

Educational reforms in

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In 1800, when Malta became a British protectorate, the Malta University of Literature was identified by the newly established colonists as an effective means to socialise Malta's up-and-coming intelligentsia into feeling loyal to the new state.

Although Malta had inherited the *Collegio*, a limited and predominantly ecclesiastic educational institution from the Order of the Hospitaller Knights, the British acknowledged the need to build a new educational system by expanding the existing one – which had been halted by the French upon their arrival.

During the first half of the 19th century, Europe embarked on educational expansion but the pattern of change was profoundly affected by the nature of the respective countries' political regimes, particularly if they were colonies.

The British in Malta sought to manoeuvre educational institutions not only to cater to a limited number of upper-class students who favoured academia but also to provide the skilled manpower required for national development.

In Malta, education was instrumental in facilitating the formation of a professional and dedicated environment for those seeking training in skills needed for industrial trades, requiring technical and

mechanical proficiency, which the British revived especially in the Grand Harbour region.

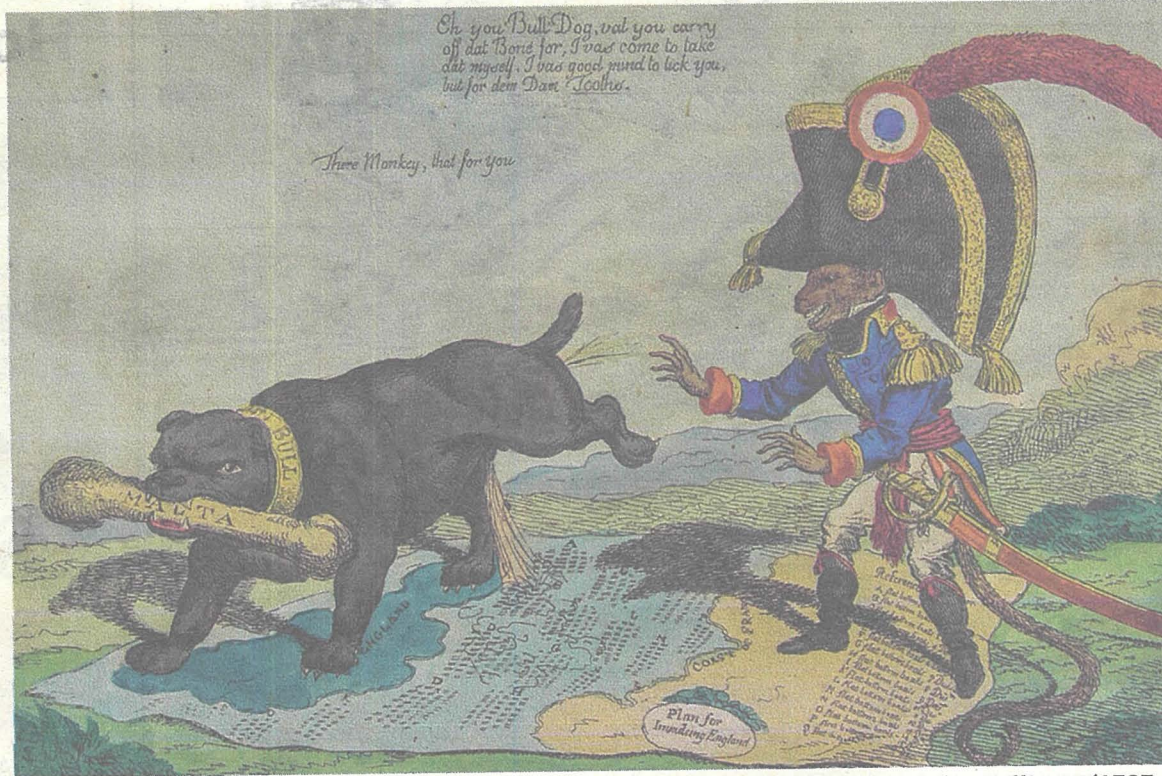
This didactic vision was only possible with the implementation of a restructured educational system. In 1836, a report formulated by a royal commission of enquiry described the operations of the Malta university as follows:

"The University of Valletta was placed on its present footing in 1834, according to a plan sent by Sir Frederick Ponsonby (1783-1837), in a dispatch of October 23, 1833, and approved by Lord Stanley (the Secretary of State for the Colonies) in a despatch of November 20 following.

"The teachers in the university consist of professors in the four faculties of Theology, Law, Medicine and Philosophy or Arts. The government of it resides in a rector, who, in certain cases, is assisted by a council.

"Efforts to build new public schools in key localities across Malta and Gozo became a priority"

"The complete academical course lasts six years. The three first years are given to instruction in philosophy; the three last to instruction in theology, law or medicine. Students are admitted once only in every three years; that is to say, they are only admitted in the year in



The Bone of Contention or The English Bull Dog and the Corsican Monkey by Charles Williams (1797-1830) published by S. W. Fores (London) on June 14, 1803. The image also refers to Britain's refusal to surrender Malta – Britain had agreed to do so under the terms of the Treaty of Amiens concluded in 1802, but the failure of the French to satisfy their obligations under the treaty made the British reluctant to fulfil theirs. The disagreements between the two sides were concentrated upon Malta, which became a significant *causis belli* and led to the resumption of war on May 18, 1803.

which the triennial course of philosophy begins."

Despite the 1834 efforts to improve its operations, the Malta University was still very much limited to the chosen few. The commissioners of enquiry recommended expanding its educational reach, especially by targeting younger age groups through setting up schools in various towns across the islands. With this vision in mind, the University reforms advocated by the commissioners were soon implemented. On

August 20, 1838, Lieutenant-General Sir Thomas Evans (1776-1863) Acting Governor of Malta, published the "orders of Her Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Colonial Department to proceed to the revision of the existing establishments for public instruction, on the principles laid down in a report of Her Majesty's Commissioners of Enquiry, as far as may be practicable and consistent with a due regard for other demands on the revenues of the local government". In the minute, he gave "an outline of the reorganisation of the University and Lyceum, which will come into operation" in January 1839.

The 1838 *Statuto Fondamentale della Pubblica Istruzione* abolished the 1834 University Council and proposed a new educational framework that branched into the following establishments: University of Literature, Lyceum, Bibliotheca, Botanical Gardens, Anatomical Theatre and Primary Schools. The principal administration of the University and Lyceum was vested in the rector and, at University level, the four faculties of Philosophy or Arts, Theology, Law and Medicine were retained. The Faculty of Philosophy or Arts engaged professors in Mathematics and Physics; Logic; Political Economy and Statistics; and Latin and Italian Literature,

Composition and Elocution. Both the faculties of Theology and Law were allotted two professors respectively, and the Faculty of Medicine branched in the study of Anatomy and Surgery, Medicine; Midwifery; Chemistry and Botany.

The Lyceum unified the 'lowe schools' – of which there were three up to that time – the *Terz Classe* (which offered primary instruction), the Grammar Class and the Humanities School into one general public school. The Lyceum was entitled to 1 teachers in the respective field of Latin (a teacher and an assistant teacher); Italian; English; French; Arabic; Ancient and Modern Greek; Arithmeti; Geometry and Algebra, with Land Surveying; Navigation; Writing; Drawing and General History and Geography.

Advancements in education Malta fell in line with the introduction of mass education western Europe in the 19th century, which later evolved to compulsory general education. Malta, education was eventual declared compulsory till the age of 14, on February 1, 1946.

Despite opposition, for the first time in the history of education in Malta, *prima* schools were centralised by the governing body and listed in the new educational plan. Since 1833, under the Ponsonby government, the Catholic

Malta in the late 1830s



Major-General Sir Frederick Cavendish Ponsonby (1783-1837) (left) and Edward Smith-Stanley, 14th Earl of Derby (1799-1869) (right). The University of Valletta was reorganised in 1834 according to a plan sent by Sir Frederick in 1833 and approved by Lord Stanley, Secretary of State for the Colonies.



Lieutenant-General Sir Henry Bouverie, Governor of Malta from 1836 to 1843. The 1839 reorganisation of the University and Lyceum came into operation in January 1839 under his governorship.

Church in Malta had been determinedly against secularism in education. The Church encouraged people not to accept elementary education or risk being either excommunicated or suffer other religious consequences. Before the reform, education centred around religious teaching to the exclusion of other important subjects, which left the country largely illiterate except for the privileged few.

In 1838, elementary schooling was changed to the British model. Places at schools were lacking and efforts to build and establish new public schools in key localities across Malta and Gozo became a priority. In Malta, education was subsidised and made free of charge. The British provided most of the funding that kept schools running depending on the quality of education in general, not on the students' knowledge.

In September 1839, at the end of the first academic year since the national educational reorganisation, Canon Emmanuel Rosignaud, rector of the Malta University and Lyceum (rector from 1834-1841) filed the rector's annual report for 1839. The report comprised six sections mirroring the new educational arrangement. A feel-good factor flows through the lines penned by Rosignaud. Nevertheless, the rector did not shy away from

criticising his work and suggesting further improvements for each respective section, aimed towards ensuring a smooth-running academic institution.

During that year, a total of 98 students attended the University (theology: nine; law: 28; medicine: 28; and philosophy and arts: 33) of which 24 (theology: five; law: 12; and medicine: seven) sat for their final exams. In his remarks, Rosignaud suggested that the study of Latin, Italian and English literature should become compulsory for those aspiring to become teachers of philosophy and arts, and not otherwise.

He noted that political economy was becoming very popular among students, and as such, attendance should be open to people who wish to educate themselves in this branch of science, thus being able to attend a certain number of lessons, with the professor's permission.

Furthermore, Rosignaud proposed adjustments and additions to the available university facilities, such as a *Gabinetto Fisico* (Physics Laboratory) and a Museum of Natural History.

Finally, he appealed for the following of the University Council's long-standing experience and practices on the choice of 'good' authors whose texts were fit for public

instruction to be used in the various branches of learning.

"In 1839, new public schools offering free elementary education opened their doors"

In 1839, the Liceo was a newcomer to the set-up, and a total of 200 students attended – Latin: 53; Italian: 114; English: 130; French: 50; Arabic: eight; ancient and modern Greek: 14; arithmetic: 102; geometry and algebra, with land surveying: 34; navigation: 15; writing: 79; drawing: 58; and general history and geography: 22.

By the end of the scholastic year, the number of students who sat for their final exams in each respective field were as follows: Latin: 49; Italian: 53; English: 69; French: six; Arabic: six; ancient and modern Greek: 12; arithmetic: 98; geometry and algebra, with land surveying: 10; navigation: four; writing: 66; drawing: 42; and general history and geography: 19.

In his report, Rosignaud reserved special mention to two branches of study – the Draw-

ing and Navigation schools. The rector praised the Drawing School and its operations as a branch of learning that has "una grandissima utilità... manifestando i Maltesi un'ottima disposizione per tutte le arti liberali e meccaniche" (a great utility... considering that the Maltese have an excellent disposition for all liberal and mechanical arts).

So as to instil "buon gusto" (good taste), Rosignaud stressed that the school must offer the Study of the Human Figure, which would set the basis for further artistic disciplines (such as history painting, genre painting, costumes, portraiture) and would provide indispensable knowledge for up-and-coming painters, sculptors, engravers and architects.

On the other hand, he also encouraged the *Studio sull'Ornato* (Freehand drawing) aimed for students interested in contributing to Malta's ever-growing mechanical industry.

Rosignaud also noted that the Navigation School complimented the islanders' disposition to the discipline. He said the people were "in all truth endowed with a natural fearlessness and courage, knowing the art of navigation very well, that they could find it useful in situations not only in Malta but also in other regions". However, Rosignaud questioned the valid-

ity of the Navigation School when permission to exercise the office of captain was still being issued without official certification by the Teacher of Navigation at the Lyceum and other qualified persons engaged by the government, unlike the practice in other disciplines (such as pharmacists, surgeons and notaries).

Rosignaud concluded his report by focusing on primary schools and elementary education in Malta. He said that three public primary schools in Malta and one in Gozo were up and running in 1838.

Nevertheless, he added that in order to educate the people in the basic knowledge of reading and writing, arithmetic and the study of English language, new centres of education in the countryside had to be identified.

In 1839, new public schools offering free elementary education opened their doors. In Mdina, Lija and Żejtun, schools were opened for boys and girls respectively, and in Vittoriosa, Żebbuġ and Żurrieq, schools opened for boys only.

Yet at the time when the report was penned, Rosignaud said that other sites had been identified for the opening of new schools: in Vittoriosa for girls, in Senglea and Naxxar for boys and girls, and Żebbuġ and Żurrieq for girls.



During the 19th century, the entrance to the Liceo was at No.76, Strada Mercanti. The main entrance to the building, which dates to c. 1647, has a baroque façade designed by architect Francesco Buonamici.