

Accounts Relating to an Early Oxford House of Scholars

By A. B. EMDEN

THERE was deposited recently in the Bodleian Library by the kindness of the Dean of Worcester a manuscript volume from the Cathedral library, MS. Q.81, so that it might be examined by Mlle. M.-Th. d'Alverny, the eminent French medievalist. Mlle. d'Alverny has been contributing an important series of articles describing the surviving manuscripts of the Latin translations of the philosophical works of Avicenna, under the title 'Avicenna Latinus', to *Archives d'Histoire doctrinaire et littéraire du Moyen Age*, and is preparing a fifth article on those manuscripts that are preserved in English libraries. Worcester Cathedral MS. Q.81 is of special interest as it comprises one of the earliest extant copies of Latin translations of the works of Avicenna and other Arab philosophers. In the opinion of Dr. Neil Ker the contents of this volume from fo. 1 to fo. 111 were written about 1230, and it seems likely that the remaining portions, that is, fo. 112 to fo. 150v, were completed not many years later.¹ This manuscript exemplifies the attraction that the Latin translations of the commentaries of Arab philosophers were having for enquiring scholars in the faculty of Arts at Oxford at this period.

Examination of this volume has revealed the presence of some cursory accounts relating to a small household of graduates, seemingly resident in Oxford.² The more important are written in ink on both sides of fo. 111. There are others, written in pencil on fo. 129, probably by the same hand. They have been skilfully deciphered by Dr. Richard Hunt. A full transcription of them is printed at the end of this article.

Although these accounts are very much briefer, they are reminiscent of those that were entered in 1424 on blank pages in a volume of logic lecture notes by Mag. John Arundell, Principal probably of Great Black Hall, subse-

¹ The contents are tabulated in *Aristoteles Latinus*, ed. G. Lacombe, pars. i, pp. 424-5.

² I am indebted to Dr. Richard Hunt for drawing my attention to them.

quently Bishop of Chichester.³ But, notwithstanding their brevity, they have a special importance. It may be claimed for them that not only are they the earliest accounts known of their kind, but that they also reveal the existence of a graduate society, pre-collegiate in form and of earlier date than any college in Oxford.

It may be presumed that these memoranda are in hand-writing of Nicholas Bacun whose name figures in the first item as receiving from Mag. H. de Celesya (Selsey, Sussex) two gold rings. Consequently, Nicholas Bacun may be deemed to have been the owner of this academically notable volume, as it is unlikely that he would have taken the liberty of defacing the pages of a valuable book belonging to someone else. His handwriting warrants the conclusion that he made his entries in it not many years after its completion. Moreover, in his accounts, as will be explained later, he furnishes a clue that supports this assumption.

His entries evidently relate to a 'domus scolarium' consisting of five fellows. It is expressly stated that each of the five fellows (*quilibet v sociorum*) contributed the sum of 2s. 1d. towards the cost of firewood. They are mentioned by name as paying their respective shares of the half-yearly house-rent due on Lady Day. First comes Mag. H. de Celesya, who appears to have been the senior master. The other three Masters are only given their Christian names: Mag. Stephen, Mag. Henry, and Mag. Ralph. Then follows a Bachelor, Dominus Robert de Exon, as the fifth member of this graduate household. In addition, there are two other scholars, Nicholas and Peter Bacun. As these accounts are the jottings of Nicholas, it may be concluded that he was acting in the same capacity as a bursar would have done in a later collegiate foundation.

It is evident from these accounts that this small graduate society was residing in a rented house. Nicholas Bacun records his collection of a contribution of 4s. from each of the five fellows towards the half-year's rent. He notes that Mag. Stephen paid his contribution on the Wednesday before Palm Sunday. If it be assumed that that Wednesday was Lady Day, then the year may be reckoned to have been 1233 or 1244; if it be assumed that Nicholas Bacun collected the fellows' contributions on the day before Lady Day, then the year may be reckoned to have been 1238 or 1249. Either 1244 or 1249 would be a very possible year in which Nicholas Bacun made his rough memorandum of accounts in his volume of Avicenna.

This conclusion receives some support from a probable identification

³ H. E. Salter suggests St. Mildred's Hall in Turl Street: 'An Oxford Hall in 1424', *Essays in History presented to R. Lane Poole* (Oxford, 1927), 421-35, but Mr. Graham Pollard has convinced me that Great Black Hall in New College Lane is preferable.

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of Nicholas. He may well be the same man as Nicholas Bacun, clerk, who was instituted in 1244 or 1245 by Bishop Grosseteste as rector of the moiety of Stoke Rochford, Lincolnshire, on the presentation of Mag. Thomas de Ebbesburne, canon of Salisbury and prebendary of Grantham Australis,⁴ and who, as was becoming customary at that time, had forthwith received licence from his bishop to spend some years of study at Oxford. As he was designated 'clerk' at the date of his institution, he was probably ordained subdeacon very shortly afterwards. On financial grounds there would not be great matter for surprise in his possession of a volume containing selections from the works of Avicenna and other Arab philosophers.

The sums of 4*s.* collected by Nicholas Bacun from each fellow of this household of graduates for the payment of the half year's rent due at Lady Day indicate that the yearly rent of their house or hall amounted to 40*s.* Evidently they resided in premises ample enough for their purpose. A yearly rent of 40*s.* compares favourably with those of the academic houses that figure in the earliest surviving rental of the Oxford property of Oseney Abbey, that of 1260, where, for instance, the yearly rent of Great Lion Hall, in St. Mary's parish, amounts to £2 13*s.* 4*d.*, and that of its neighbour, Little Lion Hall, to 38*s.*⁵ Moreover, Nicholas Bacun in noting that he is 5*s.* 6*d.* in arrears in respect of the cost of their firewood, states that the supply consisted of three tree-trunks lying in the lane outside the house, and eleven smaller trunks lying 'in curia', that is, in the quadrangle. So it appears that theirs was one of those L-shaped halls, like St. Edmund Hall or Bedell Hall, the lay-out of which Dr. W. A. Pantin has recently described.⁶

If the house in which these five graduates resided was designated a hall, it was clearly not a hall in the more restricted sense of the term, not, that is to say, a hall rented by a Master of Arts to accommodate a small company of undergraduates. The reference to the five fellows proves that the senior fellow was in the position of 'primus inter pares' and that if he had a title as head it was 'Master' and not 'Principal'. It may be claimed, therefore, for this 'domus scholarium' that it is the first known example of the type of graduate society which the founders of the earliest colleges were to establish some twenty years later in a permanent form by means of endowment and incorporation. Hitherto an example of this prototype has been lacking. After the foundation of colleges it would seem that non-collegiate graduate halls with Masters of Arts as fellows disappeared, and that only among the lawyers

⁴ *Rotuli Roberti Grosseteste, Episcopi Lincoln.*, ed. F. N. Davis (Cant. and York Soc.), 72.

⁵ *Cartulary of Oseney Abbey*, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxf. Hist. Soc., xcr) iii. 106.

⁶ W. A. Pantin, 'The Halls and Schools of Medieval Oxford: an Attempt at Reconstruction', *Oxford Studies presented to Daniel Callus* (Oxf. Hist. Soc., n.s.xvi), 31-100.

similar societies of fellows, under the name of Inn or Hall, continued in Oxford.

The initial item of Nicholas Bacun's memoranda calls for some elucidation. The two gold rings which he received from Mag. H. de Celesya may be supposed to have been required for use as a caution to be deposited in respect of the rent.⁷ The remaining items are of a kind commonly met with in the accounts of bursars of colleges. William de Wlbed (possibly Woolbeeding, Sussex) was very probably the manciple or cook who had responsibility for the expenditure of stores. Commons are mentioned in connexion with a sum of 6*d.* owing on that account to Nicholas Bacun. There is mention, too, of payments for mats, for use in hall, of coal, of a tripod or trivet for the kitchen, of garlic, of dishes, and of a lattice required for the room of Mag. Henry. The indebtedness of William Russell to Nicholas Bacun in the sum of 8*s.* 5½*d.* hardly admits of solution.

On fo. 111*v* there is a separate account headed 'De Petro'. This, no doubt, relates to Peter Bacun, who was in all probability a younger brother of Nicholas. It is recorded in the previous account that Nicholas was 7*s.* out of pocket on Peter's behalf for cloth which he had obtained through Roger, the parson of Hackney, Middlesex. The items listed in the second account are for the most part unspecified. There is reference to Peter's share of firewood and a mention of 'Domus R. Karry'. It is possible that Peter was several years younger than Nicholas and that R. Karry was a grammar-master at whose establishment he was receiving instruction, as was to happen later with the *parvuli* at Merton. Peter may be identified with Peter Bacon, priest, who was instituted rector of St. Cuthbert's, Bedford, in May 1263, by Bishop Gravesend, on the presentation of Dunstable Priory.⁸

The third set of accounts, headed 'magistri', drawn up in two columns, each in respect of seven weeks of term, is too imprecise for commentary.

The association of Nicholas and Peter Bacun with this small graduate household, and Nicholas's presumed ownership of this copy of treatises of Avicenna and other Arab philosophers invite speculation whether Nicholas and Peter may not have been related to the distinguished contemporary bearing their surname, Fr. Roger Bacon, O. F. M., among whose many interests the works of these philosophers were certainly one.

WORCESTER CATHEDRAL MS.Q.81

fol. 111*v*, col. 1.

Memorandum quod N. Bacun recepit a Magistro H. de Celesya duos anulos aureos de precio.

⁷ See *Registrum Cancellarii*, ed. H. E. Salter (Oxf. Hist. Soc., xciii), i, p. xxvii.

⁸ *Rotuli Ricardi Gravesend, Episcopi Lincoln*, ed. F. N. Davis (Cant. and York Soc.), 191.

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Item idem Magister tenetur N. Bacun in vj den. pro arragiis (sic) commune.
Item ijd. et ob. pro Magistro S.s.

col. 2.

Magister Stephanus tenetur in xiiij. pro instauro.

Memorandum de Busca in arragiis vs. et vjd. scil. que est in vico tres trunci
et in curia xj trunci parvi.

Item preter hoc quilibet v sociorum ij sol. et jd.

Willelmus de Wlbed xiiij de instauro expend (endo).

Magister Stephanus solvit de pensione domus iiij. die Veneris ante dominicam
Palmarum.

Magister Henricus solvit iiij sol.

Magister Radulfus tenetur in solidis.

Dominus Robertus de Exon solvit vj sol. de pensione hospicii et tenetur in
duobus solidis.

Willelmus Russel tenetur Nicolao Bacun in viij sol. et vd. et ob.

Item idem Nicholaus solvit vijs. pro panno qui computati sunt Petro Bacun in
debito Rogeri persone de Hakeney et debent restitui eidem Nicholao illi vij sol.

Nicholaus Bacun solvit pro natis iijd., pro carbon(ibus) ax. jd., pro tripode
iijd., pro alleis iij ob., pro discis jd. Magister Henricus pro craticula iijob. Summa N.
ijs vd. et ob.

fol. 111z.

De Petro

In busca xijs. ob. unus. In trunco xd.

Postea iijs. et vjd. et ob.

In domo R. Karry Item xd. Item viij.

Item de fratre ijs. et vjd.

Summa xiiij sol. et ijd.

De hiis tres trunci ij sol. et ex. in aliis ad opus Nicholai preter istam computacionem.
fol. 129

magistri

in prima septimana vd. ob

in secunda viij.

in tercia viij.

in quarta viij.

in quinta viij et ob.

in sexta ijd.

in sotularibus iijd.

in septima ixd.

Pro Willelmo in prima septimana vd.

in secunda viij.

in tercia viij.

in quarta viij.

in libro xij.

in sotularibus Willelmi ijd et ob.

in cathedra ijd.

in quinta viij. et ob.

in sexta septimana viij et ob.

in septima ijd.

in pargameno jd.