

The Educational System of the University of Malta: Italian Influence and Pedagogic Projects

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The study of the origins and development of Universities is important because it shows how these Medieval institutions to a large extent shaped and organized a new culture. The history and traditions of universities, their very creation, but, most of all their development from an organizational and teaching perspective are the starting point, in this specific research field, to determine the educational context and the cultural function performed by universities during the eighteenth century.

The innumerable essays and studies relating to the structure and the cultural function of European universities are rich and fruitful, whereas their pedagogic and educational issues seem to be neglected. This research will focus on this particular sphere. Education becomes an element of "individual and collective growth", as it is connected with the currents of thought responsible for its development¹.

We shall focus mainly on the development and supplementing of national and foreign educational projects which contributed to the cultural evolution of the Maltese society by performing an essential task in preventing the interruption of historical continuity. Accordingly, attention will focus on the origin of the Maltese university system, clearly derived from its religious background and modelled on Italian educational patterns.

Thus it is better to make clear that in these remarks on education and its related activities, it is important to consider the political and social context of the European universities at the end of 1700.

The University Reforms in Europe

To summarize this process, it is opportune to look at the signs of reforms and revitalization that involved the university world in different parts of Europe. Various factors helped to promote the development and the process of renewal of the university system². From the ideological point of view, this promotion contributed to spread enlightened themes, including the possibility of reforming institutions to set up a new social system.

In England and in the Netherlands the impetus of renewal was brought about by the aspirations of the middle class, businessmen and the increase of the professional class. In the rationalization projects of government structures carried out in France, Prussia and Austria by the enlightened monarchies, the reforming force was aimed at improving educational levels by an exact norm which regulated the public character of lessons, the rules for doctoral examinations and for competitive exams of teachers. In Central Europe the trend to rationalization was aimed at repressing the autonomy of colleges of Theology, Law and Medicine to assume control on the professions³.

In many Italian and European universities the corporative structure dissolved slowly to leave direct control to the monarch. This was particularly the case of the Universities of Pavia, Padua and Turin⁴. At Pavia the reform of 1771 involved all fields of the university organization (see the following historical scheme).

^o Dott.sa Morelli spent a period of research at the University of Malta from February to June 1991. She would like to acknowledge the research support given to her by J. Fenech (Faculty of Education) and Dott. J. Eynaud (Faculty of Arts), and the assistance in archival consultation by Mr J. Sultana and Mr P.G. Aquilina.

UNIVERSITY OF PAVIA

before the reform of 1771

- SENATE: - it assumed the general administration;
- BISHOP: - he received the oath from teachers;
- he conferred the doctorate according the formula "*auctoritate qua fungimur*";
- COLLEGES: - they examined the ability of candidates for the doctorate (Theology, Law, Medicine).

after the reform of 1771

- GENERAL MAGISTRATE OF THE UNIVERSITY: - it assumes the general administration;
- it was composed by four governmental officials;
- BISHOP: - he kept the privilege to invest solemnly the academic degrees according the formula "*Apostolica et Regia, qua in hac re fungimur, auctoritate*";
- COLLEGES: Theology - they were present during the finals;
Law
Medicine
- TEACHING STAFF: - it judged the ability of candidates.

During the second half of the 18th century, many universities took important steps towards a new structural and teaching asset according to two fundamental directives, secularization and centralization, which influenced the ideal purposes of the Italian and European university reforms of the eighteenth century.

The University Project of Malta

Malta's university project, consequently, fitted the trends of central Italy in the late eighteenth century, while it differed substantially from the organizational standards of northern Italy. The organizational structures of the Maltese university, since its founding constitutions in 1771, is basically similar to the approach taken by the Rome university of *La Sapienza*. Thus, a definition of links and similarities concerning the school system, as well as teaching subjects and methods, will help in determining the university pedagogic perspective through the implementation of its educational goals.⁵

The University of Malta was created as an ecclesiastical association promoted by the Order of

the Knights of St John. It did not evolve as a free association of students and teachers, but was rather a means to ensure, in the doctrinal and theological field, the unity of the catholic world through a complex educational system.

In the period under study, the Rome academic institution as well as the Maltese university, featured a system clearly inspired by Christian principles whose managing power was held by the papal administration⁶. Hence, the climate of universities within the Church rule, even more stifling than elsewhere, was not suitable for a free research or the flourishing of new ideas and, consequently, the teaching activity failed to arouse the learners' interest⁷.

Moreover, the trend to secularization expressed by other universities was impossible in an ecclesiastic organization that reconfirms the power of chancellor and consistorial lawyers.

As regards the university organization of Rome it is opportune to utilize the following historical scheme (A) that underlines the hierarchic and ecclesiastic organization of the university system of *Archiginnasio*.

(A) UNIVERSITY OF ROME

(reform of Benedetto XIV - 1748)

- THE POPE CHANCELLOR - he is responsible for the co-ordination between studia and ecclesiastic authorities as regards economic, administrative and jurisdictional activities;
- COLLEGE OF CONSISTORIAL LAWYERS (12 members) - they are responsible for the organization of the university;
- they are elected by the Pope among elements of noble origins;
- they elected the Rector of the university;
- *jus doctorandi*;
- COLLEGES OF PHYSICIANS: (12 members) Protomedico
Counsellors - *jus doctorandi*
Censors
Mayors
- COLLEGES OF THEOLOGIANS: - 3 holders of important ecclesiastic offices;
- 5 representatives of religions orders (Dominicans, Augustinians);
- 2 teachers of theology and the Holy Scriptures;
- it is considered to be the most authoritative among colleges;
- *jus doctorandi*;

- RECTOR - he has civil, scientific and cultural competence (potuit imprimi);
- he is elected within the Council of Consistorial Lawyers;
- TEACHER - he appoints by papal permit;
- he has a fixed appanage;
- there is an economic levelling among teachers;
- there is the incompatibility between profession and teaching;
- READER - he appoints by competitive exam (he is presided by the chancellor and the consistorial lawyers);
- he has a temporary function;
- LESSONS - - TYPOLOGY: daily lessons;
- METHOD: university and elementary lessons at home.

Moreover, the Maltese organization was characterized by a pyramid shaped structuring of functions and competencies. As a matter of fact, it is stated in the constitutions that *"ogni ben regolato corpo deve aver il suo capo da cui egli dipende, ed in cui egli influisca"*⁸. Such a structure was actually presided over by the Protector and magistrate of the University, who was in charge of the administrative and jurisdictional management regarding professors and enrolled students, as well as of the awarding of degrees⁹.

The post of rector, on the other hand, involved supervision over the organization and management of related elements such as the methodology applied to the various subject matters, the appointment of the teaching staff and the students; disciplinary and curricular performance. Evidence suggests that the rector took part in private and public debates¹⁰.

Besides, the rector was assisted by the dormitory rector, whose task consisted in *"invigilare sulla condotta, lo studio e l'indole dei collegiali"*¹¹.

This hierarchical system, in its specific subdivisions, set out that administrative as well as teaching and non-teaching staff was to be totally subject to the rector and to the protector of the university (see historical scheme B)¹².

The Maltese rector's counterpart within the Rome university organization had widely-differing tasks. In fact, the rector's competence extended to the judgement over whatever might occur, even between strangers, within the walls of *La Sapienza* *"(...) per tutti li beni e rendite dell'Universita in*

*qualunque luogo posti (...) per li lettori, scolari, inservienti e dipendenti in qualunque modo"*¹³.

The rector's jurisdictional function for civil and criminal cases also applied to the more peculiarly cultural and scientific ones. The formula *"potent imprimi"*, for instance, was absolutely necessary for printing any legal document from the council of consistorial lawyers¹⁴.

In this respect, it is worth reminding that in the university *La Sapienza*, the appointment of the rector by professors and students was an important first step in the process to achieve a self-governing status and independence from Church authorities. This independence had not been achieved yet in the Maltese institution because of the deep-rooted and strictly hierarchical organization of the Order of the Knights, within which competencies and responsibilities were highly defined.

(B) COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITY OF MALTA¹⁵

<u>ROLE</u>	<u>RESPONSIBILITIES</u>
VICE CHANCELLOR OF THE ORDER OF MALTA	- for civil and jurisdictional; - for the conferring of doctorates;
RECTOR	- for administrative, didactic and disciplinary activities; - for the conferring of degrees of Master of Arts-Bachelor-Doctor instead of the Protector;
VICE RECTOR	- for assisting the Rector in his functions;
SECRETARY	- for bureaucratic procedures (school calendar, list of teachers, disciple, programmes, text-books);
DORMITORY RECTOR	- for assisting the Rector in the organization of dormitory and collegians;
CONCIERGE	- for the care of entry-keys of the University;
SERVANT	- for the domestic organization of the College; - for the functions carried on by the cook, under-cook and dormitory servant;
CHAPLAIN	- for the celebration of Mass and the teaching of catechism;

SACRISTAN - for upkeep of the church, in which task he was supported by two clerics.

(C) COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND UNIVERSITY OF MALTA

(teaching and temporary staff)

PROTECTOR - it is composed by Protector-Rector
RECTOR and 3 Censors elected within the
HEADMASTER faculties of Theology-Law-Medicine;

THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE - Composed of Doctors, Readers and teachers who are in possession of the professional diploma;
- it has the faculty of judgement and vote to confer academic degrees;

COLLEGE OF LAW - it is composed of Doctor and Readers of the same faculty in possession of the professional diploma;
- it has the faculty of judgement and vote to confer academic degrees;

MEDICAL COLLEGE - *idem*.

TEACHER - he took an oath in front of the Inquisitor to teach the Church doctrine, as well as an oath of obedience to the Protector;
- he could practise the profession of teaching if he possessed the professional diploma;
- he enjoyed a fixed fee;

READERS - they supported the official teachers;

SCHOOL TEACHERS - they taught in the "scuole inferiori" of Valletta;

CHIEF LIBRARIAN - he was responsible for the maintenance and the keeping up to date of books and the editing of new index and catalogues;

UNIVERSITY PORTER - he had a subsidiary function.

SCUOLA INFIMA - the course lasted one year;

GRAMMAR SCHOOL - the course lasted two years;

SCHOOL OF RHETORIC - the course lasted two years;

MASTER OF ARTS - it was the course necessary to obtain the title of Master of Arts;
- it was the preparatory course common to the faculties of Theology, Law and Medicine;

BACHELOR - the course lasted two years in one of the three faculties chosen by the student;

LICENZA - the course lasted two years in one of the three faculties chosen by the student;

DOCTORATE - the degree could be obtained at the end of the fifth academic year.

The different education levels consisted in: "scuola infima" (primary school), corresponding to the first acquisition of instrumental knowledge (reading, writing, calculating together with general computing notions). The teaching methodology was characterized by the elementary use of the imitation technique, applied by providing examples and repeating by heart the previously-explained rules.

The second level was the grammar school (similar to secondary or postprimary school) subdivided in two years, where fundamental notions of human knowledge were outlined through a gradual emergence of the subject matters such as Latin language, Italian language, Christian doctrine, history and geography. This methodology made use of textbooks written both by Latin and Italian authors, namely *Avvertimenti grammaticali di Lingua Italiana*, by Buonmattei, *Metodo d'Imparare la Lingua Latina Volgamente*, by Parretti and *Lettere Italiane* by Bembo¹⁶.

Parretti's textbook used the method of questions, provided universal grammar rules as well as vulgar interpretation of the Latin language. The author himself explains: "Giacche si vede in esperienza che i Figliuoli in tanto apprendono qualche Piccetto (...) non perche si ricordino delle parole latine (...) bensì delle volgari, che uditono reolicatamente dalla viva voce del Maestro"¹⁷.

The educational pathway of the Maltese school system was evidently affected by the Italian methods of teaching.

The Educational Process

In addition, the educational process of the Maltese university system was carried out through a grading of levels which varied according to the student's development skills.

The third level was the school of rhetoric (similar to upper secondary school) and completed the learning of humanities: Latin literature, rhetoric, Italian literature, Greek and Roman history. The knowledge acquired was appropriate to qualify the student for future University admission.

The educational pathway culminated in a degree in one of the three faculties of theology, medicine and law, which was reached through a grading of introductory levels: Master of Arts-Bachelor-Licenza.

The Doctorate, was obtained at the end of the fifth year of attendance and study in one of the mentioned faculties and required passing two oral exams, that is:

a) oral discussion of the candidates concerning the defence of two theological, legal or philosophical theses:

b) evaluation of acquired knowledge concerning the explanation of theological, legal or philosophical themes, previously presented by the candidate within the College of University (see historical scheme D).

(D) FACULTY of THEOLOGY

UNIVERSITY OF ROME*	UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SUBJECTS:	SUBJECTS:
- Theology;	- Moral theology (by order of Benedetto XIV);
- Holy Scripture;	- Holy Scripture;
- Disputes and Dogmatics;	- Dogmatic theology;
- Ecclesiastic history;	- History of the Church and of Jerusalem;
	- Canon law

FACULTY of LAW

UNIVERSITY OF ROME	UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SUBJECTS:	SUBJECTS:
- Canonical institution;	Civil law (including Civil institution and Jerusalem-statute);
- Civil institution;	- Canonical law (including the "Decreto di Graziano" and the Council of Trent);
- "Decreto di Graziano";	- Natural law;

- Pandette;
- Civil or Canonical or Criminal law

FACULTY of MEDICINE

UNIVERSITY OF ROME	UNIVERSITY OF MALTA
SUBJECTS:	SUBJECTS:
- Theoretical medicine;	- Theoretical medicine;
- Practical medicine;	- Practical medicine;
- Surgery and Anatomy;	- Surgery and Anatomy;
- Botany;	- Botany;
- Chemistry;	- Chemistry;
- Treatise on theoretical medicine;	
- Treatise on practical medicine.	

UNIVERSITY OF ROME**	UNIVERSITY OF MALTA**
SUBJECTS:	SUBJECTS:
- Course in humanistic studies;	
- Course in Greek;	- Course in Greek;
- Course in Arabic;	
- Course in Syrian language;	
- Course in Hebrew;	- Course in Hebrew;

* University curriculum in force under Pope Benedetto XIV;

** Courses subsidiary to the study of Holy Subjects;

NB "Laurea ad honorem" introduced in 1754; "Laurea premio" introduced in 1788/89 for the University of Rome only.

Didactic and Methodological Criteria

The teaching method was modelled on the *praelectio*, that is a reading with commentary on and explanation of texts. The planning of the subjects to teach consisted in a mere selection of contents and cultural expressions, so as to ensure continuity with traditional culture. Lessons were of two kinds: "chair lessons" and "domestic lessons". The former, according to the usual practice, were

held in the University building and consisted in direct teaching, as the teacher acted personally in relation to the students. This methodology, in particular, made use of practical demonstration in the teaching of sciences and oral explanations. The loud reading of a text in the old form of *lectio*, and the explanatory lesson were also parts of oral teaching.

Domestic lessons, on the contrary, were held in the teacher's private home. The teaching methods used in the universities of Rome and Malta, were therefore quite similar. The university calendar, daily timetables including recreation time, textbooks and marks were carefully fixed. Students were not allowed any contact with the external world. Even the sending and reception of letters was controlled by the rector.

On the whole, the universities of Rome and Malta were structured on a traditional order, both from an organizational and a teaching point of view. Learning methodologies were accepted only at an instrumental level, in so far as they provided the underpinning for basic language rules and elementary operations in mathematical sciences. As for the subsequent levels of education, the learning system consisted mainly in forms of indoctrination, stressing merely superficial factual knowledge concerning philosophy, ethics and law which effectively hampered the positive development of the student's personality.¹⁸

Universities still clinging to medieval concepts could not, therefore, benefit from academic reforms sweeping across Europe and Italy at the end of the eighteenth century¹⁹. Sapienza University was a case in point since its general approach to learning was too old-fashioned to integrate the innovatory currents²⁰. The traditions regulating educational processes at the University of Malta, on the other hand were an obstacle to the very perception of the need of reform.

Abbreviations Used

ADM: Archives of Malta

ASR: Historical Archive of Rome

Bibliographical Notes

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- 5) See ADM 575 f. 495ss.; A. Mifsud, "Appunti sugli archivi di Malta" in *Archivium Melitense*, vol. II, n. 13-16; 1912-1913, pp. ss.; M.R. di Simone, *La "Sapienza" romana nel settecento*, Rome 1980, pp. 30 ss.;
- 6) Bonifacio VIII was the founder of the *Stadium Urbis* in 1303 cfr. E. Morpurgo, *Roma e La Sapienza*, Rome 1881, pp. 6 ss.; V. Borg, "Developments in education outside the jesuit 'collegium melitense'" in *Melita Historica*, vol. VI, n. 3, 1974, pp. 216 ss.;
- 7) Di Simone, *La Sapienza*, op. cit., p. 17;
- 8) See ADM 575 f. 486 t.;
- 9) Ibidem f. 487;
- 10) Ibidem;
- 11) See Laurenza, *Il primo rettore e i primi statuti dell'Universita di Malta*, Malta 1934, pp. 13 ss.;
- 12) See ADM 575 f. 486 t. for example, the interesting section on regulations;
- 13) See ASR, University of Rome p. 81, ff. 121-122;
- 14) Di Simone, *La Sapienza*, op. cit., p. 41; F.M. Renazzi, *Storia dell'Universita di Roma*, Rome MDCCCIII, p. 59;
- 15) See ADM 575 f. 459 ss.; Constitution for the new studies of the University and for the College of Education of Malta;
- 16) See ADM 575 f. 484;
- 17) F. Porretti, *Grammatica della lingua latina*, Venice, 1804, pp. 4 ss. (the first edition was published in 1727);
- 18) R. Titone, *Psicodidattica*, Brescia 1977, p. 35;
- 19) B. Peroni, "La politica scolastica dei principiformatori in Italia" in *Nuova Rivista Storica* A XII, Fasc. III pp. 267-269, for this subject of university reform cfr. Peroni, "La riforma dell'Universita di Pavia nel Settecento" in *Contributi alla Storia dell'Universita di Pavia*, Pavia 1925 (the plan of reform was published on the 31 of October 1771). Schipa, "Il secolo decimottavo" nel vol. *Storia dell'Universita di Napoli*, Napoli, 1924, (the reform took place in 1777);
- 20) Di Simone, *La Sapienza*, op. cit., p. 328;