THE FIRST PRINTED DESCRIPTION OF MALTA.
LYONS 1536.

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It has always been considered highly desirable that libraries of importance should put on show examples of early and illuminated manuscripts, incunabula, finely printed books and fine bindings. As such exhibits have considerable educational value, libraries have a duty to posterity to preserve and increase their collections. The Royal Malta Library has a fine collection of these treasures, that are the admiration of visitors.

There is, however, a little pamphlet, printed four hundred and thirteen years ago, which unfortunately is not to be seen among these rare books. This pamphlet is also unknown to our bibliophiles as the only copy of this edition existing in Malta, we dare say, is that in the collection of Notary Francesco Catania of Rabat, a keen book-collector of Melitensis. No other copies are known to exist either at the Royal Malta Library or in other local private collections. We are therefore grateful to Notary Catania who, very generously, placed his copy at our disposal for perusal and study. As this edition is extremely rare, its bibliographical description, placed in its proper historical setting, together with some notes on the Author and the Printer, would be, we think, both useful and interesting.

There seems to be no evidence that books on Malta were ever published during the years that run from the advent of printing to the year 1530, when the Island passed into the hands of the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem. It is true that the Island of Malta is mentioned in Ptolemy's

Geography which was printed in Rome in 1490 (1), in Rizo's Portulan (1490), in Bordon's Isola (1528) and Isolario (1534), but only scanty references are made to our Islands in these books (2).

In 1523 diplomatic negotiations had already started for the assignment of Malta to the Order of St. John, and when the Knights were ultimately persuaded to accept the City of Tripoli together with Malta and Gozo, before taking such an important step, it was decided to send some experienced Knights to visit these places. On the 28th June, 1524, eight Knights were elected as Visitors, one from each Tongue, and according to the terms of reference stated in their commission, they were to examine the strategic values of these places, and after making a diligent and accurate survey of all they had seen, they were to submit a written report (notarite el tuto in scriptis) (3), to the Grand Master and the Venerable Council.

This report was duly submitted, but there appears to be no indication as to what became of it afterwards (4). The original is not among the Registers of the Order, nor has its copy been preserved in the Archives. Such a report, compiled by persons belonging to eight different nationalities, would have given us an unbiased and informative picture of these islands as they appeared in the first quarter of the sixteenth century. There are, however, some detailed accounts

(1) This book was printed in Rome by Pietro de la Torre. A copy of this edition exists in the Royal Malta Library and forms part of the collection of Incunabula. It is a very rare and beautiful Folio Edition with 27 copper plates, and very appropriately is held as one of the most treasured possessions among the printed books of the Library.

(2) See C.L. Dessolavv, Visitors to Malta from the 15th to the 18th Century, in The Sundial, Vol. 3, Nos. 4-6, Malta, 1940, pp. 97-98. Another Portulan compiled in 1449 and published in 1766 is mentioned in Archivio Storico di Malta, Anno VII, p. 339.

(3) Royal Malta Library, Liber Bullarium, MS. 411, f. 333 v.

from this report in the history of the Order written by Iacomo Bosio (5).

As no other publications appeared at that time dedicated exclusively to these Islands, we may safely assert that the booklet describing Malta written by the Abbé Jean Quentin in 1533, and published in Lyons in 1536, is the first printed pamphlet dealing entirely with the Maltese Islands. It is also worth noting that the map contained in this little book is also one of the earliest printed maps of Malta.

The year 1530 was a turning point in the history of Malta. In that year the Knights took formal possession of these Islands and a new page was thereby opened in our History. The Knights brought with them security and wealth, and on account of their continental connections the name of Malta accompanied their Envoyos and their despatches, and was brought to every Court and Chancery of Europe. After wandering through many towns in Italy, Sicily and other parts of Europe, the Knights finally settled in Malta and in November, 1530, Grand Master de Villiers de l'Isle Adam made his solemn entry into the old town of Notabile.

With the Knights who came to Malta at that time there was a young and very learned Chaplain of the Langue of France, named Abbé Jean Quentin, or, as he styled himself after the prevailing fashion of those days, Johannes Quintinus Haeduus. After his family name he added the appellation of “Haeduus” after the classical name of the tribe who settled in that region of France from which he hailed (6). He was in the service of the Order both as one of the Conventual Chaplains and also as an Uditore of the Grand Master.

When the ceremony of the Grand Master’s entry into Notabile was over, de l’Isle Adam was delighted to see him self surrounded by the Islanders who came from every corner of Malta to greet and pay homage to their new Lord. He was particularly pleased to converse with the nobility and the leading men of the town, and among those who were presented to him there were many who were well versed in letters and in the antiquities of their Island home (7). This conversation gave an opportunity to Quintinus to obtain a first-hand knowledge of the local history and traditions.

Quintinus wrote his description of Malta in Latin in the form of a letter of about 4,000 words which he addressed to an imaginary Sophus. In 1536 he was in France and published this work in Lyons.

The pamphlet is printed in Quarto and its title-page, which is also the front page, bears the following words:—

**INSULAE MEA:** LITAE DESCRIPTIO/ ex Commentariorum nostrorum quotidianarum narrationibis / F. Ioan. Quintini Heudii ad Sophum/ printer’s device and motto / Lugduni apud. Seb. Gryphium/ 1536. (See reproduction opposite p. 55).

There is a variety in the size of the types used in the title page and the arrangement, though slightly marred by the splitting of some words, shows on the whole a sound taste and a refined sense of decoration.

From the title page we are given a clear indication of the contents of the book, which is followed by the name of the author. Then comes the printer’s device which consists of a rampant griffin on a rectangular block and the whole, supported by a rod, rests on a winged sphere. The device is surrounded by ornamental and floral designs and surmounted by two birds. On the sides of the device is the printer’s motto: *virtute duce comite fortuna.*

Reading down the title-page we come to the imprint and the colophon, which are found in the same form, as are often seen in sixteenth-century books. We are given first the place of printing, Lugduni (Lyons), followed by the


(6) Haeduus a powerful people of Gallia Celtica. Their chief town was Bibracte, the modern Autun (Augustodunum). Divitiae Haeduus, the friend of Caesar, was born there.

name of the printer. Lastly comes the date bold enough and in arabic figures.

In bibliographical descriptions it is usual to include the *incipit* and the *explicit* of the text under examination. The text of this description opens with the words: Melitam demum superato Pachymo perpenimis ad Nonas Aprilis, quum vos ante Septembris Idibus Massilia solvissemus; and closes with: Vale Sophe charissime, peregrinantis, id est, multa post experientia, ea quae tu ante praecipiebas cognoscentis amici tuo memor. The explicit is followed by the words: Melitae XX die Januarii, qui mihi sacer & natalis est. M.D. XXXIII. Quintinus ex animo tuus. These are interesting data for us, as we are given the assurance that the text was written in Malta on the 20th January, 1533, and we also infer that this day was the birthday of Quintinus.

The book has no binding or casing and we have no evidence that it was ever bound. It is still, therefore, in the original state in which it was first offered for sale and the quires are simply side-stitched. Very probably, however, the book has been preserved in some form of a wrapper as all the leaves, including the outer ones, are in an excellent condition (8).

The pages are not numbered, but use is made of signatures bearing the letters A, B and C, one letter for each gathering (or quire), followed by the numbers 2 and 3 in their numerical sequence on the recto of the leaves, while the first leaf of each gather shows the letter only. All the leaves bear the signature on their recto, with the exception of the title-page and the last leaf of the book. The pamphlet consists of twelve leaves (twenty-four pages), the last leaf being blank, and this one under survey is a perfect copy. It has three gatherings of four leaves each (duerni).

(8) Notary Catania bought this book from a German Antiquary after the First World War. With the exception of the autograph signature of its present owner, no other manuscript notes are seen in the book, we are therefore unable to trace the pedigree of former ownership.
The number of lines to a page is 27 and measures 98 × 146 mm. The character of the type used is a beautiful roman of exquisite elegance. Mention should also be made of two ornate capitals each occupying 26 mm square, the height of five lines. One of these is the initial letter “I” used in the dedication and the other the letter “M” used as the first letter of the text. The former has on one side the figure of a boy with a quiver on his back, aiming an arrow at a stag which lies on the other side; while the latter is surmounted by an allegorical winged figure. Catchwords are also seen at the bottom of each page and by their help the continuation of the text has been ascertained. There is no register (9) at the end of the book. By the position of the wire-marks, clearly visible on the leaves, we have succeeded in determining the format of the book.

On the recto of the second leaf there is a dedicatory epistle addressed to D. Fra Tomaso Bosio, Bishop-designate of Malta, giving in the end the place and date, where and when the letter was written, i.e. Lyons, 16th May, 1536.

What strikes the reader of this little book are certain typographical peculiarities which are not usually seen in the modern printed book. Of these we observe the letter “s” in the form of an “f” used initially and medially; the ligatures of “ct”; the attached diphthongs; some contractions and abbreviations; hyphens with a double line and accents on certain letters; the question mark in the form of a curve; and lastly the frequent presence of the ampersand. No misprints have been observed save that the word “Haedus” which occurs twice in the book, appears once without the diphthong.

On the verso of the second leaf, facing the first page of the text, there is a woodcut map of these Islands. The map represents the Islands of Malta, Gozo and Comino, and

(9) Register or Registrum is the list of the signatures with the size of the quires and usually appeared at the end of the book, just before the colophon. Evidently no register was used in pamphlets.
the neighbouring countries; sea distances being greatly reduced. In the Island of Malta are clearly seen the town surrounded by medieval walls and watch towers, while scattered over the island are various clusters of small houses representing the parishes of that period. Other places included in the map and having their denomination are Fort St. Angelo, a large garden at the Marsa and a small Church at St. Paul's Bay. (See reproduction opposite p. 57).

After the survey of the book we turn our attention to its Author. Our principal sources of the life of Quintinus are contained in a letter written in 1764, which one of the Knights, Mark Anthony de Monts, addressed to Dr. Ignazio Saverio Mifsud, Councillor of the Holy Office. Dr. Mifsud had compiled a book in which he published biographical sketches of eminent Maltese Authors (10), and De Monts desired to see the life of Quintinus included in an appendix to that book. De Monts had pointed out that, although Quintinus was not a Maltese, his many activities in Malta, connected with the first five years of the rule of the Order, entitled him to such an honour.

Quintinus was born on the 20th January, 1500, in Autun, a town of east-central France, in the province of Burgundy, the son of Philiberta Laboraut and Philibert Quentin, Chancellor of that city. As a young man he travelled widely, and in his voyages to the East he visited Palestine and Syria, and was also in Greece and later in the island of Rhodes before its occupation by the Turks.

When he came to Malta, at the age of 30, he was one of the Chaplains of the Langue of France and it is probable that he arrived with the retinue of Grand Master de l'Isle Adam. Among his works in the Island, in his capacity as Uditore, was the compilation of the laws and the "Prammatiche" called "Statuta et Ordinationes" which were enacted for the administration by the Order in their new dominion. They were promulgated on the 3rd September, 1533, and were subsequently approved and confirmed by Grand Master Lascaris (11).

As Uditore of the Grand Master, Quintinus enjoyed emoluments amounting to 200 golden scudi a year, besides full board which was habitually provided for the brethren of the Convent. He continued to receive these emoluments in virtue of a decree issued under the seal of the Order by Grand Master de Ponte on the 4th September, 1535. The decree commended his prudence and fidelity in the execution of his duties and stated further that he was to receive this yearly amount until he should have earned a Commenda or a benefice yielding an income not less than that he was then enjoying (12).

Some months afterwards a dispute arose between Quintinus and other members of the Convent who opposed his demand for admission to the Priory of the Campania. They insisted that his demand should be rejected unless proof of his nobility was duly submitted before his admission. The case was brought before the Venerable Council, presided over by the Lieutenant of the Grand Master, and it was unanimously decided that he should be admitted to that Priory, provided he submitted proof of his nobility within a period of two years, as required by the Statutes of the Order (13).

In 1535, Fra Tomaso Bosio, Vice Chancellor of the Order and Bishop-designate of Malta, to whom the book was dedicated, was away from the Island. He was sent as an Envoy of the Grand Master to greet the Emperor who was in Sicily, and during his absence from the Convent Quintinus was appointed Regent of the Chancery. In that same year passed away Grand Master de Ponte, who had succeeded l'Isle Adam in 1534, and the Knights assembled in Fort St.

(11) Royal Malta Library, Prammatiche Lascaris, MS 148, f. 23-27.
(12) Royal Malta Library, Liber Bulgarum, MS 436, f. 160 v.
(13) Royal Malta Library, Liber Conciliatum, MS 168, f. 22 v.
Angelo for the election of a successor. On the 22nd November, 1535, the assembly elected de Sainte Jaillie who at that time happened to be in France.

An Ambassador in the person of Commander de Treboas was nominated to convey the result of the election to the new Grand Master. Quintinus was selected to accompany de Treboas on his mission and he was also to act as Uditore and Secretary, as befitting the Head of a Sovereign Order.

They reached their destination in France and having accomplished their task, they were making preparations for their return to Malta, when the Grand Master fell suddenly ill and died at Montpellier on the 26th September, 1536.

Quintinus did not return to Malta and the real motive which prompted him to stay in France is not known. D’Omedes, a Spaniard, was elected Grand Master and Quintinus, guessing that the new Uditore would be selected from persons of the same nationality to which the new Head of the Order belonged, decided to remain in France, where he was later appointed Professor of Canon Law in the famous University of Paris.

As may be judged from the output of his works published between 1536 and 1561, nearly all written in Latin, Quintinus was indeed a very prolific writer. Many of his publications were printed in various places after his death. One of his works “Juris Analecta” was published in Nuremberg in 1671, while others were later reprinted in Milan and Oxford; these facts prove the reputation which his works enjoyed in the world of learning. He also translated from Greek into Latin “Syntagma Canonum Graecorum” which remained in manuscript form in the private library of the King of France. In Paris he also published a treatise on the compass under the title: “Tractatus de Ventis, et nauticae Buxula ventorum indice” (14).

Quintinus received from posterity that recognition due to him as an eminent writer and his name is to be found in the list of Medieval Latin Authors compiled by Fabricius, also in the fourth volume of Hurter’s Nomenclator (15); Maltese writers had nothing but praise for him and his name has been associated for ever with our history of that period. His description of these Islands is a milestone in the sources of our history and we find him quoted by Bosio, Abela, Clantar, Bres and others. Abela, our first Maltese historian, not only quotes him but calls him also a famous and learned man (uomo celebre e dotto) (16).

We have still another visible memorial of Quintinus in Malta in the marble slab which he erected in the “Ta’ Giezu” Church in Rabat, as a token of respect for his friend and fellow countryman Grand Master de l’Isle Adam. The closing lines of the epitaph run: “Defuncti memoria Quintinus posuit” (17).

Quintinus died in Paris on the 9th April, 1561, and was buried in the Church of S. Jean de Latran. An epitaph erected over his tomb praises the man for his erudition and for his qualities as a great champion of the faith for which he fought both with his pen and with his word.

Of Sebastian Gryphius, the printer of this pamphlet, we have sufficient data to enable us to appreciate the merits of this scholar-printer and the environment in which this little book made its appearance in the sixteenth century. His family name was Greif, latinized, according to the prevailing fashion, as Gryphius. He was born, probably, in Reutlingen (18), a German city of Württemberg and was the head of a family of printers that had other offshoots in Venice and Padua. As we have already seen, the device adopted by him was the griffin, which was also used by  


(17) The slab is also reproduced in Bulletin No. 6, published by the Institute of Historical Research, Malta. 1937, p. 1.

(18) A. Gallo, Il Libro, Roma, s.a., p. 213.
Antonio degli Antoni of Milan, and by Ludovico de Sabbio of Brescia (19). His motto: *virtute duce comite fortuna* he took from one of the letters of Cicero to Plancus (20).

Gryphius arrived in Lyons about the year 1524, and he is known to have been still there in 1556. At that time the city of Lyons vied with Paris in the production of books.

A striking feature in sixteenth-century printing was the successful work done by scholar-printers in various centres of Europe — Aldus Manutius in Venice, Johann Froben in Basel, Henri Estienne in Paris and Christophe Plantin in Antwerp (21). These printers enamoured of humanism, laboured with the sole aim of spreading the works of ancient authors, helping the diffusion of learning by rendering popular the printed book. Aldus was the most successful of them all, his Greek and Latin classics, bearing the familiar Aldine anchor, were to be found everywhere.

The work of Aldus was soon recognized by all scholars and his editions were not only admired and desired, but were also copied in their format and type design. In the early part of the sixteenth century, before Gryphius arrived in Lyons, the town had acquired notoriety by its piracy of Aldine and other desirable editions of the classics (22). It was the work of Sebastian Gryphius that gave the city of Lyons a more worthy reputation in the annals of printing.

His claim for our admiration of his work is his successful diffusion of the roman and italic types and his numerous publications of Latin classics in a small format. Book production in France in the sixteenth century emerged under the influence of two different currents. On one side there was the influence of Italian printers, preponderant at that time; on the other side that of German printers who came chiefly from the Rhineland. Both effects are highly dis-

(20) Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiores*, X, 3. Lucius Munatius Plancus made the first Roman settlement in that region in 43 B.C.
(21) *Encyclopaedia Italiana Treccani*, Milano, 1929, article: *Tipografia*.

The first printed description of Malta was followed by a second one which appeared in Paris, *ex officina Christiani Wechelii* in 1560. Its third edition was printed in Frankfurt in 1600, as the last pamphlet of the collection which appeared under the title: *Italae Illustratae seu rerum Urbiumque Scriptores Varii*. A fourth edition was published in Leyden in 1725, in the fifteenth volume of the collection edited by J.G. Graevius and P. Burmannus, under the title "Thesaurus Antiquitatum et Historiarum Sicilae" (24). Here the description of Quintinus is followed by *De Bello Melitensi* by Caelius Secundus Curio, and the *Descrittione di Malta* by Gian Francesco Abela in a Latin translation made by Jo. Antonius Seinerus.

(23) A. Lejard, *The Art of the French Book*, London, s.a., p. 43.
(24) A copy of this edition is available at the Royal Malta Library. There is also a MS copy in the Collection known as *Stromulum Melitensis*, compiled by Dr. I.S. Mifsud, mentioned above. The late Librarian Dr. Cesare Vassallo in his Catalogue of MSS, Malta, 1886, p. 22, mentions another edition and states: "La copia della traduzione Latina, pubblicata per Vangris di Venezia nel 1565, fa non ha guari subita alla Pubblica Biblioteca."