli" of the same century a request was made to obtain a hall and adjacent room for the purpose of council meetings. We can gather from this that the arcades although pleasant as a meeting place during the warm months may have been the reverse in winter.

The Members forming the *Consiglio Popolare* have already been mentioned. Not all attended the meetings and we find that at a sitting in 1478-79 the number was as low as 14, whilst on another occasion it rose to 38, making an average of 23 members. The sittings were convened by order of the Jurats, two or more, and the names of those responsible were registered. Usually the debate was opened by the Captain of the City who expressed his opinion on the orders of the day. He was followed by other members of the council, and the Jurats, the last to speak, closed the debate.

The debates were recorded by the Notary of the Council. When the decisions taken were obvious from the discussions the former were not entered. On the other hand a separate entry was made following the minutes when the decision taken might not be clear from the wording of the debates. Such entries on decisions found in the year under examination have been included. The quires of hand-made paper on which the recordings were written were later — probably in the 17th century — bound in book-form, and it is from these that the transcriptions of entries below have been made (Ms. No. 11 of the *Universitas* already described above).

The agenda of the 12 meetings for the year 1478-79 contain varied subjects of discussion, as may be seen from the transcriptions hereunder. The original entries are in Medieval Latin and old Sicilian. A precis in English is given.

* * *

(September, 1478). Fol. 388 verso.

MCCCCLXXVIII

Incipiunt Acta dominorum Juratorum anni XIII Indictione existentibus Juratis Nobilibus Johanne la Chabica, Antonio de Guyvara, Antonio Falca,

Francisco Laureri, et eorum Judice seu Notario Andrea Faucezuni; pro Judicibus Curie Civilis Notario Paulo Bonellu, Manfrido Axac, et Petro Busietil; pro Notario ipsius Curie Nardus Vassaldo; pro Acatapanis Johanne Giganti.

The above is the initial entry of the records of the transactions of the Jurats of the City and Island of Malta for the year 1478-79. It records the names of the Jurats and other Officials elected for that year.

In the list of the Jurats covering the years 1350-1530 compiled by Gian Francesco Abela in his work "Della Descrittione di Malta", Malta, 1647, pp. 421-443, the year above, for some reason, was omitted.

The Captain of the City nominated for that year was Gofridus de Sguanes.

* * *

(4th September, 1478). Fol. 388 verso.

III Septembris XII Indictione

Consilium [congregatum] super facto Juratie an detur Petro Ribera et removeatur aliquis de scrutineo.....

This first sitting was called to question the validity of the election of one of the Members, whom it was proposed to replace by Pietro de Ribera.

Here seven words prove illegible and therefore further detail cannot be given.

* * *

(26th October, 1478). Fol. 390 verso.

XXVI eiusdem

Consilium congregatum per Magnificos Antonium de Guyvara et Johannem la Chabica, duos ex Juratis, ex quo alii duo impediti non potuerunt interesse super facto Gaudensium petencium velle extrahere ad opus terre Gaudisij boy et outra bestianni, quod fiendum, in quo intervenerunt viri infra-scripti, videlicet.

This meeting was convened to discuss a petition from the Gozitans who sought permission to import cattle and other livestock from Malta. This meeting was convened by Antonio de Guyvara and Giovanni de Chabica, in the absence of the other two Jurats.

* * *

(11th December, 1478). Fols. 391 verso and 393 recto.

XI decembris

Concilium principaliter congregatum per Nobiles Antonium de Guyvara, Joannem la Chabica et Antonium Falca, tres ex Juratis, propter indisposicionem eorum consocij, super facto frumenti, quod fiendum: an capiatur aliquod prestitum cum aliquo mercatore et quod ordo servandus sit, et super facto collecte regie et commissario super ipsa collecta veniente, quod fiendum et quod rendendum eidem commissario.

Eodem die fuit rematis vocibus et bene examinatis in ipso Consilio conclusum maiorj voce concurrente quod mictatur ambaxator super facto regij donativij Magnificus Antonius de Guyvara, unus ex Juratis pro optinendo relaxitum dicte regie collecte, vel saltim in primis dilacionem et ki haya per soy dispisi uncias X bonj et ki non haya ne pluj ne minu tantu si ipsu spachassi la ambaxata in un jornu comu in chentu anni, ki pro expediendo dictam ambaxatam solum haya li dicti uncias X.

At this meeting the importation of wheat was discussed and whether a loan should be raised to defray the cost. The second item referred to a tax levied by the king which

was due to be collected by a Commissioner who was coming to the island for the express purpose.

Further down in the document we read the decision taken in reference to the king's tax. One of the Jurats, Antonio de Guyvara, was appointed by the assembly to go to Sicily and in person seek a reduction of the amount due, or failing this, an extension of the time limit of payment. Antonio de Guyvara was to receive 10 uncias of "good money" for this delicate mission and it is clearly stated he would not be entitled to any further remuneration, whether he concluded the mandate in a single day or took one hundred years to do so.

* * *

(14th January, 1479). Fol. 393 recto.

XIII Januarij

Consilium congregatum per Nobiles Johannem la Chabica, Antonium Falca et Franciscum Laureri, tres ex iuratis propter absenciam alterus consocij, super facto protestacionis iudeyce volentis quod iudei possint ire ad vendendum merces, res et raubas per casalia et burgos dicti civitatis et insule Meliveti, contra capitulum concessum ipsi Universitati per recolendam memoriam Regis Alfonsi et

A meeting of the Council was convened by three Jurats: Giovanni la Chabica, Antonio Falca and Francesco Laureri, the fourth member being absent. The subject discussed arose from a petition submitted to the government by the Jewish colony of the Island. These sought permission to sell their wares in the towns and villages of the Island. Members of the Council were reminded that this would be contrary to the concessions granted to the "Universitas" by the late lamented King Alfonso, whereby the Jews had been forbidden to leave the City for trading purposes.

(This concession is to be found in the "Capitoli" granted by King Alfonso in the year 1458. Vide "Archivio Storico di Malta", Oct. 1937 - Jan. 1938: *Documenti per servire alla Storia di Malta* (1452-1458) by R. Valentini, p. 118, Cap. 19).

* * *

(27th January, 1479). Fol. 394 recto.

XXVII Januarij

Consilium congregatum super facto Domini Gilij de Lia ex quo non vult regere scolas nisi detur sibi aliquod salarij quod fiendum, et super facto frumenti ex quo Jachinus se vult obligari a portari facere salmas centum quinquaginta dum modo detur sibi licencia di vindiri a duj carlini et si supercha ki si gecta pro populo quod fiendum.

Two different items were discussed at this meeting: the salary of the schoolmaster and the importation of wheat. The schoolmaster, Gilio de Lia, had protested against the lack of salary and threatened to resign his post unless this matter was settled. The second item concerned an importer of wheat, Jachinus. This person had applied for permission from the "Universitas" to enable him to import 150 salmas of wheat from Sicily and to fix the retail price at 2 carlini the unit, undertaking to give away to the people any surplus unsold. The unit which 2 carlini would buy is not specified.

(11th March, 1479). Fols. 395 recto and 395 verso.

XI marcij XII Indictione

Consilium congregatum per Nobiles Johannem de la Chabica et Antonium Falca, duos ex Juratis propter absenciam consociorum, super facto Fratris Johannis Mendula predicatoris de dando sibi aliquod propter laborem suum et predicaciones per ipsum factas populo et Universitati predictae in has sacra quatragesima videlicet quantum li pari ki li sianu dati, in quo consilio intervererunt viri infrascripti, videlicet

Eodem die et incontinenti rimatis vocibus et bene discussis fuit maiori voce concurrente conclusum quod dentur omnia ex pecunia et redditibus Universitatis per ipsos Juratos eidem Magistro Johanni la Mendula predicatori pro soy affannj et predicacionj ki avi factu unci sej bonj.

The Council was convened by Giovanni de la Chabica and Antonio Falca, two Jurats in the absence of the others. The sitting was to decide the honorarium to be given to Fr Giovanni la Mendula, who had been engaged to preach the lenten sermons. These sermons were delivered at the Cathedral to a congregation formed by the people and members of the government.

We read further down how the discussion centred round not only the amount to be paid but also who should pay it — the government or the church. It was finally decided by a majority of votes that the whole amount would be settled by the Jurats from the funds of the "Universitas". The amount allotted to the preacher was 6 uncias.

* * *

(28th April, 1479). Fol. 395 verso.

XXVIII aprilis XII [Indictione]

Consilium congregatum et cohadonatum per Nobiles Antonium Falca e Franciscum Laureri, duos ex Juratis in absenciam consociorum, super facto marammatis menium civitatis expediende quod fiendum in hoc, et super facto turcorum quod ordo sit servandus pro custodia insule, et super facto mitre seu corone domini Episcopi petentis ipsam habere in regno Sicilie pro conzarila et pontificalis habendi in regno Sicilie ex quo thesaurarius.

This meeting was convened by Antonio Falca and Francesco Laureri, two Jurats in the absence of the rest. The first item on the agenda was the need to expedite the repairing and the strengthening of the city walls. The second item was how best to provide safety for the population in the event of a feared Moorish invasion. The third item discussed was a request from the Bishop of Malta, Giovanni Paterno, residing in Sicily. He had asked for the mitre in order to have it adjusted to his size. He had also requested the pontifical to be sent to him.

* * *

(10th May, 1479). Fol. 397 recto.

X madij

Consilium congregatum per Nobiles Antonium de Guyvara et Antonium Falca, duos ex Juratis, in absenciam Nobilis Johannis la Chabica existentis in regno Sicilie, et Francisci Laureri existentis in Massaria, super facto Fre Flovian capitanei trium fustarum sive biremarum, petentis se affidari at assicurari seu guyari per dictos officiales, in quo consilio intervenerunt infrascripti.

The meeting was convened by Antonio de Guyvara and Antonio Falca. The other two Jurats, Giovanni la Chabica and Francesco Laureri were absent. At this meeting a petition for safe conduct was discussed. The petitioner was Fre Flovian, a Catalan Master of three vessels in harbour.

* * *

(14th May, 1479). Fol. 397 verso.

XIII Madij

Consilium congregatum per Nobiles Dominum Capitaneum et Juratos in absenciam Johannis de la Chabica, absentis ab insula super facto Frer Flovian capitanei trium fustarum existencium in portu civitatis, si li dicti fusti si divinu guyari si oy no per ki foru sguati per ipsum capitaneum et jurati et multi mercatores petentes ipsas fustas guyari per esseri ipsi mercanti guyati. Et super facto protestacionis faete per Franciscum Oliver Francisco Laureri alter ex Iuratis ki non diya guyari li dicti fusti peroki lu arobbaru intra la ysula.

The meaning of the above is obscure in some parts. This meeting was convened by the Captain of the City and three Jurats. Another petition from the Catalan Master was discussed. Captain Flovian now requested a reply, whether in the affirmative or in the negative, to his previous petition for safe conduct.

In the debate Francesco Laureri, one of the Jurats, stated that a certain Francesco Oliver, had protested to him about the robbery of his goods, maintaining that safe conduct should be denied to the Catalan Master.

* * *

(28th May, 1479). Fols. 397 (b) verso and 398 verso.

XXVIII Madij

Consilium congregatum per Nobiles Dominos Juratos videlicet Antonium Falca et Franciscum Laureri ex quo alij Jurati sunt absentes et hoc super facto protestacionis faete ipsis juratis per Nobilem Antonium Gactu super facto Hayn Zeytune ex quo ipsi Jurati providerunt ki dictu Antoniu Gact non divissi trapassari li limiti di Hayn Zeytune et ipso Nobilis Antonius requisivit ipsoꝝ Juratos ki li dugnamu lu terminu defensoriu in quo consiliu interfuerunt viri infrascripti et alij di consilio requisiti per servientem et per puplicum bannum et non venerunt.

Eodem die incontinenti fuit maiorj voce concurrente deliberatum et conclusum ki lu dictu Antoniu Gactu de Sguanes non audiatu nisi restituat omnia ad pristinum et si ipsu non si cura tornarj li confinj comu eranu ki li Jurati personaliter vayanu a lu locu predictu et sdurrupanu lu muru tornandu omni cosa ad pristinum et hoc non obstante dicta protestacione per ipsum Antonium facta Juratis et quod Universitas stet pro ut stabat in possessione et hoc facto si ipse Antonius pretendit habere aliquod jus quod se dirigit in petitorio contra Universitatem predictam.

This meeting was convened by Antonio Falca and Francesco Laureri in the absence of the other two Jurats. The matter discussed is somewhat unusual and concerned a protest from the Noble Antonio Gatt Desguanes. This gentleman strongly resented an allegation which had been made against him by the Jurats concerning some rural property belonging to him at Ghajn Zejtuna in the limits of Mellieha. He had been accused of extending the area of his fields by tampering with the boundary walls. He further requested the Jurats to define the limits of his property.

Note is made of the fact that several Members of the Council were absent at this important sitting, notwithstanding the fact that the meeting had been announced in a public "Bando" read, as was the custom, by the Town Crier. This may have been an innuendo to a group of friends of Antonio who did not wish to incur his displeasure.

However, it was decided by a majority that the protest be ignored unless the boundary walls removed by him be replaced as originally. Should the Noble Antonio fail in this then the Jurats themselves would go to the spot and demolish the wall and restore the boundary to its former position. This entry ends with a statement that should Desguanes resent this decision he was free to go to law and seek redress from the "Universitas".

* * *

(31st July, 1479). Fol. 399 verso.

ultimo Julij XII Indictione

Consilium congregatum per Nobiles Dominos Juratos cum interventu Magnifici Domini Capitanei super commissario nuper venienti ad insulam Meliveti, videlicet, Renaldi de Ferrario, commissarii, quod fieri, lecta prius commissione ipsius in consilio quod fiendum si si divi acceptari si vel.

This council was convened by the Jurats and the Captain of the City. The subject of debate concerned the recent arrival in the Island of Renaldi de Ferrario, the Tax Commissioner; and whether or no, after careful consideration, his credentials should be accepted.

* * *

(31st July, 1479). Fol. 400 verso.

Per supradictos omnes fuit conclusum et determinatum quod ex pecunia Sancti Pauli sianu inpruntati a lu Venerabili Don Mateu Galie, unci XXXV per compliri la campana, e ki haya ad obligarj tantj benj kj sianu di tanta valuta. Solum Rogerius Caxarius non fuit contentus et Nicolaus Caxaru exivit.

Before closing the debate it was suggested that the matter of the Cathedral bell be settled. It was decided that the 35 uncias owing for its completion were to be given to the Rev. Don Matteo Galea against a mortgage on the Cathedral property for a corresponding sum. All members agreed to this except Ruggero Cassar. Another member, Nicola Cassar, having previously left the meeting, was unable to vote.

* * *

(2nd August, 1479). Fols. 400 verso and 402 verso.

II Augusti XII Indictione.

Consilium congregatum per Nobiles Dominos Juratos cum interventu Magnifici Domini Capitanei civitatis Meliveti super facto Honorabilis Renaldi de Ferrario, Commissarii, presentantis ipsis officialibus quandam vice regiam commissionem volentem in effectu prosequi causas fiscales et demaniales quod fiendum super hoc; et super facto Fratris Antonii Sabat, Ordinis Sancti Aguytini, petentis esseri hayutatu di alcuna cosa di andari a studiari; in quo consilio intervenerunt viri infrascripti, videlicet.

Eodem die et incontinenti fuit per omnes supradictos discussis et examinatis vocibus in consilio predicto deliberatum et conclusum ki la dicta commissionj non sia acceptata peroki esti contra la forma di li capituli di lu regnu et di lu ritu et di lu capitulu orta et quod officiales omnes non acceptent dicta provisione ymmo quod substineant omnes penas imponendas per ipsum com-

missarium super redivibus et bonis ipsius universitatis et ki la universitate ki haya di dampni et interessi.

This meeting was convened by the Jurats and the Captain of the City to discuss the following two items. The first concerned Renaldi de Ferrario, the Tax Commissioner from Sicily, who had presented his credentials to the officials of the council at the same time stating his intention to proceed with his mission.

The second item was a petition from Fr. Antonio Sabat, a monk of the Order of St. Augustine. Fr. Sabat sought help from the council to enable him to proceed abroad to finish his studies.

After considerable debate unanimous decision was reached on the first item. The commission of Renaldi de Ferrario, the tax collector, would be rejected since it was contrary to the "capituli" and usages of the kingdom, and incompatible with local law. So opposed were the Council to the commission that they stated they were ready to sustain their decision notwithstanding any penalty which the tax collector might levy on the property of the "Universitas" for their defiance.

* * *

While working on research in the Archives of the *Universitas* the following deed came to light. It is the Act ratifying the election of the Jurats and other officials for the year 1478-79. The deed is signed by Giovanni Cardona, Conte di Prades, who was Viceroy of Sicily from 1477 to 1479.

Besides being an example of the terms in which confirmation was couched, the finding of this deed of ratification is especially fortunate as it supplies the name of the second Catapan whose mention had been omitted in the list registered in Ms. No. 11. It is also to be noted that the name of Notary Andrea Fauczuni, given in the list of Ms. No. 11, was left out in the deed of ratification.

The deed in question is written on paper and its transcription is given hereunder. It will be observed that capital letters in the case of names and surnames have been introduced in the transcription, and punctuation added where necessary, otherwise the spelling of names and surnames has been left exactly as it appears in the original. This is to be found in Ms. No. 4, c. 77.

Rex Aragonum, Sicilie, et cetera.

Vicerex in dicto regno Sicilie. Regij fideles dilecti. Recepto scrutineo vestro officialium creandorum in civitate ipsa Meliveti et vocibus examinatis personas subscriptas ad infrascripta officia deputavimus et ordinavimus sicuti principium tenore deputamus et ordinamus cum omnibus et singulis juribus, iucris et emolumentis, prehemminencijs et prerogativis honoribus et oneribus dictis officijs spectantibus videlicet. Juratos: Anthonium Guivara, Antonium Falca, Joannem la Xabica et Franciscum Laureri; iudices curie civilis: Notarium Paulum Bonellu, Manfridum Axac et Petrum Pusutil; notarium dicte

curie: Leonardum Vassaldo; Acathapanos: Joannem Giganti et Mattheum Nuncivai, ex gracie quae circa vobis dicimus et mandamus expresse quatenus supradictas personas in officiales officiorum suorum habeatis, teneatis et tractetis ac haberi, teneri et tractarij per quos deciat faciatis prestito prius per eos omnes juramento de dicta eorum officia exercendo et administrando ad servicium regium et beneficium rei publice. Datum Cathanie, XXIIIo Augusti XIe Indictione. Johanne Conte de Cardona.

A tergo: Dominus Vicereus mandavit mihi Mariano Aglata Prothonotarius, Capitaneo et Juratis civitatis et Insule Meliveti fidelibus Regijs Dilectis.

Registrata in Cancellaria.

Registrata penes Prothonotarium.