

JOURNAL OF THE FACULTY OF ARTS

Royal University of Malta

Volume III

Number 1

1965

Editor: Professor J. Aquilina
Asst. Editor: Mr. D.L. Farley-Hills

All enquiries should be addressed to the Editor:
c/o The Royal University of Malta,
St. Paul's Street,
Valletta,
MALTA.



Subscription: Five shillings per copy

PRINTED AT THE MALTA UNIVERSITY PRESS

EDITORIAL

THIS year marks the four hundredth anniversary of the Great Siege of Malta and we devote this number of the *Journal of the Faculty of Arts* to articles on various aspects of Maltese history to commemorate it. The source materials for the study of Maltese history are exceptionally rich, but for various reasons they have been generally only cursorily studied. As one of our contributors, J.P. McPartlin, has pointed out there has still neither been a thorough sifting and cataloguing of all the material, nor has there been much attempt to synthesise the detailed information that has been collected into a broader view of Malta's past. This is clearly one of the most rewarding tasks awaiting research in the field of humane studies in Malta. The problems involved are complex and seemingly intractable, but the basic problem is to provide an adequate teaching staff in the University to allow sufficient time to be spent on research work. This is not only simply a matter of appointing more teaching staff – this is fortunately being done bit by bit – but appointing the kind of staff that fits into a feasible pattern of research and teaching. In the case of history it is quite clear that research material abounds and the size of the department ought at least partly to depend on the need to develop research in this field. It would be absurd to leave the writing of Maltese history purely in the hands of foreign scholars indefinitely. Apart from anything else a strong department of historical studies here would help to make more articulate that sense of national identity which is a valuable part of the Maltese heritage.

As well as the size of any department the way in which the specializations are distributed is an important and often neglected consideration in assessing the amount of work the university teacher is being asked to do. It is not always fully appreciated that what determines the real teaching load in a university department is not the number of students taught but the spread over any given area of a subject that is expected from each teacher. The staff/student ratio, which is so often used as the

basis for arguments about the amount of work the teachers of the University do, is really largely irrelevant to this question; a lecturer talking about his special subject does very little more work with a class of 50 than he would with a class of 10, for the bulk of the work lies in preparation, that is, in the reading needed to keep up to date in any area of an arts discipline. The reading required to keep abreast of the new work being done in two centuries of English Literature for instance is not just twice that needed to cover half the time. Because it involves leaving the field of one's specialization the load becomes proportionally heavier the further the area of study is extended. When one considers the amount of new material published every year on a small area of English literature it is asking a lot of any teacher to cover more than a single period thoroughly if he is also to do research. With departments of 2 and 3 it is virtually impossible to expect much research at all.

If one adds to these difficulties the fact that a small faculty involves its members in a good deal more administrative work than a larger one (and a full time Dean who is both a teacher and an administrator must be counted as the worse off of all), that a place where research can be carried on is hard to find in the University and the Source material in most literary subjects is inadequate, the true extent of the problem is clearer. The last two points involve primarily the library facilities of the University. It is unfortunately not realistic at the moment to ask that each teacher should have a room of his own, and short of a room each research work away from a library becomes virtually impossible, but a university library ought in any case to be the centre of arts research. The present library is totally unsuited for this purpose; not only is the seating inadequate, practically no seating or desks are provided in the main hall, but for a number of weeks in the year the larger part of the arts library is out of reach because it is used as an examining hall.

The other problem involves adequate research material. It is obvious that the Royal University cannot hope to compete with large continental universities in the provision of books, but without an adequate supply of books an arts faculty cannot function. Books are to the arts what equipment is to the scientist. Yet we find not only that the Science departments get a large allowance for equipment, but that also each department of the Science Faculty gets considerably more to spend on books than the departments of the Faculty of Arts. The result is that even essential texts for undergraduate studies cannot be purchased and allotments for research requirements can scarcely be afforded at all.

Clearly some of these problems arise simply out of the general shortage of adequate funds, but others like the actual conditions of work in our library could be tackled given a proper sense of urgency. There is much

talk of the need for research at the moment and there is much talk of the need to raise our academic standards, and it is true that both are absolutely essential if we are to have a true university education available in Malta. Yet we have got to ask ourselves seriously what these hopes involve in practical terms. One necessity is a considerable increase in the money available for the purchase of books in the Departments of the Arts Faculty, can this be made available? Even more important can the right distribution of teaching staff be made between the departments to ensure that no teacher has to cover too wide a range of his subject to make efficient teaching and research at a university level practicable? It is important to discover the most efficient way of distributing the total teaching load of the teachers available in the Arts Faculty over the area taught, not on a narrow departmental basis but by the collaboration of all the departments of the Faculty. For this planning on a Faculty basis is essential.