FELICISSIMO ANTONIO DE PIRO (1699-1738)
A FRANCOPHILE MALTESE NOBLEMAN

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The French language and eighteenth-century Malta
The study of French influence in Malta, especially as regards the local population, has long been underestimated. The history of the French language in Malta has also been neglected. In the time of the Knights of St John, Italian was the dominant language in Maltese towns as it enjoyed a triple status. Firstly, it was the mother language of certain residents: Italian members of the Order, Italian settlers and some of the Maltese inhabitants. Secondly, it was the language of Maltese polite society. By the 18th century, it was increasingly being used instead of Latin for administrative purposes. Finally, the use of Italian was also widespread as it had been adopted by members of the Order of different nationalities as a language of communication or 'utilitarian language' which enabled them to communicate by means of a common language. When the French traveller Aubry de La Mottraye visited Malta in 1708, he was struck by this practical use of Italian and described it as follows:

At the time, everybody spoke Italian, even the Knights who had a different mother language [...] All the foreign residents of Malta, of whom the Knights are the majority, speak Italian ...

In spite of the importance of Italian, the linguistic situation in Maltese towns was characterized by multilingualism. Various other languages (French, Spanish, German etc.) could be heard being spoken in the streets of Valletta and the Three Cities. It should be noted that this situation was only prevalent in the Harbour area and that the Maltese countryside was largely monolingual.

Although French members of the Order were always very numerous, they alone did not make up the entire French community of Malta, la nation française

in French. Nicola Bologna was at the time in Paris for health reasons and had even followed Louis XV’s court on its annual autumn retreat to Fontainebleau.  

Giovanni Pio, 1st Baron of Budach and 1st Marquis de Piro, and France

French influence among the Maltese nobility was not limited to the second half of the 18th century. It also occurred during the first half. An excellent example of a Francophile Maltese nobleman during this period is Barocci. Felicissimo Antonio de Piro (1699-1738), the son of Giovanni Pio, 1st Baron (and later 1st Marquis) de Piro (1673-1752). In his time, Gio. Pio de Piro must have been one of the most successful and influential men in Malta. During his long and distinguished career, he served as senior Jurat and Secretay in Malta and Procureur dei Grati (also known as the Ambassador of Sicily) and Regio Secretay in Sicily. The Marquis de Piro had obtained a doctorate in Civil and Canon Law (J.U.D.) from Rome. He organised his sons’ education through his numerous contacts abroad. Two of them were educated in Italy: Angelo de Piro took Holy Orders and studied at the Seminario Giorgiano of Siena and in Rome. Giulio Adriano de Piro was a student of the Jesuits at the Collegio Romano. Unlike his brothers, however, Felicissimo Antonio de Piro would receive his education in France.

Like so many European noblemen of his time, Gio. Pio de Piro was influenced by France. Besides his numerous journeys to nearby Sicily, it is known that he visited France (vide infra). The Marquis de Piro was also a very successful businessman both locally and abroad. He did business with France and was used to receiving part of his correspondence in French. The private archives of the de Piro family (Archivum de Piro) at Casa Rocca Piccola, the well-known historic house in Valletta, contain bills, receipts and other documents in French addressed to Monsieur le Baron de Pire à Malte. Like most other European noblemen, including the Knights of St John, Gio. Pio de Piro also had his personal homme d'affaires, Domenico Poerel, a Valletta merchant who saw to his many requirements. Poerel would provide certain articles from his shops and would import clothes, accessories and other items from France. He would also undertake journeys to France (e.g. Marseilles, Lyons and the commercial fair at Beaucaire). On the 17th December 1725, for example, on his return to Malta from France,
Pourel wrote to Baron de Piro who was in Palermo. He dutifully informed his noble client that the three wigs and other items that he had ordered from France were safely in his shop and that he was ready to act according to his instructions.¹⁰

¹⁰. A. de P., A1 (Gio. Pio de Piro...Business letters from various parts of Italy and other European countries). Cf. also a letter dated 7th April 1725 from Domenico Pourel to Baron de Piro who was in Syracuse at the time; ibid., ms 78, 299.

Before being elevated to the title of Marquis of San Vincente en Castilla by King Philip V of Spain in 1742, Dr Gio. Pio de Piro had already been created Baron of Budach (also spelled “Budak” or “Budaq”) by Grand Master Perellos in 1716.¹¹ On being ennobled, it is very probable that Baron de Piro began to take a keener interest in the predominant court culture as represented by Versailles and

in the way of life of the nobility. In fact, it was precisely in 1716 that he ordered a French book in 2 volumes entitled *La description de Versailles* from Lyons. Also included as part of the same order was a plan of the ‘Machine of Marly’, the civil engineering marvel that had been constructed to pump water from the river Seine to Louis XIV’s palaces of Versailles and Marly.12

As a new member of the Maltese aristocracy, Baron de Piro knew that he would be expected to obey certain social conventions and generally speak and act in a certain way. At the time, France was a country that provided a series of powerful cultural models that were eagerly emulated by the European nobility. He doubtless felt that, especially in his dealings with French members of the Order of St John, it would not go amiss for him to be acquainted with the prevalent literary tastes of the French aristocracy. This would explain why, also as early as 1716, he ordered literary works by Voiture (Oeuvres) and Count Bussy-Rabutin (Lettres, 4 vols) from France. Vincent Voiture (1597-1648) was a member of the Académie française and one of the habitués of the *hôtel de Rambouillet*. His poems and letters were published posthumously. He was especially well-known for his wit, imagination and affectuous language (*préciosité*). The French general Roger de Bussy-Rabutin (1618-1693), *Comte de Bussy*, was also an author and a cousin of Madame de Sévigné. He had been imprisoned in the Bastille and exiled because of his ‘scandalous’ *Histoire amoureuse des Gaultes* (1665), a chronicle of life at Louis XIV’s court. Both authors were popular with the nobility in France. The same consignment of many items imported from France also included two other French books about poetry and warfare. These works were not, of course, the only French books in Baron de Piro’s library. Unfortunately, a complete list of the French books he owned has not survived in the family archives. There is, however, a note in his hand stating that he intended to draw up a list of his *libri francesi*. No such list has yet come to light but their number must have been sufficiently important for this part of his book collection to merit a special mention in his papers.

**Education in France**

After being ennobled, Gio. Pio di Piro set his sights even higher and entertained greater ambitions and aspirations. It is therefore understandable that he would want to give his heir a good education. Like many other young Maltese noblemen, *Baronczino* Felicissimo Antonio de Piro was educated abroad in the company of other boys. It should be noted that studying in France was not a practice that was limited to the nobility. At the time, a number of Maltese students from all walks of life received their education and/or professional training in France. Even as early as the 16th century, it is recorded that members of the Maltese clergy studied Sacred Scripture in Paris.13 In business circles, some students were sent to Lyons or Marseilles for a year or two in order to learn business techniques and also to enable them to master the French language and the langue d’oc dialect. In the medical field, the best students and practitioners were sent to pursue their studies (medicine, surgery and pharmacy) at such centres as Paris, Montpellier, Aix-en-Provence and Bordeaux.14 Only two students from Malta are known to have studied Law at the University of Paris during the 18th century: Ludovico Savoye15 and Pietro Paolo Grech, the son of Uditore Dr Giuseppe Fabrizio Grech. J.U.D. Pietro Grech had previously spent nine years at the famous *Collège Louis-le-Grand* run by the Jesuits in the Rue Saint-Jacques, Paris. During his stay in Paris, Pietro Grech was placed under the personal protection of the *Bailli de Froully*, the Order’s Ambassador to France.16

That Baron de Piro should decide to send his sons to study under the Jesuits was really an ‘obvious choice’ as part of the Jesuits’ educational mission consisted of preparing the future elite of Catholic society: statesmen, high officials, ambassadors etc. *Baroncino* (Felicissimo) Antonio de Piro spent 5 years as a student in France (1715-1720). He was admitted as a boarder to the Jesuits’ *Collège Royal Bourbon d’Aix* on the 28th October 1715. By sending his son to further his studies in the South of France instead of in faraway Paris, Baron de Piro could benefit from the advantages of proximity. The college was closer to home and he was in a better position to monitor his son’s progress. As usual, the patronage network did not fail to come into play.17 The college was also very conveniently situated as the *Commandeur* (later *Bailli*) Sextius de Seguiran d’Auribeau, the Order’s *Receveur et Procureur Général* in the Grand Priory of St.-Gilles, had his residence in Aix-en-Provence. He could therefore easily keep an eye on the teenager from Malta. Thus, Baron de Piro’s influence and social standing were put to good use and made it possible for him to place his son under the protection of an important member


13. Archives of the Cathedral of Malta (ACM), ms 275, 18-21; ms 275B, 18r; ms 275 C, 90-91; Mandat 5, 397r.


17. Archives of the Order of Malta, 1479, 37. Letter dated 18th February 1718 from Grand Master Pereillos to the Order’s Ambassador in Rome.
Lyons on the 1st June 1719. They took lodgings at an inn called l'Ecu and immediately began to look for a suitable educational establishment for the young Maltese nobleman. Barocchio de Piro visited a highly-recommended Academy that was attended by the sons of the nobility and was favourably impressed by what he saw (Accademia dove ... s'apprende la spada, montar a cavallo, il ballo, la cifra... e in detta academia tutti sono figli di Principe, Cavallieri). By this time, he had apparently given up his Parisian ambitions as he was admitted to this prestigious noble academy on the 7th June 1719 and stayed in Lyons till the 6th June 1720. We are well-informed about his movements and final departure as a short note describing his itinerary, written in French in his hand, has survived in the Archivum de Piro. After 5 years as a resident student in France, he was now well-acquainted with the French language. Although it contains a few careless grammatical and spelling mistakes (e.g. je paris instead of je partis). Was this a Freudian slip and did Antonio de Piro still have Paris on his mind even as he was about to leave France? This note is written in reasonably good French. Barocchio de Piro would continue to improve his level of proficiency in the French language even after his return to Malta. He travelled aboard occasionally (e.g. to Sicily) but it is not known whether he ever did visit France again. In Malta, on the 1st October 1720, he succeeded his father as the Grand Master's Agent della Ricetta and he would later be appointed Secreto by Grand Master Despuig (1736-1741).

French correspondence

By the 18th century, members of the Maltese nobility were used to mixing with foreign aristocrats both locally and abroad. Evidence of this is a charming letter which Antonio de Piro received from France shortly after his return to Malta. This letter which is part of the manuscript collection preserved in the Archivum de Piro was brought to light in the late 1990s by Dr Sara Iachini of the University of Udine who was asked to conduct a preliminary investigation of the family archives by the present Marquis de Piro. As she has pointed out, this document is rare find not only because it is a private letter written in French and sent by a woman to a Maltese

18. The collège royal Bourbon at Aix-en-Provence was founded in 1543. It was run by the Jesuits from 1621 till their expulsion in 1762. Boarders were first accepted in 1704 but the boarding system was interrupted during the years 1732-1752. Although archival data about the studentpopulation is very incomplete, it appears that the maximum number of students attending the college in the 18th century was 150-200 students. It is known that there were 64 boarders in 1709 and 99 in 1723. The collège Bourbon was officially suppressed in 1795 (M.-M. Compère, D. Julia, Les collèges français 16e-18e siècles. Répertoire 1 – France du Midi, Paris, 1984 28-33).


21. Ibid., A1 (Gio. Pio de Piro...), letter dated 26th May 1719 sent by Domenico Pouerel from Marseilles to Baron de Piro.

22. A. de P., A1 (Gio. Pio de Piro...), letter dated 5th June 1719 sent by Domenico Pouerel from Lyons to Baron de Piro.

23. Ibid., E1 (Felicissimo Antonio de Piro), Giornale 1720 a Principato... il Primo Ottobre 1720. Transcription: je parvis de Lion il 6 juin j'arrivais a aix le 10 je pars pour marseille le 22 du mene mois j'y restes jusqu'au 10 du mois de Juillet j'ayle a casis ou je partis le 2 aout (sic).

24. Ibid., A1 (Gio. Pio de Piro...), letter dated 7th April 1725 from Domenico Pouerel to Baron de Piro.
nobleman but also because of the interesting ‘gossip’ it contains. The letter is dated 29th April 1721 and was sent by Madame de Lauren de Passy from her estate near Lyons. It is a reply to previous correspondence sent by Antonio de Piro from Malta. The most important message it contains is the news about her daughter’s recent marriage to the Baron de Lennus, one of their ‘neighbours’. Apart from its interesting contents, this letter proves that Antonio de Piro had not only become well-acquainted with members of the French provincial nobility during the years he spent in France but also that he made many friends and kept in touch with them (obviously writing in French) even after he left France.

When one reads this letter, it is immediately clear that Madame de Lauren de Passy had very fond memories of young Antonio de Piro. She distinctly remembers the bouquet maltais (probably made of filigree or ganuill) presented by him as a gift. She also recalls that he had allowed Baronne de Lennus (a possible reference to her newly married daughter) to ride his horse during one of his visits. Besides horse-riding, she mentions other typical noble pursuits such as music and dancing. In fact, as a student, Antonio de Piro had been taught horse-riding and dancing. He seems to have been particularly keen on dancing as a maître de danse (who received a salary of 10,10 livres every three months) is mentioned in many of his school bills. Antonio de Piro’s son, Vincenzo, the future second Marquis (and Baron) de Piro, would also receive this type of aristocratic training in Rome (vide infra).

Madame de Passy’s letter describes what was considered to be an idyllic type of existence in the eyes of the French provincial nobility at the time: the emphasis is on good company and refined distractions. Antonio de Piro had been introduced to this elegant life style and had made a very good impression on his French friends. In such circles, it was considered proper to keep regularly in touch with one’s acquaintances. Antonio de Piro’s knowledge of French enabled him to do so and he did not disappoint his friends. This was why Madame de Passy thanks him for writing and asks him to scold the Marquis de Spada as he had not written to her for a long time. This request clearly shows that Antonio de Piro had become acquainted with other foreign nobles as otherwise he would not have been asked to pass on the message (or rather, the rebuke). Finally, there is an elegant subscription in French at the end of the letter which was bound to please its Maltese recipient who, as we shall see, was well aware of the importance of the formal conventions of French correspondence.

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25. A.de P., A6 (Gio. Piro de Piro. Correspondence from various people and places), letter addressed to Monsieur le Baron de Pire le fils, agent de S.A.S. à Malte” (bundle n° 8). An English translation of this document is included at the end of this article (vide Appendice).

26. Ibid., D1 (Relatives...), Copia d’un conto...; Compte de l’argent fourni au fils de Mr le baron [de] Piro... etc.


28. For more detailed information about the plague in Provence (1720-1722), vide M. Couarduré, F. Rebuffat, C. Carrière, Marseille ville morte: la peste de 1720, Marseilles 1968.

29. A.de P., D1 (Relatives...), Ricevuta di 100 scudi di Antonio Zammit il primo Luglio 1730.
in such places as Rome (e.g. the Quarrantino bankers) and Vienna (Wenzel). Once again, French influence was not absent as he also held investments in Marseilles (12000 scudi invested al Ospedale di Marsiglia). A unique document which has survived is a receipt written in French by Antonio de Piro and dated 20th December 1725. It gives us a very good idea of the level of proficiency he had attained in the French language. By this time, he could write very correctly and fluently in the language. It is also in an excellent, elegant hand. Indeed, when one compares it with the writing of many a French nobleman of the period, it is obvious that its superior on all accounts.

Antonio de Piro seems to have been very fussy, linguistically speaking, and probably worked hard to obtain a high standard of expression in the French language. An accounts journal which dates back to the 1730s gives us a good idea of how he worked at improving his French writing skills. On it one can still see how he practised the correct, formal way of addressing a Count in French: A son Excellence Monsieur le Comte de Saffgotsch Conseiller et Chambellan de sa Majesté Impfle Gran d’Espagne et directeur de l’Oberambt en Silesie, present etc. = Par Venise = Vienne à Breslavie (sic). Such a formula would be used to write the address of the intended recipient of a letter. Once again, as was expected in such circles, it was all very correct, elegant and proper. Baroncino de Piro would also practise writing another important part of any French correspondence: the salutation or introduction. One comes across, again in his hand, an example of the typical elegant phraseology of the time: La lettre que j’ai l’honneur...

There is undoubtedly a connection between the above-mentioned drafts and Antonio de Piro’s French correspondence with J. A. Schaffgotsch, a prominent Silesian nobleman. As his procuratore, Antonio de Piro represented his interests in Malta and Count Schaffgotsch was the godfather of his daughter Eugenia. The drafts of two (possibly three) letters sent by Antonio de Piro to Count Schaffgotsch in 1737 have survived. They are all written in French and are rare examples of French correspondence written by a Maltese nobleman. Antonio de Piro’s Italian correspondents would write to him in Italian but it is not surprising that Count Schaffgotsch and his Francophile Maltese friend should write to one another in French. Francophilia was very strong in Northern European court circles and the rulers of certain states had even gone so far as to build palaces in obvious imitation of Versailles.

When one reads this French correspondence, there is no doubt Count Schaffgotsch was particularly anxious about his son’s future. He was very keen on obtaining for him one of the Order’s commanderies and the post of General of the Galley. It is also evident that he had already enlisted his Maltese correspondent’s help in the matter. Apart from its importance for the study of the history of the French language in Malta, this correspondence also reveals what was required to achieve one’s aims in those days. In his reply (also in French), Baroncino Antonio de Piro explains how difficult it had been for him to carry out the Count’s wishes. He had personally approached the Grand Master on behalf of his friend and he expresses his exasperation as he had gone to great expense in order to promote his cause. He sends the Count a list of the various mancie and regali which had been paid to certain people at all levels in order to obtain their support. Count Schaffgotsch was expected to meet these expenses in order to secure his son’s future. The matter was eventually resolved when Grand Master Pinto granted de gratia the commandery of Gronbing to the Count’s son.

When Antonio de Piro died in 1738, Count Schaffgotsch still owed him the sum of 1000 scudi. On hearing of his friend’s untimely death, he was very anxious that Antonio’s children should receive the money that he owed their late father. In fact, the debt was eventually paid. At first, Count Schaffgotsch was probably unaware that Antonio de Piro was unable to answer his letters and he continued to write to him in French. These letters probably remained unanswered until Baron de Piro took care of his late son’s correspondence. From a linguistic perspective, it is interesting to note that Baron de Piro did not answer this correspondence in French but in Italian. In view of the difficult circumstances (family mourning), this should not be interpreted as adequate proof of Baron de Piro’s ignorance of the French language. In fact, other evidence (e.g. his collection of French books, vide supra) points to the contrary. It is probable that, submerged as he was in his son’s correspondence and still mourning the loss of his heir, he was in no mood for practising his foreign-language writing skills. It is therefore likely that he found it convenient to write in a language with which he was very familiar (i.e. Italian). Besides, many of the letters which he answered were replies to correspondence.

31. Ibid., Conto diversi (unpaginated).
32. Ibid., E (Felicissimo Antonio...), Billet de Mons Le Baron de Piro Le Filis de 600ea 20 : Xbre 1723.
33. Ibid., ms 19, Giornale di Xbre 1734-1735 e di Febraro.
34. Ibid., E (Felicissimo Antonio de Piro...), drafts of letters sent by Antoniode Piro in 1737.
35. Blanning, op. cit., 52
36. A. de P., E (Felicissimo Antonio de Piro...), Libro Maestro, 38v-39v. In fact, 165 scudi were paid as mancie in Palazzo and another 100 scudi were given as regali in Roma e Malta. These expenses and various other administrative fees, honoraria and postage amounted to nearly 1000 scudi.
37. For details about other problems concerning the Order’s commanderies in Silesia that would arise during the years 1742-1743, vide C. Testa, The Life and Times of Grand Master Pinto 1741-1773, Malta 1989, 94-96.
38. A. de P., E (Felicissimo Antonio...), letter dated 15th September 1738 sent to M. Jean Pio le Baron de Piro.
39. Ibid., E (Felicissimo Antonio de Piro...), Brogiardo dell’Eredità del fù Antonio mio figlio che passò all’Altra Vita il 6 Feb’ 1738.
originally sent from Italy (e.g. Rome, Palermo and Scicli). This does not mean that he would have been incapable of answering in French but one must remember that even his French-educated son would prepare rough drafts (a time-consuming activity) before actually writing the final version of his French correspondence.

**French fashion and culture**

Antonio de Piro was undoubtedly influenced by French culture during most of his short life. He loved fine clothes and was a keen follower of French fashion. It is no exaggeration to state that he seems to have been quite an aristocratic dandy. He was, of course, not the only one as members of the upper classes were expected to look the part, especially if they aspired to being respected and considered on equal terms by Malta’s ruling elite (the Knights of St John). Furthermore, dressing extravagantly was a symbol of social standing which made it possible for members of Maltese high society to flaunt their ‘superiority’ in front of the lower classes.\(^{40}\) Judging by the 18\(^{\text{th}}\)-century portraits of certain Maltese noblemen (and noblewomen) that have survived, a number of Maltese nobles could easily be mistaken for French aristocrats.

Antonio de Piro could also be quite a spendthrift who did not hesitate to order clothes and material from France. In Malta, there were a number of French merchants who were too glad to see to all his family’s needs. Thus, on one occasion, Baroncino de Piro even received 52 diamonds on behalf of his father. These had been sent by Monsieur Pourlier from Paris.\(^{41}\) Ordering clothes and other articles from France when one lived in faraway Malta could sometimes be a problem. In 1735, for example, Antonio de Piro instructed the French merchant Jacques Bérand to return some velvet he had ordered on his behalf from Marseilles as the material was of very inferior quality. Bérand was also to ask for a refund of the price paid (161.10 livres) on behalf of his Maltese client.\(^{42}\) Jacques Bérand was a rich and highly-respected French merchant who originally hailed from Riez in Provence and who had settled in Valletta. He enjoyed an excellent reputation and catered especially for the needs of the Knights of St John.\(^{43}\) It is therefore significant that Maltese noble families also availed themselves of his services.

Although Baroncino de Piro predeceased his father, he married three times. In 1724, he married Eleonora di Costanzo. He married Caterina Dorell in 1729 and his third wife, Elena Grech Balzani, in 1736.\(^{44}\) As was to be expected, Francophilia could not fail to manifest itself on such special occasions. In 1724, for example, Baron de Piro gave his son jewellery, clothes and other expensive accessories as wedding presents:

![Receipt](image)

**Fig. 3.** Receipt (written and signed in French), given to Monsieur Gaspard Espanet by Feliciissimo Antonio de Piro, for the sum of 600 scudi. (Archivio de Piro)

un abito intero alla francese d’argento alla moda detto alla Persiana, che costò ... scudi 312\(^{45}\)

un abito con il suo manto di giacchiato color cerasa, guarnito con merletto d’argento cucito in Franci ... scudi 94

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40. F. Ciappara, *op. cit.*, 37.
41. A. de P., El (*Feliciissimo Antonio Antonio* ...), receipt dated 27th August 1731.
42. Ibid., E (*Feliciissimo Antonio de Piro* ...), Conti diversi, (entry dated 29th September 1735).
44. A. de P., *Miscellanea* notebook compiled by Igino, 7\(^{\text{th}}\) Baron de Piro.
45. A similar outfit is mentioned among Antonio de Piro’s personal effects that were found at his residence after his death: Alito vestito di bronzo di Francia con oro disegno alla Persiana (*ibid.*, E, *Feliciissimo Antonio de Piro* ... : Pegni e Crediti).
Due busti broccato di seta guarniti d’argento travagliati in Francia ... scudi 28.6 spada d’argento fatta in Parigi ... scudi 30\(^6\).

French influence continued even after Antonio de Piro's third marriage. Among the items mentioned in bills sent by Domenico Pouerel, one comes across various clothes that were purchased from France and sent to Malta from Lyons via Marseille: e.g. un abito fondo cerasa fiori e festoni d’argento ... 500 livres; per un abito fondo bianco fiori e festoni di seta ... 225 livres.\(^7\) On one occasion, some black lace costing 34 scudi was purchased in order to give an additional touch to a manto di giacchato bought from France: Dati alla Signora Elena per compra d’una piczilla nera per il sopradetto manto di giacchato venuto da Francia ... scudi 34.\(^8\)

After Antonio de Piro died ab intestato on the 6th February 1738, an inventory of his possessions was drawn up.\(^9\) An interesting entry in this official document is a reference to 151 books bound alla francese (French binding). This does not mean that all of the deceased’s books were in French. However, there can be no doubt that he enjoyed reading in this language and had become well-acquainted with French during his days as a student in France. When this list was being compiled, 3 French dictionaries (tre dizionari francesi legati alla francese) were found at his residence. Dictionaries have always been a valuable linguistic tool in foreign-language teaching/learning and these French dictionaries must have served Antonio de Piro very well whenever he corresponded or read in French. The fact that they were not in their place with the other 151 books seems to indicate that they must have been in regular use, possibly even shortly before his death.

**Conclusion**

After Antonio de Piro’s death, the family titles were inherited by his son Vincenzo Adriano who became the 2nd Marquis (and Baron) de Piro (1736-1799). Vincenzo de Piro was Gio. Pio de Piro’s beloved grandson and heir. He was educated in Rome (at the Jesuits’ Collegio Romano) and lived up to his grandfather’s high expectations. When one reads all the correspondence concerning Vincenzo de Piro – the letters he himself wrote and the reports sent by his Jesuit tutors – the young Marchesino de Piro seems to have been a respectful, obedient and diligent student who was highly praised by all those who had the pleasure of meeting him. He is usually remembered for the prominent role he played as a representative of the people and as one of the leaders of the Maltese during the uprising against the French (1798-1800). He died at Mdina when the hostilities were at their height.

Although, unlike his father, Vincenzo de Piro was not educated in France and he was against French rule in Malta, one should not confuse language with social or political issues. Like other Maltese who were against the French, the 2nd Marquis de Piro also had a knowledge of French. In Rome, he had received a typical young nobleman’s education which included tuition in the French language. He

\(^{6}\) Ibid., P5 (Marriage Settlements). Among the various expenses incurred by Antonio de Piro during 1736-37 (amounting to some 2500 scudi) is the manufacture of a sword made of French silver costing 20 scudi. It was made and gilded in Malta for the sum of an additional 20 scudi (Ibid., E1. Felicissimo ... Nota cavata da un conto di spese scritto di mano del fa Antonio ...).

\(^{7}\) Ibid., E (Felicissimo Antonio de Piro ...), Conto del Signe Br. Antonio de Piro, Conto di Pouerel.

\(^{8}\) Ibid., E1 (Felicissimo Antonio ...), Nota di spese straordinarie cavate da un giornale del f Sign.r Buflle Ant. de Piro ... Antonio de Piro’s widow married another Maltese nobleman, Count Giovanni Francesco Preziosi, Secreto to Grand Master Pinto. (Ibid., Y1, Divisions, Donations and Expenses, 10th and 19th centuries).

\(^{9}\) Ibid., E (Felicissimo Antonio ...), Mobili e Abiti usali e per Casa: libri 151 alla francese (item 38).
also seems to have been quite athletic and eventually rose to the rank of Colonel in the Royal Sicilian Regiment. Many school bills sent by the Jesuits during the years 1751-1756 have survived. They reveal that the young Marquis de Piro had a French tutor in Rome and that he studied the language at least during 1755-1756. His French master was paid 1 scudo per month.\(^{50}\) The main French textbook that was used was the Nouvelle méthode curieuse et abrégée pour apprendre à perfection la langue française, the best-seller by Michel Feri de la Salle.\(^{51}\) Twenty editions of this standard French grammar were published in the 18th century. Two of these appeared in 1755, the same year a copy was bought for the young Maltese nobleman in Rome. The Jesuits approved of Feri’s grammar as it was influenced by such Jesuit authors as Buffier and Bouhours.\(^{52}\)

The type of education received by the young Vincenzo de Piro in Rome proves that even those Maltese nobles who were not educated in France (i.e. the majority) could learn French and become well-acquainted with French culture. Count Giovanni Antonio Ciantar (1696-1778), the leading Maltese 18th-century historian,\(^{53}\) received his education at the Collegio Nazareno in Rome and it was only later that he studied the French language.\(^{54}\) There were, of course, other French-speaking nobles in Malta: Marquis Carlo Antonio Barbaro, Baron Gaetano Azopardi (who spent 4 years studying and practising medicine at Montpellier), the Counts Bologna, the Counts Sant, Count Giovanni Francesco Preziosi etc. Other nobles who knew French were of French origin (e.g. the Dorel, Fournier and, very probably, the Formosa de Fremeaux families).\(^{55}\) By the 18th century, Maltese nobles mixed freely with members of the foreign ruling class (including French Knights of the Order of St John). It is also clear that Maltese noble families followed dominant cultural trends and were in many ways (business, fashion, residence, education and language) no different from their other European counterparts.

**APPENDIX**

English translation of a letter written in French and addressed to Monsieur le Baron de Pire le fils, agent de S.A.S. à Malte. (A. de P., A6)

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51. Ibid., Spese fette... 3° Gen. 1755 a tutto Marco d’.
I wish you, Sir, the best possible health and ask you to do me the honour of remembering me and allowing me to remain your very humble and most obedient servant.

De Laurencin de Passy

I would be grateful if you were to convey my best wishes to the Commandeur de La Romagère.

I have just spent three weeks at my daughter's residence where I met the most interesting people.

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Fig. 5. French correspondence received by Felicissimo Antonio de Piro: the de Laurencin de Passy letter, 1721. (Archivium de Piro)