

THE MALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

by

The Hon. Secretary

During these last years "The Malta Historical Society" has continued with its activities to further interest in the study of Maltese History. Various members have contributed their share towards its modest achievements in the annual publication of Malta's only scientific review of History. Mgr. Prof. Arthur Bonnici has continued to dedicate himself to the Society and to be continuously unanimously elected as President, while Fr. Bonaventure Fiorini, O.F.M. Conv. continued to participate as an active member of the Committee in spite of the fact that he had to fulfil much onerous duties on behalf of the Franciscan Order. In January 1970, Mr. Charles Galea Scannura accepted to substitute him as Hon. Secretary.

The publication of *Melita Historica* has been taken over by Prof. A. P. Vella, O.P., who formerly was assisted by Fr. Alexander Bonnici who has contributed a number of good historical articles. Prof. Vella has somehow always managed to ensure the publication of the journal in spite of the fact that he is always facing printing and, especially, financial problems. It has to be realized that the cost of the publication is covered solely by the subscription fees paid by members and the advertisements of some local firms.

The M.H.S. has continued to organize public lectures, though these need to be more regular and it is hoped that more members would come forward to deliver talks about historical topics. The lectures given by Fr. A. Bonnici: "Aspetti di vita Cristiana nell'Isola di Malta nel 1600", Mgr. Prof. A. Bonnici: "Maltese Priests Politicians" and especially Prof. A.P. Vella, O.P.: "An Elizabethan Plot to capture Malta" aroused much interest and attracted a very good audience.

For some time, the Society has been trying to build its own library consisting mainly of exchanges of historical magazines. Following a proposal made during the General Meeting of 1969, these were transferred to the Departmental Library of the Department of History, R.U.M. Msida, where they are being set in order. The Hon. Secretary has also ensured that contacts with foreign historical institutions be maintained and in August 1971 he was asked to provide information regarding available data in Malta with regard to the governorship of the Marquis of Hastings (1824-1826) to Mr. Colin Johnston Robb, 'Consultant: Preservations of Old Churches, Mansions, Theatres, Military Monuments and Curios' of Ballynahinch, Co. Down, N. Ireland.

It is felt that the study and appreciation of Maltese History still needs a lot of encouragement. Hence the M.H.S. warmly welcomed the Conference MALTESE HISTORY: WHAT FUTURE? which was organized by the Department of History of the Royal University of Malta on the 19th and 20th March, 1971. The Conference was a big success both in achievement and attendance. It was the first time that the spacious Arts Auditorium of the new University Building at Msida, was filled to capacity. Various members of the M.H.S. attended and either contributed papers or participated in the discussions. The Conference discussed the teaching of History in Malta, History Books and Teaching Aids and the Preservation of Public and Private Records in Malta. Dr. M. Reeves of St. Anne's College, Oxford, England, addressed the Conference on "The Teaching of History Today".

The participants were also invited to attend another lecture on "La Conservazione degli Archivi Pubblici" given by Dott. A. Baviera Albanese, the Director of the State Archives of Palermo, Sicily, on 22nd June, 1971.

Various resolutions were passed by the Conference during the concluding session. These resolutions affect teachers, facilities for the teaching of History, syllabi and examinations, history textbooks and teaching aids and archives. The M.H.S. was also asked to set up a History Teachers' Group to provide a forum for the discussion of the problems of History teaching in Malta at all levels. The Society's Committee has entrusted this work in the hands of Mr. M. Sant, Mr. G. Ellul and its Hon. Secretary, Mr. C. Galea Scannura.

An immediate outcome of the Conference was the decision to publish a full calendar of R.M.L. Ms. *Univ. II*, which contains the minutes of Malta's Università in the XVth Century. Dr. Paul Xuereb's appeal in the concluding session for funds for this publication, immediately produced subscriptions totalling nearly £200. The Organizers of the Conference hope that more contributions would come forward to ensure the publication as soon as possible.

The M.H.S. strongly feels that the appreciation of Maltese History is a matter of national importance. Hence before the General Election which was held in June 1971, the Committee issued a Memorandum requesting all political parties to place emphasis on the History of Malta in their electoral programmes so that (a) the study of Maltese History be encouraged, (b) greater attention be given to the teaching of History, and (c) a Public Record Office be set up for the safeguarding of public documents.

Finally it may be recalled that The Malta Historical Society is twenty-one years old. For this purpose we are concluding this brief article about the Society with the address delivered by Mgr. Prof. A. Bonnici, on the

29th January, 1971 during the Annual Conference of the Society:

"Twenty-one years ago I made a bold venture. It was perhaps the boldest venture in my life.

After thirty years of active life and the publication of forty-two issues of its organ Archivum Melitense, the Historical and Scientific Society, ceased to exist. Maltese and foreign scholars had no local organ where to publish the products of their research work.

In the year 1950, I published an article in Lehen is-Sewwa, inviting Maltese intelligentsia, either to give a new lease of life to that Society, or to set up a new association with new blood in it.

The article met with the approval of the public in general. Prominent people in the Island, such as Prof. Joseph Manchè, then Vice-Chancellor and Rector of the Royal University, Sir Arturo Mercieca, ex-President of the Court of Appeal, Dr. Enrico Mizzi, the Nationalist Leader, and several doctors, lawyers, priests and scholars sent me letters of encouragement. I never dreamt my article would have such a repercussion.

A group of historians rallied around me and most willingly helped me with their wise suggestions. In the first meeting held in a room at the Royal University, presided over by Prof. Manchè, it was decided to set up a new association under the name of The Malta Historical Society and I was unanimously elected Chairman thereof.

Two years later, the Society started publishing an annual Journal — the Melita Historica — which replaced the Archivum Melitense, and for well eighteen years the Journal has maintained a high standard of achievement and earned thereby the respect of Maltese and foreign scholars.

The aim of our Society is manifold:

- (i) to foster local historical interest in the members and among the people,*
- (ii) to publish articles on Maltese history,*
- (iii) to review books, articles and other publications regarding our Islands,*
- (iv) to reproduce the texts of important documents of Maltese History, and*
- (v) to compile handlists of Melitensia, dealing with any aspect of Maltese History.*

With the valid and efficient help of the members, and particularly of those forming part of the Society's Committee, we have attained a part of our aims. But still there is much to do.

I entertain the hope (i) that Melita Historica will be published twice yearly: we have sufficient material to publish, what we need is more

money and a co-operating printing press; (ii) that texts of important historical documents will be classified and reproduced, for the time being even in a cyclo-styled form; (iii) that the handlists started to be compiled years ago will be completed and published; (iv) that more public lectures and papers will be read and of course be attended by more members; (v) that the Government and other Cultural Institutions will acknowledge the work which is being disinterestedly performed by the Society and help us in our needs.

Finally, I thank most heartily the members of the Committee who proved to be very co-operative and most helpful, the Editorial Board of the Journal for their hard work in the publication of the 1970 issue, the firms that have helped us with their subscriptions towards the Journal, the scholars who have read papers or contributed articles, the V. Rev. Fr. Provincial and Guardian of the Conventual Friars Minor for their lending us the premises for our General and Committee meetings, the Director of the Catholic Institute and the Authorities of the Royal University for allowing us to make use of their premises for public lectures.

Lastly, but not least, I thank you, members, who show a special interest in our Society with your attendance. May God bless our work and multiply our efforts for a longer life and a betterment of our dear Society."

Let us hope that this appeal will not only be heard but will be the flame that will stimulate new blood to take an active part in spreading the knowledge of Maltese History.



THE MALTA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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