University of Malta

Faculty of Arts

THE BERNINESQUE IMPACT ON REGIONAL LATE BAROQUE SCULPTURE IN MALTA

The Stone-Carving Tradition

Volume I

Christina Cassar Meli

Supervisor: Prof. Keith Sciberras

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in History of Art presented in the Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta

September 2021

THE BERNINESQUE IMPACT ON REGIONAL LATE BAROQUE SCULPTURE IN MALTA

The Stone-Carving Tradition

Volume I

Portrait of Gian Lorenzo Bernini from Filippo Baldinucci, *Vita del cav. Gio. Lorenzo Bernino,* **1682.**

To Bailey

DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, _____ declare that this thesis is my original work, gathered and utilised especially to fulfil the purpose and objectives of this study, and has not been previously submitted to any other university. I also declare that the publications and archival material cited in this work have been personally consulted.

_____

Christina Cassar Meli

x

ABSTRACT

This research analyses the Berninesque impact on the regional visual culture of the eighteenth century in Malta, as manifested in the production of sculpture in the vernacular stone tradition. It explores the channels through which High art was translated to the grassroots level and the result of the popular reaction to the reception of this influence from Rome. In its examination of regional characteristics and stylistic parallelisms with the Eternal City, it analyses the response of the local *scalpellini* families active in Late Baroque Malta to the typologies of Papal Rome. The dynamics of the production of sculpture and the *scalpellino*'s workshop are also examined within the context of the international spread of the Berninesque tradition.

Sculpture produced in Rome during the seventeenth century constituted the primary source for sculptors and *scalpellini* working in the eighteenth century in Malta. The Order of St John, being a most forceful link with Rome for Malta, commissioned sculptural works from Rome in fulfilling its desire to emulate the Eternal City. The artistic environment which the Order of St John created also enabled the presence of foreign artists and architects in Malta, the travel of local artists to Rome, and the availability of printed sources for consultation by local artists. The culmination of these contextual factors swiftly resulted in the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style and the Berninesque tradition highly impacted the local visual culture from the late years of the seventeenth century.

This spread of the Berninesque tradition in Malta belongs to the wider international context of the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style. This research distinguishes and analyses stylistic regional differences and parallelisms between the dynamic production of regional late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sculpture in Malta and the south of Italy, particularly Naples, Lecce, Palermo and the Val di Noto towns. It determines the degree of Berninesque imprint and its interaction with regional characteristics of sculpture which add indigenous traits to the style.

Late Baroque sculpture in Malta was dominated by *scalpellini* families, the protagonists of this research. The flourishing of these tightly-knit and personally-affiliated artistic families was the direct result to the surplus of demand in commissions for newly-built or enlarged churches in eighteenth-century Malta. The Berninesque

influence reached them at the right time in the right place for a sudden and impactful infiltration of the local stone tradition. Through extensive archival research and widespread comparative analyses, this research analyses the sculptural works of Pietro Paolo Troisi, Pietro Paolo Zahra, and the Fabri family of *scalpellini* as anchored within this internationally-relevant milieu of the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to express my greatest gratitude to Prof. Keith Sciberras who guided me in my research every step of the way. His knowledge, authority, and direction on the subject were indispensable for the realisation of this study, and I must thank him for being available any time for all of my questions and concerns. I would also like to thank all of the lecturers and colleagues of the Department of Art and Art History who all helped in some way or other. Thank you also to Nadette Xuereb, who was always there to answer endless administrative queries.

I would also like to thank all my colleagues and friends at the Notarial Archives Foundation who were always there when I needed support. My gratitude goes most of all to Dr Joan Abela, who is not only a friend and inspiration, but also the most brilliant mentor which life has serendipitously provided me with. Thank you also goes to all the staff at the Notarial Archives for their help during long research hours. Acknowledgements are also due to the Office of the Chief Notary to Government, as well as other archives in Malta including the Archiepiscopal Archives at the Curia in Floriana, the Mdina Cathedral Archives, and parish archives, most importantly at Senglea where Archpriest Fr Robin Camilleri has always welcomed me.

Acknowledgements must also be made to the clergy, staff, and volunteers of every church, whether parish or filial, in Malta and abroad, for allowing me to examine the relevant altar reredoses and take photos for my research; unfortunately, there are too many to mention individually but their help was central to the completion of this research. In regard to my research in Rome, I would like to thank Dr Guendalina Serafinelli for taking the time to meet and guide me at the Bibliotheca Hertziana; and in Naples, Giuseppe Brancaccio for his in-depth tour of the *Museo e Archivio Storico dei Pellegrini*, including the church of the Santissima della Trinità.

On a personal note, thank you to my close supportive family, especially my mother, Mary Ann, who is always behind every project I concoct. My deepest thanks must go to my wife, Gabriella, for being there for me twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week without fail. This achievement is yours as much as it is mine.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

VOLUME I

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AAM – Archiepiscopal Archives Malta

ACM – Archivum Cathedrale Melitense

AOM – Archives of the Order of St John

NAV – Notarial Archives Valletta

NAM – National Archives of Malta

NLM – National Library of Malta

SPA – Senglea Parish Archives

VP – Visitationes Pastorales

R – Register

f. – folio

ff. – folios

Ms. – manuscript

r. – recto

v. – verso

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

N.B. This list of figures refers to figures in text. References to figures in each corresponding appendix in Volume II of this dissertation start with the relevant letter of the appendix; e.g. the reference Fig. C.1 within the text refers to the image number 1 in Appendix C.

Introduction

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

LIST OF PLATES

INTRODUCTION

Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

The impact of the Berninesque[1] tradition is manifested in eighteenth-century regional sculpture in Malta, particularly so in stone-carved altar reredoses by Maltese *scalpellini*. The impact of this Berninesque tradition was enabled through a set of conditions that provided links with Rome which led to the manifestation of the Berninesque *concetto*[2] in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture and the entrenchment of the style in the grassroots visual culture of the eighteenth century. Maltese *scalpellini* families, the local recipients of this forceful dissemination via several different channels, expressed this influence in their designs of eighteenth-century regional sculpture.

The work of Maltese eighteenth-century regional *scalpellini* belongs within the wider context of the international milieu,[3] particularly to Italy and the spread of Roman Baroque sculpture south of Rome. As a result, regional stylistic differences and parallelisms are evident in the production of Maltese Late Baroque sculptural work by different *scalpellini* families, such as the Fabri and the Zahra families, and Late Baroque sculpture produced in other regional centres in the south of Italy, particularly Naples, Lecce, Palermo, and the Val di Noto, including Ortigia, Noto, Modica, and Ragusa.[4] The proximity of these regional centres also ensured parallelisms in the mechanics of the production of sculpture, the workings of the *bottega*, and the industry of the art of sculpture; but regional characteristics and different reception of the Berninesque tradition and the Roman Baroque style also guaranteed substantial differences in the final output of the local artists.

The socio-artistic context of the Berninesque impact in Malta has its links with Rome at the forefront. The socio-economic religious and political scenario in Malta is also closely related to its international context of the dissemination of the Berninesque style. At the forefront of the set of conditions which enabled the influence of the Roman Baroque style to infiltrate the visual culture of eighteenth-century Malta was the

---

[1] For a definition of the word 'Berninesque' as anchored in literature, see Chapter I.
[2] On Benini's *concetti* and the implementation of his theoretical visions in the execution of his works, see the extensive research in Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Arts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980.
[3] For more on the Roman Baroque context, see Steven F. Ostrow and Anthony Colantuono (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania University Press, 2014.
[4] A comparative analysis between the Late Baroque sculpture of Malta and centres of production in the south of Italy is made *infra* in Chapter II.

Order of St John.[5] The role of the Order of St John in enabling the occurrence of this influence through its importation of Roman Baroque works of art and its commissioning of works in Malta by foreign artists and architects was indispensable. The desire of the Order to emulate Rome is evident not only in the legacy of the visual culture which it gave Malta but also in its documentary sources:

> '*Il convento generalmente applaudisce l'opera, et ogni uno dice che
> chi vuole spendere i suoi danari con gusto vada in Rome.*'[6]

The Order harboured a great desire to be like Rome, and the most effective way to accomplish that aim was to emulate the visual culture, including the Berninesque tradition, which it used to enhance its propaganda. It is evident from documentary sources that the Order of St John was satisfied with this decision to commission works of sculpture from Rome – Grand Master Carafa expressed their satisfaction with Ferri's *Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John* which in anticipation was opened as soon as it arrived in Malta before it was settled into its proper place. The Grand Master describes it as '*veramente degnissima*':[7]
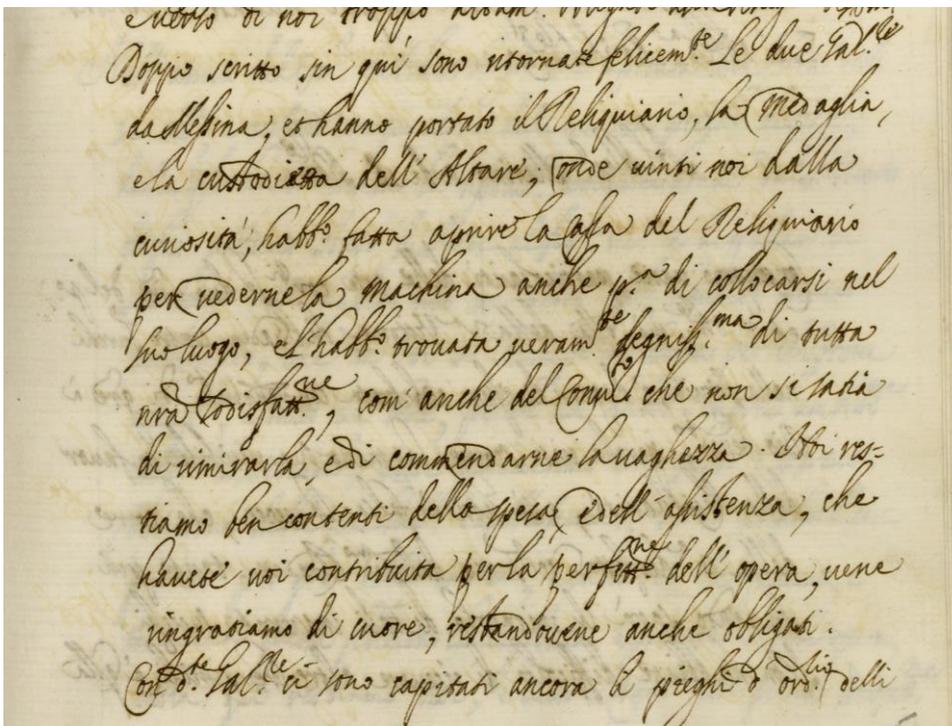
[5] On the Order of St John and its role in bringing the Roman Baroque style to Malta, see Keith Sciberras, *Roman Baroque Sculpture*, Midsea Books, Malta, 2012.
[6] This note, dating to 1689, is from a letter by Fra Giovanni Domenico Manso, secretary to Grand Master Carafa, to the Order's Ambassador in Rome. Sciberras (2012), 1.
[7] AOM, Arch. 1456, f. 155r, published in Sciberras (2012), 394.

Even when there were hurdles and delays, the Order of St John's zeal to acquire art from the Eternal City persisted:

> '*sarà bene sfuggire quei artefici che sono troppo lunghi e che anno stentare l'opere… motive che ha tenuto perplesso Sua Eminenza se doveva ricorrer, o' no' in Roma per detto Reliquiario, ma considerate la qualità dell'opera, e la perfettione che si desidera non si potuto, ne si doveva uscire di Roma.*'[8]

This introduction of the new style, in which the Order of St John was so influential, was important for the *scalpellini* active in eighteenth-century Malta, as it impacted their design concepts and their individual contribution to regional Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. They transformed this influence from High Art to regional sculpture which belong firmly at Malta's grassroots level of Late Baroque sculpture but which, at the same time, was extremely instrumental to bring about an impactful change to Malta's visual culture from the seventeenth to the eighteenth centuries.[9]

Although the Berninesque tradition can be observed in many different regions, the link between Rome and Malta - both stylistically and contextually - was direct. This is the case for the stylistically influential connection between Rome and Malta, which resulted in a strong spread of the Berninesque tradition.[10] This link resulted in stylistic influence and in several general similarities, as well as considerable variances between regional altar reredoses in Malta and Roman High Baroque works by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the *Berniniani*. In the dissemination of this influence, the immense impact of treatises and printed material on Maltese patrons and artists cannot be overemphasised, especially for local *scalpellini* who never left Malta's shores.[11]

There were several remedies for this shortcoming, including contacts with individuals who did manage to experience Bernini's works first-hand, but they also had written sources at their disposal. Bernini's two biographies could have had perhaps

---

[8] This quote should be read within the context of the commissioning of the reliquary for the right hand of St John from Ciro Ferri in Rome. The quote has been published in Sciberras (2012), 2. For more on the Reliquary by Ciro Ferri and the mechanics of patronage and industry which surrounds it, see Sciberras (2012), 152-173.

[9] This socio-artistic context of eighteenth-century Malta, the set of conditions which brought about the influence of the Berninesque style, the role of the Order of St John, and the protagonist-scalpellini of this research are discussed *infra* in Chapter I.

[10] The channels of influence are analysed in Chapter I *infra*.

[11] The role of prints and architectural treatises is analysed *infra* in Chapter III, while comparatively analysing works from seventeenth-century Rome and eighteenth-century Malta.

provided a suitable description of the works by the master which were most influential in Malta. Among more of the later works which significantly influenced the designs of Maltese *scalpellini*,[12] the *gloria* above the *Cathedra Petri* is described by Domenico Bernini[13] as: '…*sopra la quale si aprisse maestosamente la Gloria del Paradiso con quantità di Angeli, che trà loro stramischiati, e con vago ordine confuse, si mostrano riverenti*…'[14] This description fits the majority of *glorias* executed in eighteenth-century Malta, such as the monumental altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. 0.0), with particular emphasis on the golden rays and the wonder of the stricken angels.

Sua Descri-
zione.

tirato, che non potè non gradire al sublime intendimento di Alessandro. Voleva in esso, che i quattro Dottori della Chiesa, cioè i due Greci Gregorio Nazianzeno, & Athanasio, & i due Latini Agostino, & Ambrogio in figura due volte più grandi del naturale, e tutti di Bronzo, sostenessero in atto di venerazione una gran Cathedra di somigliante materia, sopra la quale si aprisse maestosamente la Gloria del Paradiso con quantità di Angeli, che trà loro framischiati, e con vago ordine confusi, si mostrano riverenti, & ossequiosi a quella preziosa Reliquia. E perche nel mezzo di questa Gloria sarebbe necessariamente caduto il vano di una gran finestra, egli convertendo quel difetto in suo vantaggio, fece, che ne' vetri di essa, come in luogo di luce inaccessibile, apparisse lo Spirito Santo in sembianza di Colomba, che dà compimento a tutta l'Opera. Viddene dunque il Papa

---

[12] For the late works of Bernini, see Valentino Martinelli, *L'ultimo Bernini (1665-1680): nuovi argomenti, documenti e immagini*, Rome, Quasar, 1996.

[13] On the biographies of Bernini and their interpretation, see Tomaso Montanari, *La libertà di Bernini: La sovranità dell'artista e le regole del potere*, Turin, Einaudi, 2016; Maarten Delbeke, Evonne Levy, and Steven F. Ostrow, *Bernini's Biographies: Critical Essays*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006; and Franco Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

[14] Domenico Bernini, *Vita del cavalier Gio. Lorenzo Bernino*, Rome, 1713, 109.

Fig. 0.0 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ.

The culmination of this stylistic influence led to a consolidation of the Berninesque impact in Malta with several significant works being executed in Maltese churches in this Roman Baroque style, from entire Berninesque ensembles, to large Berninesque altar reredoses, and even small churches with all of their altar reredoses completely immersed in the Berninesque tradition.[15] Regional characteristics, predominantly the medium, polychromy, and the more vernacular technical execution of figurative compositions, add local personality to what is otherwise an expression of Roman Baroque descent. The main *scalpellini* whose works are analysed in this research are significant for their proliferation of Malta's churches and altar reredoses with this style. Although there are minor other *scalpellini* and other craftsmen mentioned in the archives which contribute greatly to the context,[16] the main protagonists of this research remain Pietro Paolo Troisi, Pietro Paolo Zahra and his workshop, as well as the Fabri family of *scalpellini*, chief among them Gerolamo, Antonio, Carlo, Giuseppe, and Francesco.[17] The broadening of their sculptural oeuvre, attributed to them on the basis of archival documentation and stylistic comparative analysis using connoisseurship skills, is essential to the ingraining of the Berninesque impact in Malta's visual culture and to the anchoring of their work in eighteenth-century Malta within the wider international context.

Literature Review and Bibliographic Anchoring

The 2012 publication (first published in 2004) by Sciberras is the dominating research in the field of Roman Baroque sculpture commissioned for Malta by the Order of St John.[18] This research constitutes the most significant starting point for this study. Sciberras analysed the context of the Order's commissioning of Roman Baroque sculpture and the first works' arrival in Malta. He established the attribution and the mechanics surrounding the commission of the Christ the King by Alessandro Algardi for Valletta's Marina. This is discussed within the context of the Convent's love and admiration for Rome.[19] The mechanics of the Order's commissions of works of art from Rome are also analysed and Sciberras established Fra Marcello Sacchetti's role as

---

[15] These three categories are formally and comparatively analysed in Chapter IV *infra*.
[16] Some of these *scalpellini* are discussed in Chapter I of this dissertation.
[17] For more on the protagonists of this research, see Chapter I *infra*.
[18] Sciberras, (2012).
[19] Sciberras (2012), 1-66. The desire to emulate Rome is emphasised throughout this dissertation, and particularly discussed in Chapter I *infra*.

Ambassador of the Order to the Holy See in the production of Roman Baroque works for Malta and their transportation to the Islands.

Seminal sculptural projects for the Conventual Church, such as the *Baptism of Christ* by Giuseppe Mazzuoli are also analysed. Sciberras analysed the commission originally given to Melchiorre Cafà, the re-interest in the project by Gregorio Carafa and the eventual completion of the sculptural group by Giuseppe Mazzuoli with the gilt *gloria* by Giovanni Giardini.[20] He confirmed the attribution of the sculptural group to Mazzuoli and contributed an analysis of the mechanics of the Order's commission. Sciberras also analysed Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John*.[21] The author analysed Bernini's influence on Ferri's design, especially in the inclusion of *angeli adoranti* inspired by the *Cappella del Sacramento* in St Peter's Basilica.[22] Sciberras had also published an article in 1999 wherein he had confirmed the attribution to Ciro Ferri through the discovery and publication of archival documentation.[23] Previously, the reliquary had been attributed on stylistic basis alone to Ferri in 1981 by Hanno-Walter Kruft.[24] Both sculptural groups had an impactful role in disseminating the Berninesque style to regional *scalpellini*. This research on Mazzuoli's sculpture and Giardini's *gloria* as well as Ferri's reliquary is all extremely significant to this particular research, since they constitute three works of art which introduced regional *scalpellini* to the Roman Baroque style.

Works of Roman Baroque sculpture are concentrated in the Conventual Church of St John, considered by the Order as the most important church in Malta.[25] Sciberras analysed several works of art which the Conventual Church of St John received for its immersion in the spirit of the Roman Baroque. He established Giovanni Battista Contini as the designer and supervisor of works of the high altar of the Conventual Church.[26] Girolamo Lucenti, a close collaborator of Bernini who enjoyed papal

---

[20] Sciberras (2012), 102-137. The *gloria* by Giardini was a continuous reference point for Maltese *scalpellini* in their designs for altar reredoses, and they transformed it into stone. See Chapter III *infra* for several examples of the *gloria* used as a typology in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture and specific examples in the catalogue entries of Chapter IV *infra*.

[21] Sciberras (2012), 138-174.

[22] Sciberras (2012), 158.

[23] Keith Sciberras, 'Ciro Ferri's Reliquary for the Oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato in Malta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxli, 1156 (July 1999), 392-400.

[24] Hanno-Walter Kruft, 'Another Sculpture by Ciro Ferri in Malta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxiii, 934 Special Issue Devoted to Sculpture (January 1981), 26-29.

[25] Sciberras (2012), 51.

[26] For more on Giovanni Battista Contini's high altar for St John's, see Sciberras (2012), 267-277.

patronage, is confirmed for the first time to have designed and directed the bronze works.[27] Additionally, Sciberras confirmed Antonio Arrighi, an important Roman seventeenth-century silversmith, as the designer and executant of the high altar silver statues.[28] In relation to the funerary monuments in the Conventual Church of St John, Sciberras confirmed, stylistically analysed, and securely documented the attribution of the Nicolas Cotoner monument to Domenico Guidi.[29] Sciberras also analysed the monument to Emanuel Pinto da Fonseca. While the execution of the statues had been ascribed to Vincenzo Pacetti, Sciberras established that Laurent Pécheux, a French painter active in Rome, had been responsible for the invention of the monument.[30] These funerary monuments served to immerse Malta in the spirit of the Roman Baroque and disseminate its stylistic characteristics.[31] As will be discussed *infra*, Maltese *scalpellini* utilised these works as sources from which to glean ideas and motifs to use in their designs. Furthermore, Sciberras's analysis of the 1660s redecoration programmes 'which turned its interior into one of the most important jewels of Baroque art south of Rome',[32] constituted the training ground of the local *scalpellini* where they assimilated the Roman Baroque style into their local seventeenth-century tradition, which was successfully carried into the eighteenth century.[33]

Sciberras established Melchiorre Cafà's contribution to the introduction of Roman Baroque sculpture in Malta. The author had elaborated on the artist who left Malta at a young age to advance his career in Rome in his 2006 edited publication.[34] The detailed introduction about the artist's short life and his works in Rome and in Malta is relevant to this research, since Cafà also had considerable influence on the

---

[27] Sciberras identified his assistants, among them Giovanni Battista Giorgini, Ottavio Venerati, and Marco Gamberucci. For more on the role of Girolamo Lucenti and his assistants, see Sciberras (2012), 277-292.

[28] For more on Antonio Arrighi's high altar statues, see Sciberras (2012), 293-308.

[29] For detailed information on the commission and the analysis of this funerary monuments, including the monument to Gregorio Carafa, the monument to Ramon Perellos de Roccaful (by Giuseppe Mazzuoli), the monuments to Marcantonio Zondadari and Manuel de Vilhena (both by Massimiliano Soldani-Benzi), and the monument to Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca, see Sciberras (2012), 190-262.

[30] For more on the monument to Emanuel Pinto da Fonseca, see Sciberras (2012), 239-255.

[31] Sciberras's discussion of the Order's mechanics includes the manner in which commissioning works in Rome from Malta was carried out, the role of the Embassy, and the transportation methods and costs involved in delivering the sculptural works from Rome to Malta. For more on this, see Sciberras (2012), 67-100.

[32] Sciberras (2012), 53.

[33] For more information on this, see Keith Sciberras, *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His life and art in mid-18th century Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2010.

[34] Keith Sciberras (ed.), *Melchiorre Cafà: Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2006.

Fig. 0.1 Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Cathedra Petri*, St Pater's Basilica, Rome.

Fig. 0.2 Attributed to Mattia Preti and the Casanova family, Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, Valletta.

Fig. 0.3 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

designs of Maltese *scalpellini*. While analysing the sculptor's first documented works, executed under the direction of the Maltese Casanova family of *scalpellini* and situated in Syracuse, the author stated that these works in the Torres chapel in the Cathedral of Syracuse are 'typical of mid-seventeenth century production found in Malta'.[35] Cafà's first works are contained upon the surmounted decoration on the doors of the chapel and consist of the Bishop's coat of arms flanked by two *putti*. Sciberras attributed the figures to Cafà, who was then only a sixteen year old boy. Sciberras stated that Cafà showed a 'prodigious outburst of talent'[36] in the Maltese context where there was a lack of leading sculptors working in the style of the Roman Baroque. He justifies this by stating that, in spite of this regional context, 'Malta was preparing itself to be fully immersed in High Art and to witness the birth of a new mentality'.[37] When in Rome, Cafà worked with Ercole Ferrata and the early works he sent to Malta for two important churches show the influence of Ferrata's master, Alessandro Algardi. The *Virgin of the Rosary* in the Dominican Church in Rabat and the *St Paul* in the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta are testament to this influence under which Cafà initially worked in Rome.[38] As discussed *infra*, they impacted Maltese *scalpellini* in an unprecedented manner and Sciberras identified them as the works which 'set the standard iconography for the representation of the respective theme in Malta'.[39] The print of the *Charity of St Thomas Villanova* had the same effect.[40] Commissioned by Camillo Pamphili, it was 'meant to show signs of a new stylistic approach to the public in general'[41] and indeed, Cafà exhibited a style influenced by both Algardi and Bernini but innovative at the same time. Cafà's *bozzetti* and drawings in Malta also left their

---

[35] Sciberras (2006), 2. For the Cappella del Sacramento in the Cathedral of Syracuse and the role of Francesco Buonamici and the young Melchiorre Cafà, refer to Conrad Thake, 'Francesco Buonamici (1596-1677) A Pioneer of Baroque Architecture in Malta and Syracuse', in *Annali del Barocco in Sicilia. Studi sul Seicento e Settecento in Sicilia e a Malta*, Siracusa, Gangemi Editore, 19-29.

[36] Sciberras (2006), 2.

[37] Sciberras (2006), 3. Testament to his roots is a quote by Pascoli which Sciberras included in his introduction on Cafà's disposition to carve marble as if it were limestone, naturally the medium he was used to in Malta: 'ma nel lavorare il marmo gli bisogno alle volte l'assistenza del maestro, non perche lavorar non sapesse; ma perche troppo portato del vivo fuoco, che aveva, volute avrebbe tutto finire in pochi colpi'. This is quoted in Sciberras (2006), 5.

[38] Both the *Virgin of the Rosary* and the *St Paul* are analysed *infra* in Chapter IV, Catalogue Entry XVIII.

[39] See Sciberras (2006), 4 for a detailed analysis of Cafà's *St Paul* and the *Virgin of the Rosary*.

[40] The print of the *Charity of St Thomas Villanova* must have been available in Malta since it inspired designs by Maltese *scalpellini* who appropriated parts of it into their altar reredoses. This is discussed *infra* in Chapter IV, Catalogue Entry VI.

[41] Sciberras (2006), 6.

imprint on the local tradition as can be observed by the example provided by Sciberras of statues executed by local *scalpellini* inspired by Cafà's martyrs.[42]

Apart from Sciberras's landmark publications, little literature exists which deals with the stylistic reverberations of the Berninesque manner in regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta. Debono, showing limited art historical analysis, published historical archival research from the Notarial Archives.[43] His main concern was the transcription and partial translation of contracts which commission Pietro Paolo Zahra and his son, Francesco Vincenzo, several tasks, among them sculpture for churches, designs for church decorative arts, architectural plans for small churches and domestic houses, and architectural sculpture. While the author's archival research is extensive, his main deficiency is a lack of art historical interpretation. The publication's introduction only skims the context of the eighteenth century and photographs of the works are completely absent. It is, however, a valuable publication for this study as an adequate starting point for archival research on the activities of eighteenth-century *scalpellini*.

Pietro Paolo Zahra is a key player in this research, since his workshop was extremely prolific in the first half of the eighteenth century, permeating the Maltese Islands with stone-carved altar reredoses imprinted with the Berninesque tradition. Critical art historical analysis and archival research related to Pietro Paolo Zahra were consolidated in Sciberras's publication of 2010 which focused on the life and art of Pietro Paolo's son, Francesco.[44] The first five chapters of the publication are relevant to the study of regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta. In these chapters, the author considered the context of the eighteenth century and discussed the artistic background which characterised Francesco Zahra's art. Sciberras analysed some of the more important works by Pietro Paolo Zahra.

Publications focused on the history of parish churches in Malta mention some *scalpellini*'s works but many are not academic.[45] A number of unpublished

---

[42] For more on Cafà's influence on the development of regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta, see Sciberras (2006), 13.

[43] John Debono (ed.), *Documentary Sources on Maltese Artists: Pietro Paolo Zahra (1685-1747) and his son Francesco Vincenzo (1710-1773)*, Malta, published by author, 2010.

[44] Sciberras (2010).

[45] Such publications, often in the form of short books or pamphlets, are usually concerned with the cultural aspect of a community and many times, the authors speak of the developments of art and architecture in the particular village with the socio-political-religious aspect as a very prominent backdrop. Some make reference to the parish archives. However, the majority of such publications lack a proper research methodology and can be classified more accurately as dilettante books.

dissertations are related to the dissemination of Roman Baroque sculpture in Malta. Pietro Paolo Zahra as a sculptor has been the subject of one undergraduate dissertation by Agius.[46] The general subject of sculpture in Malta has also been the topic of a number of dissertations, including Micallef Grimaud,[47] Attard,[48] and Camilleri.[49]

The next significant research on the subject of the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style from Rome to Malta was undertaken by this author (hereafter referred to as Meli) in 2017 in a postgraduate dissertation,[50] the topic of which was identified with the guidance of the Department of Art and Art History. Meli analysed the Late Baroque works of Pietro Paolo Zahra and placed his extensive oeuvre within the international context of the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style from Rome to Malta. The research focused on the sculptured altar reredoses forming part of Zahra's corpus of works, although brief analysis is also made of his decorative works of art. The research analysed the manner in which the imprint of the Roman Baroque on Maltese eighteenth-century sculpture was made possible, through a particular set of conditions which enhanced the global spread of the High Baroque. Its amalgamation with the local tradition is also analysed to identify regional characteristics of Maltese Late Baroque altar reredoses. This research also analysed Pietro Paolo Zahra's works of art in direct comparison with both their source in Rome and their counterparts in Sicily, particularly in the Val di Noto region and Palermo. The most important contribution of this research is the shedding of light on the artistic links between Malta and Rome. An article focusing on the Berninesque impact on Pietro Paolo Zahra's most important

---

[46] Pietro Paolo Zahra is discussed in connection with the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix at Senglea and thus the author limited the sculptor's oeuvre to one specific, although very important, example. Gabrielle Agius, 'Pietro Paolo Zahra and the Roman baroque manner at the Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea', unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2014.

[47] This undergraduate dissertation focuses on eighteenth-century marble altars in Malta. James Micallef Grimaud, 'Eighteenth Century Marble Altar Typologies of the Maltese Islands', unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2010.

[48] This undergraduate dissertation discusses figural baroque reredoses in Malta. Noel Attard, 'An Art Historical Gazetteer of the Figural Baroque Reredos of the Maltese Islands', unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2006.

[49] This postgraduate dissertation discusses seventeenth-century stone carved altar reredoses in Malta. Donald Camilleri, 'The Stone-Carved Altar Reredos in 17th Century Malta', unpublished MA dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2002.

[50] Christina Meli, 'From the Eternal City to Malta: The Roman Baroque Imprint on the Regional Late Baroque Sculpture of Pietro Paolo Zahra', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2017.

commission, the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea, was published by Meli in 2018.[51]

It is from these specific literary points of departure that the research of the Berninesque impact on the regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta must be launched. It is however imperative to place these research projects within the wider international context, and thus it is appropriate to interpret them within the framework of the history of Bernini studies which ultimately provided the backdrop against which this study must be grounded. Retracing the evolution of the scholarship on Roman Baroque sculpture and Bernini studies is essential for evaluating the academic context of the regional spread of the Berninesque tradition from Rome to several other locations, including Malta. Two important sources for this development of Berniniana literature are the introduction of Ostrow's and Colantuono's publication *Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture*[52] and the contribution of Evonne Levy in the Bernini 2017-2018 exhibition catalogue.[53] From the early writings of Rudolf Wittkower on the Roman Baroque style and particularly on one of its most prominent sculptors, Gianlorenzo Bernini, scholarship on the subject has become increasingly widespread with publications both of a general expansive and broad scope and of a microscopic and specialised thematic nature. Wittkower produced the first *catalogue raisonné* on Bernini with his publication in 1955 (republished in 1997)[54] and this constituted the first major art historical study on the artist and his works. Wittkower's subsequent publication of the landmark three volumes on Baroque art and architecture[55] are still considered to be very relevant to academic scholarship. In spite of the publications' broad nature in terms of time and space (the volumes cover the years 1600 to 1750 and are concerned with art and architecture in Italy), Ostrow and Colantuono remark that

[51] Christina Meli, 'Pietro Paolo Zahra's Late Baroque Sculpture in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea: Art-historical Considerations and Insights from the Notarial Archives', in Alex Attard, Joan Abela, Emanuel Buttigieg (eds), *Parallel Existences. The Notarial Archives. A Photographer's Inspiration*, Birkirkara, Kite Group, 2018, 223-235.
[52] Steven F. Ostrow and Anthony Colantuono (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania University Press, 2014.
[53] Evonne Levy, 'Wittkower's Old Oak Branches: Thirty Years of Bernini Studies (1980s-today)' in Andrea Bacchi and Anna Coliva (eds), *Bernini*, Milano, Officina Libraria, 2017.
[54] Rudolf Wittkower, *Bernini The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*, London, Phaidon Press, 4th revised ed. 1997, first published 1955.
[55] Rudolf Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750 Volumes I-III*, Revised by Jennifer Montagu and Joseph Connors, Yale, Yale University Press, First published 1958 (1999).

'one of his most significant contributions was to never lose sight of the larger cultural-historical context'.[56]

With new interest raised on the subject due to Wittkower's publications, literature on Roman Baroque sculpture and Bernini studies increased steadily from the 1960s onwards. Maurizio and Marcello Fagiolo dell'Arco's publication of 1967 contributed to one of the most thriving themes of Bernini studies – theatre.[57] Richard Krautheimer's publication on Rome of Alexander VII was the first to subject the sculptor's works to iconographic analysis.[58] This method was continued and revisited by Irving Lavin's contributions which shifted the attention to Bernini's works in the Vatican Basilica with his publication in 1968 on the crossing of St Peter's[59] in which he expounded on the deep iconographic meaning of Bernini's *concetti*. This research is highly important for this study since the Maltese scenario in the eighteenth-century was characterised by the desire to emulate Rome. It is also apparent, from the stylistic comparative analysis *infra*, that the works in St Peter's Basilica, most particularly the *Cathedra Petri*, the *Tomb of Urban VIII*, and the *Cappella del Sacramento*, were among the most desirable works for Maltese *scalpellini*, who appropriated several motifs and typologies from these works of art to use in their designs. Lavin also expanded on Bernini studies by turning his attention in 1978 to Bernini's *bozzetti* when he coined the popular term 'calculated spontaneity' in his writings on the artist's terracotta sculptures.[60] Lavin's most major contribution to Bernini studies is however embodied in the publication *Bernini and the Unity of the Arts*[61] in which he managed to shift scholarly attention to Bernini's use of the *bel composto* as referred to by his biographer, Filippo Baldinucci.

---

[56] Ostrow & Colantuono (2014), 14.

[57] Maurizio & Marcello Fagiolo dell'Arco, *Bernini. Una introduzione al gran teatro del barocco*, Rome, Mario Bulzoni Editore, 1967.

[58] Richard Krautheimer, *The Rome of Alexander VII, 1655-1667*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987.

[59] Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Crossing of St. Peter's*, New York, New York University Press, 1968.

[60] Irving Lavin, 'Calculated Spontaneity: Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch', *Apollo*, cvii, 195 (1978), 398-405.

[61] Irving Lavin, *Bernini and the Unity of the Arts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980.

Fig. 0.4 Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Angel with the Superscription*, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 0.5 Pietro Paolo Zahra, *Angel with the Superscription*, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

Fig. 0.6 Domenico Guidi, *Angel with the Lance*, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 0.7 Pietro Paolo Zahra, *Angel with the Lance*, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

45

Two other chief works which stemmed from Wittkower's *catalogue raisonné* are Valentino Martinelli's *L'Ultimo Bernini*,[62] which is a catalogue of late works by Bernini starting from 1665 to the year of his death 1680, and Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco & Maria Grazia Bernardini's *Gian Lorenzo Bernini, regista del Barocco*,[63] which accompanied a major exhibition on Bernini in 1999, and although a landmark publication still did not succeed in replacing Wittkower's 1995 catalogue.[64] Martinelli's research is also seminal for this study since there is a tendency in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture which sees *scalpellini* gravitate towards Bernini's later works, imbued with a spiritually High Baroque spirit, rather than his earlier works. General studies on Roman Baroque sculpture accompanied these landmark publications throughout the years[65] with specialised areas of research such as Jennifer Montagu's *Roman Baroque Sculpture: Industry of the Art[66]* which focuses on the workings of the *bottega* and the method of sculptors working in different mediums in seventeenth-century Rome. Montagu's research can be considered a superior model on which the industry of the art in Malta can be outlined, from the mechanics of patronage as discussed by Sciberras in his doctoral research and subsequent publication, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta*, to the investigation of the regional industry of sculpture as examined by Meli (2017) and in this research.[67]

From these general and vast studies, thematic and more specialised studies started to emerge. All are relevant to this research in their own particular way. Portraits by Bernini were thrown in the limelight by means of a major exhibition in 2008 and its accompanying exhibition catalogue edited by Catherine Hess, Andrea Bacchi, and

---

[62] Valentino Martinelli, *L'ultimo Bernini (1665-1680): nuovi argomenti, documenti e immagini*, Rome, Quasar, 1996.

[63] Maurizio Fagiolo dell'Arco & Maria Grazia Bernardini, *Bernini Regista del Barocco*, Milan, Skira Editore, 1999.

[64] This is the opinion of Evonne Levy in Levy (2017).

[65] Among these, one can mention Georg Sobotka, *Die Bildhauerei der Barockzeit*, Vienna, Schroll, 1927; Giuseppe Delogu, *La scultura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento*, Florence, Nemi, 1932; Alberto Riccoboni, *Roma nell'arte: La scultura nell'evo modern dal Quattrocento ad oggi*, Roma, Casa Editrice Mediterranea, 1942; Italo Faldi, *La scultura barocca in Italia*, Milan, Garzanti, 1958; John Pope-Hennessy, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, London, Phaidon, 1963; Paolo Portoghesi, *Roma Barocca*, Massachusetts, MIT, 1970; Valentino Martinelli, *Scultura italiana dal manierismo al rococo*, Milan, Electa, 1968; Antonia Nava Cellini, *La scultura del Seicento*, Turin, UTET, 1982; Bruce Boucher, *Italian Baroque Sculpture*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1988; Tod. A. Marder, *Bernini and the Art of Architecture*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1998; and Alessandro Angelini, *La scultura del Seicento a Roma*, Siena, Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 2005. See Ostrow & Colantuono (eds), (2014).

[66] Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art*, London, Yale University Press, First published 1989 (2nd edition, 1992).

[67] Refer to Chapter I for a discussion of the 'behind-the-scenes' of sculpture, as uncovered through the documents of the Notarial Archives

Jennifer Montagu.[68] Attention to Bernini's oeuvre and preparatory techniques was given in the publication *Bernini: Sculpting in Clay* edited by C.D. Dickerson II and Anthony Sigel.[69] Conversely, the literature on sculptors of the Roman Baroque, other than Bernini, also grew significantly over the years with the publication of a number of monographs which treat their works, such as Algardi[70] and Duquesnoy[71] but also other sculptors active in the period such as Pietro Bernini,[72] Nicolo Cordieri,[73] Ercole Ferrata,[74] Giuliano Finelli,[75] Domenico Guidi,[76] Stefano Maderno,[77] Camillo Mariani,[78] Francesco Mochi,[79] Melchiorre Cafà,[80] and Antonio Raggi.[81]

The tangent of the *bel composto* as started by Lavin in 1980 was reverberated and taken up in studies by scholars such as Felix Ackermann and Giovanni Careri, whose works either extended or criticised Lavin's contribution, and Martin Delbeke and Tomaso Montanari, both of whom treated the subject of the *bel composto* within a larger theme, that of the biographies. The theme of art theory connected to Bernini studies always posed a problematic issue for scholars due to the fact that Bernini did not leave any writings, or at least none survive. It is why the sculptor's two biographies

---

[68] Andrea Bacchi (ed.), *Bernini and the birth of Baroque portrait sculpture*, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008.

[69] C.D. Dickerson III, Anthony Sigel, & Ian Wardropper (eds.), *Bernini: Sculpting in Clay*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013.

[70] Jennifer Montagu, *Alessandro Algardi*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1985.

[71] Marion Boudon-Machuel, *François du Quesnoy*, 1597-1643, Paris, Arthena, 2005 and Estelle Lingo, *François Duquesnoy and the Greek Ideal*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007.

[72] Hans-Ulrich Kessler's publication *Pietro Bernini (1562-1629)* (2005). Hans-Ulrich Kessler, *Pietro Bernini (1562-1629)*, Vienna, Hirmer Verlag, 2005.

[73] Barry Harwood's dissertation 'Nicolo Cordieri: His Activity in Rome, 1592-1612', PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1979 and Sylvia Pressouyre's publication *Nicolas Cordier: Recherches sur la sculpture à Rome autour de 1600*, L'École Française de Rome, 1984.

[74] Jessica Marie Boehman's dissertation 'Maestro Ercole Ferrata', PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2009.

[75] Damian Dombrowski's publication *Giuliano Finelli: Bildhauer zwischen Neapel und Rom*, Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2009.

[76] David Bershad's dissertation 'Domenico Guidi: A 17th Century Roman Sculptor', PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1971 and Cristiano Giometti's publication *Domenico Guidi 1625-1701: Uno scultore barocco di fama europea*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2010.

[77] Agnese Donati's publication *Stefano Maderno scultore: 1576-1636*, Bellinzona, A. Salvioni & Co., 1945.

[78] Roger C. Burns's dissertation 'Camillo Mariani: Catalyst of the Rome Baroque', PhD Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1980 and Maria Teresa De Lotto's 'Camillo Mariani (1567-1611): Catalogo ragionato delle opere', PhD Dissertation, University of Udine, 2006.

[79] Meinolf Seimer's dissertation 'Francesco Mochi (1580-1654): Beitrage zu einer Monographie', PhD Dissertation, University of Würzburg, 1981 and Marcella Favero's publication Francesco Mochi: Una carrier di scultore, Rome, UNI Service, 2008.

[80] Keith Sciberras (ed.), *Melchiorre Cafà: Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2006.

[81] Robert H. Westin's dissertation 'Antonio Raggi: A Documentary and Stylistic Investigation of His Life, Work, and Significance in Seventeenth-Century Roman Baroque Sculpture', PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978.

and Chantelou's notes on his visit to Paris are indispensable sources of information. This problem was first identified in 1966 by Cesare D'Onorofio in a publication which compared the two Bernini biographies by Filippo Baldinucci and Domenico Bernini.[82] Before this, the biographies had only been used in an uncritical manner by Stanislao Fraschetti in 1900[83] but Rudolf Preimsberger's 1985 publication *Themes from Art Theory in the Early Works*[84] mitigated the void left by the lack of writing or treatises by Bernini's own hand. The same issues of the precedence of the two Bernini biographies were taken up by Tomaso Montanari in 1988[85] and before him, Catherine Soussloff examined two particular myths told by Filippo Baldinucci and Domenico Bernini in 'Old Age and Old-Age Style in the "Lives" of Artists: Gianlorenzo Bernini'.[86] Vast literature on the Bernini biographies followed this list in the early years of the twenty-first century authored by Maarten Delbeke,[87] Evonne Levy, Steven F. Ostrow,[88] Joris Van Gastel,[89] and Tomaso Montanari.[90] Franco Mormando also produced the only critical translation of Domenico Bernini's biography of his father.[91] The inextricable link between art theory and Bernini's biographies remain a research area of great interest in today's Bernini scholarship.

The essays in the exhibition catalogue accompanying the seminal Bernini exhibition held from November 2017 to February 2018 at the Galleria Borghese in Rome identify another area of research which is just emerging, that is seminal to the significance of this research. Evonne Levy outlines the most major and landmark

---

[82] Cesare D'Onorofio, 'Note berniniane, 1, Un dialogo-recita di Gian Lorenzo Bernini e Lelio Guidiccioni', *Palatino*, 10 (1966), 127-134. Cesare D'Onorofio, 'Note berniniane, 2, Priorità della biografia di Domenico Bernini su quella del Baldinucci', Palatino, 10 (1966), 201-208.

[83] This is the opinion of Levy expressed in Levy (2017). Stanislao Fraschetti, *Il Bernini. La sua vita, la sua opera, il suo tempo*, Milan, Hoepli, 1900.

[84] Rudolf Preimesberger, 'Themes from Art Theory in the Early Works' in Lavin, Irving (ed.), *Gian Lorenzo Bernini: New Aspects of his Art and Thought: A Commemorative Volume*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State, 1985.

[85] Tomaso Montanari, 'Bernini e Cristina di Svezia: alle origini della storiografia berniniana' in Alessandro Angelini, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e i Chigi tra Roma e Siena*, Pizzi, 1998, 328-477.

[86] Catherine Soussloff, 'Old Age and Old-Age Style in the "Lives" of Artists: Gian Lorenzo Bernini', *Art Journal*, 46 (1987), 115-121.

[87] Maarten Delbeke, 'The pope, the bust, the sculptor and the fly: an ethical perspective on the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini in the writings of Sforza Pallavicino', *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome*, 70 (2000), 179-223; Maarten Delbeke, T*he Art of Religion: Sforza Pallavicino and Art Theory in Bernini's Rome*, Routledge, London, 2012.

[88] Maarten Delbeke, Evonne Levy, and Steven F. Ostrow, *Bernini's Biographies: Critical Essays*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

[89] Joris van Gastel, *Il Marmo Spirante: Sculpture and Experience in Seventeenth-Century Rome*, Leiden, Leiden University Press, 2013.

[90] Tomaso Montanari, *La libertà di Bernini: La sovranità dell'artista e le regole del potere*, Turin, Einaudi, 2016.

[91] Franco Mormando, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 2011.

publications in Bernini scholarship in her essay entitled 'Wittkower's Old Oak Branches: Thirty Years of Bernini Studies (1980s-today)'.[92] Among these research areas, Levy states that 'Bernini's impact on sculptors and architects who came after, or the reception of Bernini's work, is a subject that is just now coming into view'[93]. This constitutes a clear justification of the investigation into the Berninesque impact on Regional Late Baroque Sculpture in Malta as part of the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style and the international spread of the Berninesque tradition.

The flourishing of the Berninesque tradition in eighteenth-century Malta was not an exclusive artistic scenario. Rather, it belongs to an internationally-relevant context of the dissemination of this style through several channels which facilitated its manifestation and execution in other locations. The style, due to the addition of regional characteristics, takes on a different but recognisably similar dress to the one it wears in Rome. Research on the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition has been carried out, although this area deserves a deeper analysis. Research in this regard tends to belong to one of these categories: the first category deals with literature adopting a broad approach to the dissemination of the Roman Baroque; the second section deals with the mobility of works from Rome to particular regional locations; and the third part analyses literature concerned with the Berninesque influence on regional sculptors and how this materialised.

Malta was amongst the many other locations which were the recipients of Bernini's *fortuna critica*. This extensive critical fortune plays a great role in the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in Malta. While analysing this phenomenon, Bacchi and Delmas[94] established Bernini's influence on other sculptors as the most forceful result of his *fortuna critica*. Bernini was the most imitated sculptor in the *Accademia* and his popularity is attested to by copies of his work still found in French and Spanish academies. The majority of Maltese *scalpellini* did not have the opportunity to study in academies; only the select few spent a year or two in Rome.

---

[92] Evonne Levy, 'Wittkower's Old Oak Branches: Thirty Years of Bernini Studies (1980s-today)' in Andrea Bacchi and Anna Coliva (eds), *Bernini*, Milano, Officina Libraria, 2017, 357-367.

[93] Levy (2017), 365. For an analysis of Bernini's reception in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see also Lucia Simonato, *Bernini scultore: Il difficile dialogo con la modernità*, Electa, Milano, 2018; and Livio Pestilli, On Bernini's Reputed Unpopularity in Late Baroque Rome, *Artibus et Historiae*, xxxii, 63 (2011), 119-142.

[94] Andrea Bacchi and Anne-Lise Delmas, 'The Fortunes of Bernini in 18th Century Sculpture' in Andrea Bacchi and Anna Coliva (eds), *Bernini*, Milano, Officina Libraria, 2017, 332-348.

This is reflected in the occasionally poor standards of a work of art and in the inability to correctly portray the human figure, but the spirit of the Berninesque style is still powerful in Maltese churches.

Several artists who went to Rome copied Bernini's works.[95] This fits within the Maltese artistic context of Troisi's visit to Rome and his subsequent Berninesque compositions back in Malta. Bernini's celebrity status also created a market for copies for important patrons all over Europe.[96] Models of Bernini's works of art in Europe are also abundant.[97] Since models and drawings could travel, artists could study the works of Bernini in their own studio in their own country; this is verified by inventories listing copies of Bernini. The authors stated how artists who had never stepped in Rome could access Bernini's works. Relevant to Malta's scenario in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Bacchi and Delmas established how Bernini's influence on sculptors all over Europe was inevitable since Bernini had codified all the canonical types of sculpture, effectively influencing sculptors all over Europe, even though the regional characteristics added to these works of art reveal the freedom which the artists who executed them exercised. The authors considered the *Baldacchino* as one of the greatest imitable achievements of Bernini, with copies in churches all over Europe.[98] The *Cathedra Petri* is also used as a model for many examples throughout Europe.[99] Both works left their indelible imprint in Malta.

The identification of sculptors who contributed to the popularisation of Berninesque typologies is essential for determining the authorship of regional works as

---

[95] Among them, Bacchi and Delmas mention two French sculptors, Edme Bouchardon and Augustin Pajou, who copied Bernini's works in drawings not only in Rome but also outside, and Joseph Wilton and John Flaxman. Bacchi and Delmas (2017), 335-336.

[96] Bacchi and Delmas mention Massimiliano Soldani Benzi in this regard who executed copies of the *Blessed Soul* and the *Damned Soul*, now in the Liechtenstein collection, for Prince Johann Adam Andreas. Bacchi and Delmas (2017), 339.

[97] A copy of a *Kneeling Angel* of the Cappella del Sacramento (by Luc François Breton); two *Frame-Holding Angels* after those in Santa Maria del Popolo (attributed to Jacques Philippe Bouchardon); a *Santa Bibiana* in the Louvre; a *Ludovica Albertoni* in the Louvre and another one in the Musée Magnin in Dijon; a *Charity* and a *Justice* from the tomb of Urban VIII in the Resnick collection in Los Angeles; and numerous terracottas in the Farsetti collection. Bacchi and Delmas (2017), 340.

[98] Bacchi and Delmas mention the worthy copies by Andrea Calcioni in wood in 1698 in Foligno Cathedral and by the brothers Domenico and Antonio Giuseppe Sartori in 1739 in the cathedral of Trento.

[99] The authors mention the following as examples: the *Glory with Saints Benedict and Bernard* in Santo Spirito in Agrigento executed between 1720 and 1730 by master craftsmen connected to Giacomo Serpotta; the *Transparente* in Toledo Cathedral created by Narciso Tomé between 1729 and 1732; and the much later high altar of Saint Michael in Vienna by Jakob Gabriel Mollinarolo in 1779. Bacchi and Delmas (2017), 341.

well as revealing information about the artist's background which could contribute to an explanation of how the Berninesque style transpired in the sculptor's work.[100] Most often, the influence is explained through a visit to the Eternal City. In Malta, Pietro Paolo Troisi, who visited Rome, served an imperative role in the history of the Berninesque impact in Malta by introducing Berninesque models to the regional artistic scene and to other *scalpellini*. However, other artists – Maltese and foreign – who never visited Rome were still familiar with his works. In this regard, Bacchi and Delmas mention Etienne Maurice Flaconet. In Malta's case, Pietro Paolo Zahra and the Fabri family, who are not documented to have studied in Rome, were responsible for the popularisation of Bernini's typologies in Malta. The authors established how certain themes, such as Enrico Merengo's version in the church of the Scalzi in Venice and Giacomo Serpotta's *Santa Monica* in Sant'Agostino in Palermo, could not have been executed without considering Bernini's *Ecstasy of St Theresa*.[101] Similarly, the very conception of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea could not have materialised were it not for Bernini's conception of the angels on the Ponte Sant'Angelo in Rome.

A broader approach to the manifestation of the Baroque style in Europe was adopted in 1987 in the convention 'Roma, l'Italia e l'Europa: Il Barocco delle Capitali'.[102] The ensuing publication edited by Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna[103] focused on analysing the architecture and city of Rome and the rest of Europe.[104] Their findings and analysis are of paramount importance for this research,

---

[100] They include Balthasar Permoser (1651-1732) in Dresden; Jean Delacour (1627-1707), and later Hendrik Frans Verbruggen (1654-1724) and Theodore Verhaegen in the southern Netherlands; Louis Francois Roubiliac and Francis Bird in England; and Edmé Bouchardon (1698-1762) and Lambert Sigisbert Adam in France. Bacchi and Delmas (2017), 342.

[101] Bacchi and Delmas (2017), 345.

[102] This was held in Rome between 22 and 27 October 1987.

[103] Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992.

[104] This included essays on the Berninian image of Louis XIV (Irving Lavin, 'L'immagine berninana del Re Sole' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 3-58.); clarity of design in baroque architecture in Rome and in Europe (Stefano Ray, 'Da Roma all'Europa. Architettura barocca e architettura dell'età del barocco tra ambiguità e chiarezza di disegno' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 83-150.); the influence of Gian Lorenzo Bernini on the artistic endeavours of the Rospigliosi family in Pistoia (Sebastiano Roberto, 'Gian Lorenzo Bernini e la committenza artistica dei Rospigliosi a Pistoia nel '600' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 357-404.); the influence of the Roman Baroque style in architecture in Prague (Luigi Zangheri, 'Giovanni Pieroni e Baccio del Bianco a Praga e nell'Impero' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 503-526.); and the language of the Baroque as explained through the device of the *Quarant'ore*

especially in terms of methodology. Contributions in this publication serve to ground this research in its academic history as well as provide the essential international context which conditioned the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in Malta. Two other publications containing the proceedings of the same conference focus on the *Barocco Napoletano*[105] and the *Barocco Mediterraneo*.[106] These three publications are instrumental to this research, as they provide parallels of the expression of the Baroque, and at times the Berninesque tradition, in other regional locations.

Travel literature is analysed by Chantal Grell and Milovan Stanic who also take a broad scope to the subject and focus on the spread of Bernini's influence in Europe and the reception of Bernini's works.[107] They credit travel literature with the dissemination of Bernini's most famous works, a situation which could be applied to Malta's context of the eighteenth century. This literature is also significant to highlight the differences between distinct regions, especially in the localised reception of the Berninesque tradition. An analysis of Winckelmann's abhorrence of Bernini's depictions of flesh and slavish imitation of nature[108] appears in stark contrast to the Maltese artistic scenario, where the Berninesque tradition was not only accepted but welcomed by the Order of St John and the Diocese, both of which wanted to emulate Rome and its artistic propaganda. Several essays in this volume analysed aspects of this dissemination of Bernini's triumphant style, including the specific reception of Bernini's style in several countries.[109] However, the focus remains the dissemination of

(Mark S. Weil, 'L'orazione delle Quarant'ore come guida allo sviluppo del linguaggio barocco' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 675-694.)

[105] Gaetano Cantone (ed.), *Barocco Napoletano*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992.

[106] Maria Luisa Madonna and Lucia Trigilia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992.

[107] Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002. These are the proceedings of an international symposium held at the Italian Institute of Culture in Paris in November 1998.

[108] Claude Michaud, 'Chantal Grell et Milovan Stanic (éd.): Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique, 2002', *L'épicurisme des Lumières, Dix-huitième Siècle*, 35 (2003), 656-657.

[109] In England, amongst many negative approaches to Bernini, a copy of the Four Rivers Fountain still graces Blenheim. See Charles Avery, 'Sculpture gone wild: Bernini and the English' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 159-178. The *Transparente* in the Toledo Cathedral was heavily influenced by Bernini's works. See Antonio Bonet Correa, 'Bernini y el arte barroco en España' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 241-254. On the effect of Bernini's designs for the Louvre on subsequent European architecture, see Sabine Frommel, 'Le projet du Bernin pour le Louvre, traditione italienne contre tradition française' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds),

Bernini's style mainly in France and Germany with three contributions on England, Italy, and Spain. Eighteenth-century Late Baroque art south of Rome, including Naples, Lecce, Sicily, and of course Malta, is not included. This highlights the significance of the need for this research.

It is shown by the analysis *infra* that one of the most effective ways of disseminating the Berninesque tradition was the commissioning of works from Rome for Malta. This case scenario was not exclusive to the Maltese Islands and the incidence of works commissioned from Roman artists intended for locations outside Rome is high. It is partly in this manner in which the tradition of Bernini's adoring angels, or *angeli adoranti*, was popularised all over Europe. Frank Martin deliberated on the authorship of two sculpted angels in an article on the altar of St Francis Regis in the church of the Descalzas in Madrid.[110] The altar, executed by several Roman artists for the south transept of the Jesuit Iglesia del Noviciado, had a turbulent history[111] but its original structure survived, including its central relief depicting *St Francis in Glory* documented to be by Camillo Rusconi. The authorship of the Berninesque angels flanking the gable had remained uncertain. Martin supported his theory that these two angels are by Bernardino Cametti by extracts from biographical matter and through the formal analysis of the altar. The same comparative and formal analyses are applied *infra* to the *angeli adoranti* in Maltese examples since the majority share the same facial typology, the same angled and broad drapery folds, and the same quality of feathering in their wings. Stylistic comparisons to Cametti's documented work were identified by the author, especially in Cametti's use of drapery[112] and similarities in the physical and facial features.[113] These stylistic similarities are evidence of the mobility of works of art, essential for the spread of the Roman Baroque style.

Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 43-76. On the influence of Bernini's Colonnade in the piazza of St Peter's on the Catholic Church of Dresden by Gaetano Chiaveri , see Costanza Caraffa, 'La piazza S. Pietro di Bernini e la chiesa cattolica di Dresda di Gaetano Chiaveri' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 207-224.

[110] Frank Martin, 'Two Angels by Bernardino Cametti in Madrid', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxlii, 1163 (February 2000), 104-107.

[111] Martin divulges its history: it was dismantled in the nineteenth century when the church of the Jesuit Iglesia del Novicaido was demolished and transported to the Convent of the Trinidad Calzada in the Calle de Atocha, only to be relocated for the third time to the newly built apse in the church of the Descalzas Reales when it was rebuilt after the older one had been destroyed by fire in October 1862.

[112] Martin analyses the characteristics of the drapery folds in Martin (2000), 106.

[113] Martin (2000), 107.

The mobility of *bozzetti* and drawings was an effective way of disseminating the Berninesque manner, as shown *infra* through the employment of working material by Maltese *scalpellini*. By analysing style, studying chronology, examining documentation, and envisaging provenance patterns, Irving Lavin reattributed a new *bozzetto* at the Musée des Beaux-Arts at Besançon which was previously attributed to the *Berninesque* sculptor Luc-François Breton to Bernini while disassociating another *bozzetto* at Harvard's Fogg Art Museum up to then attributed to Bernini.[114]. In his research, Lavin analysed two early inventories of the models owned by the school directed by Breton, featuring four works after Bernini.

In Malta, the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition manifested itself through the inclusion of Roman Baroque elements in regional sculpture, evidence of the impact of the international style on regional traditions.[115] This was certainly not exclusive to Malta. Henry H. Hawley stated that 'the history of art in Central Europe from the Renaissance until the middle of the nineteenth century was determined primarily by successive waves of stylistic influence which surged forth over the Alps from Italy'.[116] Similar to Malta and the presence of foreign architect and artists on the Islands,[117] Hawley identifies the travels of Italian artists as the main mode of this transmission of ideas. He analysed how this situation resulted in 'the cultivation in a northern climate of these Italian artistic ideas'.[118] The local artists picked up this new style and amalgamated it with their own tradition to produce 'unexpected, but vigorous, new mutations'.[119] Through such studies, it is increasingly clear that the Berninesque impact on Maltese eighteenth-century *scalpellini* was not an isolated case but part of an international phenomenon.

---

[114] He related this *bozzetto* with Bernini's last work in St Peter's, the *angeli adoranti* on the Altar of the Sacrament. Lavin also established a connection between this *bozzetto* and the collection of *bozzetti* at the Fogg Museum. Irving Lavin, 'Bernini-*Bozzetti*: One More, One Less: A Berninesque Sculptor in Mid-Eighteenth Century France', in Hannah Baader (ed.), *Ars et Scriptura: Festschrift für Rudolf Preimesberger zum 65*, Berlin, Geburtstag, 2001, 143-56. Revised and reprinted in Irving Lavin, *Visible Spirit: The Art of Gian Lorenzo Bernini*, Vol. II, London, Pindar, 2009, 1018-45.
[115] This is analysed in Chapter III and Chapter IV *infra*.
[116] Henry H. Hawley, 'Eighteenth-Century Sculpture from Germany and Austria', *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, li, 1 (January 1964), 2-13:2.
[117] The presence of foreign artists, such as Mattia Preti, and architects, such as Roman Carapecchia and François de Mondion, brought about change in the aesthetic of the regional tradition and increased the influence of the Roman Baroque style on regional Maltese sculpture. This is discussed in Chapter I *infra*.
[118] Hawley (1964), 2.
[119] Hawley (1964), 2.

A similar case of this dissemination of the Roman Baroque style can be found in Poland. Similar to the dissemination observed from Rome to Malta, Jan K. Ostrowski analysed Italian influence on the stylistic development of eighteenth-century Polish Baroque sculpture.[120] Ostrowski analysed how the development of traditional sculpture was interrupted by the introduction of foreign factors. He analysed the significant influence of Baldassare Fontana, emerging from the circle of Bernini as pupil of Carlo Fontana – one of the most influential artistic figures for the dissemination of Bernini's influence in ecclesiastical architecture – and Antonio Raggi, both of whom remained the role model for Polish artists for decades.[121] Thus, parallel to the first half of the eighteenth century in Malta, Italian art remained dominant in Polish sculpture for the first forty years of the eighteenth century.

Similar to the Maltese artist Pietro Paolo Troisi, who had studied in Rome, Ostrowski identified the work of Antoni Fraczkiewicz as the prime example for exhibiting Italian influence on Polish eighteenth-century sculpture, and explained the facilitation of this influence by stating that his guide, Kaspar Bazanka, had also studied in Rome. This situation is analogous to the Maltese eighteenth-century artistic scenario which saw artists travelling to Rome to further their studies. Additionally, in the same manner in which Pietro Paolo Zahra, whose works are discussed *infra*, came into contact with Pietro Paolo Troisi, Fraczkiewicz later comes into contact with works by Baldassare Fontana and assimilated the style into his regional manner. The author also identified the impact from Rome in the stucco work of Pompeo Ferrari and Giovanni Battista Bianco and their circles working in Poland.[122]

According to Ostrowski, the influence coming from the region Silesia acted as a link through which ideas from Italy could reach Poland,[123] resulting in common characteristics of eighteenth-century Polish sculpture, among them the massive form, the athletic anatomy of the figure, the classical heads, and the movement of the decorative and heavy drapery. This parallels with the typological motifs which Maltese

---

[120] Jan K. Ostrowski, 'Die polnische Barockskulptur im 18. Jahrhundert Probleme und Forschungsaufgaben', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, lii, 1 (1989), 89-113.

[121] This was so before being overcome with the Polish generation of Plersch, Pinsel and Osinski. Ostrowski (1989), 105.

[122] For more information on the influence of Rome on the works of Polish sculptors, see Ostrowski (1989), 105.

[123] This included Great Poland (Rawicz, Gostyn, Lubin) and Lesser Poland (Krakow, Tschenstochau). Ostrowski (1989), 106.

Late Baroque sculpture borrowed, or rather almost appropriated, from the tradition of the Roman Baroque style and the Berninesque tradition, such as the acanthus leaf, the adoring angels and their recognisable and repetitive *affetti*, and the *gloria*. However, it must be emphasised that, although there are several parallelisms (as well as differences) between Maltese and South Italian regional Late Baroque sculpture, over the course of this study it becomes clear that the link between Rome and Malta was undeviating. Through the channels analysed in this research, the influence was direct from the Eternal City to Malta.[124]

Regional characteristics enhance the local tradition when it meets the influence of the Berninesque tradition. Ostrowski stated that the medium used by sculptors was wood and it was often polychromised in the Polish tradition, making use of either gilding or the colour white.[125] This regional use of the most available material once again corresponds to the use of a regional material in Malta, limestone. The use of gilding and polychromy, also a common practice in regional Maltese sculpture, impart to the style a certain vernacular spirit. In comparison with Rome, but also locations such as Sicily and Naples, marble was used less in Malta, especially by regional *scalpellini* who were accustomed to sculpting Malta's malleable limestone. The dissemination of the Roman Baroque style in Sicily is addressed by Stefano Piazza in his analysis of marble architectural decoration in Sicily from the fifteenth to the eighteenth century.[126] He discussed the dissemination of the art of classical Rome to Sicily through the travel and activity of foreign artists who worked in Palermo and Messina. Similar to Malta's situation and many other regional centres which were conditioned by the art of the Eternal City, he also attributed this dissemination to the travel of patrons, who might have acquired similar pieces on their journeys. In parallel with the regional characteristics of other centres of production which were impacted by the Roman Baroque style, Piazza analysed a type of polychromy marble decoration which is considered a prime example of the regionalist character of Sicilian Baroque.[127]

---

[124] The channels which enabled this influence are analysed in Chapter I *infra*.

[125] See Ostrowski (1989), 106 for the discussion on the finishes which Polish sculptors chose to give their sculptures.

[126] Stefano Piazza and Susan Vicinelli, 'Marble Architectural Decoration in Sicily: Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, lxxiii, 1/2 European Sculpture and Decorative Arts (1999), 42-54.

[127] The four pieces of sculpture are discussed in further detail in Piazza and Vicinelli (1999), 42.

Fig. 0.8 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Cappella del Sacramento, St Peter's Basilica, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 0.9 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Mark, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 0.10 Gianlorenzo Bernini, High Altar, Church of S. Agostino, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 0.11 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Crucifix, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Concurrent with the state of affairs in eighteenth-century Malta, the social context surrounding polychrome marble architectural decoration in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Palermo greatly impacted its production. Although the context's characteristics are different, the circumstances which gave way to Italian influence in Sicilian sculpture are analogous to the conditions in Malta which allowed the Berninesque tradition to impact regional sculpture. Civic and religious construction activity was at its peak during the second half of the sixteenth century.[128] The same happened in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Malta.[129] Piazza analysed how the self-celebratory aims of the Catholic Church at the time gave rise to the need of large ecclesiastical complexes and as a result, architectural ornamentation acquired such an important role that it 'became one of the primary expressions of the baroque vocabulary in Palermo'.[130] This necessity for larger churches in Malta was not only connected to Counter Reformation ideals but was also the result of a demographic surge, thus resulting in the need for bigger spaces in which more people could congregate.

Comparable to the insufficient or absence of formal training for Maltese *scalpellini*, Piazza divulged how Sicilian craftsmen involved in the execution of these works were competent at creating architectural and decorative motifs but limited when it came to the design, execution, and modelling of figures. According to Piazza, this was due to inadequate training, resulting in sculpted figures 'rigid and void of expression'.[131] In Malta, *scalpellini* such as Pietro Paolo Zahra, who never left the Islands,[132] find difficulty in the sculpting of figures in spite of the fact that they feature continuously in his compositions. This gives a more vernacular feeling to his works, although in some other cases his figurative sculpting is of a better quality.[133] In the case of Sicily, Piazza suggested that two artists working during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, namely Giacomo Amato and Giacomo Serpotta, eased this insufficiency. Amato is documented to have studied in Rome and while no sufficient

---

[128] Piazza and Vicinelli (1999), 47. According to Piazza, it was religious building activity in the early seventeenth century that changed Palermo. The same building activity changed Late Baroque Malta in the eighteenth century.

[129] Evidence of this is the innumerable contracts found in the Notarial Archives, Valletta, which commission the construction of any type of building and its decorative elements. See Appendix B for examples in the archival database.

[130] Piazza and Vicinelli (1999), 48.

[131] Piazza and Vicinelli (1999), 51.

[132] Travels made by Pietro Paolo Zahra have not transpired from archival research but the possibility of finding such evidence is still open.

[133] Several works by Pietro Paolo Zahra are analysed throughout this study, particularly in the Catalogue Entries in Chapter IV *infra*.

documentation exists to support Serpotta's travels, he was certainly familiar with art of the mainland.[134]

Literature on the dissemination of the Roman Baroque sculpture in Sicily is dominated by publications on Giacomo Serpotta. Serpotta's designs and works are indebted to the local Sicilian tradition of the Gagini family.[135] Similar to some *scalpellini* in Malta, such as Pietro Paolo Zahra, Serpotta is not documented to have visited or worked in Rome but the intensity of the Roman Baroque's influence on his works makes this premise difficult to accept.[136] Several authors divulge their research on the important sculptor.[137] Donald Garstang, deliberated on the authorship of the extensive sculptural programme of the church of Santo Spirito in Agrigento and reconfirms his earlier attribution of the several parts of the sculptural decoration to 'lesser members of the Serpotta family'.[138] He clarified the roles of the extended family workshop; however, he does not address the apparent stylistic influences from the Roman Baroque style on this node executed by the Serpotta family. This was addressed when Garstang analysed Serpotta's work in the Oratorio della Madonna della Consolazione e S. Mercurio in Palermo.[139] The author identified the influences Serpotta received from his collaboration with Roman-trained established architects such as Giacomo Amato, who would have probably given his input on design schemes. Garstang also added that a superior from the religious confraternity commissioning the work of art would have also had a say in the iconographical scheme. In this manner,

[134] According to Piazza, 'the activity of these artists introduced new compositional principles to the local decorative style, and the knowledge and reworking of Roman themes played an increasingly important role'. By the 1730s, the marble decoration of the earlier years had begun to lose popularity and the new style propagated by Serpotta was preferred. Piazza stated that Palermo had by this time opened up to receive the influence of the Late Baroque as it was developed in Italy and Europe. Piazza and Vicinelli (1999), 51.

[135] His style also had common traits with fifteenth century reliefs which were prevalent at the time on the mainland. Bruce Boucher, *Italian Baroque Sculpture*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1998, 185.

[136] Anthony Blunt argues that a visit to Rome was not impossible in a period which enjoyed freedom of movement and that the similarities in his works to sculpture by Bernini and François Duquesnoy support this theory. Anthony Blunt, *Sicilian Baroque*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, 35.

[137] Among them, Pierfrancesco Palazzotto commented on the great similarities between Serpotta's *Allegoria della Prudenza* in the Oratory of S. Cita in Palermo and the *Allegoria* in the funeral monument of Cardinal Carlo Bonelli in S. Maria sopra Minerva. Pierfrancesco Palazzotto, 'Tradizione e rinnovamento nei primi apparati decorativi barocchi in stucco di Giacomo Serpotta a Palermo (1678-1700)' in *Arredare il Sacro: Artisti, opere e committenti in Sicilia dal Medioevo al Contemporaneo*, Milano, Skira Editore, 2015, 81-108: 87.

[138] This was probably executed by Giacomo's brother, Giuseppe and his son, Procopio. For more information on this attribution, see Donald Garstang, 'When Serpotta is Not Serpotta: The Stuccos in the Church of S. Spirito in Agrigento', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxlvii, 1227 (June 2005) Furniture, Decorative Arts, Sculpture, 368-375.

[139] Donald Garstang, 'The Oratorio della Madonna della Consolazione e S. Mercurio in Palermo and the Early Activity of Giacomo Serpotta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxx, 1023 (1988), 430-432.

Garstang justifies the Roman Baroque influence on Serpotta's works without having to sustain the theory of a trip or a study period in the Eternal City.[140] This justification could be extended to the Maltese eighteenth-century artistic context, wherein Pietro Paolo Zahra's collaboration with Pietro Paolo Troisi adequately furnished him with knowledge of the Berninesque style sufficient to completely condition the rest of the works he produced throughout his prolific career.

The same state of affairs of Roman Baroque influence over the local tradition in Ukraine was analysed by Ostrowski.[141] The Berninesque impact on Johann Georg Pinsel and other artists active in Ukraine can be easily compared to the influence of the same source on Maltese *scalpellini*. In addition to this, an analysis of the High Altar of the Church at Hodowica is evidence that the spillover and peak of the Berninesque influence into the eighteenth century was not a situation exclusive to Malta but was an occurring characteristic in other regions, such as Poland and Ukraine. Ostrowski's analysis of the close collaboration between Pinsel and the architect Bernard Meretyn[142] is analogous to collaborating Maltese artists from the Troisi, Zahra, and Fabri family[143] who worked under foreign architects. The effect of the Roman Baroque is also evident in the manner of execution, analogous to the Bernini workshop and the idea of Bernini as the designer and *regista del Barocco*. This kind of workshop setup was necessary due to the grand scale of Roman Baroque sculpture and could also be found in regional centres of production, albeit on a smaller scale, such as Ukraine and Malta.[144]

Ostrowski's formal analysis of the church architecture emphasised its similarities and design solution to Italian models.[145] He observed the Bernini imprint also in Pinsel's use of a concealed source of light. It is clear that all of Pinsel's figures owe their conception to a Berninesque typology as Ostrowski analysed the angels

---

[140] Garstang (1988), 432.

[141] Jan K. Ostrowski, 'A Great Baroque Master on the Outskirts of Latin Europe. Johann Georg Pinsel and the High Altar of the Church at Hodowica', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxi, 42 (2000), 197-216.

[142] Pinsel was born around 1720 in a family of artists; indeed, his surname is probably in reference to his father's profession of a painter. His services were sought by important patrons in Poland. Ostrowski (2000), 198.

[143] Works by these *scalpellini* are analysed *infra*, particularly in Chapter III and IV.

[144] Workshop mechanics and the context of the eighteenth-century *bottega* are discussed in Chapter I *infra*.

[145] Specific examples are given such as the works of Francesco Borromini, Guarino Guarini, and Carlo Fontana. Ostrowski (2000), 199. Similarities were found between the frescoed background wall of the altar by Aleksander Rolinski and designs by Andrea Pozzo and Giuseppe Galli Bibiena. For more on the analogies between this node of Polish Baroque sculpture and Roman Baroque prototypes, see Ostrowski (2000), 199.

adoring the Crucified Christ;[146] the dynamism and emotional depth of the *Mother of Sorrows* which is compared to that derived from the Berninesque tradition and to a painting of the *Pietà* by Giovanni Battista Gaulli;[147] the *Sacrifice of Isaac* which could have been inspired by the Laocoön group but the 'idea of the strong leaning forward of the entire figure is perhaps derived from Bernini';[148] and the *Samson and Lion* which finds its similarities in the sculpture of *Hercules and the Nemean Lion* by Stefano Maderno.[149] An analysis of the channels through which Pinsel was influenced by Bernini, Maderno, Gaulli, and other Italian masters would have continued to enhance the author's analyses.[150]

The medium used by the sculptors is chief among regional characteristics and, similar to Malta, regional sculptors in the Ukraine found their own alternative to marble. While limestone is used in Maltese *scalpellini*, Ostrowski emphasises the fact that Pinsel used a medieval medium of lime-wood which was then covered with naturalistic polychromy for the exposed parts of the body and otherwise gilded. The recurrence of the subject of regional materials is a clear indication that, not only in Malta but in all regional centres of sculptural production, sculptors made use of the most available material and adapted it to the expression of the Baroque. Ostrowski also observed stylistic regional characteristics, such as the swirling of the figures in metallic draperies[151] and lack of artistic training in the manner in which the anatomy is sculpted, especially of nude figures.[152] This is another recurring issue in the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style; while the style was easier to imitate, it was difficult to fake the education of a trained artist in Rome, which would have been acquired in the *Accademia* and while working in the *bottega* of an established artist. Undeniably, this situation in eighteenth-century Poland repeats itself in eighteenth-century Malta.

---

[146] For a more detailed formal analysis, see Ostrowski (2000), 203.

[147] Ostrowski also emphasises Baciccio's role as chief translator of Bernini's works and concepts into pictorial form. The Berninesque *Mother of Sorrows* is discussed in more detail in Ostrowski (2000), 209.

[148] Ostrowski (2000), 213.

[149] Ostrowski (2000), 213.

[150] Ostrowski leaves the discussion on the mechanics of the imprint of the Italian influence to the very last paragraphs, and then only mentions drawings, *bozzetti*, and *modelli* as technical aids to the artist. Ostrowski (2000), 214.

[151] This is, in fact, a feature of the eighteenth-century Lvov school of sculpture, although the author states that Pinsel 'never adopted the characteristic manner of geometrical stylization of folds with sharp, crisp edges'. Ostrowski (2000), 203.

[152] Ostrowski explains that this is probably due to his lack of proper academic training which gave him 'no chance to become acquainted with the canon of Renaissance and Baroque art'. Ostrowski (2000), 203.

The Roman Baroque style of sculpture travelled widely, reaching also South America. Although it is not the scope of this research to analyse the dissemination in this region, it would go amiss if it fails to take literature pertaining to this into consideration, especially for its methodological approach. It is particularly interesting to note that while in Malta there was a direct link with Rome which provided Maltese *scalpellini* with undeviating inspiration, this was not always the case in other parts of the world. Gauvin Alexander Bailey and Fernando Guzmán analysed and reconsidered the established attribution of the statue of St Sebastian to Johannes Bitterich, a Tyrolean sculptor and Jesuit brother who worked in South America.[153] The authors dismissed this attribution and proposed another artist, Adam Engelhard, a German Jesuit sculptor and cabinet-maker.[154] The authors' analysis of the elements of the statue of St Sebastian shed light on its Central European characteristics.[155] They stated that the Baroque idiom in South America was indirectly imprinted with the Roman Baroque after it had already travelled to Germany, Austria, and the rest of Central Europe and acquired regional characteristics from several provinces. Roman Baroque influence is more direct in other works of art, such as Jacob Kellner's *Death of St Francis Xavier*;[156] the *St Stanislas Kostka on his deathbed* by Pierre Legros in S. Andrea al Quirinale in Rome served as the obvious model.[157] Regional characteristics are also observed, such as the 'elongated gaunt body'[158] inspired by eighteenth-century Central European sculpture.

The travel of artists was a universal phenomenon and indispensable for the successful dissemination of the Roman Baroque. In this regard, the same authors, Bailey and Guzmán, analysed another node of colonial art in Chile, a Rococo altarpiece dedicated to St Ignatius.[159] Originally located in the now destroyed church of San Miguel in Santiago,[160] the retable of St Ignatius is the result of the influx of Central European Jesuit brother artists and craftsmen into Chile. The authors emphasised how

---

[153] Gauvin Alexander Bailey and Fernando Guzmán, 'The 'St Sebastian' of Los Andes: a Chilean cultural treasure re-examined', *The Burlington Magazine*, cliii, 1304 Sculpture (November 2011), 721-726.

[154] Bailey and Guzmán (2011), 725.

[155] For a deeper discussion on the statue of St Sebastian, see Bailey and Guzmán (2011), 724-725.

[156] Originally situated in the Jesuit church of S. Miguel, this is now housed in the Cathedral Museum, Santiago.

[157] The authors also commented on how the theme was executed in wake of the tradition of portraying dying saints pioneered by Melchiorre Cafà and Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

[158] Bailey and Guzmán (2011), 726.

[159] Gauvin Alexander Bailey and Fernando Guzmán, 'The Rococo altarpiece of St Ignatius: Chile's grandest colonial retable rediscovered', *The Burlington Magazine*, clv, 1329 (December 2013), 815-820.

[160] This is now in the suburban church of San Juan Evangelista, Santiago.

this travel of artists between 1718 and 1755 promoted the implementation of the latest style of Central Europe in Chile, including the Bavarian Baroque and the French Rococo style.[161] It is noteworthy that different *scalpellini* in different regions appropriated different parts of a Roman Baroque altar reredos. In this case, the blue columns in the altarpiece of St Ignatius imitates Andrea Pozzo's altar dedicated to the same saint in the Church of the Gesù in Rome,[162] a decorative device which is not found in regional Maltese sculpture. The authors also analysed the regional Bavarian Baroque influence on this altarpiece, especially in the false marbling technique (*Marmorieurung*) which is a distinctive feature of Germanic retables in Chile. On the other hand, both false marbling and Pozzo's writings are common occurrences in Malta's eighteenth-century sculpture. A Germanic Baroque sensibility is observed by the authors who stated that the works 'recall the combinations of Asam and his contemporaries achieved using components of Bernini's *Baldacchino* (1624-33) and *Cathedra Petri* (1657-1666) in St Peter's in Rome'.[163] Similarly, all of these significant works of art find their counterparts executed in eighteenth-century Malta, as will be discussed *infra*.

Similar to the modes of dissemination in Malta, the Berninesque influence in Chile came to fruition in various ways, chief among them Andrea Pozzo's *Perspectiva*. Bailey and Guzmán stated that Bernini's models were further developed in this publication which was widely dispersed and also included an illustration of the altar of St Ignatius in the Church of the Gesù in Rome.[164] They stated that 'even European artists relied on prints when recreating the kinds of altarpieces they would have known at home and that, like their counterparts in Buenos Aires, the altarpieces were pastiches of different prototypes and ornamental design'.[165] In this way, the Jesuits in Chile diffused new forms of religious decoration by using primarily Germanic models which were influenced by the Roman Baroque style itself. This is once again in stark contrast

---

[161] In this regard, Bailey and Guzmán stated that the areas of present-day Argentina and Chile were the most influenced territories because 'they relied heavily on engraved models from the prolific publishing houses of Augsburg'. Bailey and Guzmán (2013), 815.

[162] The authors highlight this similarity in Bailey and Guzmán (2013), 816.

[163] Bailey and Guzmán (2013), 818-819.

[164] The authors identified two other contemporary French and German engravings of altars modelled on Pozzo's version at the Gesù church.

[165] The authors identify two prints; one by Jacques-Francois Blondel and one by Franz Xaver Habermann. Bailey and Guzmán (2013), 820.

with Malta's state of affairs in which the Roman Baroque links were direct and uninterrupted.

Similar to the situation of the Order of St John in Malta and its desire to emulate Rome which is analysed by Sciberras,[166] political propaganda is considered one of the reasons behind the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in Poland by Krzysztof J. Czyżewski and Marek Walczak in their analysis of the influence of the Roman Baroque style and the reception of its models for sepulchral art.[167] The bishops of Cracow determined the development of monuments with bishop portrait busts in the Cathedral of Saints Wenceslaus and Stanislaus and they 'deliberately employed artistic solutions from the papal Rome to emphasise their own prestige'.[168] This situation was not exclusive to the Kingdom of Poland since the influence of Rome was felt in many parts of Europe, including in Malta where the Order of St John imported and commissioned works of the Roman Baroque style to augment their political standing. While in Malta, the Conventual Church of St John seems to have been the main recipient of this Roman Baroque influx, in Poland the influence manifested itself in portrait sculpture, as popularised by Bernini, which were then incorporated as part of the design of church monuments to the Bishops of Cracow.

The travelling of artist-students has become a recurring theme in this investigation of the dissemination of the Berninesque style to regional locations. The modes of the dissemination of Italian stylistic influences are analysed by the authors, who consider the great number of Polish students who went to study abroad, particularly in the city of Padua, a great determining factor for the enabling of this dissemination.[169] All of these modes of transporting the style from Italy have been observed in the case of eighteenth-century Malta.[170] Another recurrent theme is the use of prints for inspiration or even blatant copying of motifs, which was another mode of

---

[166] This publication is discussed *supra* in this Introduction.

[167] Krzysztof J. Czyżewski & Marek Walczak, 'The Monuments with Portrait Busts of the Bishop of Cracow: On the History of the Reception of Roman Baroque Models of Sepulchral Art in Poland', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxxvi, 71 (2015), 181-223.

[168] Czyżewski & Walczak (2015), 181.

[169] The authors, supporting their statements with legitimate examples, stated that these students would have been familiar with the typology of aedicular monuments with busts. According to them, the most pivotal among these tombs was the tomb of Cardinal Stanislaw Hozjusz in the basilica of S. Maria in Trastevere. This was known in Poland through reports of visitors and also through a series of one hundred copperplates published in Rome in 1588 in Hozjusz's biography. For more on the mode of transporting the style from Italy to Poland, see Czyżewski & Walczak (2015), 190-191.

[170] See Chapter I *infra* for more on the channels of distributing the Berninesque tradition from Rome to Malta.

practice in eighteenth-century Malta, and in other regional centres.[171] One particular monument, dedicated to Piotr Gembick, is erected in the aedicular *alla Romana* manner and the authors observed the introduction of a number of stylistic motifs, all of which have an Italian prototype.[172] Chief among the Roman Baroque influences is the use of drapery, used also in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. The authors observe the use of drapery in the ancient sarcophagi as a prototype for this motif but they also reference Bernini's profuse use of drapery in the tomb of Alexander VII in St Peter's Basilica and the monument to Maria Raggi in S. Maria sopra Minerva.

Busts are not as common in Maltese regional sculpture and their profuse employment in Poland is further proof of regional differences between different expressions of the Roman Baroque and the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition. The authors analysed the employment of the *alla Romana* bust in the Gembick monument, where the bust is placed within a niche. They deduce that this was a concept which is traced to Bernini's workshops where it was favoured due to its iconographic importance and ability to accentuate the plasticity of the sculpture. The authors compared the manner in which the sitter seems to emerge from the niche to the same motif employed by Giuliano Finelli in the tomb of Cardinal Giulio Antonio Santori in S. Giovanni in Laterano.[173] In this regard, the authors analysed the debt that these Polish busts owe to Bernini prototypes, such as the bust of Giovanni Battista Santoni is S. Prassede and the bust of Pedro de Foix Montoya for S. Giacomo degli Spagnoli. The utilisation of the half-open book to suggest the spontaneity of the captured moment is also observed by the authors in other examples such as Algardi's bust of Cardinal Giovanni Garzia Mellini in S. Maria del Popolo. The transmission of such motifs is

---

[171] Czyżewski & Walczak analysed the memorial dedicated to Bishop Jakub Zadzik which followed the tomb of Szyszkowski. The authors observed the pair of eagle's heads at the top of the oval niche which may have been derived from prints and they compared their use in a vase with eagle handles by Alessandro Algardi and Silvio Calci in Villa Borghese in Rome. Czyżewski & Walczak divulge more details on the memorial dedicated to Bishop Jakub Zadzik in Czyżewski & Walczak (2015), 192-194.

[172] The use of Ionic pilasters with skulls below the capitals instead of the columns can be observed in Roman sepulchral monuments, such as the tomb of Clemente Merlini in S. Maria Maggiore designed by Francesco Borromini. The authors also detected similarities with Roman sculpture in the use of the sarcophagus incorporated into the aedicule. To support their theory they mention numerous examples from Roman churches, among them Alessandro Algardi's monument to Cardinal Giovanni Garzia Mellini in the church of S. Maria del Popolo, but they fail to mention Bernini's use of the sarcophagus in his designs for papal tombs. For more detailed description, see Czyżewski & Walczak (2015), 188.

[173] It is also observed how the sitter of the Gembick monument is caught in a spontaneous moment, deemed by the authors to be 'among the earliest instances of busts sculpted outside of Bernini's workshop that put into practice the principles of the affects theory and the Berninesque concept of the *speaking likeness*'. For more details on the speaking likeness as employed in this bust, see Czyżewski & Walczak (2015), 200.

once again attributed by the authors to the travel of artists.[174] This is analogous to the situation in eighteenth-century Malta, although to other expressions of the Berninesque tradition, chief among them the altar reredos with typically Berninesque typologies.

In Malta, working material played an essential role in the dissemination of the Berninesque style, especially for *scalpellini* who never left the Islands. Andrea Pozzo's *Perspectiva* was surely known in Malta, as evidenced by its presence in archival inventories.[175] The situation was not exclusive to the Maltese Islands. Sara Fuentes Lázaro analysed the distribution of architectural and sculptural models of the Roman Baroque style with reference to the effects of Andrea Pozzo's designs on the development of eighteenth-century Spain cathedral façades.[176] Interestingly, she refers to these cathedral façades as retable-façades because they were inspired from designs for ephemeral celebratory altars. She identified the fact that Pozzo's treatise *Perspectiva* was never translated to Spanish in spite of the versions available in several languages.[177] This was an analogous situation with the Maltese state of affairs. Both in Malta and in Spain, the treatise was however still circulated among clergy, patrons, and artists, and many Jesuits could read the original in Latin or Italian. Since artists used the treatise exclusively for its plentiful images and independently of its original intended purpose, the translation was never essential. As a result, Spanish cathedrals finished in the course of the eighteenth century adopted stylistic solutions from Pozzo's most inventive designs.[178] It is evident from certain borrowings in Maltese eighteenth-century altar reredoses that Maltese *scalpellini* were familiar with the publication.[179]

A recurring characteristic in Maltese *scalpellini* family was the close ties that existed within each family and between different families.[180] These professional and personal ties continued to ensure the effective and efficient transmission of the Berninesque style within Malta itself. The same set of conditions has been uncovered in

---

[174] Czyżewski & Walczak state that 'it may be assumed that de Rossi – before he left for Poland in 1651 – had seen the famous bust in S. Maria del Popolo and used it as a model for his Cracow work'. Czyżewski & Walczak (2015), 201.

[175] This is discussed further in Chapter I *infra*.

[176] Sara Fuentes Lázaro, 'The Contribution of Perspectiva Pictorum Architectorum to Retable-Façades in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Cathedrals', paper presented during the international convention *Architettura e città. Problemi di tutela e valorizzazione nei centri storici e nelle periferie*, La Spezia, 27-28 November 2015.

[177] For more details on the numerous versions of Pozzo's treatise *Perspectiva Pictorum Architectorum*, see Fuentes Lázaro (2015), 455.

[178] Fuentes Lázaro (2015), 455.

[179] These similarities are analysed in Chapter III *infra*.

[180] For more on this, see the protagonists of this research in Chapter I *infra*.

Croatia by Martina Ožanić. [181] She analysed the impact of the Roman Baroque style on the altars of sculptor and woodcarver Franz Anton Straub in northern Croatia within the framework of elements which determined their production in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Croatia. She identified the models which these sculptors followed and analysed the influence ultimately derived from Bernini or his circle. Ožanić divulged information on the family of sculptors Straub whose main source of influence was Bernini and his theatrical scenography.[182] She also analysed how the brothers exchanged templates, ideas, and drawings obtained from Italy which they then altered according to their own sensibilities and regional stylistic characteristics.

When analysing the development of the altar reredos in Croatia, Ožanić analysed the manner in which its architectural components merged together to form one complete whole. She credited this development to the impact which the known corpus of works of Bernini had in Croatia, in the same manner that a certain corpus of works by Bernini was known in Malta. Significantly, she also included sculptors who formed part of Bernini's most immediate circle, such as Antonio Raggi and his work after the design of Bernini in the church of SS. Domenico e Sisto in Rome since, even in Malta, the *Berniniani* serve as further instruments of dissemination of the style. Furthermore, Ožanić identified the fact that this influence not only merged the architectural components of an altar together but also its iconographic aspect.[183] The 1577 Charles Borromeo publication *Instructiones fabricate et supellectilis ecclesiasticae* is identified by Ožanić as one of the ways in which this Roman Baroque influence was disseminated into Croatia.[184] The use of themes and motifs, such as the canopy or *baldacchino*, are identified by Ožanić in Croatian eighteenth-century sculpture. Ožanić also analysed the influence exerted by one of Bernini's innovative theatrical devices, the hidden source of light, on the development of eighteenth-century Croatian sculpture. This pattern of utilising different theatrical elements from Bernini's *concetti* and amalgamating them with regional sculptural motifs is also repeated in eighteenth-century Malta.[185]

---

[181] Martina Ožanić, 'Altaristika u opusu Franza Antona Strauba na području sjeverne Hrvatske – geneza motiva, utjecaji, odjeci', *Peristil* 61 (2018), Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Conservation Department in Zagreb, 65-87.

[182] Ožanić (2018), 66.

[183] Ožanić (2018), 67.

[184] For more information on the influence of the *Instructiones fabricate et supellectilis ecclesiasticae* on art in Croatia, see Ožanić (2018), 68.

[185] For the Berninesque typologies utilised by Maltese *scalpellini*, refer to Chapter III *infra*.

The expansive research which has been carried out on Bernini studies serves to ground the research area of the Berninesque impact on regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta within its sphere of academic studies on the spread of this tradition. Many other research projects focus on discussing the Baroque expression of several locations, but do not dedicate research effort to deciphering in which manner that particular Baroque expression was successfully disseminated from Rome. The main contributions of research in the area of art history which is dedicated to analysing those links and channels between Rome and several other locations which enabled the Roman Baroque style, and particularly the Berninesque impact, to permeate and in some cases even take over the local tradition of sculpture, are limited in quantity, but there seems to be a growing trend in academic scholarship on the subject. It is within these academic contributions that an investigation into the Berninesque impact on regional eighteenth-century Maltese *scalpellini* should be considered.

Methodological Approach and Theoretical Grounding

The intriguing methodological tools used in art historical research are several and diverse; primarily they are used to react to the research question and its implementation within its theoretical framework. Through the extensive literature review on the subject of Bernini studies and the international spread of the Berninesque tradition, a research gap has been identified, namely the subject of the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition, and the Roman Baroque style of which it forms part, in the regional sculpture of eighteenth-century Malta. This dissertation aims to fill this gap in the academic literature by analysing the research statement through several methodological approaches.[186]

The term 'Berninesque' in theory and in established literature largely refers to that style in sculpture which is executed 'in the style of Bernini'. Several authors use the well-established term and the first part of the first chapter of this dissertation engages with the various literature which make use of the word 'Berninesque'.[187] Even though it is sometimes used to infer lesser quality than actual works by Bernini, the

---

[186] The research statement is: This research aims to analyse the impact of the Berninesque tradition on regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta through an evaluation of the links and channels which enabled this influence. It aims to place the work of Maltese eighteenth-century regional *scalpellini* within the wider context of the international milieu with particular reference to Italy and the spread of Roman Baroque sculpture south of Rome.

[187] Refer to Chapter I *infra*.

term 'Berninesque' has developed into a quasi-style of its own, many times describing either works which have been executed by followers and associates of Bernini who would have had direct contact with the master or works of a regional nature executed in Bernini's style as a result of the dissemination of the sculptural tradition. In this dissertation, the term 'Berninesque' is largely used in the latter sense, that is, to refer to the dissemination of the style of Bernini from Rome to other regional locations.

'Regional Late Baroque sculpture' is not a very commonly found phrase in established literature but it is used in this dissertation to refer to any sculpture which is deemed to be Late Baroque – very often due to its style as established in art history or late dating in the Baroque period as accepted in this discipline – in any place or region which is not Rome, that is, the place where Baroque art was born. In this research statement, the term 'Late Baroque' refers to sculpture which had been executed from the late seventeenth century to the entirety of the eighteenth century, although many works of art in Malta with which this research engages date to the first half of the eighteenth century. Other works of art, especially in the south of Italy, date to the seventeenth century. The term 'regional' is essential for distinguishing between what is regarded as sculpture imported from Rome or executed in a location other than Rome by Roman artists and sculpture which is produced in a location other than Rome by local artists. In the case of Malta, the term 'regional' describes the works undertaken by the local *scalpellini* in various parish churches as well as in secular buildings, as opposed to the Roman Baroque art imported from Rome which is located mainly in the Conventual Church of St John.

The 'links and channels' in this research statement refer to the modes of transmission through which this Berninesque tradition managed to influence regional sculpture. These could be various, as exemplified by the literature reviewed above, but all of these variables have one common result: the impact of the Berninesque style on local artists and the subsequent development of a regional style which embraces, in varying degrees, the Roman Baroque style of sculpture. In the case of Malta, these links and channels are identified and analysed in detail in the first chapter[188] through various modes, including archival research and contextual evidence.

---

[188] For more information on the links and channels which enabled the Berninesque style to influence Maltese *scalpellini*, refer to Chapter I *infra*.

The phrase 'spread of Roman Baroque sculpture south of Rome' is a vast expression which could refer to many more locations which are geographically south of Rome and which are not included in this study. Therefore, for the purposes of limiting this research to manageable proportions, the phrase 'south of Rome' is understood to mean five particular locations, namely Malta, Naples, Lecce, Palermo, and some towns in South-East Sicily. These locations have been identified as major exponents of Roman Baroque art outside Rome with similar stylistic expressions of the style. On the other hand, the similarities and disparities identified in their regional Late Baroque sculpture points towards the theory that, although there are several links and parallels between the different locations, the link with Rome was direct. This comparative analysis is explored further in the second chapter which, following approaches taken in established literature on the particular locations, draws these parallels and discrepancies in the reception of Berninesque influence.[189]

The theoretical grounding of this research is supplemented by the extensive literature review *supra* and the constant relaying between the methods used in this research and those already established by other authors, namely extensive formal analysis, technical analysis, archival analysis, and connoisseurship skills. In formulating the literature review, landmark publications were accessed through the UM Library, online, and at the Bibliotheca Hertziana. This analysis of other research projects was indispensable for formulating the appropriate methodology to be used for this study and for its grounding within the state of research in the area of Bernini studies, with particular emphasis on the international dissemination of the Berninesque tradition.

The primary sources for this research consisted of the works of art located in Maltese churches; several archives including the Notarial Archives, the Curia Archives, the Mdina Cathedral Archives, and parish archives; seventeenth- and eighteenth-century prints allowing the proper comparison of works of art in Malta to others executed in Rome; and old photographs portraying the work of art when it is no longer extant due to alterations or destruction. Extensive original archival research and analysis formed an integral part of the basis of this study and was essential for the secure attribution of works of art as well as to enhance stylistic and comparative

---

[189] Refer to Chapter II *infra* for more a comparative analysis between the Late Baroque sculpture of Malta and the south of Italy.

analyses.[190] Archival research and its subsequent analysis were imperative to augment the theoretical channels between Rome and Malta enabling the Berninesque tradition to travel to Maltese shores. Analysis of archival documents mentioning Rome in commissioning works of art consolidates its authority in artistic matters. Biographical information on the protagonists of this research and the fleshing out of the context of eighteenth-century *scalpellini* were also the product of archival research. Archival documentation illustrates the bustling trading activity in Maltese harbours and the subsequent exchange of merchandise and ideas which quickly resulted in a cultural melting pot, paving the way for the dissemination of the Berninesque style into Malta and its parish churches.

Archival research provided details on the running of the bottega and the general industry of sculpture in Malta. This is the case with research carried out at the Notarial Archives, where legally-binding contracts commissioning a work of art provide many details of the commission including dates, names of patrons and artists, payments, and other clauses which reveal information on the industry of the art of sculpture in Malta such as the name, quality, and reputation of quarries; the value and availability of stone; the division of labour and the different occupations such as architects, sculptors, stone carvers, master masons, builders, quarry owners, and stone merchants; the payment terms; the tools to be used in the execution of the work; the assistants; any estimates of the work made by selected *periti*; and the general responsibilities of each party to the other.

Relevant archival documentation was catalogued in a systematic manner to capture as many details as possible from the discovered documents as well as to provide visual aids of the work of art, where available (Table 3). Around 400 volumes were consulted, from which around 688 contracts were found to be directly or indirectly relevant to the research question (Table 2).[191] The largest amount of documents relate to the secular construction industry (218 contracts), followed by ecclesiastical sculpture (145 contracts), estimation of property (102 contracts), patronage and mechanics of the *bottega* (70 contracts), decorative arts (58 contracts), ecclesiastical construction industry (51 contracts), biographical information (28

---

[190] Archival research was carried out in the Notarial Archives, the Mdina Cathedral Archives, and the Archiepiscopal Archives in Floriana. Parish archives were also consulted where needed.
[191] Only a selection of this has been used in this research and the other data represents opportunities for further study.

contracts), and secular sculpture (16 contracts). The cataloguing of the relevant contracts has proved to be a successful method of organising information and provided a clear and systematic manner to analyse information.

Stylistic and technical analyses were carried out on several eighteenth-century altars. Onsite research was an essential part of the entire research exercise since it is through physical close contact with the work of art that a stylistic and technical verdict might be formed. It is also through examining the works that the degree of influence of the Berninesque Roman Baroque on regional *scalpellini* in Malta can be determined. The degree of influence needed to be gauged in two different approaches – firstly in terms of quantity, and secondly in terms of quality. For these reasons, onsite research in churches constituted one of the main pillars of this research. Connoisseurship skills, acquired through close and frequent encounters with works of art, were indispensable for the successful completion of the study.

The survey included 326 altars in 98 Maltese churches (Table 1). The churches chosen were built either in the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century or built earlier than this period but majorly altered in the eighteenth century. The database determines the total number of altars in a church and the style which their altar reredoses adopt. Altars have been categorised into the following sections: Berninesque or Roman Baroque altar reredoses which include figures; Berninesque or Roman Baroque altar reredoses which do not include figures but include other architectural decoration; altar reredoses which display Barocchetto characteristic elements; altar reredoses which display the style prevalent in seventeenth-century Malta whether actually executed in the seventeenth century or later in a retardataire style; and other styles. For a comparative approach, several Roman churches were also visited and surveyed to collect data and images of the Berninesque style. The same exercise was carried out for the Val di Noto area in Sicily, including the towns of Ortigia, Noto,

72

Number of churches surveyed	Number of altars surveyed
98	326

Typology of altars	Number of altars
Berninesque/Roman Baroque with figures: angels/saints/*putti*	97
Berninesque/Roman Baroque with architectural motifs: *gloria* & cherub heads	101
Barocchetto	29
17th c. Baroque: decoration determined by architecture, including figures	73
Other	26

Table 1: Summary of results of church and altar typology survey.

Archival research at Notarial Archives, Valletta	
Number of consulted volumes	c. 400
Number of relevant volumes	236
Number of relevant documents	688
Relevant documents categorised	
Biographical information	28
Ecclesiastical sculpture	145
Ecclesiastical architecture or construction	51
Secular sculpture	16
Secular architecture or construction	218
Valuations of property	102
Decorative arts	58
Patronage & mechanics	70

Table 2: Summary of consulted documents at the Notarial Archives, Valletta.

Names of relevant artists & craftsmen at the Notarial Archives, Valletta			
Ecclesiastical sculpture	**Ecclesiastical architecture**	**Secular sculpture**	
Antonio Zahra	Gio Maria Tabone	Lorenzo Fabri	
Pietro Paolo Zahra	Giacomo Bianco	Gaetano Fabri	
Giacomo Zahra	Gregorio Mangion	Carlo Fabri	
Felice Zahra	Alexandro Pulis	Gerolamo Fabri	
Francesco Fabri	Leonardo Mallia	Antonio Fabri	
Antonio Fabri	Gio Maria Caruana	Gregorio Durante	
Giacomo Fabri	Petruzzo Debono	Pietro Paolo Zahra	
Gerolamo Fabri	Giovanni Camilleri		
Giuseppe Fabri	Romano Carapecchia	**Decorative arts**	
Gregorio Durante	Giuseppe Azzopardi	Antonino Fiteni	Aloisio Bouchout
Giovanni Durante	Lucio Falson	Lorenzo Vella	Michelangelo Muscat
Carlo Durante	Francesco Cuschieri	Candeloro Magro	Marc'Antonio Morelli
Filippo Durante	Francesco Debono	Gio Domenico Grima	Matteo Cutajar
Lorenzo Durante	Salvatore Calleja	Pietro Scotto	Pietro Santucci
Gio Antonio Durante	Placido Randon	Giuseppe del Piano	Giuseppe Galea
Ignazio Portelli	Tommaso Parnis	Giuseppe Mifsud	Gio Antonio Tanti
Andrea Imbroll	Francesco Zerafa	Pietro Tanti	Christopher De Luccia
Erasmo Azzopardi	Vitale Covati	Giuseppe Turriglio	Gio Battista Caloriti
Alexandro Gelfo	Ferrnate Vanelli	Giovanni Mallia	Stefano Erardi
Giovanni Florio	Giovanni Bonavia	Francesco Zahra	Antonio de Domenicis
Francesco Scolaro		Antonio Farrugia	Natale Ciurmi
Salvatore Gilibert		Aloisio Fenech	Gioacchino De Giorgio
Gio Maria Gilibert		Andrea Pace	Gio Dom Carbonaro
Giuseppe Casanova		Paolo Galea	
Giovanni Damato		Giuseppe Gatt	
Antonio Mamo		Giovanni Sapiano	
Francesco Foti		Giuseppe Borg	
Domenico Carbonaro		Margarita Torno	

Table 3: Summary of artist and craftsmen names at the Notarial Archives, Valletta.

Ragusa, and Modica, resulting in the survey of 27 churches while 22 churches were visited in Palermo. The same exercise was carried out for Naples, where 15 churches were visited, and Lecce, where 12 churches were surveyed. These surveys serve to determine Malta's position in the spread of the Berninesque impact south of Rome.

The chosen methodology for this research had its limitations for which concessions and justifications have to be made. In the theoretical analysis, the unavailability of a considerable amount of relevant literature in Malta is a disadvantage; this was mitigated by a period of study in the Bibliotheca Hertziana in Rome. This period in Rome also served to re-familiarise with the churches of Rome, and the works of Bernini and the *Berniniani*. The research design focused on the study of notaries active from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century. In order to further focus the research, notaries who were active in the harbour areas of Cospicua, Senglea, Vittoriosa, and Valletta, and those active in the Mdina/Rabat area were preferred due to their more common connotations with the artists and patrons commissioning works of art and the higher percentage of works of art in churches in these localities. This archival research is complemented by other research exercises in other archives, including the Curia archives, the Mdina Cathedral Archives, and parish archives. The closure of the Notarial Archives for rehabilitation at the end of summer 2019 and the unavailability of volumes for double checking of data was another issue, slightly mitigated by the early start of the archival research.

In relation to the technical and stylistic analysis, the considerable number of destroyed altar reredoses presents a disadvantage when it comes to both the quantitative and qualitative research aspects of this study. This seems to be a common problem of the authors in the literature reviewed and it is thus not exclusive to Malta. At other times, improper 'restoration' and alterations to the work of art impede a proper qualitative judgement to be made. Similar to these authors' remedies, in Malta's case, this limitation is mitigated with the descriptions sometimes found in archival documentation and with the occasional photo of the altar dating back to the nineteenth century before it was either torn down to make way for a new one or destroyed in World War II. Furthermore, it would be amiss not to mention the impact which the Covid-19 pandemic had on hindering the progress of the research as originally planned. Archives, churches, libraries, and travel all came to a halting stop in March 2020. This disadvantage was mildly mitigated with the availability of online sources; but the

pandemic inevitably and negatively impacted the research timeline, which had to be appropriately readjusted to fit the current reality.

CHAPTER I

The Socio-Artistic Context of the Berninesque Manner in Malta and its Links with Rome

Pietro Paolo Zahra or Fabri family, Altar of the Assumption, Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Safi. Detail.

This chapter analyses the use of the term 'Berninesque' within the international context in search for a definition of the word. It focuses on the socio-artistic context of eighteenth-century Malta impacted by the Berninesque tradition which it amalgamated with local traditions. The protagonists of this research are also identified and their work introduced. Most importantly, this chapter identifies the channels which allowed the artistic dissemination between Rome and Malta to emerge.

1.1 Defining the term 'Berninesque' within the context of the international spread of the Roman Baroque style

The term 'Berninesque' has been used by art historians in literature on seventeenth-century works by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and the subsequent dissemination of his Roman Baroque style in Europe and worldwide. Since the term forms an inherent part of the research ethos, there is a need to define the word. The suffix '–esque' implies a definition of the word as 'in the style of; resembling';[1] thus, in this context 'Berninesque' means in the style of Bernini or resembling the style of Bernini. Similarly, the suffix '–esque' is defined as 'an adjective suffix indicating style, manner, resemblance, or distinctive character'.[2] A search in literature employing the word 'Berninesque', whether extensively or sporadically used, reveals that it always refers to a work or a concept which is either directly or remotely related to Bernini and his style.

It becomes immediately clear that the highest use of the term 'Berninesque' is found in literature which discusses sculptors contemporary to Bernini, many times working in his style and consequently sometimes referred to as *Berniniani*. It is used as early as 1937 by Rudolf Wittkower to refer to Rainaldi's Berninesque period.[3] The term is repeatedly used to refer to a style which is influenced by Bernini's tradition. Leonard Opdycke utilises the term 'Berninesque' to describe a work which is executed in the style of Bernini or after a work by the master. [4]

---

[1] Oxford Dictionaries, '-esque', https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/-esque accessed 6 May 2019.

[2] Dictionary.com, '-esque', https://www.dictionary.com/browse/-esque accessed 6 May 2019.

[3] Rudolf Wittkower, 'Carlo Rainaldi and the Roman Architecture of the Full Baroque', *The Art Bulletin*, xix, 2 (1937), 242-313.

[4] Leonard Opdycke, 'A Group of Models for Berninesque Sculpture', *Bulletin of the Fogg Art Museum*, vii, 2 (1938), 26-30: 26.

Robert H. Westin uses the term 'Berninesque' to differentiate between the style of Bernini and the manner of Algardi.[5] The term is here used to differ between two camps of the Roman Baroque and therefore, it once again refers to the style of the sculptors. Mark S. Weil analyses Antonio Raggi's Berninesque style, stating that through Raggi's close working ties with Bernini, he assimilated his style into his own.[6] Gertrude Rosenthal makes extensive use of the term to refer to the style or manner of Gian Lorenzo Bernini.[7] The term is also employed to infer a style which is heavily dependent on the manner of Bernini; in this case the author is analysing the work of Ercole Ferrata and Pierre Legros II.[8] It is a style which is somehow modified but still intrinsically linked to its inventor; a manner which would not have transpired if not for Bernini's invention. The same meaning is attributed to the term 'Berninesque' by David L. Bershad while critically discussing a series of papal busts by Domenico Guidi when he refers to Wittkower's cautious acceptance of an attribution in spite of the work being Berninesque, that is, in the style of Bernini.[9] More recently, Steven F. Ostrow uses the term 'Berninesque' in the same sense, that is, alluding to style and Bernini's *concetto*.[10] Some Maltese scalpellini may be referred to as 'Berninesque' in this sense of the word since they entirely submit to Bernini's influence in the execution of their works. The definition of the term 'Berninesque' can be safely intrinsically tied to the question of style, that is, the distinctive appearance of the Berninian aesthetic.

The term 'Berninesque' is also used extensively in literature which focuses on the discussion of regional works of sculpture which owe their conception to the Roman Baroque style of sculpture and particularly the inventions of Bernini. Malta's case fits in well within this sense of the word 'Berninesque' since the

---

[5] 'Peroni's statues reflect his background in Algardi's studio, whereas Raggi's orientation is more Berninesque.' Robert H. Westin, 'Antonio Raggi's Death of St Cecilia', *The Art Bulletin*, lvi, 3 (1974), 422-429: 426.

[6] Mark S. Weil, 'The Angels of the Ponte Sant' Angelo: A Comparison of Bernini's Sculpture to the Work of Two Collaborators', *Art Journal*, xxx, 3 (1971), 252-259: 256.

[7] 'The crisp folds, although flowing in a Berninesque manner, are yet arranged in such a way that the fine S-shaped contour of the figure is preserved'. Gertrude Rosenthal, 'An Italian Rococo Relief in Bernini's Tradition', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 5 (1942), 56-67: 57.

[8] Rosenthal (1942), 63: 'The illusionistic effect, the selection and arrangement of the figures, the handling of the draperies, the characteristics of a modified Berninesque style, point to the workshop of Ferrata or of Pierre Legros II.'

[9] David L. Bershad, 'A Series of Papal Busts by Domenico Guidi', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxii, 813 (1970), 805-809+811: 805.

[10] Steven F. Ostrow, 'Gianlorenzo Bernini, Girolamo Lucenti, and the Statue of Philip IV in S. Maria Maggiore: Patronage and Politics in Seicento Rome', *The Art Bulletin*, lxxiii, 1 (1991), 89-118: 101.

adjective is aptly applied to Maltese *scalpellini* and their output of works which are the result of the international spread of Bernini's dominating style in seventeenth-century Rome. Irving Lavin uses the term 'Berninesque' to refer to a sculptor who worked in the style of Bernini – a style so close to the Bernini tradition that his *bozzetti* were mistakenly attributed to the master himself.[11] The same meaning is imbued by John Beldon Scott in his article on Guarino Guarini's invention of the passion capitals in the chapel of the Holy Shroud in Turin wherein he analyses Antonio Bertola's altar reliquary and describes it as 'Berninesque' because it is executed in the style of Bernini.[12] The concept of the 'Berninesque' *bel composto* is also discussed by John Beldon Scott[13], who critically discusses another of Bernini's Baroque concepts as employed by Guarini in Turin, that of 'the Berninesque device of the scenographic relationship of separate sculptural and architectural components brought into visual proximity across space'.[14] Dissemination of Bernini's style into other countries, such as Poland, is analysed by Krzysztof J. Czyżewski and Marek Walczak in their article on the monuments with portrait busts of the Bishops of Cracow.[15] The term 'Berninesque' is in this article also used to refer to a particular artistic device used by Bernini, in this case the 'speaking likeness' of his portraits.[16] In his article on the works and style of Johann Georg Pinsel in the Church at Hodowica in Ukraine, Jan K. Ostrowski uses the term 'Berninesque' to refer to the 'dynamism derived from the Berninesque tradition'[17] which he observes in the works by Pinsel, as opposed to another artist whose quality of works he deems inferior. Likewise, Hellmut Hager uses the term 'Berninesque' while analysing Balthasar Neumann's Schönborn Chapel at Würzburg Cathedral.[18] He discusses the chapel's prototype which is executed in a style inspired by Bernini's manner. Nina

---

[11] Irving Lavin, 'Bernini-Bozzetti: One More, One Less: A Berninesque Sculptor in Mid-Eighteenth Century France' in *Visible Spirit: The Art of Gianlorenzo Bernini Vol. II*, The Pindar Press, London, 2009, 1018-1045.

[12] John Beldon Scott, 'Guarino Guarini's Invention of the Passion Capitals in the Chapel of the Holy Shroud, Turin', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, liv, 4 (1995), 418-445: 424.

[13] John Beldon Scott, 'Seeing the Shroud: Guarini's Reliquary Chapel in Turin and the Ostension of a Dynastic Relic', *The Art Bulletin*, LXXVII, 4 (1995), 609-637: 617.

[14] Beldon Scott (1995.b), 632.

[15] Krzysztof J. Czyżewski and Marek Walczak, 'The Monuments with Portrait Busts of the Bishops of Cracow On the History of the Reception of Roman Baroque Models of Sepulchral Art in Poland (Bernini – Algardi – Rossi)', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxxvi, 71 (2015), 181-223.

[16] Czyżewski and Walczak (2015), 200.

[17] Jan K. Ostrowski, 'A Great Baroque Master on the Outskirts of Latin Europe. Johann Georg Pinsel and the High Altar of the Church at Hodowica', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxi, 42 (2000), 197-216: 209.

[18] Hellmut Hager, Balthasar Neumann's Schönborn Chapel at Würzburg Cathedral and Its Berninesque Prototype, *Architectural History*, xxvi (1983), 73-81+151-156.

A. Mallory also uses the term 'Berninesque' in her study of the dissemination of Bernini's tradition in Spain. She analyses Narciso Tomé's *Transparente* in the Cathedral of Toledo and describes it as 'a rare and outstanding example on Spanish soil of those comprehensive Baroque works of Berninesque origin'.[19] Many of the interiors of Maltese Late Baroque parish and countryside churches could be aptly described as Berninesque in this sense of the word, meaning that their general style owes its conception to Bernini's inventions.

The term is occasionally used to denote a degree of lesser quality in the sculptural works being discussed, especially when compared to works executed or invented and engineered by Bernini. This use of the term 'Berninesque' is also fitting for Malta's situation, where many of the Late Baroque sculptural works are Berninesque in spirit but are much lower in quality when compared to Roman Baroque examples. While discussing a marble cupid attributed to Paolo Valentino Bernini, W. L. Hildburgh states that 'to me the figure seems so clearly Berninesque in character, yet so weak in comparison with the work of Bernini himself'.[20] In this case, the author is using the term 'Berninesque' to express his view that the work of art, although inferior in quality of execution, yet still possesses the spirit of Bernini's works in terms of style. Similarly, in an article on Baciccio's drawings, Hugh Macandrew utilises the word 'Berninesque' to refer to the style of Bernini: 'The attitude still persists that any Berninesque drawing not good enough to be by Bernini must therefore be by Baciccio'.[21] The term is therefore also used to describe works of art which although are executed in the style of the master, they are to some degree of a lesser quality either because of their complete dependence on the master and therefore, because of lack of invention or because the artist is less dextrous and produced work of a lesser virtuosity.

Within this international context, it is fitting to use the term 'Berninesque' in Malta to refer to sculpture which is to some degree impacted with the style of Bernini. In Malta's case and from a survey of Maltese churches, it is apparent that

---

[19] Nina A. Mallory, 'Narciso Tomé's "Transparente" in the Cathedral of Toledo (1721-1732)', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, xxix, 1 (1970), 9-23: 18.
[20] W. L. Hildburgh, 'A Signed Marble Cupid Perhaps by Paolo Valentino Bernini', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, lxxxi, 476 (1942), 280+282-284: 283.
[21] Hugh Macandrew, 'Baciccio's Early Drawings: A Group from the Artist's First Decade in Rome', *Master Drawings*, x, 2 (1972), 111-125+171-181: 111.

the Berninesque style impacted altar reredoses the most, especially when one considers the number of Berninesque motifs used by *scalpellini* in their designs. These motifs range from figurative devices, such as *angeli adoranti*, *putti*, cherub heads, saints, the dove of the Holy Spirit, and the Eternal Father to inanimate motifs such as the use of the *gloria*, acanthus leaves, festoons, and shell motifs. Other devices of Berninesque origin are used in eighteenth-century Maltese sculpture, among them concealed dramatic light and fluttering drapery folds which seem to obey no laws of gravity. In some instances, only a few motifs in an altar reredos could be identified as being Berninesque, but in other Baroque nodes all of these come together to create one total work of art constituing a regional manifestation of Bernini's *bel composto*. Before identifying, quantifying, and analysing Berninesque altar reredoses in Malta, it is imperative to first take into consideration the socio-artistic context of eighteenth-century Malta and analyse the means in which Maltese *scalpellini* familiarised themselves with the Roman Baroque style of Bernini.

1.2 The right place at the right time: the socio-artistic context of regional eighteenth-century Malta

The Berninesque impact on regional Late Baroque sculpture was enabled through the socio-artistic context of eighteenth-century Malta within the international context of Baroque Rome.[22] Rome had always been a point of reference and a superior example for Malta, both politically and spiritually, and it remained the city to emulate as a constant source for artistic endeavours. This was especially true in the case of the Order of St John. This admiration for Rome fuelled the Order's desire to commission sculptural works from Rome.[23]

---

[22] The socio-artistic context of the eighteenth century, with particular reference to Pietro Paolo Zahra, is discussed in Christina Meli, 'From the Eternal City to Malta: The Roman Baroque Imprint on the Regional Late Baroque Sculpture of Pietro Paolo Zahra', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2017.

[23] For more on the Order of St John's love for Rome, see Keith Sciberras, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2012.

Fig. 1.1 Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, Valletta, Apse.

Alessandro Algardi's *Christ the Saviour*[24] for Valletta's Marina did not leave such an imparting impact on Maltese *scalpellini*, in spite of its very accessible location. Rather, Maltese *scalpellini* must have found works inspired by Berninesque drama and theatricality more adaptable to their tastes and skill. Flourish and dramatic ceremony were perhaps considered more suitable by Maltese *scalpellini* who were brought up in a Mediterranean culture rather than one of Classical restraint and sensibility. Dramatic flying drapery and extravagant gestures were convenient tools to hide other inadequacies such as difficulties in portraying the human figure. On the other hand, Melchiorre Cafà's processional statues of *St*

---

[24] For the history and analysis of the commissioning of *Christ the Saviour*, see Sciberras (2012), 3.

Paul and the *Virgin of the Rosary* enjoyed enormous success and *fortuna critica*.[25] Almost all subsequently commissioned statues of St Paul and the Virgin Mary pay tribute to Cafà's Algardesque *contrapposto* pose.

The Order's later commissions for the Conventual Church of St John, which was the main recipient for Roman Baroque sculpture commissioned by the Order, had a greater impact on Maltese *scalpellini* .[26] Important works such as Giuseppe Mazzuoli's *Baptism of Christ*,[27] Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary for the Right Hand of St John the Baptist*,[28] and the several funerary monuments to different Grand Masters in the Conventual Church of St John[29] are discussed in more detail *infra* but at this point, it is clearly evident that the Order's desire to emulate Rome was a result of its admiration. This veneration is exhibited by official statements in letters, such as '*Il convento generalmente applaudisce l'opera, et ogni uno dice che chi vuole spendere i suoi danari con gusto vada a Roma*'.[30] The Order's role in the development of Maltese sculpture in the eighteenth century by its importation of Roman Baroque works can never be overstated.

The fact that Malta did not enjoy the permanent presence of a distinguished sculptor meant that established artists and architects, such as Mattia Preti[31] and Francesco Buonamici[32] in the seventeenth century and Romano Carapecchia[33] and

---

[25] For more on the commissioning of the *St Paul* and the *Virgin of the Rosary*, see Sciberras (2012), 37-39.

[26] See Sciberras (2012) for the works of art commissioned by the Order for the Conventual Church of St John.

[27] See Sciberras (2012), 102-152 for more on the commission of Giuseppe Mazzuoli's *Baptism of Christ*.

[28] Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary for the Right Hand of St John the Baptist* is discussed by Sciberras in Sciberras (2012), 152-173. See also Sciberras, Keith, 'Ciro Ferri's Reliquary for the Oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato in Malta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxli, 1156 (July 1999), 392-400 and Hanno-Walter Kruft, 'Another Sculpture by Ciro Ferri in Malta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxiii, 934 Special Issue Devoted to Sculpture (January 1981), 26-29.

[29] The funerary monuments to Grand Masters in the Conventual Church of St John are discussed by Sciberras in Sciberras (2012), Chapter 4, 175-261.

[30] This quote is from a letter by Fra Giovanni Domenico Manso, secretary to Grand Master Carafa, to the Order's Ambassador in Rome. Sciberras (2012), 1.

[31] For more on Mattia Preti, see Keith Sciberras, *Mattia Preti: The Triumphant Manner*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2012 and respective bibliography.

[32] For more on Francesco Buonamici, see Denis De Lucca, *Francesco Buonamici: Painter, Architect and Military Engineer in Seventeenth Century Malta and Italy*, Msida, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2006. See also Conrad Thake, 'Francesco Buonamici, 1596-1677: a pioneer of Baroque architecture in Malta', *Treasures of Malta*, viii, 2 (23) (Easter 2002), 17-22; and Denis De Lucca & Conrad Thake, *The Genesis of Maltese Baroque Architecture: Francesco Buonamici (1596-1677)*, Msida, University of Malta, 1994.

[33] For more on Romano Carapecchia, see Denis De Lucca, *Carapecchia: Master of Baroque Architecture in Early Eighteenth Century Malta*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 1999.

François de Mondion[34] in the eighteenth century, were the consulted individuals for sculptural design. They filled this void and left their indelible mark on the development of Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. Sculptural programmes such as those in the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Valletta (Fig. 1.1) probably saw the involvement of Mattia Preti in its design.[35] It contains the first ever sculpted *gloria* in Malta, and the participation of the Casanova family in its execution[36] makes it even more significant for the development of regional sculpture since the motif was to later become one of the most exploited themes in the design of altar reredoses. The Casanova's close contact with artists such as Preti would have ensured effective transmission of ideas, eventually inherited by eighteenth-century *scalpellini*. Preti was also heavily involved in the designs for the gilded wall carvings in the Conventual Church, which introduced typical Roman Baroque motifs to the Maltese artistic scene. *Scalpellini* working there could easily adapt them into their own designs which they then executed in Maltese churches.[37] Although their figurative work is less successful, because of their lack of academic training, Berninesque motifs are mostly successfully repeated.

The stable environment of the eighteenth century led to a significant demographic increase, resulting in the need for larger churches.[38] The Maltese Diocese aptly responded to these circumstances by rebuilding, enlarging, or commissioning churches all around the Islands. This raised the demand for more sculptors, gilders, painters, silversmiths, and other craftsmen to furnish these church interiors; the trade of the *scalpellino* flourished in these circumstances.[39] Sculpture, especially large scale works such as altar reredoses, demanded entire teams of workers, consisting of builders, designers, painters, and gilders. It was not uncommon to find artists who worked in more than one capacity; indeed almost all *scalpellini* who worked in stone on altar reredoses were also involved in the design and sometimes execution of secular architecture and decorative architectural

---

[34] For more on François de Mondion, see Denis De Lucca, *Mondion: The Achievements of a French Military Engineer working in Malta in the Early Eighteenth Century*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2003.

[35] Sciberras (2012), 112.

[36] Filipp Mallia, *Il-Fratellanza tas-SS.mu Sagrament ta' S.M. tal-Portu, il-Belt, 1575-1975*, Malta, s.n., 1975, 21.

[37] Sciberras (2010), 9.

[38] Frans Ciappara, 'The Parish Community in Eighteenth-Century Malta', *Catholic Historical Review*, xciv, 4 (2008), 675.

[39] The socio-artistic context of the eighteenth century is discussed in Meli (2017).

sculpture.[40] This trend was also extended to the decorative arts and some *scalpellini* executed decorative works for churches such as *scanelli*, *carte gloria*, candlesticks, tabernacles, and sanctuary lamps.[41] Freestanding statuary in both stone and wood were also widely commissioned. In the collaborative spirit of the eighteenth-century, *scalpellini* were very closely tied with gilders, architects, and *capomaestri*. In this way, the eighteenth-century Maltese socio-artistic scenario embraced the Berninesque idea of combining the three arts; not only in the *bel composto* of a work of art, but also in the lifestyle, the general manner of working, and in the multidimensional *bottega*.

1.3 The protagonists in regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta

The main protagonists of this research are already well-known in the Maltese artistic scenario.[42] One of the most prolific sculptors was Pietro Paolo Zahra.[43] The son of another *scalpellino* active in Maltese churches in the seventeenth century, Antonio, Pietro Paolo was born in Senglea where he remained for his entire life. His works, on the other hand, are spread all over the Maltese Islands.[44] His collaboration with Pietro Paolo Troisi, an eighteenth-century Maltese artist who studied in Rome, ensured that Zahra had several available sources of Bernini's work. The degree of influence imparted by the Berninesque manner on his altar reredoses (Fig. 1.2) makes it difficult to accept that this artist never left the Islands

---

[40] This situation is analogous to the circumstances in seventeenth and eighteenth century Sicily. For more on the socio-historic artistic context of Sicily, see Maria Giuffrè, *Baroque Architecture of Sicily*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2007, 96-113.

[41] Such was the case with the Zahra family. Pietro Paolo Zahra and his son, Francesco Zahra both designed decorative objets d'art for churches, an exercise which they performed in addition to their work in painting and sculpture. This is discussed *infra* and supported by documents from the Notarial Archives, Valletta. For more on Francesco Zahra, see Keith Sciberras, *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His life and art in mid-18th century Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2010.

[42] The protagonists of this dissertation are discussed in more depth *infra* in Chapter IV.

[43] Pietro Paolo Zahra has been the subject of a Master's dissertation. See (Meli) 2017. He has also been considered in a number of other studies and publications. Two dissertations have focused on Pietro Paolo Zahra's most eloquent and significant work, the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea: Ivor Robinich, 'The Fraternity of the Crucifix and its Oratory in Senglea', unpublished diploma dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2008 and Gabrielle Agius, 'Pietro Paolo Zahra and the Roman baroque manner at the Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2014. A publication focuses on the documentary evidence in respect of Pietro Paolo Zahra's works: John Debono, *Documentary Sources on Maltese Artists: Pietro Paolo Zahra (1685-1747) and his son Francesco Vincenzo (1710-1773)*, Malta, published by author, 2010. Pietro Paolo Zahra is mentioned in Keith Sciberras, *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His life and art in mid-18th century Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2010 and John Azzopardi (ed.), *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773*, Malta, Friends of the Cathedral Museum, 1986.

[44] For history of commissions and analysis of altar reredoses of Pietro Paolo Zahra, see Meli (2017).

but no documentary evidence has yet been discovered which accounts for a period of study in Rome. It is possible that he never left Malta and that he learnt the trade solely through his father's workshop in Senglea. The regional quality of his charming theatrical works could constitute evidence of this inclusivity. Working also in the Zahra family were Zahra's brother, Giacomo, and his two sons, Felice and Francesco, the latter becoming one of Malta's most important artists of the eighteenth-century.[45]

The Fabri family, consisting of several generations involved in the execution of sculpture, architecture, and decorative arts for both ecclesiastical and secular patrons, is another major protagonist of this study. Not much is yet known about the family.[46] However, the frequency of the Fabri name being mentioned in archival documentation points towards the increasing possibility that this family was also extremely prolific in eighteenth-century Malta. Like Zahra, they worked in a manner emulating the Berninesque tradition (Fig. 1.3). The quality of their works fluctuates, an understandable factor since the family consisted of several individuals with different working capabilities.[47] The most significant members for this study which emerge from archival research were active in the first half of the eighteenth-century all hail from Vittoriosa; Gerolamo, son of Pietro, was the head of the prolific family and his sons who worked as sculptors, wood workers, and architects,

---

[45] For more of Francesco Zahra and his works in eighteenth-century Malta, see Sciberras (2010).

[46] Publications on their works are almost inexistent. Some authors briefly refer to them and some of their works in passing in publications. The Fabri are mentioned in two dissertations: Sandro Debono, 'Mariano Gerada (1771-1823). Maltese Art and Spain 1750-1830', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, University of Malta, 2007 and Donald Camilleri, 'The Stone-Carved Altar Reredos in 17th Century Malta', unpublished M.A. dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2002. They are also mentioned sporadically in booklets which discuss works of architecture in which they were involved such as Kenneth Cassar (ed), *The Inquisitor's Palace: an architectural gem spanning centuries and styles*, Heritage Malta, Malta, 2013. Some of their works are mentioned by Sciberras in Sciberras (2010).

[47] The same situation can be found in other families of artists, not only in Malta but also in international *botteghe*. In the case of the Serpotta family of *stuccatori*, the son of Giacomo, Procopio did not reach the dextrous level of his father's talent. For more on the Serpotta family and attributions which differ between the various members of this family, see Donald Garstang, 'When Serpotta is not Serpotta: The Stuccos in the Church of S. Spirito in Agrigento', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxlvii, 1227 (2005), 368-375.

Fig. 1.2 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Mark, Rabat.

Fig. 1.3 Attributed to the Fabri family, Altar of St Bartholmew, Church of St Bartholomew, Żurrieq.

were Antonio, Carlo, Giuseppe, and Francesco. Francesco's son, Gaetano, is also mentioned in archival documents as are the sons of Antonio: Pietro Paolo,[48] Lorenzo,[49] Giacomo,[50] and Francesco.[51] The family remained active in the second half of the eighteenth century and well into the nineteenth century.

While the Zahra and Fabri families worked mainly in Maltese limestone, the Durante family, another prominent family of sculptors active in eighteenth-century Malta, worked mainly in marble. The Durante family also imported marble, a commodity that was never naturally available in Malta, which increased its prestige and perfectly showed off the spending power some patrons possessed.[52] Many members of the Durante family worked in the Conventual Church but they also designed and executed innumerable works for parish churches, secular buildings, and private patrons. However, their works were rarely figurative. Many times they were commissioned to execute marble cladding in altars, pavements, pedestals, and tombs.

Eighteenth-century *scalpellini* inherited the seventeenth-century tradition of the Casanova family.[53] Their workshop in Senglea was established by Michele Casanova around 1630 and his sons Damiano, Vincenzo, and Antonio worked in it. Melchiorre Cafà trained with them before leaving for Rome, thus increasing their importance in Maltese art history.[54] Vincenzo seems to have been the most successful out of the three brothers. He was heavily involved in architecture and is referred to as *Architectus Magister Officii Domorum* meaning that he was part of

---

[48] Pietro Paolo Fabri was commissioned secular sculpture under the direction of the Architect Andrea Belli. NAV, Notary Francesco Alfano, R15, Volume 14, 1740-1741, ff. 96v-97v.

[49] Lorenzo Fabri was commissioned secular sculpture on houses in Valletta. NAV, Notary Francesco Alessi, R14, Volume 32, 1755-1756, ff. 465v-467.

[50] Giacomo Fabri was commissioned the painting of the altar of the Greek church in Vittoriosa. NAV, Notary Francesco Alfano, R15, Volume 15, 1741-1742, ff. 483v-484v.

[51] Francesco Fabri was one of the most active *scalpellini* of the Fabri family; his name is repeated several times in the volumes at the Notarial Archives. Among many other commissions, Francesco Fabri was commissioned the now destroyed altar of the Pieta in the church of the Virgin of Graces in Żabbar. See NAV, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, R2, Volume 4, 1734-1735, ff. 296-297v.

[52] This is discussed *infra* and supported by archival contracts from the collection of the Notarial Archives, Valletta.

[53] The Casanova family are briefly discussed in Meli (2017).

[54] Sciberras (2010), 9. See also Meli (2017), 65.

the *Officio delle Case*.[55] Together with his brother Antonio, they executed the titular altar reredos of the parish church of St Bartholomew at Għargħur.[56]

Another member of the Casanova family, Giuseppe, executed the profusely decorated titular altar reredos of Attard Parish Church.[57] The Casanovas were also involved in the execution of the sculpture which adorns the two Jesuit oratories[58] and the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Valletta (Fig. 1.1).[59] Their style is influenced by Roman Baroque motifs, such as floral motifs, scrolls, and volutes in high relief, very clearly inspired by the carvings of the walls of the Conventual Church of St John.[60] Their sculptural motifs are however still intrinsically determined by the architectural elements; figures are placed in niches or between columns. It was only in the eighteenth century, with the introduction of Berninesque designs by Pietro Paolo Troisi that the Zahra and the Fabri family were able to update Maltese sculpture and break the barriers between architecture, sculpture, and painting.

Pietro Paolo Troisi is described as a multi-disciplinary artist involved in architecture, scenography, engraving, silver, and sculpture.[61] Born on 29 June 1686 in Valletta, Troisi became one of the most important Maltese sculptors of the eighteenth century due to his study trip to Rome and his subsequent works in Malta.[62] Pietro Paolo Troisi was thus part of the artistic trend that saw a considerable number of Maltese artists travelling to Rome for a study period of one or two years.[63] Troisi's brief but successful link with the *Accademia di San Luca* in Rome spanned over two years from 1704 to 1705.[64] His natural talent saw him

---

[55] Eugene F. Montanaro, 'The building of a new church dedicated to Saint Julian in 1682', *Melita Historica*, xi, 1 (1992), 35-58: 43. See also Meli (2017), 65. Vincenzo Casanova was the architect of the old parish church of St Julian's and the Cospicua parish church dedicated to the Immaculate Conception.

[56] Camilleri (2002), 41. See also Meli (2017), 65.

[57] Camilleri (2002), 44. See also Meli (2017), 65.

[58] For a detailed account of the Casanova contribution to the Jesuit oratories, see Paul Cassar, 'The Oratories of the Onorati and the Immaculate Conception at the Jesuit church, Valletta', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2014.

[59] Meli (2017), 67.

[60] Meli (2017), 67.

[61] For detailed biographical notes on Pietro Paolo Troisi and a compilation of his artistic output, see Briffa (2009), 15. See also Meli (2017), 89.

[62] Biographical notes on Pietro Paolo Troisi were first published in Bonello (1993), 32. See also Meli (2017), 89.

[63] This is discussed in Sciberras (2009), 239. See also Meli (2017), 90.

[64] Giovanni Bonello, 'Pietro Paolo Troisi: the quest for a gifted sculptor', *The Sunday Times*, 29 July 1993, 32-33. In this regard, Bonello quotes Luigi Pirotta, 'Contributo alla storia della Accademia

being promoted to the advanced students' class. Troisi's connection with the *Accademia di San Luca* conditioned his style and subsequent works he executed back in Malta. As was tradition, the artist was assigned to a *bottega* of an established master in Rome, possibly that of the sculptor Pietro Papaleo, who had been Cafà's student. Through his mentor, he was surely exposed to the work of Cafà in Rome, not only because he was being trained by his former student but because they were both Maltese and it would have been natural for Troisi to search for and study his fellow sculptor's works, especially considering Cafà's fame and success in Rome.

In 1705, Troisi won the *Concorso Clementino* with a terracotta relief illustrating Romolo offering sacrifice to Ercole.[65] It has been observed that the figure of Romolo bears resemblances to the figure of Atilla in Algardi's *Attila and the Hun* in St Peter's Basilica; however, there also seems to be a greater resemblance to the St Eustace in Melchiorre Cafà's relief in the church of Sant'Agnese, especially in the figure's stance and facial typology. The *Concorso Clementino* which Troisi won was judged by Carlo Maratti, who was also the *Principe* of the *Accademia* at the time, and the sculptors Jean-Baptiste Theodone, Lorenzo Ottoni, and Pietro Papaleo.[66] The classical Baroque hints in Troisi's bozzetto reflect the tastes of the *Accademia* at the time when he was studying there.

Although Carlo Maratta, a painter championed by Bellori, held the revered position of *Principe* of the *Accademia di San Luca* from 1699 to 1713, precisely coinciding with the two years which Troisi spent in Rome, it seems that Troisi was still influenced by the theatrical manner of Bernini's High Baroque. This phenomenon is corroborated by the fact that, although by the beginning of the eighteenth century Rome's Late Baroque was taking on a new aesthetic as favoured by the Late Baroque classicising Maratta style, Bernini's authority persisted

---

Nazionale di S. Luca. Alunni delle scuole accademiche premiati nei vari corpi', *Urbe*, 2 (1962), 14-20 as quoted by Michael Ellul in 'Art and Architecture in Malta in the Early Nineteenth Century', *Proceedings of History Week*, 1982, 18-19.

[65] Joseph A. Briffa, *Pietro Paolo Troisi (1686-1750): A Maltese Baroque Artist*, Msida, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2009, 22-24. Refer to this publication for an illustration of the work of art.

[66] Briffa (2009), 23. Briffa quotes this from notes from the Archives of the Accademia di San Luca, Rome, acquired by him through Keith Sciberras and Angela Cipriani.

strongly until the last quarter of the eighteenth century.[67] In fact, there is evidence in the records of the *Accademia di S. Luca* itself that Bernini's authority remained prevalent until the mid-1770s, since it was in 1775 when copying the *S. Bibiana* was given as an exam in the academy.[68] Even artists who are considered to be Late Baroque Roman sculptors were still not free of Bernini's influence. In spite of the classicising manner of Carlo Maratta who engineered the Lateran project, it is clear from the resulting statues 'that Bernini's influence had certainly not been erased from the collective memory of these sculptors'.[69]

This perfectly exemplifies that the taste for Bernini's style was not satiated before the end of the eighteenth century, when the Berninesque tradition was completely quashed and invalidated by Winckelmann and his authoritative writings.[70] At the time, even Winckelmann writes that 'the Romans don't think at all. A statue of Charity by Bernini is all they care for'.[71] In this light, it is hardly surprising that Troisi's designs back in Malta are much more in line with the Berninesque channel of the Roman Baroque. With specific reference to Troisi's designs for ceremonial arches for Grandmasters and for altar reredoses, particularly the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat and the Altar of Repose for the Mdina Cathedral, it is obvious that the inspiration for their design and execution were Bernini's *concetti* of the angels on the Ponte S. Angelo, the *Cathedra Petri*, and the typology of the *angeli adoranti* begun by Bernini in the High Altar of the church of S. Agostino.

Newly unearthed archival documentation continues to shed light on names of artists and craftsmen who played an important role in the production of Late Baroque sculpture in Malta.[72] Eighteenth-century artists occupied significant

---

[67] Livio Pestilli, 'On Bernini's Reputed Unpopularity in Late Baroque Rome', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxxii, 63 (2011), 119-142: 139-140.

[68] Bernini's sculpture was given to students as an exam by the *Accademia di S. Luca* for an astounding nine times, a far higher number than allocated to other sculptors such as Antonio Raggi and Alessandro Algardi, whose works were only chosen twice, and other great masters such as Michelangelo, whose work was only chosen once. Bacchi and Delmas (2017), 334.

[69] This was true especially in the case of Giuseppe Mazzuoli but also in the case of Camillo Rusconi and Filippo della Valle. Mazzuoli's *St Philip* is the most Berninesque but Rusconi's *St Matthew* has Bernini's psychological intensity and treatment of drapery. Pestilli (2011), 139.

[70] Pestilli (2011), 135-140.

[71] J. J. Winckelmann, *Lettere italiane*, vol. 1, Milan, 1961, as quoted in Pestilli (2011), 135.

[72] Work contracts at the Notarial Archives, Valletta reveal the names of several team players in the execution of eighteenth-century sculpture and the industry of construction and architecture. They also reveal working patterns and a series of collaborations between craftsmen, artists, and architects.

positions within their local communities which is an adequate indication of their social status and the respect they enjoyed from their community. A testament to this is the fact that they were entrusted to administer churches and altars as procurators. Pietro Paolo Zahra was entrusted as a procurator of a legate left by another member of society after his death.[73] A prominent stone and wood gilder who had a busy workshop, Alexandro Gelfo, was also procurator of the Confraternity of the Virgin of Charity within the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta[74] while Don Mattheo Durante, a member of the family of popular marble workers, held the position of procurator of the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked.[75] Scalpellini were also well-connected with important individuals in the Diocese of eighteenth-century Malta.

Trade formed an essential part of artists' lives. Almost all families which were active within the regional artistic scene during these years in Malta, including the Zahra,[76] Fabri,[77] and Durante families,[78] were involved in trade. It seems that their involvement in producing art for Maltese patrons was not their only concern and for some it might have even taken up a relatively small portion of their time.[79] The fact that many of these stone and marble workers resided in the harbour area – Valletta, Senglea, Cospicua, and Vittoriosa – is also highly indicative that income generated from trade held a strong percentage of their livelihood. Being in direct and constant contact with people originating from different countries and traditions, Malta's harbour was a melting pot of cultures and a hub for the exchange of ideas, thus creating the ideal atmosphere and set of conditions for these Maltese artists to be

---

[73] NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 15, 1742-1743, ff. 162v-164.
[74] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 3, 1728-1730, ff. 66-66v.
[75] NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 33, 1750-1751, ff. 551-551v.
[76] Giacomo Zahra, Pietro Paolo's brother, is documented to have worked with Pietro Paolo in his workshop. However, although much of his artistic work was probably carried out under his brother's name in contracts, many transactions recorded at the Notarial Archives are related to his work as an 'aromatorio'. The lengthy contents of his 'aromataria', which he sold in 1748, are recorded in NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 25, 1748-1749, ff. 291-297v. The inventory amounted to the estimated sum of 542 scudi 9 tari 12 grani.
[77] The Fabri family's several generations were all involved in trade. Their activity is mostly documented in the volumes of notaries who worked in the harbour area. An example of such trade is the selling of wood from Sardegna by Francesco Fabri. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 476-477.
[78] The Durante family were involved in the importation of marble. See *infra* for more information and documentation.
[79] This seems to have been the case for some artists since documentation at the Notarial Archives shows that their activity at the notary's place was more deeply connected to trade rather than artistic commissions. There are instances where the number of contract related to trade heavily outnumbers the contracts related to artistic production.

influenced by the artistic scene in Rome.[80] The link between patronage, regional ecclesiastical Maltese art, and trade is even reflected in names of galleys. A frigate named 'La Madonna di Porto Salvo e di S. Filippo Neri', dedicated to the prominent church on Senglea Point which enjoyed the patronage of the locals, was used for trading purposes.[81]

The artistic community in eighteenth-century Malta was tightly-knit. *Scalpellini* were associated with each other on a personal level, resulting in relationships which quickly reflected themselves in their professional lives and workshops.[82] Marrying into each other's families consolidated their working relationships. It was therefore of great importance for Zahra's career that he established his authority as a *scalpellino* by his marriage to Augustina Casanova,[83] daughter of Vincenzo Casanova.[84] Consolidating the family Zahra's relationship to other reputable workshops on the island is also evident in Francesco Zahra's marriage to Teresa Fenech, the daughter of Gio Nicola Buhagiar's neighbours who was his tutor and who was also related to Buhagiar's wife, Anna Maria Cachia.[85] Claudio Durante married Anna Maria Burlò,[86] daughter of Giorgio Burlò, whose family was involved in trading activities as well as connected to artistic patronage of the church of the Virgin of Porto Salvo and St Philip Neri in Senglea.[87] Gio Maria Gilibert, nephew of Giuseppe Casanova[88] and a *marmista*, left the contents of his workshop

---

[80] This situation of trade and ports being essential for the development of art is analogous to the situation in Sicily, where Palermo and Messina and other major coastal cities accepted new ideas and styles more willingly as opposed to the inland areas and centres where new ideas were accepted in a much slower and reluctant manner. Giuffrè (2007), 154.

[81] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 2, 1726-1727, ff. 231v-232v.

[82] For a comparative analysis with familial relationships on an international level, see Stephanie C. Leone, 'Luca Berrettini (1609 –1680): The Scalpellino-Merchant in Pietro da Cortona's Architectural Production and Baroque Rome', in Susanne Kubersky-Piredda (ed), *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, Bibliotheca Hertziana, Munich, 2017, 437-472.

[83] Senglea Parish Archives (SPA), *Liber Matrimonium*, Volume I, 1587-1715, 1074. Their pre-nuptial agreement dating to the 22 June 1706 can be found in NAV, R388, Notary Gio Domenico Pace, Volume 24, 1705-1706, ff. 696v-704. Published in Debono (2010), 6-10. This is also analysed in Meli (2017).

[84] For more information about the sculptural works of the Casanova family, see Camilleri (2002).

[85] Eugene F. Montanaro, 'Materials for the Life of Francesco Vincenzo Zahra (1710-1773)' in John Azzopardi (ed.), *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773*, Malta, Friends of the Cathedral Museum, 1986, 10. See also Meli (2017), 38-39.

[86] NAV, R424, Notary Pietro Paolo Saliba, Volume 22, 1735-1736, ff. 26-31v.

[87] For more on this connection between the Burlò family and the church of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, see Christina Meli, 'The Church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo and the Congregation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri in Senglea: An Architectural Appraisal', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2015.

[88] See John Debono, 'A Note on the St John Co-Cathedral marble tombstones: the Artisans, foreign and Maltese', *Melita Historica*, xii, 4 (1999), 387-401: 390-392.

to his nephew Claudio Durante.[89] This was done through a '*donazione inter vivos*'[90] while Gilibert was still alive and probably retiring from his line of work, thus displaying not only the collaboration between artisans but the personal relationships which determined these close professional ties. These personal-working relationships continued to be strengthened throughout life as artists selected other artists to be their children's godparents. Augustina Casanova's godfather, Zahra's wife, was Gioacchino Fabri, whose family was to produce several generations of *scalpellini*.[91] Furthermore, Gio Nicola Buhagiar was the godfather to both Oratio Nicola Zahra, who was the son of Zahra who died in early youth[92] and Blandina Zahra, daughter of Francesco.[93]

These personal relationships resulted in collaboration with other regional artists, such as painters, gilders, marble workers, and stone masons, whose skills were indispensable when patrons commissioned works of art for churches, particularly altar reredoses. The several stages of planning, designing, building, carving, painting, and gilding sculpture required not only a considerable stretch of time but also a team of artists, and thus it became necessary that good work relationships between craftsmen were well-maintained. Gilding, an essential component of an eighteenth-century Maltese altar reredos, was always carried out by a professional gilder according to the artist's design. Like *scalpellini*, gilders in eighteenth-century Malta seem to have been concentrated in the harbour area of the Islands since they were very much associated with them in their line of work. Erasmo Azzupard,[94] Alexandro Gelfo,[95] and Francesco Foti[96] all resided in Valletta while Domenico Carbonaro[97] hailed from Vittoriosa. Other names reveal that the *scalpellini* and

---

[89] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 16, 1744-1746, f. 485v.
[90] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 16, 1744-1746, f. 485v.
[91] Sciberras (2010), 9. See also Meli (2017), 38-39.
[92] Montanaro (1986), 9. See also Meli (2017), 38-39.
[93] Montanaro (1986), 9.
[94] Erasmo Azzupard is listed as '*di questa Città Valletta*'. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 4, 1727-1728, f. 171v.
[95] Alexandro Gelfo is listed as '*di questa Città Valletta*'. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 14, 1741-1742, f. 502v.
[96] Francesco Foti is listed as '*de Civitate Valletta*'. NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 1, 1727-1728, f. 278v.
[97] Domenico Carbonaro is listed as '*di questa Città Valletta*'. NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 11, 1735-1736, f. 591.

craftsmen circle in eighteenth-century Malta was larger than what had been previously known.[98]

At times, *scalpellini* executed altars designed by other *scalpellini*, such as in the case of Francesco Fabri's sculptural work on the altar dedicated to the Pietà in the parish church of the Virgin of Graces in Żabbar.[99] On the other hand, Zahra executed the altars of St Paul at the parish church of the Annunciation at Balzan[100] and of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat[101] to Troisi's design. In this regard, the Maltese scenario follows international patterns of the more capable artist executing the design and the assistant or less popular collaborator carrying out of the physical labour.[102] Collaboration between *scalpellini* and painters was common since their craft were two indispensible elements of an altar reredos. This collaboration was sometimes extended to teams of the same family;[103] there are several cases in which Zahra collaborated with his son, Francesco, among them one instance in Francesco's career in which Zahra accepted the commission for a portrait of a private patron in the name of his son.[104]

Artisans were very often chosen by patrons or other artists to come up with an estimation of works executed, many times for the scope of settlement of payment. There are cases where *Signore* Gio Nicola Buhagiar *pittore* and *Maestro* Alexandro Gelfo *doratore* are called up to estimate the painting and gilding on a statue of the Virgin of Light executed by Giuseppe Peres, son of Erasmo Peres and brother of Antonio Peres, all members of the same gilding workshop in Valletta.[105]

---

[98] Revealing new names from archival documentation is essential to establish the workforce behind the production of a particular work of art and the inner working of a *bottega*. This situation is analogous to international examples of *botteghe* and the industry of the art. For more on the detailed mechanics of the industry of the art in Roman Baroque sculpture, see Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art*, London, Yale University Press, First published 1989 (2nd edition, 1992).

[99] NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 4, 1730-1731, ff. 296-297v.

[100] NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 27, 1713-1714, f. 761. Published in Debono (2010), 40.

[101] NAV, R303, Notary Giovanni Grech, Volume 2, 1709-1710, ff. 883-885. Published in Debono (2010), 20.

[102] The practice of executing works of art designed by another artist or architect is not exclusive to Malta and was common practice in the commissioning of Roman Baroque sculpture from Roman *botteghe*. For more on the role of the sculptor as an executant, see Montagu (1992), 77-98.

[103] For more on artist collaboration, see Sciberras (2010), 38-59 and Meli (2017), 62-71.

[104] Pietro Paolo Zahra accepted payment for a portrait of the late Alessandro Manduca from Vittoriosa on the behalf of his son, Francesco. NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 21, 1737-1738, ff. 533-533v. Published in Debono (2010), 185.

[105] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 14, 1741-1742, ff. 331v-332v.

These ties were not restricted to Maltese artists and indeed, other foreign regional artists working in Malta created an increasingly cosmopolitan environment. Giovanni Viale '*del fù Giuseppe Neapolitano habitante in questa Città Valletta*'[106] was called to give a gilding estimate in reference to works executed by Giuseppe Peres. The connection with these foreign artists also encouraged the transmission of new ideas and styles from the Continent.

Collaboration was extended to other individuals carrying out activities which, although not seemingly connected to artistic commissions, represented important transactions which *scalpellini* and marble workers had to perform in order for their business to succeed. Essential contacts had to be made with quarry owners, stone cutters, master masons, and *muratori*, especially for the initial steps of any commission received.[107] When the commission was considered monumental in size, such as in the case for the termination of the building of the *campanile* of the parish church of St Lawrence in Vittoriosa, these contacts between craftsmen proved to be even more indispensable.[108] Three workmen were engaged to do the work who, for the cutting of stone for this project, collaborated with the *Fabbricatore* of the *campanile*, Giacomo Bianco and the procurator of the church, Don Antonio Farrugia.[109]

Quarry owners, stone cutters, and *muratori* were often connected to each other in their trading activities and it is also clear that one individual carried out more than one activity. The division of labour did exist but the lines of demarcation between professions were often blurred.[110] A certain Clement Bondi presents a good example of an individual who embodied the three different but related roles of

---

[106] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 16, 1744-1746, f. 645v.

[107] The international scenario and context to this situation in Malta is expounded upon by Jennifer Montagu in Montagu (2012). The author analyses the importance of contacts with different professionals and craftsmen in the industry to maintain an efficient workshop. See Montagu (1992), 21-47.

[108] These were essentially still unknown individuals who were essential for the running of a well-organised workshop. Such a situation could be found elsewhere within Europe. Within an international context, Jennifer Montagu analyses the role of the 'boys' in the Roman Baroque *bottega*, who technically carried out the grunt work for the realisation of a commissioned work of art. Montagu (1992), 126-150.

[109] NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 15, 1742-1743, ff. 144-145v.

[110] The same situation is found in seventeenth and eighteenth-century Sicily. Maria Giuffrè divulges how the treatise written by Giacomo Amico, *L'Architetto Prattico*, was aimed towards 'amateurs, desirous of becoming architects', intellectuals, experts, curious youths; but also 'stone masons, carpenters, and other kinds of craftsmen', who 'can find here solid advice for their professions'. Giuffrè (2007), 113.

a quarry owner,[111] a stone cutter,[112] as well as a stone mason.[113] Renowned *scalpellini*, master masons, and even *capomaestri* were involved in numerous other activities. Francesco Fabri, a *scalpellino*, also sold wood imported from Sardegna[114] while Francesco Zerafa, one of the Order's *capomaestri*, supervised the transportation of stone in important commissions.[115] Transportation of stone was another area of concern.[116] The patron very often left this in the *scalpellino*'s hands and the latter needed to be well-connected to other individuals who carried out this type of work.[117] The same transportation needs were extended to other kinds of materials, including wood and marble which had to be sourced from abroad and imported.[118] The Durante family imported marble shipped from Livorno, which is only 76 kilometres south of quality marble producer Carrara. [119]

Collaborators could have also fulfilled the role of assistants in a *bottega*.[120] Several assistants were to be found in specialised workshops dealing with works in stone,[121] silver,[122] gold,[123] and wood;[124] some were contracted for a particular

---

[111] NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 28, 1765-1766, ff. 389v-399v.

[112] NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 32, 1772-1773, ff. 364v-365v.

[113] NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 21, 1748-1749, ff. 217v-218v.

[114] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 476-477.

[115] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 21, 1743-1744, ff. 492-493v.

[116] Transportation of material such as limestone, marble, and other substance needed for the completion of the work of art is always a concern. See Montagu (1992), 21-47 for more on the transportation of material and the entire process from the quarry to the church. The same transportation issues were faced by artists and patrons when it came to transporting the finished work of art, when the exigencies of the situation required that the majority or the entirety of the artist's work be carried out off-site the intended location for the work of art. For more on the transportation of works of art from Rome to Malta, see Sciberras (2012), 95-99.

[117] Angelo Vella was one of the individuals who carried out this type of work. NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 20, 1747-1748, ff. 559v-560v.

[118] The importation of marble is discussed *infra*.

[119] Claudio Durante imported marble from Livorno through Antonio Ciantar. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 8, 1731-1732, ff. 94-94v.

[120] For the role of assistants in Roman Baroque *botteghe*, see Montagu (1992), 1-20, 126-150.

[121] Pietro Paolo Zahra is documented in two instances paying Giacomo Zahra, his brother, for work on the altar of the Trinity in the parish church dedicated to the Nativity of the Virgin in Senglea. NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 4, 1720-1721, ff. 407v-408. NAV, R487, Notary Alessandro Vivieri, Volume 7, 1721-1723, ff. 52v-54.

[122] Giuseppe Manicolo is recorded to have served as an assistant in the silversmith's *bottega* of Emanuele Rusignau for six months. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 11, 1738-1739, ff. 786v-787v.

[123] Paolo Spagnol is recorded to have served as an assistant in the goldsmith's *bottega* of Vincenzo Rigo. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 10, 1737-1738, ff. 233-233v.

[124] Michele Bonnici, a fourteen year old boy, was apprenticed to work for five years in the wood making workshop of Michelangelo de Guavena in order to learn the trade. His father appears on his behalf on the contract. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 11, 1738-1739, ff. 214v-215.

amount of time[125] while others were simply engaged for a couple of days.[126] Regional artists worked very closely together in the creation of entire nodes of the typical Late Baroque fusion of architecture, sculpture, painting, and the decorative arts. The permeation of the Berninesque tradition into all sectors of ecclesiastical art was facilitated. The decorative arts were especially instrumental in embellishing altars. *Scalpellini* were found working extremely close with carpenters, silversmiths, goldsmiths, and tailors. It is in this collaborative light impacted by the dynamic nature of Roman Baroque sculpture and its ethos that one has to analyse commissions for choir seating, altar furnishings, lamps, and other decorative artistic embellishments in Maltese churches.[127]

Sculptors were sometimes required to draw up the design for carpenters such as in the case of the choir stalls in the parish church of the Nativity of the Virgin in Senglea, designed by Zahra and executed largely by the carpenter Giuseppe Borg who had to leave the important sculpted parts for the *scalpellino* to carve.[128] In other cases, like the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea, all the commissions for this entire Late Baroque node can be traced; from its conception, the buying of the property,[129] its demolition, the design of the plan, its construction,[130] the sculpture which adorns it,[131] the wooden seating,[132] the *organetto* ordered from Sicily,[133] and even the commissioning of the *vent'altare*.[134]

---

[125] Salvatore Grech agreed to assist Giuseppe Borg in the art of his trade of *muratore* for the duration of one year. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 8, 1735-1736, ff. 274-274v.

[126] Carlo Borg paid Gio Paolo Camniti for several things such as stone and other material as well as the four days of work of an unnamed *lavoratore* and another four days of work of an unnamed *figluolo*. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 14, 1741-1742, ff. 451-451v.

[127] The concept of the Roman Baroque permeated all sectors of artistic production. For this reason, artists collaborated with various other individuals to be able to produce the finished work of art. This is discussed by Jennifer Montagu in relation to the ephemeral floats, architecture, and other splendours put up in festivals and feasts organised in Rome, in which renowned artists designed and directed the construction of several ephemera. Montagu (1992), 173-197.

[128] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 5, 1732-1733, ff. 75-77v. Published in Debono (2010), 127.

[129] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1728-1730, ff. 227-235.

[130] Giacomo Bianco was commissioned with the building of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1728-1730, ff. 884-888v.

[131] Pietro Paolo Zahra was commissioned the entire sculptural decoration of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 7, 1730-1731, ff. 684-685v. Debono (2010), 155. NAV, R343, Notary Vincenzo Marchese, Volume 36, 1737-1738, ff. 752-753. Debono (2010), 191.

[132] Giuseppe Borg was commissioned the wooden seating of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 11, 1734-1735, ff. 1282v-1284.

[133] Giuseppe Turriglio was commissioned to execute an *organetto* for the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 17, 1740-1741, ff. 784-785.

Pietro Paolo Troisi's work in silver is an excellent example of how the Berninesque tradition spread not only to sculpture but also to the decorative arts.[135] Pietro Paolo Zahra, was involved in the design and production of the *scanello* and tabernacle for the high altar of the parish church of Senglea,[136] and Francesco Fabri was commissioned the *candelieri* for the Franciscan Church in Valletta.[137] The Fabri family was also involved in painting as Giacomo Fabri's painting of the chapel of the Virgin of Damascus in Vittoriosa[138] and the buying of painting supplies such as *oglio di lino, e colore* clearly show.[139]

The multidimensionality of the Maltese eighteenth-century artistic context, which is clearly reflected in the multifaceted Maltese Late Baroque *bottega* and the lives of its protagonists, is the effect of the influence emanating from the Continent. *Scalpellini*'s active role in their contemporary society and trading scene opened many channels through which the new artistic ideas developed in seventeenth-century Rome could reach the shores of Malta, much later in the eighteenth-century where they were interpreted as well as they could be understood by Maltese artists. The strong reverberations of Roman Baroque sculpture in Malta's visual culture, as determined by Bernini's innovative ideas, are the direct result of these links between Rome and Malta.

1.4 From Rome to Malta: the channels transforming High Art into Regional visual culture

Cultural ideas are transmitted through two chief channels of dissemination; the movement of people and the movement of objects. The travel of artists greatly impacted the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style as artists moved in search of work, for purposes of study and exploration, or simply because a more desirable opportunity was presented in another location. Patrons could just as easily travel and bring back new ideas with them which they could then commission to be executed in their homeland. Works of art were transported to other locations and

---

[134] Margarita Torno was commissioned to execute a velvet and gold embroidered *vent'altare* for the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 4, 1727-1728, ff. 725-726.

[135] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 6, 1733-1734, ff. 190-191.

[136] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 7, 1730-1731, ff. 34-35v.

[137] NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 24, 1740-1741, ff. 103v-105.

[138] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1744, ff. 483v-484v.

[139] NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 29, 1746-1747, ff. 777-777v.

placed within a foreign context characterised by its regional tradition. Regional *scalpellini*, not trained in the *Accademia*, used these works as their sources, amalgamating their elements with the regional traditions. *Scalpellini* brought different qualities to the execution of the work, including their artistic baggage and influences, their training (or lack thereof), their inspiration, and their technical ability. Scalpellini needed to supersede cultural barriers to understand these sources. Working material, such as prints, treatises, drawings, *modelli*, and *bozzetti*, travelled widely but their regional interpretation could have been completely different than their intended original meaning. Language and literacy barriers were also common problems, resulting in a situation in which regional artists chose illustrated parts to suit their momentary needs rather than delving into the written sections of treatises.

The emulation of Rome by the Order of St John has already been discussed[140] and this situation repeated itself at Malta's grassroots level. This adherence to a new visual culture is not only apparent visibly and stylistically in the execution of the arts but also confirmed in writing when patrons commissioned works to artists, architects, and workers. In different instances of architectural commissions, patrons make it clear that certain elements, such as a balcony,[141] a façade,[142] or a marble altar scanello,[143] must be executed *alla Romana*.[144] The meaning of this phrase as understood by the parties involved may be acquired from an analysis of the channels which enabled this influence.

---

[140] This has been discussed *supra* in the light of research carried out by Sciberras (2012).

[141] Filippo Pace is commissioned by the Carmelite Church in Valletta to execute building works in a group of houses in Valletta which the church owns. The contract states that the architect was to include '*un balcone alla Romana nella sala*'. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 9, 1736-1737, f. 33.

[142] Angelo Romano and Giovanni Cortis promise the patron, Michelangelo Damico, to '*fabricare la facciata nuova assieme colla porta maggiore alla Romana*' in a group of houses in Senglea. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 12, 1739-1740, f. 563.

[143] Antonio and Francesco D'Amato, father and son artists from Messina, were commissioned to build a marble altar for the Church of All Souls in Valletta. Part of the contract speaks about the scanello of the marble altar. The contract stipulates that the artists had to execute '*scanelli per la scalinata alla Romana*'. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1744, f. 201v.

[144] It is to be noted that the phrase *alla Romana* has as yet been only found in the contracts at the Notarial Archives, Valletta, specifically in the acts of one particular notary, Notary Franceso Alfano. It is to be questioned whether in other instances notaries would have omitted this phrase since verbal communication could have been easily conducted between patron and artist and the inclusion of it in the actual contract would have been made, as long as it was not specifically necessitated by law, merely to serve an auxiliary purpose and to make the contract wording clearer.

1.4.1 Channels of the spread: The mobility of works of art

The importation of works from Rome by the Order of St John was instrumental in the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition into Malta. Works of the Roman Baroque present in Malta had an influential power over Maltese *scalpellini*. The latter sought to inspire themselves, sometimes even borrowing entire motifs or figures, from works of art by important artists active in Rome in the seventeenth century commissioned specifically for Malta by the Order of St John. It was the Order's love for Rome and its desire to emulate its culture which led to this commissioning of works from the Eternal City mainly for the Conventual Church of St John.[145] Simultaneously, Maltese master masons and *scalpellini* were employed by the Order to carry out several works, among them the building of fortifications and other structures as well as to execute sculptural work. They were immediately exposed to these newly commissioned works of art and subsequently, they assimilated this new language of motifs into their own style when designing altars and sculpture for parish and countryside churches. Commissioned works of art by the Order from Rome is one of the major reasons behind the similarities one observes in the sculpture of a remote countryside church in Malta with the grandeur and theatricality of Roman churches.

Four major works of art affected the development of the regional Maltese Late Baroque expression of sculpture. As already stated *supra*, Alessandro Algardi's *Christ the Saviour*[146] did not have much effect on Maltese *scalpellini*, perhaps because its classicising Baroque was perceived to be too clean, too sober, too restrained for the passionate theatrical Maltese taste.[147] In this light, it is somewhat strange that two of the most influential works of art were ultimately inspired by the designs of Alessandro Algardi as inherited by Ercole Ferrata and passed down to Melchiorre Cafà. The political and cultural power of the Diocese is also exemplified in the fact that these two works of art were not commissioned by the Order but sent from Rome by Cafà for Maltese churches; the *St Paul* for the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta and the *Virgin of the Rosary* for

---

[145] For more on the Order of St John's desire to emulate Rome, see Sciberras (2012).
[146] Sciberras discusses the commission and the work of art in detail in Sciberras (2012), 2-17.
[147] For more on this preference, see Meli (2017), 79.

the parish church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin in Rabat.[148] The tremendous influence which these two statues had on Maltese *scalpellini* is reflected in the fact that the majority of renditions of St Paul and the Virgin Mary, under many of her titles, are after Cafà's designs.

The two other most influential works of art of the Roman Baroque were the *Baptism of Christ* by Giuseppe Mazzuoli and the *gloria* by Giovanni Giardini fixed behind the composition of the sculptural group and the Reliquary for the Right Hand of St John the Baptist by Ciro Ferri. These works are alreasy well-known and thoroughly researched.[149] What is interesting to observe in this light are the many elements which Maltese *scalpellini* borrowed from this work of art to reutilise in their designs. Mazzuoli's drapery folds and *putto* and Giardini's *gloria* surrounded with clouds emanating from the dove of the Holy Spirit – which in their own right are elements inspired by Bernini's *Cathedra Petri* – are a common sight in Maltese parish and countryside churches. Even more impactful are the *angeli adoranti* utilised by Ciro Ferri in the Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John the Baptist. Ferri was inspired to create this design by the solution employed by Bernini in the *Cappella del Sacramento* in the Basilica of St Peter. Along with the floral motifs, facial typologies, theatrical ceremonial, and pious devotion, these *angeli adoranti* characterise the spirit of Maltese eighteenth-century ecclesiastical sculpture.[150] In this manner, the works of art which the Order of St John commissioned from Rome gave Maltese *scalpellini* the opportunity to expand their portfolio with the addition of new *Berninesque* motifs without the pressing need to leave the Islands' shores.

1.4.2 Channels of the spread: The travel of patrons and artists

The movement of people facilitated the dissemination of artistic ideas. Foreign artists and architects who were working in Malta in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, among them Mattia Preti, Francesco Buonamici, François de Mondion, and Romano Carapecchia, brought with them new ideas from abroad and were thus instrumental in the dissemination of the Baroque style into Malta.

---

[148] Sciberras discusses these two important works of art in Sciberras (2012), 37-39.
[149] For more on these works, see Sciberras (2012), 101-173, 102-173.
[150] A deeper discussion on the *Berninesque* elements of Maltese eighteenth-century ecclesiastical sculpture can be found *infra*.

It is documented that Maltese *scalpellini* were working under their direction and this was yet another opportunity for *scalpellini* to learn about this style.

Pietro Paolo Zahra is documented to have worked with Carapecchia on two projects. Carapecchia was commissioned the design of the new sacristy of St Paul Shipwrecked Church in Valletta while Zahra was later commissioned by the same church to execute sculptural and wood-carved works in the same sacristy.[151] Zahra was executing the designs of an architect informed by the work of artists active in Rome who introduced new ideas in Malta. Carapecchia's design for the church of St James in Valletta is reminiscent of Bernini's design for the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale. It utilises Berninesque characteristics such as the combined use of coloured marble, light coloured church interiors, and gold (Fig. 1.6 & Fig. 1.7).[152] It was easy for Zahra to borrow these designs which he would have seen while working with Carapecchia.

Other *scalpellini* worked under the direction of foreign architects resident in Malta. Gregorio Durante and Pietro Paolo Troisi worked with Charles François de Mondion in the project for the statue of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena in the piazza of Fort Manoel.[153] De Mondion, an important eighteenth century architect working for the Order in Malta in the early eighteenth century, was also responsible for the regeneration of Mdina spearheaded by Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena. The earliest works of Francesco Zahra, son of Pietro Paolo, are found within this context, the sculpted coat of arms on the *Torre dello Standardo* opposite Vilhena's palace.[154] Troisi was also involved in this De Mondion project since he produced the oval bronze relief of the Grand Master[155] which is flanked by two stone carved female figures attributed to the Fabri family of sculptors,[156] who were also involved

---

[151] Sciberras (2010), 52-55. See also Meli (2017), 77.

[152] For more on the church of St James, see Meli (2017), 76-77. See also Denis De Lucca, *Carapecchia: Master of Baroque Architecture in Early Eighteenth Century Malta*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 1999, 120.

[153] The involvement of Gregorio Durante and Pietro Paolo Troisi in this project is discussed *infra*.

[154] See Sciberras (2010) for more on Francesco Zahra's first commissions. Sciberras (2010), 19.

[155] For more on this bronze relief and Pietro Paolo Troisi's works, see Joseph A. Briffa, *Pietro Paolo Troisi (1686-1750): A Maltese Baroque Artist*, Msida, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2009.

[156] The Fabri family are recorded to have executed the sculptural work of Mdina's Main Gate and Greek's Gate. NLM, Ms. 96, *Università: Spese per le fortificazioni 1723-1728*, f. 195 note. Conrad Thake, 'Architectural Scenography in 18th century Mdina', S. Fiorini (ed.) *Proceedings of History*

Fig. 1.6. Romano Carapecchia, Side elevation, Church of St James, Valletta.

Fig. 1.7 Gian Lorenzo Bernini & Antonio Raggi, Dome decoration, Church of Sant'Andrea al Qurinale, Rome.

Week, The Malta Historical Society, 1994, 63-76: 74. See Meli (2017) for more on the figures attributed to the Fabri family. Meli (2017), 77-79.
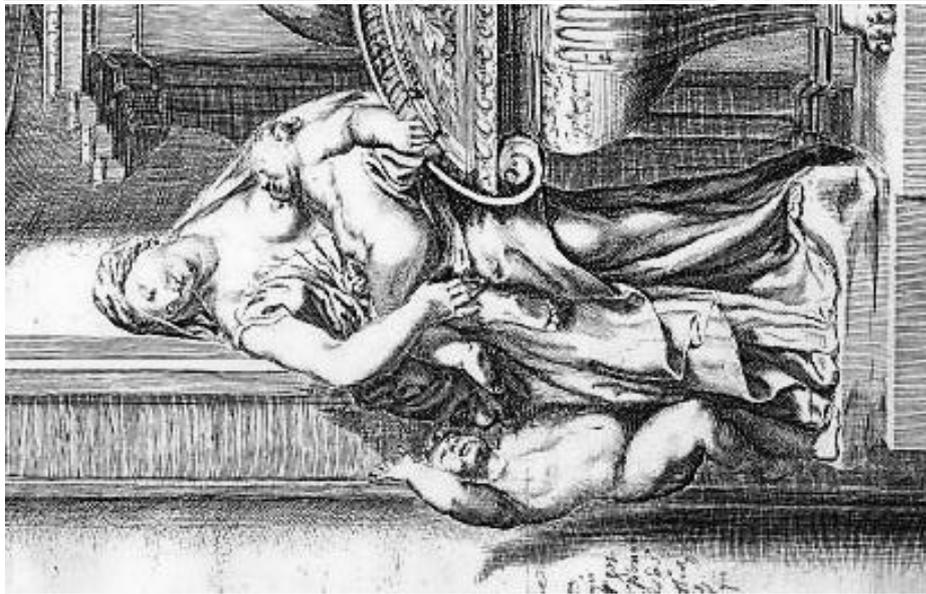
Fig. 1.8 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII, St Peter's Basilica. Detail of print.

Fig. 1.9 Giuseppe Mazzuoli, Monument to Grand Master Perellos, St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta. Detail.

Fig. 1.10 Fabri family, Portal decoration, Magisterial Palace, Mdina. Detail.

Fig. 1.11 Domenico Guidi, Monument to Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner, St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta. Detail.

Fig. 1.12 Fabri family, Portal decoration, Magisterial Palace, Mdina. Detail.

in the sculpture of the Mdina Main Gate. One of the female figures bears resemblances in posture to the Charity in the *Monument to Grand Master Perellos* by Giuseppe Mazzuoli, both of which owe their conception to Bernini's *Charity* in the Tomb of Urban VIII (Fig. 1.8-1.10).[157] The other figure is a mirror image of the triumphant angel of Fame blowing the trumpet in Domenico Guidi's *Monument to Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner* (Fig. 1.11 & 1.12). Such close contact between Maltese and foreign artists and architects propelled the Maltese *scalpellini* even closer to the Berninesque tradition. Maltese eighteenth-century artists, such as Alessio Erardi and Gio Nicola Buhagiar, travelled to Rome to study and brought back new ideas apparent in their subsequent commissions.[158] Study periods abroad were instrumental in disseminating the Roman Baroque, especially in the case of Troisi's visit to Rome. The fruits of this visit to Rome are apparent in the design of Troisi's subsequent works in Malta which are imbued with a new Berninesque

---

[157] Meli (2017), 78-79.
[158] For more on this trend of artists studying in Rome, see Sciberras (2010), 249.

sensibility. The altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. 1.22), executed in tandem with Zahra,[159] is evidence of this influence.

Maltese *scalpellini* were contracted work even outside Maltese shore lines. It is already known how in the seventeenth century Francesco Buonamici contracted sculptural work to the Casanova family of *scalpellini* in the Torres Chapel in the Cathedral of Syracuse, where Melchiorre Cafà was also present (Plate 64).[160] It is now becoming clearer that Maltese *scalpellini* were also offered work abroad even in the eighteenth century. In 1740, Francesco Zerafa enabled Maltese *scalpellini* to travel to Italy on a work assignment.[161] Giacomo Cassar, Michele Zammit, and his son Gio Maria Zammit, all from Luqa, were commissioned by Francesco Zerafa to work and exercise their skill of '*muratori, Lavoranti di pietre di Scarpellini, di ribuccatori, e di biancheggiatori con lavorare quals[ias]i sorte di pietra*'[162] to build the property of Cavaliere Fra Francesco Parisio in Calabria. Such an exportation of workers implies that either the demand for work in the south of Italy was so great that foreign workers were needed to sustain the need or that the quality of work of Maltese *scalpellini* exceeded, or at least was at par, with the work of regional *scalpellini* in Italy. Whatever the circumstance, such instances show that the Casanova case was not an isolated one and further archival investigation would possibly reveal more examples of the same type. Such situations put the breadth of the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition within international perspective.

The Durante family also had several contacts with Italy. They imported marble and other materials[163] but they were also contracted work in marble in Sicily. In 1741, Gregorio Durante appeared on a contract on behalf of his family, including his sons Giovanni Antonio, Carlo, Filippo, and Lorenzo Durante, to undertake the work involved in the marble cladding of the façade of the church of Sant'Angelo in Licata, Sicily.[164] Gregorio Durante had to work in Carrara marble

---

[159] For an art historical and formal analysis of this altar, see Meli (2017), 207-211.
[160] For details on this commission, see Keith Sciberras (ed.), *Melchiorre Cafà: Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2006, 2-3.
[161] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 16, 1739-1740, ff. 442-443v.
[162] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 16, 1739-1740, f. 442.
[163] The importation of marble is discussed *infra*.
[164] He had to elongate the façade according to the nave and aisles according to the *modello* made for this purpose. The contract is very detailed in its conditions and also in its description of the work

except for designated places in which marble from Genoa was to be used. He was, however, allowed to work on some pieces in Malta but the cost and responsibility of the transportation to Licata had to be borne by him. For the entire work, he was to be paid the considerable sum of 6000 *scudi*. However, in 1742, Gregorio Durante was paid 7200 *scudi*;[165] further work must have been undertaken by the *marmisti* than was envisaged when the payment was agreed upon.

Furthermore, another contract was entered into by the same parties in 1758 dealing on the further building of the same church which had entered another phase. The Durante family in this case was commissioned with the transportation of all the marble needed for part of the façade of the church from Carrara to Licata.[166] The contract explicitly states they were to visit Carrara, choose the marble, and transport it to Licata at their own risk and expense. They needed to insure the trip and the marble from their own sources. The individual commissioning the Durante family, the *Illustrissimo Signore Bonaventura Trigona Barone di Rabbuggino di detta Città di Licata Deputato*, was present in Malta for the agreement and drawing up of the deed.[167] This evidence clearly shows that Maltese artists, *scalpellini*, and other craftsmen had direct contact with important suppliers of marble and ultimately belonged to the international aspect of the dissemination of the Roman Baroque and the international practices of the industry of the art.

1.4.3 Channels of the spread: The dissemination of working material

Only traces of physical evidence or references to the existence of working material used in the eighteenth century survive to this day. In Malta, prints and drawings brought from abroad, mainly from Italy, constituted an indispensable source of motifs, poses, renderings of drapery folds, and images of figures such as angels, *putti*, cherubs, and saints, especially for Maltese *scalpellini* who did not spend a period of study in Rome. Visual printed sources was one of the limited ways in which they could familiarise themselves with the art prevalent at the time.

---

which had to be carried out by Gregorio Durante and his family. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 17, 1740-1741, ff. 835v-840v.

[165] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 18, 1741-1742, ff. 941-942.

[166] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 35, 1758-1759, ff. 69-70v.

[167] The branch of Barons of the fief of Rabugini, located in the territory of Licata, originated with Bonaventura Trigona in the eighteenth century, and the last investor of the title appears to be his son Vincenzo on November 20, 1787. Vittorio Spreti, *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana*, Volume 6, Bologna, Forni, 1981, 714.

This situation was not exclusive to the Maltese Islands and the distribution of prints and drawings to disseminate the Berninesque idiom was an international phenomenon.[168]

The personal intertwining of Maltese scalpellini families encouraged the sharing of new ideas and working material. In some cases, the venturing of one artist to Rome brought around immeasurable waves of recurring influence. This is the circumstance which surrounds the one year of study which Pietro Paolo Troisi spent in Rome. Coming immediately back to Malta with new ideas for Maltese churches, Pietro Paolo Troisi's collaboration with Pietro Paolo Zahra, on the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. 1.22),[169] dramatically changed the course of Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. The Troisi-Zahra collaboration, through which there is no doubt that the two sculptors shared ideas, drawings, and prints brought from Rome, resulted in Zahra's introduction to the Roman Baroque manner which he then popularised all over Malta. It is also in this light in which one must analyse the inheriting of material and designs, indeed entire workshops, from one generation to another. Gio Maria Gilibert, a Maltese marble worker and sculptor, left Claudio Durante, his *pronipote*, the entire contents of his workshop.[170] Such collaboration between members of *scalpellini* families ensured the efficient dissemination of style and ideas.

Evidence of existing material which *scalpellini* might have used as sources for their designs and sculpture can also be found in inventories in notarial deeds that list immoveable and moveable property which an individual possessed.[171] One of the most exciting wills uncovered in Maltese art history belonged to the painter Alessio Erardi, who had studied in Rome and worked in the *bottega* of a follower of

---

[168] This is discussed in the Literature Review. See 25-57 *supra*.

[169] NAV, R303, Notary Giovanni Grech, Volume 2, 1709-1710, ff. 883-885. Published in Debono (2010), 20.

[170] '*tutti i ferri, stigli, disegni di sua professione dovunque si trovano, assieme con tutti i marmi, lavorati, non lavorati conservati nel magazino del lavoro, e nel grande magazino includendo il tutto, anche le tre pezze di marmot bianco, ed uno nero esistenti fuori delli magazeni, e pure quelli… stilli, marmi, disgeni, ed opere perfette, ed imperfette…*' NAV, R303, Notary Giovanni Grech, Volume 16, 1727-1728, ff. 752v.

[171] This would have been drawn up for several reasons, among them for the scope of assessing possessions to be inherited by nominated persons.

Carlo Maratta.[172] A year after his death,[173] an inventory describing all of Alessio's possessions was formally compiled.[174] The detailed inventory categorises his possessions in *beni stabili*, *ori e argenti*, *colori*, and most importantly *libri* and *quadri*. The impressive list of 629 paintings, 284 of which were of a religious motif, included copies of famous paintings by Mattia Preti, Raffaello, Domenichino, Caravaggio, Pietro da Cartona, Giuseppe d'Arpino, Caracci, Guido Reni, and Carlo Maratta. In the collaborative spirit of the eighteenth century, all of these copies could have been available for local *scalpellini* to see and study new sources for their designs. The few pieces of sculpture of Alessio Erardi's workshop also betray the fact that the artist used them for his studies of drawings.[175] Most importantly, the inventory of Alessio Erardi's possessions provides concrete evidence that architectural treatises and books of prints and designs were present in Malta. Among the important titles, there are images of the churches of Rome and treatises written by Andrea Pozzo, Sebastiano Serlio, Giorgio Vasari, Andrea Palladio, and Filippo Titi.[176] Such an inventory is evidence that important prints and internationally significant treatises were physically present in Malta. This is also evident from the borrowing of motifs from such sources (Fig. 1.13 & Fig. 1.14).

Physical prints also survive in different archives. The Marchese collection of prints at the Mdina Cathedral Archives contains prints and engravings after several important artists and their works of art. Among them, a print by the printmaker Jean

---

[172] For more on Alessio Erardi and how his study period in Rome affected his artistic output when back in Malta see, Keith Sciberras, *Baroque Painting in Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2009, 229-237.

[173] Before he died, Alessio Erardi had signed a formal will on 10 June 1726. NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 39, 1715-1716, ff. 648v-651v. Published in John Debono, *An Inventory of Alessio Erardi's Paintings and Books*, Malta, Peresso Publishing, 1989.

[174] NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 964-1002v. Published in Debono (1989).

[175] '…*due mani grandi di gesso, due piedi di gesso, sei puttini di gesso, due gruppi di puttini di gesso, un Cristo in Croce di gesso senza la Croce, altre tre mani di gesso, sei piccole teste di gesso…*' NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 987.

[176] '…*un libro grande, di stampe diverse, raccolta di varie antichita, coperto con cartone; un libro con statue antiche in foglio, La vita di San Gaetano in figure, libro in foglio; un altro libro per traverso, con la stampa delle sette chiese di Roma, e le figure di Rafele d'Urbino, impresse nella loggia del Vaticano; la seconda parte del trattato di Prospettive in lingua Francese; libro d'architettura di Sebastiano Serlio Bolognese; Ragionamenti del Signore Cavaliere Giorgio Vasari Pittor ed Architetto, un altro libretto a traverse con fogliami; Trattato delli cinque ordini d' Architettura del Palladio in francese; Ammaestramento di Pittura, Scoltura ed Architettura dell'Abbate Filippo Titi…*' NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 988-989.

Fig. 1.14 Andrea Pozzo, Figura quarantesimasettima. Teatro tutto intero & ombreggiato, Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum, 1642-1709, Seconda Parte.

Fig. 1.13 Pietro Paolo Troisi & Francesco Zahra, Altar of Repose, Mdina Cathedral.

113

Baron dating to the second half of the seventeenth century is after Bernini.[177] It has the inscription 'il Bernini Inv.', although it does not seem to appertain to any known Bernini composition or executed work of art. It could simply have been a design in the style of Bernini, therefore could be categorised as 'Berninesque', representing the Virgin and Child. The printmaker, also known as Baronius as is his signature in the inscription, was born in Toulouse but spent his later life in Rome and was therefore familiar with Bernini's works.[178] The fact that such a print would have been present in Malta points towards the indication that artists, *scalpellini*, and craftsmen were familiar with Berninesque designs.

Other prints survive not because they were deemed to be important to be kept for posterity but because they were utilised by bookbinders in their craft as scrap material. It is therefore not surprising, albeit exciting, to find prints and design drawings being used as spine and cover supports of volumes at the Notarial Archives. An eighteenth-century thesis print survives in the parchment binding of a volume belonging to the acts of Notary Antonio Pace who was active in eighteenth-century Senglea (Plate 61).[179] The print, which is used as stiffener and thus is not completely visible since it wraps around the volume's spine, was dedicated to Joaquin de Portocarrero, who came from Spain and was a Knight of the Order.[180] The print, which was significantly commissioned from the workshop of Hubert Vincent in Rome, is also important for its decorative border which features angels surrounded by floral and acanthus motifs and *putti* holding back drapery to reveal the print's text which focuses on a religious thesis.[181] The entire concetto is influenced by the Berninesque tradition. The workshop of Hubert Vincent in Rome produced prints after famous Roman Baroque masters, including Ciro Ferri. Hubert

---

[177] Acknowledgments are due to Krystle Attard Trevisani for providing me with this image.

[178] Another copy of the same print is in the collection of The British Museum. See <https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/collection_object_details.aspx?objectId=3244730&partId=1&people=133284&peoA=133284-2-60&sortBy=objectTitleSort&page=2> accessed 13 August 2019.

[179] The print can be found in the inside cover of the manuscript. NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 14, 1730-1731.

[180] He became the Viceroy of Sicily under the Habsburgian monarchy and later became Cardinal. He donated his book and paper collection to the Order and thereby founded the Bibliotheca. Indeed, the same coat of arms features on both the donated books which survive and on the print at the Notarial Archives. Acknowledgements to Vanessa Buhagiar are due for the information on Joaquin de Portocarrero.

[181] Contact with the relevant professionals has been made in order for the print to be x-rayed since to keep the structure of the volume intact and not destroy its original sewing, it cannot be dismantled. Once the text is clearer, more research has to be conducted into the meaning of the print and the reasons for which it was commissioned.

Vincent, born in Lyon but active in Rome in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century, is described as having 'a very indifferent style',[182] meaning that he was only fit to copy other's designs but for the sake of dissemination, this was more than sufficient.

The fact that the print is utilised in one of Notary Antonio Pace's volumes is also significant. This notary was particularly close to artists and craftsmen, such as the Zahra and the Durante family, possibly also because he was active in Senglea and this peninsula was flourishing with regional artistic trade. His deeds contain more than 35 contracts which concern Maltese *scalpellini* and craftsmen working in the decoration of Maltese churches. It would therefore have been easy to obtain scrap material from artists' workshops. Indeed, other scrap material from *scalpellini*'s workshops was used as parchment stiffeners in his volumes, among them a design for an altar reredos of which only a small part survives[183] (Plate 62) and a design for a marble decorative inscription which seems to survive in its entirety but is impossible to see entirely due to the manner in which it is folded (Plate 63).[184] The discovery of such designs is a rare instance since these were considered ephemeral objects and not usually conserved. Luckily, the bookbinder's fateful choice of using them in the volumes preserves them in their original state.

The medium used in the majority of commissions of Maltese Late Baroque sculpture is Maltese limestone, naturally because it was one of the most available materials. However, *scalpellini* and artisans also worked in other materials such as wood and marble. The availability of these materials in Malta was from scarce to non-existent and this left the artists with only one option. Importation or the acquiring of materials was very often the responsibility of the artist commissioned for the work. In some cases, the importer was not an artist such as in the case of Sebastiano Talora who imported several different kinds of wood from Venice on the *Tartana L'Immacolata Concettione*.[185] Other times, the artist would have

---

[182] Michael Bryan, *A Biographical and Critical Dictionary of Painters and Engravers Volume II*, Carpenter and Son; J. Booker; and Whittingham and Arliss, 1816, 556.

[183] The altar reredos design can be found in the inside cover of the manuscript. NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 18, 1734-1735.

[184] The marble decorative inscription design can be found in the inside cover of the manuscript. NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 22, 1738-1739. This parchment cover will also be x-rayed once the required permission is issued from the Notarial Archives.

[185] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 649v-651v.

imported the material himself, such as in the case of the Durante family, who imported marble.[186] The quality of the marble was most definitely one of the most major concerns of patrons commissioning works of art, probably because since marble was not obtainable in Malta, they could not be physically present when the choice of the material was carried out. It was therefore important for the patron to secure his interests in writing. In a contract dating to 1759, the patron Don Francesco Agius[187] as procurator of the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St George in Rabat, Gozo, commissioned Gio Andrea Durante to execute all the marble works of the reredos, the tabernacle, the *scanello*, and the marble floor.[188] The contract, which mentions two separate designs (unfortunately not attached to the deed), provides elaborate details of the quality and the type of marble to be used in a legend.[189] Although, in this case, the acquiring of the marble by Gio Andrea Durante or another member of the Durante family is implied, two other contracts confirm that the family was involved in the importation of marble from Italy. Claudio Durante is documented to have bought transported marble to Malta by a certain Antonio Ciantar.[190] The deed lists Livorno as the port of departure of the *Tartana Giesu Maria Sant'Anna* heading down to the port of Valletta. The port of Livorno was not more than two days away from Carrara, although the latter is not specifically mentioned in the contract. It is however specifically mentioned in a contract which commissioned Gregorio Durante to fabricate the pedestal for Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena's statue for the piazza in front of Fort Manoel.[191]

Now relocated to Floriana, Gregorio Durante was charged with the responsibility of executing the design drawn up by De Mondion of the pedestal complete with steps for holding up the statue of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena by Troisi.[192] Among the many conditions listed in the contract between Gregorio Durante and Fra Feliciano de Savasse, Gregorio Durante was bound to acquire the

---

[186] This is discussed *supra*.
[187] This patron has been identified as being Gian Pietro Francesco Agius de Soldanis, thus adding to the importance of this commission.
[188] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 35, 1758-1759, ff. 401-403.
[189] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 35, 1758-1759, ff. 402v.
[190] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 8, 1731-1732, ff. 94-94r.
[191] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 10, 1733-1734, ff. 188v-193.
[192] The statue of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena by Pietro Paolo Troisi is discussed in Briffa (2009), 43-47.

marble for the pedestal from Carrara. Moreover, he had to physically go to Carrara to choose the required pieces of marble and was also responsible for their transportation to Malta.[193] This confirms two theories: the first that the Order of St John did indeed seek to commission the local artists and craftsmen; the second that regional sculptors did visit important quarries such as Carrara for the obtaining of material.

Other mediums to be used in commissions for churches were also imported. Exotic products were included in such importations. Petruzzo Castagna in the name of other merchants including Fortunato Burlò, promised Giuseppe Peres, son of Eramso Peres, a father-and-son team of gilders, to exclusively import from Venice significant amounts of '*oro delle Croce, che gia colorito e saldo*', '*sangue drago in pietra che sia ben roscio*', '*gomma alacca*', and '*termentina bianca*'.[194] The importation of such mediums shed light on several factors of the Maltese eighteenth-century community; first, there was a demand for such materials; second, the patron was wealthy enough to pay not only for the materials but also for their acquiring and eventual execution of the work of art; third, the need to acquire materials which were not available in Malta illustrates the desire to furnish homes and churches with exquisite works of art; fourth, and most importantly, this circumstance put Maltese artists and craftsmen in touch with contacts from abroad and thus allowed them to submit their designs to international artistic currents.

The channels of artistic dissemination which have been identified eased the way for the Berninesque tradition to have a greater impact on eighteenth-century regional sculpture in Malta.[195] The set of conditions which allowed for the Berninesque style to have such an impactful effect on regional Maltese Late Baroque sculpture were also manifest in other countries which display Berninesque characteristics in the regional production of their seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sculpture. A comparative analysis which places Malta's situation at par with the Berninesque imprint south of Rome, especially Naples, Lecce, Palermo, and the Val di Noto, grounds the production of regional Maltese eighteenth-century

---

[193] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 10, 1733-1734, ff. 191v-192.
[194] NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 33, 1750-1751, ff. 965v-966v.
[195] The impact of the Berninesque tradition in Malta's regional Late Baroque sculpture is analysed *infra* in Chapter 3.

sculpture within the international context of the spread of the Berninesque Roman Baroque style.

CHAPTER II

Stylistic Parallelisms
in Regional Sculpture:
Malta and the south of Italy

Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Catherine, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

The first chapter of this dissertation analysed the socio-artistic context which surrounded the production of regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta, particularly focusing on the links with Rome which enabled the Berninesque manner to be transmitted to local *scalpellini*. The aim of this second chapter is to discuss the international spread of the Berninesque tradition and analyse the stylistic resemblances between the regional visual culture of Malta and ecclesiastical Late Baroque sculpture in Naples, Lecce, Palermo, and the Val di Noto. Although Malta's regional Late Baroque sculpture has considerable stylistic similarities with the Sicilian *tardo barocco* and Naples's and Lecce's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baroque manifestations, this does not necessarily mean that the Berninesque tradition in Malta was determined by influence coming from the south of Italy. Rather, as this analysis and ensuing disparities will portray, Bernini's influence in Malta was the direct result of the undeviating links between Rome and Malta. An analysis of the socio-artistic context in the different regions of the south of Italy and Malta is also significant for the apparent similarities which existed in the set of conditions which shaped regional sculpture and its Berninesque imprint.

2.1 A comparative reflection on the Berninesque tradition in Naples and Malta

Similar to Malta, one of the ways in which the Berninesque style infiltrated the Neapolitan scene was through Roman Baroque works of art commissioned for Neapolitan churches.[1] This is the case with the Cacace chapel in San Lorenzo Maggiore, considered one of the most important chapels for Neapolitan Baroque and an excellent example of a *paragone* between Andrea Bolgi, a loyal follower of Bernini, and Cosimo Fanzago, one of the most important actors of the Neapolitan Baroque (Plate 65). The effect of Bernini's style on Andrea Bolgi is apparent in the sculptural portraiture of the Cacace chapel. The solutions adopted by Bolgi '*sono pienamente berniniane nello scarso aggetto degli altro rilievi, nel movimento vorticoso dei panneggi e nella estroversa emotività dei ritratti*'[2] but the local tradition, as exemplified by the rest of the decoration executed by Cosimo Fanzago,

---

[1] For information on the relationship between Naples and Rome in the eighteenth century, see Jill Johnson Deupi, 'Cultural Politics in Bourbon Naples, 1734-1799: Antiquities, Academies and Rivalries with Rome', PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2006.

[2] Riccardo Lattuada, 'Napoli e Bernini: Spie di un rapport ancora inedito' in Gaetana Cantome (ed.), *Centri e periferie del Barocco. Barocco Napoletano*, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome, 1992, 645-670: 648.

is also emphasised: '*ma il ricchissimo contesto decorativo in tarsia marmoreale policroma di Fanzago e la tradizionale iconografia delle figure inginocchiate in orazione, adottata per le due effigie poste più alto, constituiscono una sintesi napoletana dei problema plastico-decorativi.*'[3] The Berninesque spirit which imbues the portraiture in the Cacace chapel can be compared to the same pious spirit which permeates the sculptural portrayals of the saints in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta (Fig. C.43 & Fig. C.44).

It has been acknowledged that the Berninesque impact in Naples was solidified with the arrival of the brothers Pietro and Bartolomeo Ghetti, who formed part of the workshop of the *berniniano* Francesco Baratta, and who must have arrived in Naples with several prints and designs of Bernini's works in their luggage.[4] Similar to the situation with Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra in Malta, the use of these prints are described as sometimes being too mechanical or superficial but in any case, they '*constituiscono un tramite efficace per la conoscenza di partiti berniniani*'.[5] Similarly, in many Berninesque altar reredoses in Malta, the feeling often prevails that the *scalpellini* unashamedly copied designs and inserted them in their local context. This is, however, not to say that the Berninesque impact was any less effective, albeit, more shallow in artistic and spiritual theory than its Roman counterpart, although the understanding of artists and patrons of Bernini's *concetti* remains to be seen.[6] As an example of this, Lattuada analyses the similarities between the *San Francesco Borgia* in the Gesù Vecchio in Naples and Bernini's *St Longinus*, and the façade decoration of the Gesù Nuovo[7] in Naples with Bernini's use of the *angeli adoranti* in S. Agostino in Rome and on the Ponte S. Angelo.[8] In the latter, the same solution is adopted for *putti*, which is comparable to the typology as used in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. C.31 & Fig. C.32).

These stylistic similarities are visual evidence of the influence of Bernini on the development of the local expression of the Baroque, not only in Naples or in

---

[3] For more on the role of Cosimo Fanzago, see Lattuada (1992), 648.

[4] On Pietro and Bartolomeo Ghetti and their effect on Neapolitan art, see Lattuada (1992), 648.

[5] Lattuada (1992), 648.

[6] This is discussed *supra* in the Introduction.

[7] On the Gesù Nuovo, see Maria Ann Conelli, 'The Gesù Nuovo in Naples: Politics, Property and Religion', PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1992.

[8] For more detail on the Gesù Vecchio and the Gesù Nuovo, see Lattuada (1992), 648.

Malta, but to every location to which it travelled to in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The use of drapery in Malta in the Sarria church in Floriana as designed by Mattia Preti can be compared to the use of the same scenographic element in the remodelling of the paleo-Christian church of S. Restituta in the Naples Duomo by Arcangelo Guglielmelli after the damages it suffered in the 1688 earthquake (Fig. C.1 & Fig. C.2).[9] This Berninesque *concetto*, as utilised in both Naples and Malta, is undoubtedly inspired by Bernini's decoration in the Sala Ducale in the Vatican Palace. The same Berninesque typology is used in the church of Santa Maria della Sanità in Naples by the same Guglielmelli and in the chiesa della Compagnia della Disciplina della Santa Croce by Lorenzo Vaccaro (Fig. C.15). In Malta, a very vernacular attempt to recreate this composition is made in the countryside church of St Catherine in Qrendi.[10] The idea of drapery revealing the narrative, almost as if the altar reredos was a theatrical stage with curtains, is repeated by Domenico Antonio Vaccaro in the chapel of the Virgin of the Rosary in the Certosa di San Martino in Naples.[11] This more subdued approach to this Berninesque device is comparable to other Maltese Late Baroque examples, such as the altar of St Anthony of Padova in the church of St Francis and the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark, both in Rabat.

A note on the *festa barocca* does not go amiss when discussing the influence of Bernini in Naples. As stated by Lattuada, the Schor family – predominantly Cristoforo and Filippo who were called to Naples in 1683 by the new viceroy, Gaspar Méndez de Haro – was responsible for its importation from Rome to Naples, with many ideas based on the designs of Bernini.[12] According to Lattuada, '*l'acquisizione del lessico berniniano ebbe a Napoli un catalizzatore*

---

[9] Santa Restituta is analysed in Lattuada (1992), 649.

[10] Refer to Fig. C.16 for illustration.

[11] On the Certosa di San Martino, see Concetta Martone Dragani, 'Between Heaven and Earth: Negotiating Sacred Space at the Church of the Certosa di San Martino in Early-Seventeenth-Century Naples', PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2012. See also John Nicholas Napoli, 'Fashioning the Certosa di San Martino: Ornament, Illusion, and Artistic Collaboration in Early-Modern Naples', PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2003.

[12] Lattuada (1992), 652. It is also in this Baroque spirit of the *festa barocca* and the idea of the *bel composto* which led to artists being involved in all three arts. Sabina de Cavi states: 'Indeed, large-format arts and crafts became a stylistic hallmark of southern Italian art, and several Neapolitan baroque artists practiced many arts at once. For instance, the decorator Giovan Domenico Vinaccia (active in Naples, 1661–95) worked as silversmith, sculptor, intagliatore, architect, and apparatore, while Domenico Antonio Vaccaro (1678–1745)—like Gianlorenzo Bernini in Rome—was sculptor, painter, and architect.' Sabina de Cavi, 'Applied Arts in Naples: Materials and Artistic Techniques from Micro- to Macrocosmos', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, xix, 2 (Fall-Winter 2012), 196-230.

fondamentale nei fratelli Schor, che andarono ad affiancarsi ad altri artisti locali già pronti ad affrontare consapevolmente la complessità del linguaggio di Bernini'. This is similar to the development of the situation in Malta in the beginning of the eighteenth century when Pietro Paolo Troisi returned from his sojourn to Rome with new Berninesque ideas, which were then manifested not only in permanent stone altar reredoses, but also in ephemeral triumphal aches and altars of repose, one of which survives and is set up in the Mdina Cathedral to this day (Plates 17, 42, 43). It is, in fact, in Troisi's design in which the angels inspired by the Ponte S. Angelo angels make their first appearance in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture.[13]

The Berninesque impact in Naples is also apparent in the use of angels. The chapel of the Crucifix in San Giovanni Maggiore exemplifies the Berninesque typology of the *angeli adoranti*, where parallelisms with the Cappella del Sacramento in the Vatican can be easily made (Fig. C.49).[14] The same parallelisms are observed in the work of Domenico Antonio Vaccara, who inherited the interest in Bernini through his father Lorenzo, in two instances: between the angels in the chapel of the Virgin of the Rosary in the Certosa di San Martino and the Berninesque angels in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome; and between the flying angels in the dome of the church of the Concezione a Montecalvario in Naples and the choir angels supporting the organ lofts in Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome.[15]

All of these Berninesque angels find their counterpart in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. The angels holding up the drapery in the church of Santa Restituta can be compared to Maltese examples, such as those in the church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. 2.1 & Fig. 2.2), while the *putti* are identical in posture to those in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta and the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Fig. C.3-C.8). Sitting angels atop the entablature of altar

---

[13] Their first actual execution was in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea by the scalpellino, Pietro Paolo Zahra, Troisi's collaborator.

[14] Lattuada (1992) quotes the research of Fiammetta Chiurazzi in this regard: Fiammetta Chiurazzi, *Civiltà del Seicento a Napoli*, II, Naples, 1984, 230-231. Lattuada (1992), 653.

[15] The church of the Concezione a Montecalvario is analysed in Lattuada (1992), 654.

Fig. 2.1 Santa Restituta, Duomo, Naples. Detail.

Fig. 2.2 Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 2.3 Altar of the Holy Crucifix, Church of San Giovanni Maggiore, Naples. Detail.

Fig. 2.4 Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Mark, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 2.5 High Altar, Duomo, Naples. Detail.
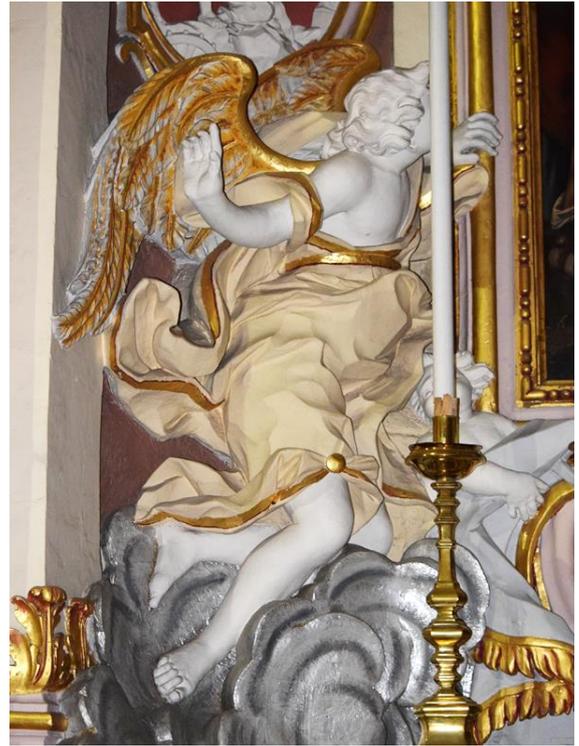
Fig. 2.6 Altar of St Catherine, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 2.7 Altar of the Holy Crucifix, Church of San Giovanni Maggiore, Naples. Detail.
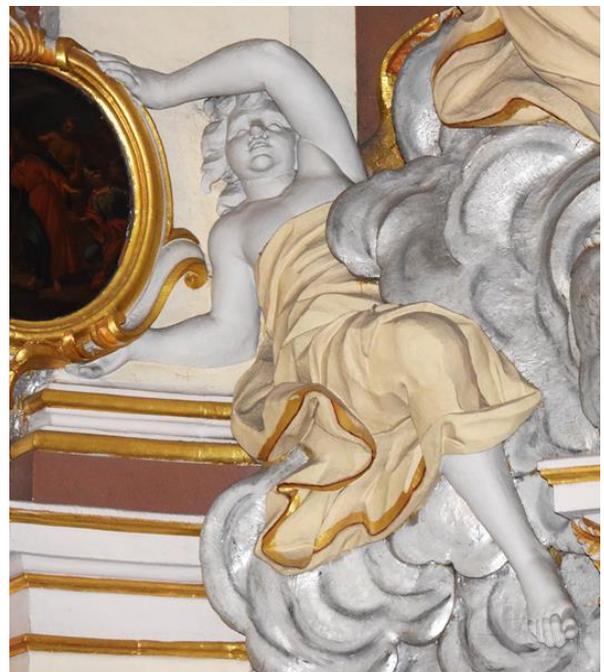
Fig. 2.8 Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

reredoses are also found in both Naples and Malta, as exemplified by the examples in the Certosa di San Martino and the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ.[16] Angels in flight supporting several elements of a composition are common in both Neapolitan and Maltese Baroque churches – those found in the Duomo and the Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini in Naples and in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea and the church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ are only but a few examples.[17] They are reminiscent of many Berninesque works of art in Rome, including the *Memorial to Maria Raggi*, the Fonseca chapel at San Lorenzo in Lucina, and the profusely decorated ceiling of Il Gesù.

Putti are also profusely used in both Malta and Naples, and Roman Baroque typologies are found repeated in several instances, including pairs of *putti* flanking coats of arms or holding up a crown, owing their style to examples found in prints such as that depicting the Tomb of Urban VIII by Bernini.[18] *Putti* perched atop volutes in altar reredoses, such as those found in the church known as Purgatorio ad Arco in Naples and the parish church of the Annunciation in Balzan,[19] also owe their placement to many Roman Baroque works of art which Bernini designed, where very often full-fledged angels, saints, or allegories take their place, such as in the nave of the church of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome.

The influence of Bernini's *Cathedra Petri* is evident in the reproduction of both angels and the *gloria* in the eastern apse of the Duomo of Naples (Fig. C.29). The angel at the lower left of the composition (Fig. C.27) with his arm reaching out towards the central *gloria* and legs outstretched as if frozen mid-flight is a parallel of Bernini's design in the *Cathedra Petri*. The same posture is applied to an angel at the side of the altar painting in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. C.28). In the same Maltese church, parallel *putti* to those in the Naples Duomo, conveniently fill the space effectively and harmoniously.[20] The *gloria* in the Duomo of Naples owes its very conception to Bernini's *concetto* and there is a clear indication of the patrons' and artists' desire to emulate this idiosyncratic motif of Roman Baroque art. The same love for Roman Baroque works of art is mirrored

---

[16] For illustrative purposes, refer to Fig. C.19 and Fig. C.20.
[17] See Fig. C.27, Fig. C.28, Fig. C.63, and Fig. C.64 in Appendix C.
[18] Refer to Fig. C.35 and Fig. C.36 for examples.
[19] See Fig. C.37 and Fig. C.38 in Appendix C for illustrations.
[20] Refer to Fig. C.23 and Fig. C.24 for this analogy.

in the Order of St John's choice of artist and final design for the eastern apse of the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta, especially in the choice of the gilt *gloria* and the contrasting marble figures placed in front of it (Fig. C.30). The pious expression and spiritual fervour which imbue the figure of the Virgin in the Duomo and the animated theatrical drapery folds imitating the psychological state of their bearer firmly belongs to Bernini's *St Theresa* – a typology which was popularised all over Europe, including Malta, as exemplified by the saints flanking the main altar painting in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta (Fig. C.21 and Fig. C.22). A similar *gloria* to the one in the Duomo's main altar is also employed behind the figure of the Virgin in the church of Santa Maria Donnaromita in Naples, an altar designed and executed by Bartolomeo and Pietro Ghetti.

The entire scheme of the altar of the Crucifix in San Giovanni Maggiore is akin to the altar reredos in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea, including the insertion of the Eternal Father atop the crucified Christ flanked by two *angeli adoranti* (Fig. C.49 and Fig C.50). One of the angels atop the entablature of the altar in Naples mirrors the posture, with hands lightly touching and folded in prayer, of the angel atop the altar reredos dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat.[21] The other angel, with hands folded piously on the chest, parallels the angel on the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat.[22] Both angels can also be conspicuously found in Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary for the Right Hand of St John* in the Conventual Church of St John, which also influenced the Maltese *scalpellini* in their designs (Plate 10). The Eternal Father can be compared to multiple examples in Maltese churches but it is highly reminiscent of the Eternal Father atop the altar of the Assumption of the Virgin in the parish church of St Helen in Birkirkara, especially in posture and iconography (Fig. C.55 & Fig. C.56). The quality in this particular Maltese example is subpar, although this is not the case in all instances. The Eternal Father also makes a significant appearance in the main altar of the Certosa di San Martino comparable to the Maltese counterpart in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea.[23]

---

[21] See Fig. C.51 and Fig. C.52.
[22] Refer to Fig. C.53 and Fig. C.54.
[23] See Fig. C.17 and Fig. C.18.

The composition of Andrea Pozzo's Trinity in the upper section of the altar of St Ignatius of Loyola in the church of Il Gesù in Rome has several parallels in many European nodes of Roman Baroque-inspired altar reredoses. The main altar of the church of the Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini in Naples (Fig. C.57), executed in the middle of the eighteenth century, pays homage to Pozzo's design while exhibiting Berninesque influences in the inclusion of the *gloria*, and the numerous angels and *putti* supporting the clouds upon which the figures rest. The same composition is employed in the parish church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin in Qrendi (Fig. C.58), although the latter is much less technically accomplished. The material chosen in the latter was stone, rather than stucco as in the case of the Neapolitan example, and this gives it a more regional Maltese character. There are also affinities in the Christ of the Santissima Trinità dei Pellegrini with Giuseppe Mazzuoli's Christ in the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta.[24]

The importance of Bernini's *fortuna critica,* in part enforced by de' Rossi, was of great significance in Naples especially for little known sculptors, such as Aniello Perrone. Like Pietro Paolo Troisi in Malta, his journey to Rome to observe the statues of antiquity and the famous works of Bernini sustained and proliferated Naples during the first half of the eighteenth century with motifs derived from the Berninesque tradition.[25] In this regard, the Gesù Nuovo in Naples is significant, especially the chapel dedicated to San Ciro (previously dedicated to Sant'Anna), where Giuseppe Bastelli employed the Solomonic twisted columns[26] made popular by Bernini's *Baldacchino*. The same typology of columns, so affiliated with Bernini's style, are repeated by Troisi in his design for the Altar of Repose for the Mdina Cathedral (Plate 17). It is therefore not surprising to find references to Bernini's manner in Neapolitan eighteenth-century documents, especially when commissioning or providing payment for a work of art.[27] Certain documents of this kind make reference to the Solomonic columns as '*alla Bernina*'[28] and the *gloria* as

---

[24] See Fig. C.59 – Fig. C.62 in Appendix C.
[25] For more on Aniello Perrone, see Lattuada (1992), 656.
[26] On Giuseppe Bastelli, see Lattuada (1992), 656.
[27] For references to Bernini's manner as mentioned in documents, see Lattuada (1992), 656.
[28] This referred to the commission of an altar by Giuseppe Bastelli in 1741 for the church of Santa Maria della Sanità. Lattuada (1992), 656.

the '*raggio alla Bernina*'.[29] Similar connotations to the Roman Baroque style have been discovered in Maltese notarial documents, where it is made clear that certain commissioned elements, such as a balcony,[30] a façade,[31] or a marble altar scanello,[32] must be executed '*alla Romana*'.

A significant indication that the Berninesque manner was not superficial or solely in the periphery was the fact that even the most important exponents of Neapolitan Baroque art were influenced by the style. Amongst others, Lattuada mentions Gian Domenico Vinaccia to whom he attributes a familiarity with Bernini and the culture of the Roman Baroque as exemplified in the *Paliotto d'argento della Cappella del Tesoro di San Gennaro*.[33] The inspiration behind the latter has been attributed to the Bernini prototype of the *Baldacchino*.[34] In addition to this, the work of art's theatrical narrative and its ambiguity to be classified as a bas-relief, an altar reredos, or a three-dimensional sculpture, continue to enhance the idea that this was designed as an ephemeral work of art – a *macchina* – rendered permanent in silver.[35] Lattuada emphasises that the highest culture of the *Paliotto* is that it does not constitute an isolated event of reception of the Berninesque culture, but the work of Lorenzo and Domenico Antonio Vaccaro proves that an international Roman Baroque language had been present for a number of years. This artistic scenario is paralleled in Malta, and especially reflected in the socio-political situation created by the Order of St John, which saw the Order and the Diocese

---

[29] This referred to the commission of a sepulchre for San Gregorio Armeno by Nicolò Tagliacozzi Canale in 1745, which required a '*mondo ornato da un raggio alla Bernina*'. Lattuada (1992), 656.

[30] This is discussed *supra* in Chapter 1. Filippo Pace is commissioned by the Carmelite Church in Valletta to execute building works in a group of houses in Valletta which the church owns. The contract states that the architect was to include '*un balcone alla Romana nella sala*'. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 9, 1736-1737, f. 33.

[31] This is discussed *supra* in Chapter 1. Angelo Romano and Giovanni Cortis promise the patron, Michelangelo Damico, to '*fabricare la facciata nuova assieme colla porta maggiore alla Romana*' in a group of houses in Senglea. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 12, 1739-1740, f. 563.

[32] This is discussed *supra* in Chapter 1. Antonio and Francesco D'Amato, father and son artists from Messina, were commissioned to build a marble altar for the Church of All Souls in Valletta. Part of the contract speaks about the scanello of the marble altar. The contract stipulates that the artists had to execute '*scanelli per la scalinata alla Romana*'. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1744, f. 201v.

[33] On Gian Domenico Vinaccia, see Lattuada (1992), 654. On the chapel of San Gennaro in Naples Duomo, see Helen Hill, 'Beyond Mere Containment: The Neapolitan Treasury Chapel of San Gennaro and the Matter of Materials', California Italian Studies, 3(1), 2012, 1-21.

[34] For more details on the similarity with the *Baldacchino*, Lattuada (1992), 655.

[35] Lattuada (1992), 655. This idea of the Baroque *macchina* being transformed into a permanent altar is also explored in Sabina de Cavi, 'Applied Arts in Naples: Materials and Artistic Techniques from Micro- to Macrocosmos', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, xix, 2 (Fall-Winter 2012), 196-230.

refer to Rome for both the importation of works of art and inspiration for local expressions of the Berninesque style. In Malta, the style continued to be popular throughout the eighteenth century, although it transformed into a style akin to the Rococo – or a Barocchetto – employing certain decorative elements synonymous with the Roman Baroque such as scrolls, volutes, acanthus leaves, *putti*, and shell motifs, but executed in a more frivolous and light-hearted manner. This is exemplified by the church of the Virgin of Manresa in Floriana and the church of the Virgin of Providence in Siġġiewi (Fig. C.46 and Fig. C.48). The medium, which remains limestone – tends to partially weigh down the graceful style. This continuation into Rococo also seems to have been the case in Naples and the islands in the Gulf of Naples, as illustrated in the church of San Stefano in Capri and the church of Santa Sofia in Anacapri (Fig. C.45 & Fig.C.47).

Although there are a number of similarities, especially in the postures of figures used by sculptors, the method of the transmission of the Berninesque tradition, and in the appropriation of Roman Baroque typologies, there is also a considerable leap in quality from Malta to Naples. Neapolitan churches display a higher quality of sculpture and are in general more sombre in their application of the Berninesque tradition than their Maltese counterparts.[36] This less accomplished application in Maltese churches is the result of a more vernacular approach towards the execution of sculpture by local *scalpellini*. This is, however, not the case in the demonstration of the Baroque essence as local *scalpellini* were fervent in their application of Bernini's visible spirit;[37] in Malta's churches, altar reredoses exude the Berninesque spirit and immediately remind the spectator of the Eternal City, complete with a healthy dose of regional characteristics and provincialism. In addition to this, from the stylistic and contextual analysis of Naples and Malta, it is clear that the link to Rome was direct in both cases. In spite of the resemblances which emerge from this comparative stylistic analysis, both Naples and Malta had their own channels with the Eternal City, and the similarities analysed here were the ultimate result of this parallelism in channels of influence.

---

[36] There seems to be a closer stylistic link between Neapolitan and Maltese Baroque painting, more than in sculpture.

[37] This is the term which Irving Lavin famously gives to Bernini's works and the feeling they produce. Irving Lavin, *Visible Spirit: The Art of Gianlorenzo Bernini Volumes I-III*, London, Pindar, 2007-2012.

2.2 A comparative analysis of the *Barocco Leccese* and Maltese Late Baroque sculpture

Especially when compared with Naples' more solemn and heavier Baroque manifestations, Lecce's regional Baroque expression seems to be related to the Rococo style – or the Barocchetto – even more.[38] In this particular sense, it seems that Maltese Late Baroque sculpture finds more stylistic parallelisms (such as figurative poses and use of *angeli adoranti*) with the Neapolitan Baroque, since it is more robust and less delicate than Lecce's intricate designs in almost every church in the historic centre of this city.[39] There are, however, some noteworthy comparisons between Lecce's and Malta's Baroque sculpture which will be analysed below, as well as other parallelisms, such as the regional character imbued into the Baroque style by the use of limestone rather than marble and stucco. In addition to this, both regional expressions seem to go beyond – '*è al di là del barocco*'[40] – the style of the Roman Baroque.

The transmission of ideas from Rome to Italy's southern cities is almost identical to the spread of the Roman Baroque from Rome to Malta. The movement of people and the socio-political happenings of a particular location influenced the production of new art. Two new orders in Lecce in the beginning of the seventeenth century – the Jesuits and the Theatines – greatly supported the infiltration of a Romanised strain in Lecce's art and architecture.[41] It has been established that this Roman influence is manifested in three important churches: the church of Il Gesù; the church of Santa Maria delle Grazie; and the church of Sant'Irene. Their designers, especially Michele Coluzio, who designed the Santa Maria delle Grazie, and Francesco Grimaldi, who designed Santa Irene, are deemed to have perhaps been the only artists who did not hail from Lecce or its surroundings.[42] Their

---

[38] Maurizio Calvesi and Mario Manieri-Elia state: '*Il barocco leccese è sempre barocchetto: come il rococo, è al li da là del barocco; ma anche al di qua di esso, visto che, del barocco, non compie mai l'essenziale riforma prospettico-spaziale rispetto ai moduli del rinascimento.*' Maurizio Calvesi and Mario Manieri-Elia, *Personalità e strutture caratterizzanti il "barocco" leccese*, Comunita Europea dell'Arte e della Cultura, Italy, 1966, 11.

[39] For a survey of Lecce's churches, see Michele Paone, *Lecce Città Chiesa*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 1974.

[40] In relation to Lecce, this is the opinion expressed in Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 11.

[41] On Lecce's general artistic context, see Vincenzo Cazzato and Marcello Fagiolo, *Lecce. Architettura e Storia Urbana*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2013, 161-231. For more on Lecce's context, see Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 51.

[42] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 51.

different knowledge and culture is reflected in their designs, particularly Grimaldi's background of his work in S. Andrea della Valle in Rome which is mirrored in his work for the church of Sant'Irene.[43] The same happened in Malta in the first half of the eighteenth century, especially with the church of St James in Valletta, which was designed by Romano Carrapecchia who had been previously active in Rome.

It is however extremely evident, especially when analysing church façades and altar reredoses in the main churches in Lecce's historical centre, that the regional tradition in Lecce was powerful enough to limit the effect of the Berninesque and Roman Baroque imprint on the local style. According to Calvesi and Manieri-Elia, who also downplay the effect of the Spanish Baroque on the artistic output of Lecce in the seventeenth century, the two main influences on Lecce's Baroque sculpture were: the medieval tradition which resurfaced in the Baroque era with new shapes; and the organic character of the local material of construction, that is, the Lecce stone, as discussed above.[44] This lack of influence from the Roman Baroque in Lecce stands at a very stark contrast with Malta's situation in the eighteenth century, since it transpires from the analysis of the production of local *scalpellini*, that the effect of the Berninesque tradition brought about by the socio-political context of the Order of St John and the Diocese largely formed and dictated the style of the interior of Maltese churches. Naturally, there are local regional differences between the eighteenth-century sculptural production in Malta and the original Bernini conceptions in Rome, such as the divergence in quality, the local medium of stone, and the style's tendency to go above and beyond the Roman Baroque, but the spirit undoubtedly remains Berninesque in its effect on the spectator. Contrastingly, Lecce's churches and their intricate interiors instigates wonder and awe at the skill of the sculptor whereas Malta's altar reredoses are much more focused on the religious sentiment which they are meant to instil in the faithful.

---

[43] For more on the church of Sant'Irene, refer to Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 51.
[44] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 116.

Fig. 2.9 Chiesa del Carmine, Lecce. Detail.

Fig. 2.10 Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Mark, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 2.11 Chiesa del Carmine, Lecce. Detail.

Fig. 2.12 Altar of the Holy Crucifix, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 2.13 High Altar, Church of Sant'Irene, Lecce. Detail.

Fig. 2.14 Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 2.15 High Altar, Church of Sant'Irene, Lecce. Detail.

Fig. 2.16 Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Qrendi. Detail.

Perhaps the most distinguishing regional characteristic of the *Barocco Leccese* is its intricate ornamentation. In comparison to Malta's more sculptural expression of regional Baroque, the sculptors and *scalpellini* of Lecce imbued their designs with a pictorial quality which is not often found in Malta. It is also due to this factor that Malta's eighteenth-century Baroque is more Berninesque than Lecce's eighteenth-century sculptural production which is more related to the Rococo.[45] This preference for intricate ornamentation, which has been likened to embroidery in stone, was strengthened and conditioned by Venetian influence brought about by the strong maritime and commercial relationship between Lecce and Venice.[46] In the same manner in which the Order of St John commissioned works of art from Rome, important Lecce patrons commissioned important works of art, such as the statute of S. Oronzo in the main piazza of the historic centre, from Venice. The same desire to emulate another location's production of works of art evident in Malta is also found in Lecce, in the fact that the statue was destroyed and another was ordered once more from Venice. The same degree of Roman Baroque in Malta can be found in Lecce but in terms of Venetian influence, and the local artists had the same contact with these works of art: Giuseppe Zimbalo was the person chosen to place the Venetian statue of S. Oronzo on its column in the piazza. The same type of contact between an established architect and a local scalpellino can be found between Pietro Paolo Zahra and Romano Carapecchia in their work in the sacristy of the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta.[47] Consequently, local artists started to design works influenced by their contact with outside sources – Pietro Paolo Zahra's works took on Berninesque Roman Baroque elements while Giuseppe Zimbalo's designs for altar reredoses in Lecce were imprinted with '*la gracilità delle volute e l'affettata levità delle statuine*'.[48]

Venetian influence, the medium of Lecce limestone, and the persisting medieval tradition of ornamentation were not the only influences on the Baroque

---

[45] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia make a similar comparison between Lecce and Sicily while clearly favouring the aesthetics of the *Barocco Leccese*: '*Invece ad esempio la pietra dei monumenti siciliani, dotata di diverse qualità, ha proposto agli artisti del luogo un ornato più scultoreo che pittorico, più aspro che mielato*'. Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 116.

[46] This commercial relationship is documented. Among other circumstances, Venetian works of art were imported into Lecce, which served as inspiration for local artists. Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 116-119.

[47] This is discussed and analysed in Meli (2017), 77.

[48] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 119.

sculpture of Lecce; two other major inspirations have long been identified as the influence emanating from Naples as well as inspiration from Eastern Sicily.[49] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia indicate that the influence from Naples might have been the strongest, especially the influence from the '*barocco di radice appunto manieristica del Fanzago*'.[50] Cosimo Fanzago, as the main actor of the Neapolitan Baroque, is singled out as the most influential artistic personality on the Baroque expression on Lecce's sculpture and architecture.[51] Proof of this are the considerable amount of marble altar reredoses in the churches in Puglia, including the main altar of the Duomo of Lecce, which are modelled on Neapolitan examples by Fanzago. Further proof are the Fanzago elements in Giuseppe Zimbalo's design for the façade of the Monastero dei Celestini,[52] which is influenced by the interior decoration of the Certosa di San Martino in Naples.[53] These elements, including various typologies of windows, pilasters, capitals, festoons, and niches found in Seicento architecture in Lecce, impart onto it an elegant and nervous character which reveals its Neapolitan source.[54]

Inspiration from Eastern Sicily came from Guarino Guarini,[55] who worked in Messina amongst other places and was another important artistic personality who impinged on the *Barocco Leccese*.[56] Although not documented to have visited or worked in Lecce, Calvesi and Manieri-Elia do not rule out the possibility of such a journey; even if this had never materialised in reality, they state that there were enough sources for local artists to familiarise themselves with his designs.[57]

---

[49] For more on the influence of Naples and Sicily on the art of Lecce, see Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 121.

[50] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 121.

[51] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia state that Fanzago's '*repertorio si diffonde per tutta l'Italia meridonale, ed anche nel Salento, dove trova una interpretazione indipendente e originale*'. Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 121.

[52] Vincenzo Cazzato discusses the repertoire of the Fanzagesche elements. See Vincenzo Cazzato, 'Lecce: Assi e linguaggio di una città barocca', in Maria Luisa Madonna and Lucia Trigilia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 369-405: 379.

[53] For more on the impact of Fanzago on the sculptural tradition of the *Barocco Leccese*, see Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 121.

[54] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 122.

[55] On Guarino Guarini, see Carol Ann Goetting, 'Guarino Guarini: His Architecture and the Sublime', MA dissertation, University of California, 2012.

[56] For the influence of Gaurino Guarini on sculptors active in Lecce, refer to Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 129.

[57] This theory, which corresponds to the same dissemination of working material in other locations, is discussed in Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 129. For more on the dissemination of architectural treatises in the Salento, see Mario Cazzato, 'Il libro e la squadra: la circolazione dei trattati di

Corresponding to the same situation in Malta, prints and engravings could have easily made their way to Lecce, through the order of the Theatines.[58] The most apparent recipient of this influence is the façade of the church of San Matteo in Lecce.[59]

One of the main differences between Lecce and Malta is that the Berninesque style seems to have infiltrated Malta much deeper than Lecce. This higher impact of Bernini in Malta can be observed from the willingness of *scalpellini* to accept this new style and incorporate it completely in their numerous designs. This resulted in a considerable number of altar reredoses in Maltese churches which display a style that is more akin to the Berninesque spirit than its Leccese counterpart, which is more similar to a Barocchetto in style and essence. Although in Lecce the influence from Rome is present in architects who had worked in the city and through the flourishing of religious orders, the traditional and regional style of the Leccese architects, designers, and *scalpellini* seems to have resisted close copies of Bernini's works.[60]

However, some affinities between the culture of Lecce and Malta, particularly in the circulation of treatises and prints, can still be observed. The *Barocco Leccese* architect, Mauro Manieri, possessed the three volumes of de' Rossi's *Studio dell'architecttura civile* published by Alessandro Specchi.[61] The same volumes were present in Malta in the eighteenth century.[62] The same similarity can be found in the lines of distinction between the role of the architect and the role of the sculptor. This is the case with one of the city's most important artistic personalities in the Baroque era, Francesco Antonio Zimbalo.[63] In Malta,

---

architettura nel Barocco salentino' in Vincenzo Cazzato, Regina Poso, and Giancarlo Vallone (eds), *per la Arti e per la Storia. Omaggio a Tonino Cassiano*, Architettura e Città Collana diretta da Vincenzo Cazzato, No. 10, Mario Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2017, 98-103. For extensive archival research on the inventories of books in notarial deeds, see Chiara Piccolo Giannuzzi, *Fonti per il Barocco Leccese*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 1995, 393-449.

[58] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 129.

[59] On the church of San Matteo in Lecce, see Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 130.

[60] This is the result of the onsite research and stylistic analysis which has been carried out in Lecce.

[61] Mario Cazzato, 'Il libro e la squadra: la circolazione dei trattati di architettura nel Barocco salentino', in Vincenzo Cazzato, Regina Poso, and Giancarlo Vallone (eds), *per la Arti e per la Storia. Omaggio a Tonino Cassiano*, Architettura e Città Collana diretta da Vincenzo Cazzato, No. 10, Mario Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2017, 98-103: 101.

[62] The circulation of treatises and prints present in Malta are discussed in Chapter I and III of this dissertation.

[63] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia state: '…*ma, a Lecce, fino a che punto vale la distinzione tra scultore e architetto? Spesso riassunte nella personalità di un solo artista, come nel caso di Gabriele Riccardi*

several important regional artistic personalities were involved in designing both architecture and sculpture. Pietro Paolo Zahra has also been referred to as '*Architetto*' in documents commissioning him designs.[64] The same situation was applied to Gabriele Riccardi in the sixteenth century in Lecce, who is referred to as both a *capomastro* and a sculptor.[65] Very similar to the Maltese situation in the late sixteenth century, Lecce had no significant resident architect/sculptor to provide for the artistic needs of the city. This set of circumstances therefore created the ideal setting for the '*insediamento del Coluzio a del Grimaldi e l'affermarsi, solo momentaneo, del loro gusto monumentale e romaneggiante, di un provincialismo senza autenticità regionale (anche se gli impianti grandiosi del Grimaldi avranno un'infuenza sugli interni di Giuseppe Zimbalo).*'[66]

It is therefore very clear that this Roman influence has been regarded by some as an almost adverse imprint on the regional branch of the Baroque in Lecce; in fact, it is described by Calvesi and Manieri-Elia as a provincialism deprived of any regional authenticity. This might ring true especially when compared to the production of intricate ecclesiastical architecture and sculpture in Lecce; however, the imprint of the Roman Baroque and the Berninesque tradition on regional sculpture does not necessarily imply works of art devoid of authenticity. Rather, in such a situation where the Berninesque imprint is strong, other regional factors come into play, such as the material used, the background and artistic baggage of the *scalpellino*, and the socio-political context which fuelled this influence. The work of art itself changes meaning, significance, and quality in relation to its location, even in extreme cases where sculpture is imported from Rome to a

---

e di Giuseppe Zimbalo, le due attività risultano comunque strettamente complementari'. Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 52. For more on Francesco Antonio Zimbalo as a sculptor, see Raffaele Casciaro, 'Su Francesco Antonio Zimbalo', in Vincenzo Cazzato, Regina Poso, and Giancarlo Vallone (eds), *Per le Arti e per la Storia. Omaggio a Tonino Cassiano*, Mario Congedo Editore, 2017, 86-97.

[64] On 12 September 1728, the master mason Giacomo Bianco was commissioned to build the church of St James at Żurrieq on the plans designed by *maestro Paolo Zahra Architetto*. NAV, Notary M.A. Brancati, R87, Volume 38, ff. 25v-26v. See Meli (2017), 45.

[65] Raffaele Casciaro, 'Su Francesco Antonio Zimbalo scultore', in Vincenzo Cazzato, Regina Poso, and Giancarlo Vallone (eds), *per la Arti e per la Storia. Omaggio a Tonino Cassiano*, Architettura e Città Collana diretta da Vincenzo Cazzato, No. 10, Mario Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2017, 86-97: 86.

[66] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia state '*Lecce sembra priva di forti personalità locali, e questo può avere contribtuito a favorirere l'insediamento del Coluzio e del Grimaldi e l'affermarsi, solo momentaneo, del loro gusto monumentale e romaneggiante, di un provincialismo senza autenticità regionale (anche se gli impianti grandiosi del Grimaldi avranno un'influenza sugli interni di Giuseppe Zimbalo).*' Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 52.

regional location (as in the case of Malta, where sculpture was imported from the Eternal City by the Order of St John), and even more so in situations where the stylistic influence is the only element which has been transported.

According to Calvesi and Manieri-Elia, the Lecce stone found only in the quarries of the Salento area, invites an '*esuberanza della decorazione*'.[67] It is undeniable that Lecce's limestone, like Malta's, is easily workable and is thus very much suited for the production of sculpture. The material, of course, influences the outcome of the work of art;[68] and this is without a doubt where the Baroque sculpture of Lecce and Malta are most akin. The malleable Maltese limestone was also the *scalpellini*'s choice of medium, influenced not only by tradition but also by its convenient availability. When comparing the two stones, it is apparent that Maltese limestone is yellower in colour than the Lecce limestone, which already has a warm tone. This gives it a beautiful tone when light is directly or subtly thrown on it and it lends itself quite well to the theatrical element of *chiaroscuro* in sculpture. The chromatic quality with which the limestone imbues the sculpture of Lecce gives the style its characteristic glow and is thus immediately recognisable as the *Barocco Leccese*.[69] This kind of regional characteristic is also found in Malta's stone altar reredoses where the stone is left bare. However, the Maltese stone tradition very often dictated the plastering, polishing, painting, and gilding of altar reredoses, thus the formal result of the work of art differs from the naked stone of Lecce's altar reredoses.

The regional tradition present in Lecce ensured that the altars almost always keep their architectural articulation very clear, such as is the case of the altar reredoses in the Basilica di Santa Croce compared to the main altar of Il Gesù in Valletta[70] and the parish church of the Transfiguration in Lija,[71] as well as the main altar of the church of Il Gesù in Lecce compared with that of the parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Attard.[72] Apart from the medium of stone, this is

---

[67] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 116.

[68] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia beautifully compare this to music and state that '*è come, in musica, lo strumento, il cui timbre contiene una emozione intrinseca*'. Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 116.

[69] Calvesi and Manieri-Elia state: '*La resa pittorica e cromatica di questa pietra non trova poi rispondenza in nessuna altra material; essa quindi, oltre a condizionare I risultati formali, conferisce loro singolarità*'. Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966), 116.

[70] Refer to Appendix D Fig. D.1 and Fig. D.2 for illustrations.

[71] See Fig. D.6.

[72] Refer to Appendix D Fig. D.21 and Fig. D.22.

140

the extent to which one can compare the Berninesque imprint on the ecclesiastical sculpture of Lecce and Malta because while in Lecce the strong regional tradition and other sources of artistic influence stand up to the Roman Baroque influx, the very late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century altar reredoses in Malta are completely immersed in Bernini's *concetti*. A notable inclusion in Lecce's altar reredoses are the Solomonic columns, which also appear repeatedly in seventeenth-century Maltese Baroque. An argument could here be made in favour of this inclusion being due to Berninesque influence, as these immediately recognisable columns are quintessential of the *Baldacchino* in the Vatican. Influence from the Roman Baroque can also be detected in Lecce's Duomo, particularly in the allegories of Religion and Hope flanking the altar of the Crucifix, which are highly comparable to Malta's versions on the altar of the Virgin of Charity in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. D.45 – Fig. D.48).

The prominence which Lecce's sculptors placed on architectural typologies in altar reredoses is unlike many Maltese examples where the designer does away completely with architectural members, such as columns, pilasters, bases, architraves, and cornices in favour of large figurative typologies. Lecce's seventeenth-century altar reredoses are indeed comparable to some seventeenth-century altars in Malta and in eighteenth-century instances where some Maltese *scalpellini* hold on to the seventeenth-century tradition. An adequate example from Malta is the *paragone* in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Plate 15), where the main altar is intricately decorated and the side altars are reserved only for figurative decoration. Many of Lecce's seventeenth- and eighteenth-century altars can also be described as hovering on the border between intricate decoration and *horror vacui* extremity. In stark contrast with Malta, Lecce's designers manipulate several types of flora, fauna, and miniature figures such as tiny *putti*, and place them strategically in between the architectural components of the altar reredos. This tradition, which is also comparable to Giacomo Serpotta's style in the Palermo oratories,[73] goes completely amiss amongst Maltese *scalpellini*.

In spite of Lecce's very particular take on the Baroque style, as discussed above there are still Berninesque echoes which infiltrated the *Barocco Leccese*.

---

[73] For more on Giacomo Serpotta's designs and comparisons with the Maltese Late Baroque, see the next section *infra* of this chapter.

Perhaps the most internationally iconic figure of the Baroque is the angel, or in its younger and smaller form, the *putto*. Altars and tabernacles in Lecce possess this similarity which owes its popularisation to the Berninesque tradition with the eighteenth-century Maltese Baroque. Although angels and *putti* have been used from early expressions of religious art and architecture, their use seems to reach an apex in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, especially in the production of altar reredoses.[74] This popularisation is due to seminal designs by Bernini, such as the *Cathedra Petri* and numerous other examples in which angels are utilised, as well as ensuing works by followers of Bernini.

In the majority of cases, angels are utilised as divine messengers as well as ideal beings to direct and focus the faithful's gaze unto particular parts of the altar.[75] In other cases, especially in Baroque sculpture, angels are given specific roles: supporting the *gloria*, such as in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Lecce compared to the chapel of St Theresa of Avila in the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta;[76] supporting crowns, such as in the church of Santa Teresa in Lecce and the parish church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin in Rabat;[77] supporting several aspects of the composition like scrolls, such as in the church of Santa Chiara in Lecce and the church of St Mark in Rabat,[78] and frames such as in the church of Sant'Irene and the Duomo in Lecce, and the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea, the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ, and the church of the Annunciation in Mdina.[79] *Putti* are also used in compositions to indicate the presence of the Eternal Father in heaven, [80] such as in the church of Santa Teresa in Lecce comparable to the decoration in the parish church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin in Rabat.[81] *Putti* carrying cartouches are a typical sculptural expression, especially of the first half of the eighteenth century.[82] They make the

---

[74] This is discussed in Maria Alessandra Sozzo, *Tabernacoli barocchi nella diocese di Lecce tra arte e simbologia*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2005, 8-12.

[75] Sozzo (2005), 9.

[76] For images, see Appendix D Fig. D.3 and Fig. D.4.

[77] Refer to Appendix D Fig. D.29 and Fig. D.30.

[78] See Appendix D Fig. D.33 and Fig. D.34.

[79] Refer to Appendix D for images Fig. D.39, Fig. D.40, Fig. D.43, Fig. D.44, Fig. D.49, and Fig. D.50.

[80] This is discussed by Sozzo in relation to the composition of tabernacles, but her argument can be easily applied to the composition of Baroque altar reredoses. Sozzo (2005), 10.

[81] See Appendix D Fig. D.27 and Fig. D.28.

[82] Sozzo here refers to the tabernacle of the main altar of the church of San Lorenzo a Lizzanello, dating to 1720. Sozzo (2005), 11.

composition more serene, joyful, or sombre, according to the need of the designer; they open and hold back curtains, such as in the church of San Matteo in Lecce and the church of St Mark in Rabat;[83] and emphasise symbolical meaning, such as the importance of the Sacrament.[84]

The latter function of angels and *putti*, that is to infer more importance to the area where the Holy Sacrament is held as emphasised by the recommendations of the Council of Trent, is perfectly embodied in the main altar of the church of Sant'Irene in Lecce. Executed in 1753 by Giusto de Marco, the composition of the two *putti* flanking the globe and the other two in mid-air supporting the Crucified Christ dominate the interior of the church and instil an eastern drive towards the main altar. It has been described as the example of Lecce Baroque sculpture in the second half of the eighteenth century:

> '*L'artificiosa composizione architettonica e scultorea, seppur caratterizzata da una ridotta presenza di elementi esornativi che si diffondono durante la seconda metà del Settecento, è affidata soprattutto agli angioli 'paffuti' che sovrastano il tabernacolo: due sorreggeno il globo celeste alla cui sommità sono collocate in ardito equilibrio altri due angeli che sembra staino per spiccare il volo o mossi dal vento divino, ma che invece sorreggono la croce.*'[85]

It has already been established earlier in this chapter that the greatest degree of Roman Baroque influence in Lecce is found in the church of Il Gesù and the church of Sant'Irene. To these may be added the chiesa del Carmine. It is indeed here where one finds the greatest degree of similarity with Maltese Late Baroque sculpture, thus emphasising the point that Lecce's Baroque sculpture was resistant enough to minimise the Roman Baroque's effect as much as possible, in favour of tradition and other artistic influences as discussed above.

The statue of Sant'Irene on the church façade seems to belong to the Berninesque tradition of the *Santa Bibiana*, in the sense that it portrays a female saint seemingly in communication with the Heavens above, a state of mind made

---

[83] For images, see Appendix D Fig. D.31 and Fig. D.32.
[84] These different roles entrusted to angels in a composition are analysed in relation to Malta in Meli (2017), 123-139, and in relation to Lecce in Sozzo (2005), 9.
[85] Sozzo (2005), 12.

evident by her pious upward-looking gaze, the hands clutched at her chest, and the animated drapery which envelopes her body. Furthermore, several comparisons may be made between the sculpture of the Crucifixion on the main altar of the church of Sant'Irene and the composition found on the interior façade of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. The composition, which may be described as Berninesque in spirit, consists of a Crucified Christ with a *gloria* radiating from behind and two *putti* hugging and supporting the base of the cross. The posture and gesture of one of the *putti* supporting the globe under the cross in the church of Sant'Irene (Fig. 2.13) mirrors the same position of other *putti* in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix (Fig. 2.14), which ultimately belong to the expression of the Roman Baroque in their portrayal of piety. The angels flanking the altar of the Crucifix in the church of Sant'Irene (Fig. 2.15) also belong to the Berninesque tradition of the *angeli adoranti*, first conceived in sculpture by Bernini in the main altar of the church of S. Agostino in Rome, and may be aptly compared to several examples of adoring angels in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture, including the ones at the parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Qrendi (Fig. 2.16) and the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. D.43 and Fig. D.44).

Amongst several Baroque sculpture in the historic centre of Lecce which is strongly idiosyncratic to its local tradition, the chiesa del Carmine stands out as a church which is imprinted with Roman Baroque influence. The façade of the church (Fig. D.9) is an indication of its interior decoration, with a coat of arms flanked by two large angels, a decorative typology found all over Roman Baroque sculpture and as a consequence, also in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture (Fig. D.10). All of the Carmelite church's altar reredoses give way to large figurative decoration and bolder decorative motifs, rather than Lecce's usual miniscule intricacy of decoration, and this gives the church an immediate connection with Rome and as a result, with Malta. The *putti* in this church are not miniscule and they do not depend on the architectural members of the altar reredos, such as the columns or the bases, to exist. There are similarities in the iconography of *putti* such as the *putto* with the Crown of Thorns,[86] but it is also apparent that there are resemblances in the posture, the modelling of the figure, and the use of drapery.

---

[86] Refer to Appendix D Fig. D.17 and Fig D.18.

The likeness with Malta in the chiesa del Carmine is most noticeable in the use of fully-fledged angels, which is a rare sight in the churches of the historical centre of Lecce. In this regard, there are similarities between the upper part of the composition of the altar of St Michael Archangel and the altar of St Catherine in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ.[87] In both instances, the angels converse with and react to the narrative of the altar painting. There are similarities in the way the angels are seated on scrolls in one case and on clouds in the other, in the way the drapery is animated, and in the *affetti* employed by the sculptor to give a Baroque sense of piety.

The altar of St Anthony the Abbot in the same Carmelite church also displays a pair of *angeli adoranti* at the top of its composition. They are highly comparable to several *angeli adoranti* in Maltese churches, including the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark,[88] all of which owe their original conception to Bernini and their popularisation in the works of *Berniniani* and distribution through printed sources. Both angels singularly find their counterparts in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture; their hands clasped to their chest, their kneeling posture, and the animated drapery which swathes their bodies are greatly similar to the angels in the church of St Mark in Rabat (Fig. 2.9 and Fig 2.10) and the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. 2.11 and Fig. 2.12), among other examples.

The figurative expression of angels is carried onto the main altar of the chiesa del Carmine in Lecce, where a pair of kneeling angels hold up large cornucopias out of which candelabras emerge. The manner in which the angels' legs are placed and the way in which one leg of each angel slips from underneath the enveloping drapery is reminiscent of the same approach in the angels on the Ponte S. Angelo. The same kind of approach is taken in the angels in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea, while the supporting action of each angel in the chiesa del Carmine is easily comparable to many examples in Malta, including the angels supporting the main altar's stone frame in the church of the Virgin of Mercy in Qrendi.[89]

---

[87] See Fig. D.11 and Fig. D.12 in Appendix D.
[88] Refer to Appendix D Fig. D.13b and Fig. D.14b.
[89] Refer to Appendix D for images Fig. D.15 and Fig. D.16.

The chiesa del Gesù in Lecce displays a style of altar reredoses which are more aptly classified as Barocchetto, rather than Berninesque, since it is a more-light hearted style closer to the Rococo. The same kind of *putti* found in the chiesa del Carmine in Lecce are found in the chiesa del Gesù, although the Rococo-like decoration of the altar reredoses in this church is also comparable to the main altar reredos of the Virgin of Manresa in Floriana (Fig. D.19 and Fig. D.20). This Rococo-like style in regional Maltese Late Baroque ecclesiastical sculpture did not become popular until the second half of the seventeenth century, with churches like the Virgin of the Abandoned in Żebbuġ and the Virgin of Tal-Ħerba in Birkirkara. Unlike Lecce, where this style prevails from the beginning of the century, the first half of the eighteenth century in Malta was heavily characterised with the Berninesque imprint. The Rococo style, although somewhat restrained, can also be observed in the chiesa di Santa Maria della Providenza o delle Alcantarine in Lecce. The statues on the back wall of the main altar, representing St Mary Magdalene and St Anthony the Abbot, are close in posture, quality, and spirit to the statues of St Margaret and St Paul in the parish church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin in Rabat. The similarity does not end there because the pedestals on which all of these statues rest are similar to each other while the shell motif above their heads is also common to all four.[90]

In conclusion, although the general stylistic impression of the *Barocco Leccese* is unique for its use of intricate ornamentation in its indigenous stone, there still remain some similarities with Maltese Late Baroque sculpture, especially in the use of the medium of limestone, but also in few of the Berninesque *concetti* such as the typology of the *angeli adoranti* which managed to infiltrate through Lecce's strong sense of tradition. In terms of quality, Malta's best examples of its Late Baroque sculpture can hold their ground well in comparison with Lecce's quality, but some of the more provincial works suffer in comparison to the skill of Lecce's *scalpellini*. Nonetheless, on closer inspection, it is also evident that some of Lecce's examples could also be classified as satisfactory at best in terms of figurative sculpting. The Berninesque imprint in Malta is however stronger than in Lecce, both in quantity of works of art and especially in the intensity of the execution of Bernini's pious and theatrical spirit.

---

[90] See images Fig. D.23 to Fig. D.26 in Appendix D.

2.3 Parallelisms in the Berninesque impact on the Sicilian *Tardo Barocco* and Late Baroque Malta

The channels of the dispersal of the Berninesque tradition from Rome to Sicily and to Malta are strikingly similar. The travel of artists and architects to the mainland to gain more knowledge and experience in their field meant that they returned to Sicily with a newfound understanding of the Roman Baroque, which they then applied to their subsequent commissions. This situation is parallel to what was happening in Malta throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Travel of artists and architects was also facilitated through their membership in several religious orders and this gave them the opportunity to meet other fellow artists and architects coming from diverse backgrounds to discuss theories and share different ideas.[91] A good example of this phenomenon is the eighteenth-century ecclesiastical architect Giacomo Amato,[92] who received his education in Rome as a member of the Order of the Crociferi. He amalgamated the imprint imparted on him by the designs of Borromini, Bernini, and Pietro da Cortona with the influence of Rainaldi's and Maderno's style.[93] The travel of patrons also significantly contributed to the dissemination of the Berninesque style. It was easy for patrons to commission a sketch or acquire a print of the work they admired to take back home in order to have a visual aid for their selected local artist to recreate or take inspiration from the Roman work. The input of individual patrons on specific projects was also common in Sicily.[94]

The travel of renowned foreign artists and architects and their eventual settling down or shorter period of work in a regional centre also promoted the dissemination of the Berninesque idiom. This was the case in Sicily with the mathematician Guarino Guarini who brought Borromini's novice ideas with him to

---

[91] Similar to the situation in Malta, their period of study in Rome is not well documented and their Roman sources remain uncertain but it is probable that they were given access to the most important libraries of the time. Giuffrè (2007), 103.

[92] On Giacomo Amato, see Blunt (1968), 32.

[93] Giuffrè (2007), 104.

[94] Giuffrè (2007), 101. See also Stefano Piazza and Susan Vicinelli, 'Marble Architectural Decoration in Sicily: Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, lxxiii, 1/2 European Sculpture and Decorative Arts (1999), 42-54: 42. They attributed dissemination of artistic influence from mainland Italy to Sicily to the travel of patrons, who might have acquired similar pieces on their journeys.

Messina where they were widely accepted.[95] Giovanni Battista Vaccarini similarly brought Bernini's style to Catania, significantly in his design for the Elephant Fountain in front of the Duomo.[96] It seems that the employment of foreign artists and architects to work on Sicilian architectural and artistic projects was a common practice and some, such as Francesco Buonamici, worked in both Malta and Sicily, constituting yet another link between Rome and the two Mediterranean islands.[97]

Another important channel which aided the distribution of Berninesque ideas, motifs, and compositions in Sicily was the dissemination of working material, among them the drawings, prints, and treatises which helped the craftsmen, *scalpellino*, or artist who had never visited Rome envisage the language of the High Baroque and the internationally accredited works by Bernini.[98] This was important especially since not all artists travelled for their studies; although technical experts and those who showed particular promise were sent to the

[95] Maria Giuffrè, *The Baroque Architecture of Sicily*, Thames and Hudson, London, 2007, 14. Giuffrè states that Borromini's revolutionary ideas took root in Messina where they became part of the architectural language of the eighteenth century.

[96] Giuffrè states that this probably reflects the architect's time spent in Rome looking at Bernini's designs, particularly the elephant in the Piazza della Minerva. Giuffrè (2007), 21.

[97] Giuffrè (2007), 100. Giuffre states that the trend to employ foreign artists had started in the second half of the sixteenth century but was also kept in the seventeenth century. Examples are Orazio Torriani, Cosimo Fanzago, Francesco Buonamici, and Francesco Maria Ricchino. See Giuffrè (2007), 101.

[98] For more on the distribution of prints and their effect in Sicily, see Stefano Piazza, 'L'influenza delle incisioni romane nell'architettura siciliana del Settecento', in Stefano Piazza (ed.), *La circolazione dei modelli a stampa nell'architettura di età moderna*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 147-156; and Stefano Piazza, 'Le fonti editoriali della decorazione architettonica in marmi policromi nella sicilia del seicento: Alcune riflessioni', in Giovanna Curcio, Marco Rosario Nobile, Aurora Scotti Tosini (eds), *I Libri e L'ingegno. Studi sulla Biblioteca sell'Architetto (XV-XX Secolo)*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2010, 71-76.

Fig. 2.17 Chiesa del Gesù, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 2.18 Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Qrendi. Detail.

Fig. 2.19 Chiesa del Gesù, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 2.20 Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 2.21 Chiesa del Gesù, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 2.22 Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 2.23 Chiesa di Santa Ninfa dei Crocieferi, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 2.24 Church of the Virgin of Mercy, Qrendi. Detail.

Fig. 2.25 Chiesa di San Ippolite Martire, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 2.26 Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Qrendi. Detail.

Fig. 2.27 Oratorio del Carminello, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 2.28 Altar of St Catherine, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 2.29 Oratorio di Santa Cita, Palermo. Detail.
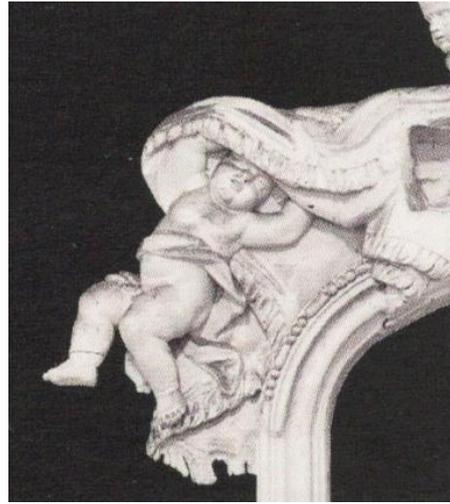
Fig. 2.30 Church of St Mary Magdalene, Valletta. Detail.

Fig. 2.31 Oratorio di San Lorenzo, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 2.32 Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

mainland, local craftsmen did not always have this opportunity.[99] The majority of regional architects were trained on the job with treatises and manuals as their most significant source, such as Giacomo Amico,[100] who is credited with endowing Palermo[101] and Western Sicily with the Late Baroque style.[102] His treatise, or architect's manual, *L'Architetto Prattico*, was published in 1750 and is mainly concerned with ecclesiastical building.[103]

Treatises were considered essential tools both for the architect and the builder. Traditionally, the architect was differentiated from the builder by his theoretical knowledge but in late seventeenth-century Sicily, particularly in Eastern Sicily after the earthquake of 1693, builders and craftsmen assumed more important roles through the utilisation of treatises such as Amico's *L'Architetto Prattico*.[104] The treatises of Serlio and Vitruvius were revered in Baroque Sicily.[105] Similar to the situation in eighteenth-century Malta,[106] copies of these treatises are mentioned in inventories of personal libraries[107] – a fact which shows the dependence of untrained builders and master masons lacking an official education for the creation of new designs. Personal libraries were not only essential for the practice of the profession but also an indication of the calibre of the individual. Similar to wills found in Malta,[108] Sicilian wills also reflect that artists had extensive books in their possession, ranging from treatises such as Andrea Pozzo's *Prospettiva*,[109] prints by

---

[99] Giuffrè (2007), 96. She states that the majority of Sicilian artist trained in local workshops.

[100] On Giovanni Baigio Amico, see Blunt (1968), 32.

[101] For more on the Baroque architecture of Palermo, see Anthony Blunt, *Sicilian Baroque*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, 30-38.

[102] Giuffrè (2007), 108.

[103] Giuffrè attributes this to the fact that Amico was a priest and remained tied to his religious Order. Giuffrè (2007), 109.

[104] Giuffrè speaks about the treatise in detail in Giuffrè (2007), 225.

[105] Giuffrè states that the treatise of Vitruvius is mentioned as early as 1484 and 1567. Giuffrè (2007), 224-225. She also adds that Serlio's treatises, which were rich in images, introduced classical forms all around Europe which could then be manipulated by regional artists and architects in the name of Baroque invention. Giuffrè (2007), 225.

[106] Inventories found at the Notarial Archives, Valletta show how copies of these treatises, along with other books of prints and engravings, were present in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Malta. This is discussed *supra* in Chapter 1.

[107] For more on private libraries in Sicily, see Giuseppe Antista, 'Libri di Architettura nelle Bibliothece Private del XVIII secolo', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 219-223.

[108] An excellent example of this is Alessio Erardi's will found at the Notarial Archives, Valletta. NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 964-1002v. Published in Debono (1989).

[109] This was also part of Alessio Erardi's collection of books. NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 988-989.

Domenico de' Rossi, and other publications concerned with various subjects such as religion, philosophy, and history.[110] Illustrations of buildings in Rome were also included in such inventories in wills.[111]

Prints, drawings, and their circulation were a crucial part of the artist's and architect's profession and individuals like Giacomo Amato and Rosario Gagliardi kept portfolios of their work.[112] Gagliardi, a self-taught architect, listed his sources in the margins of his drawings and although these could have served as instructions to builders, these quotations probably also served as an intentional indication of the architect's knowledge and higher aspirations.[113] Unfortunately, the lack of surviving drawings of regional eighteenth-century Maltese sculpture prevents a comparison between the practices of artists in the two Mediterranean islands but the apparent stylistic similarities with Rome in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture, such as the entire scheme employed in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix where the sculptor-designer quoted three important Bernini nodes,[114] suggest that this quoting of the Roman Baroque was conscious and intentional. It has been suggested that the reason behind their slim survival rate in archives could perhaps be attributed to their preciousness which would have made workshops jealously guard them to keep ahead of other competing artists.[115]

Other similarities between the socio-artistic context of Baroque Malta and Baroque Sicily have been observed. The rebuilding of the majority of the south-eastern towns in Sicily after the earthquake of 1693,[116] of which Rosario Gagliardi[117] and Giovanni Battista Vaccarini[118] were the main protagonists,

---

[110] Giuffrè (2007), 228-229. Giuffre also lists an extensive number of works which could have been used as sources.

[111] Giuffrè (2007), 229. These are also found in several inventories and wills of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in Malta at the Notarial Archives.

[112] Giuffrè discusses these drawings in Giuffrè (2007), 226.

[113] This is suggested by Giuffrè in Giuffrè (2007), 227.

[114] Pietro Paolo Zahra designed and executed the sculpture in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea which is discussed *infra* in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4. The design quotes Bernini's angels carrying the instruments of the Passion of Christ on the Ponte S. Angelo in Rome, Bernini's *Cathedra Petri* and Bernini's design for the altar of the *Cappella del Sacramento*.

[115] This theory has been put forward in Giuffrè (2007), 229-230.

[116] For more on this see Stephen Tobriner, *The Genesis of Noto: An Eighteenth-Century Sicilian City*, California, A. Zwemmer, 1982 and Cleofe Giovanni Canale, *Noto – La Struttura Continua Della Città Tardo-Barocca*, Palermo, S.F. Flaccovio, 1976.

[117] For more on Rosario Gagliardi, see Marco Rosario Nobile and Maria Mercedes Bares (eds), *Rosario Gagliardi (1690 ca. – 1762)*, Caracol, Palermo, 2020; Salvatore Boscarini, 'Rosario Gagliardi e Giovan Battista Vaccarini: temi architettonici a confronto', in *Corso internazionale di storia dell'architettura (1st, 1994, Siracusa); Rosario Gagliardi e l'architettura barocca in Italia e in*

coincided with another building boom in Malta in the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century.[119] The large demographic increase during these centuries in Malta required larger spaces, more residential buildings, and larger churches. The trade of the architect, the master mason, and the *scalpellino* flourished. As the trade grew in the harbour areas of Malta, it was easier for *scalpellini* families to live in the vicinity and for this reason the majority lived in Senglea, Cospicua, Vittoriosa, and Valletta. This flourishing phenomenon near the harbour was not unfamiliar in Messina and Palermo.[120] Similar to the situation in Malta, there seems to be an overlap of different capacities and skills in Sicily, where there was a shift from the idea of *caput magister* to the role of an architect-designer, showcasing the desire to make that leap from the practical to the theoretical.[121] There are also documented instances in Malta where a scalpellino who was academically untrained is referred to as *Architetto* while being referred to as *scalpellino* and even *scultore* in other documented occurrences and also carrying out the work of a *capomaestro*, or a master mason, in his day-to-day work.[122]

In Sicily, the prosperity of certain orders and confraternities led to the building of oratories which showed off the wealth of the confraternity's members.[123] This circumstance flourished in the Cottonera area in Malta, where three oratories dedicated to the Holy Crucifix (and the Virgin of Sorrows) were built metres away from each other, each to serve the needs of its respective

Europa, Annali del barocco in Sicilia, 1996. A UM dissertation focused on Gagliardi: Yvette Sciberras Mifsud, 'Rosario Gagliardi and Ecclesiastical Buildings in Sicilian Towns: A personal portrait', unpublished MA dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2007.

[118] For more on Giovanni Battista Vaccarini, see Fichera Giuseppe, *Giovanni Battista Vaccarini e l'architettura del Settecento in Sicilia*, Reale accademia d'Italia, Rome, 1934; and Marco Rosario Nobile, 'Disegni del Settecento negli archivi parrocchiali della provincia di Ragusa', in *Il Disegno di architettura*, May 1990.

[119] On the Baroque architecture of south-east Sicily, see Anthony Blunt, *Sicilian Baroque*, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, 24-29.

[120] Giuffrè analyses how the major coastal Sicilian cities flourished much before the inland towns and cities where traditional ideas from the past were favoured. Giuffrè (2007), 154.

[121] This is discussed and analysed by Giuffrè in Giuffrè (2007), 112-113. See also Armando Antista, L'Architetto e il capomastro: una disputa nel cantiere della chiesa di Santa Caterina d'Italia a Valletta, *Lexicon. Storie e Architettura in Sicilia e nel Mediterrraneo*, Edizioni Caracol, 18 (2014), 92-96. See also the important publication by Jennifer Montagu on the industry of the art in which she analyses the different roles of the sculptor. See Montagu (1989).

[122] On 12 September 1728, the master mason Giacomo Bianco was commissioned to build the church of St James at Żurrieq on the plans designed by *maestro Paolo Zahra Architetto*. NAV, R87, Notary Marc'Antonio Brancati, Volume 38, ff. 25v-26v.

[123] For more information on the link between artists and confraternities in Palermo, see Palazzotto (2016), 53-66.

confraternity. This, however, pales in comparison to Palermo, a city which is overflowing with oratories, many of which are decorated by the Serpotta workshop.[124] The decoration, in stucco in Sicily and in limestone in Malta, lends the oratories their grandeur and instils a sense of astonishment in the viewer. Documented reactions to Serpotta's oratories are also similar to documented reactions to regional sculpture in Malta, particularly the work of Pietro Paolo Zahra. Giuffrè makes reference to the novel Retablo published in 1987 by Vicenzo Consolo in which he describes his brother's reaction upon entering the Oratory of San Lorenzo in Palermo: 'I went in, and thought I had entered paradise'. He then describes the decoration of the oratory in detail, mentioning the several figures and motifs such as 'panels, statues and cornices, all of milky-white colour; the occasional flash of pure gold, swags, scrolls, flowers, foliage, cornucopias, torches, shells, crosses, haloes, plumes, tassels, cords…' [125] Similarly, a document about the old Senglea parish church (which was destroyed in WWII) described the sculptural decoration of the titular altar executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra: '...*si vede dietro l'Altare maggiore un vasto, e bellissimo Coro nuovamente fabbricato nel 1728 con due finestroni che li danno lume, e col tetto fatto a lamia, come si vede architettato. La sua Prospettiva, che rappresenta l'Altare Titulare è famosissima nella sua scultura, opera del celebre Paolo Zahra di questa Città, ... Ne suoi lati si vedono attaccati due grandi Quadri rappresentanti l'uno l'Annunziazione, e l'altro la Presentazione della Beatissima Vergine Maria, opera del Pittore Francesco Zahra, adornati tutti due con belli cornice con oro fino dorati.*'[126]

---

[124] For more on the Serpotta workshop, see Palazzotto (2016), 44-52. For more on Serpotta, amongst others see Blunt (1968), 34-36; Gaetano Gangi, *Il Barocco nella Sicilia Occidentale*, De Luca Editore, Rome, 1968, 28-36; Pierfrancesco Palazzotto, 'Note sulla maniera di Giacomo Serpotta a Palermo: relazioni, influenze, cantieri', in Vincenzo Abbate, *Serpotta e il suo tempo*, Silvana Editoriale, Palermo, 2017, 64-72; Pierfrancesco Palazzotto, 'Technique and Inspiration in the Work of Giacomo Serpotta, Master of Ornament', in Pierre Caye and Francesco Solinas, *Les Cahiers de l'Ornement*, De Luca Editori d'Arte, Rome, 2016, 175-196; Pierfrancesco Palazzotto, 'La committenza confraternale. Giacomo Serpotta e il fasto degli oratori palermitani tra XVII e XVIII secolo', in Valerio Viola, Rino La Delfa, and Cosimo Scordato (eds), *La "sovrabbondanza" nel Barocco*, Euno Edizioni, Palermo, 2019, 231-247; Marco Rosario Nobile, 'Giacomo Serpotta e Giacomo Amata: una problematica collaborazione', in Vincenzo Abbate, *Serpotta e il suo tempo*, Silvana Editoriale, Palermo, 2017, 56-63; Donald Garstang, 'The Oratorio della Madonna della Consolazione e S. Mercurio in Palermo and the Early Activity of Giacomo Serpotta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxx, 1023 (June 1988), 430-432; Donald Garstang, 'When Serpotta Is Not Serpotta: The Stuccos in the Church of S. Spirito in Agrigento', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxlvii, 1227, Furniture, Decorative Arts, Sculpture (June 2005), 368-375.
[125] Giuffrè (2007), 105.
[126] SPA, *Descrizione della Chiesa Parrocchiale dell'Invittà Città Senglea 1805*, 12-13. See also Meli (2017), 50, 197.

Similar to the formula adopted in Malta, the architecture of the oratories is simple – very often rectangular and occasionally pierced with windows on the sides.[127] If windows are impossible to incorporate in the design of the building, due to the common juxtaposition of an oratory to the church, the side walls of the oratory are often sectioned into thirds or fourths by the utilisation of columns, pilasters, or other architectural decoration. Strikingly similar is the format of the Oratorio del Rosario di San Domenico in Palermo[128] to the layout of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. E.149 and Fig. E.149). Both have a number of paintings on their side walls which dictate the format made up of bays which encompass the painting crowned with decorative *putti* or other figures. The bays are separated by means of a free standing figure in niches or on a pedestal. While the format of these oratories pays attention to the story as it unfolds on the side walls, in the spirit of the Baroque, the peak of its ethos is reached in the oratory's altar. In both oratories, the frame is surrounded by sculpted figures and decorations drawing the eye to the action happening in the altarpiece.[129]

A similar formula is used by Sicilian and Maltese *scalpellini* in their design for altar reredoses, although some regional differences can also be observed. The use of intricately decorated columns is much higher in Sicily, particularly in the Val di Noto area,[130] than in Malta. It seems that in the Maltese Islands, *scalpellini* made a clear break between seventeenth- and eighteenth-century altar reredoses by the exclusion of columns in the latter in favour of the increased use of pilasters or the complete elimination of architectural decoration. Intricately designed columns and columns bases can be observed in altar reredoses which were either commissioned in the mid- to late seventeenth century or in others which were style spill-overs from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century.[131] The eighteenth century

---

[127] For more on oratories and their architecture to function as oratories, see Pierfrancesco Palazzatto, *Giacomo Serpotta. Gli Oratori di Palermo*, Kalos, Palermo, 2016, 21-27.

[128] For more on this oratory, see Palazzotto (2016), 246-256.

[129] To read about the typical characteristics of Palermo's oratories, refer to Palazzotto (2016), 27-33.

[130] For more on Noto, see Antonella Mazzamuto, 'Noto: Storia e Progetto della Città Barocca', in Maria Luisa Madonna and Lucia Trigilia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 121-146. For more on the Baroque influence and the rebuilding of Noto and other eastern Sicilian cities after the earthquake of 1693, see Ernesto Dario Sanfilippo, 'L'influenza barocca nelle ricostruzioni della città della Sicilia orientale dopo il terremoto del 1693', in Maria Luisa Madonna and Lucia Trigilia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 103-120.

[131] Amongst them, there are the altar reredos dedicated to St Philip Neri in the Church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Fig. E.147); in many of the altar reredoses in the parish church of the Assumption

and the altar reredoses designed by the Zahra and the Fabri families of *scalpellini* opt for the simpler architectural formula of figures flanking the altar painting with a *gloria* and more figures occupying the space of the apsidal cap. In Sicily, it seems that the architectural format of including columns in the design of an altar reredos persisted well from the seventeenth into the eighteenth century.[132] This decoration is very often complemented by the use of Corinthian or Composite capitals.[133]

In spite of this, there are also numerous Maltese and Sicilian examples in which the designer chose to eliminate columns or pilasters in favour of the more High Baroque solution of breaking barriers between the three arts of architecture, sculpture, and painting.[134] In some altar reredoses, the designer included fluted pilasters in the composition, making for a more cohesive and gradual break from the architecture to the sculptural decoration. This is the case in the altar reredos dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. F.62). In its general composition, use of the colour white with gilded parts, and its motifs, this altar reredos is comparable to the main altar in the church of S. Chiara in Noto (Fig. F.61). Although the latter utilises columns in the church's interior architectural plan, these are not part of the altar reredos itself which is composed of two angels flanking the altar painting surmounted by a *gloria* of the Holy Spirit and *putti*.

In other cases, the altar painting's wooden frame encompasses all the decoration of the altar reredos.[135] This solution does not seem to be immensely popular in either Sicily or Malta. The most commonly used format places two figures, many times angels, on either side of the altar painting surmounted by

in Attard (Fig. E.4); in the altar of St Elijah in the church of the Annunciation in Mdina (Fig. F.16); and in the altar reredos of St Alphonse in the parish church of the Transfiguration in Lija (Fig. F.20).

[132] Examples of these are the altar reredos of the Blessed Sacrament chapel in Syracuse Cathedral (Fig. F.3); the High Altar of Syracuse Cathedral (Fig. F.15); the church of S. Chiara in Noto (Fig. F.61); the altars in the church of S. Domenico in Noto (Fig. F.77); and the altar in the Oratorio del Carminello in Palermo (Fig. E.146).

[133] Examples are the case of the High Altar of the Cathedral of Syracuse (Fig. F.19) and the altar of St Alphonse in the parish church of the Transfiguration in Lija (Fig. F.20), amongst many other examples in Sicily and Malta.

[134] On the altar as a complete work of art, or a *bel composto*, of the three main arts, see Lucia Trigilia, 'L'altare Barocco Opera D'arte Totale, echi di Juan Andrea Ricci, Gian Lorenzo Bernini e Andrea Pozzo nella Sicilia del Settecento', in María del Pilar López and Fernando Quiles (eds), *Visiones renovadas del Barroco iberoamericano*, Universo Barroco Iberoamericano, 2016, 146-155.

[135] Examples are in the case of the main altar of the church of S. Benedetto in Siracusa (Fig. F.25) which is comparable to Pietro Paolo Troisi's wooden frame enclosing the altar painting on the main altar of the church of the Annunciation in Mdina (Fig F.26).

decoration, very often composed of *putti*, more figures, and Baroque motifs; thus doing away with the need for an architectural frame utilising columns.[136] All of these *angeli adoranti* and standing angels flanking the altar painting owe their conception to Bernini's designs; the first in the church of S. Agostino and the second in the church of S. Maria del Popolo in Rome.

The use of other figures, very often placed on either side of the altar reredos's broken pediment, is also common in Bernini's and the *Berniniani*'s sculpture in Rome. The figures range from *angeli adoranti* to saints to other allegorical figures. Regional sculpture again makes reference to Bernini's *angeli adoranti* on the High Altar of the church of S. Agostino and possibly also to Melchiorre Cafà's altar of St Thomas of Villanova, situated in the same church, which also shows angels in prayer on each side of the broken pediment. This formula is repeated in the main altar of the church of S. Cristoforo in Syracuse, a transept altar in the church of S. Domenico in Palermo, and the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat.[137]

Putti feature in almost every altar reredos which includes figurative decoration in Sicily and Malta. While in some cases, *putti* are reserved to fill in the composition and to showcase the emotive spirit the sculptor wants to instil in the faithful, in other altar reredoses they are the only figures which are featured. This is the case in the altar reredos dedicated to the Death of St Joseph in the Duomo di San Pietro in Modica, which is similar to the decoration employed in an altar reredos in the old parish church of St Mary in Birkirkara (Fig. F.97 – Fig. F.98). The same composition of *putti* surrounding the altar painting is taken up in the altar of the Virgin and Child in the church of S. Domenico in Palermo (Fig. E.54), but the addition of drapery lends it a more dramatic Berninesque flourish, especially in its inspiration from Bernini's use of drapery in the decoration of the Sala Ducale in the Vatican Palace and the drapery behind his *St Constantine*. The same motif of drapery is adopted in Malta by Mattia Preti in his design of the altar reredos of the

---

[136] Some examples of this format could be given, among them the altar of the Nativity in the Cathedral of San Giovanni Battista in Ragusa (Fig. F.8), comparable with the altar of the Annunciation in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. F.82); another altar in the church of S. Ninfa dei Crocieferi in Palermo (Fig. E.85), comparable with the altar of the Virgin of Light in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. E.86); and another altar in the church of S. Orsola in Palermo (Fig. E.122), comparable with the altar of St James in the church of St James, Żurrieq (Fig. E.123).
[137] For images, refer to Fig. F.35, Fig. F.36, Fig. E.58, and Fig. E.59.

Immaculate Conception in the church of the same dedication in Floriana (Fig. E.55). The drapery adds mystery and a sense of theatrical revealing since the use of the *putti* is the only device which uncovers the painting to be seen by the faithful.[138]

The use of the *gloria* motif is internationally widespread. Bernini's influence through the *Cathedra Petri* and the dissemination of its design in print form certainly increased its popularity but its attractiveness and impact must have also been appealing for regional sculptors keen to impress patrons and their competition. Utilising the same motifs as Bernini and emulating the art of the Eternal City positively showed off the sculptor's knowledge and freshness of style. It is for these reasons that the motif of the *gloria* is used widely in altar reredoses in both Sicily and Malta in several forms. They range from small encased oval or round *gloria*[139] to more pronounced bursts of golden rays with *putti* and fully-fledged angels.[140]

In both Sicily and Malta, the *gloria* always has a central motif from which the rays emanate. In many cases in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture, the central motif is the dove of the Holy Spirit.[141] The motif is used in Sicily as can be seen in the Oratory of S. Mercurio and the Oratory of S. Caterina in Palermo,[142] however, not in the extensive manner in which it is used in Malta. Other motifs used in Sicily include the Sacred Name of God in Herbrew;[143] the Lamb of God;[144] the Eye of God;[145] and the Eternal Father.[146] The Eternal Father is also used extensively in

---

[138] The same formula is taken up, albeit less successfully, in a countryside church dedicated to St Catherine in Qrendi (Fig. E.57).

[139] Examples are as the ones on the altar reredos of the church of S. Chiara in Noto (Fig. F.67) and the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. F.68).

[140] Such as those in the main altar of the church of S. Carlo al Corso in Noto (Fig. F.55), the main altars of the church of S. Ippolite Martire (Fig. E.38) and the church of S. Matteo al Cassaro (Fig. E.73) in Palermo, and in the apsidal cap of the altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Fig. F.56); to more subdued *gloria* rays such as in the church of the Gesù in Palermo (Fig. E.3) and the parish church of the Assumption in Attard (Fig. E.4).

[141] Examples of this are numerous and include the altar of St Catherine in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. E.45) and altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. E.169).

[142] For images, see Fig. E.168 and Fig. E.44.

[143] An example is the main altar of the church of S. Iganzio al'Ollivella in Palermo (Fig. E.116).

[144] Such as in the main altar of the church of S. Matteo al Cassaro in Palermo (Fig. E.66).

[145] Examples are the church of S. Chiara in Noto (Fig. F.67) and the church of the Gesù in Palermo (Fig. E.3).

[146] Such as in the church of S. Caterina in Palermo (Fig. E.79).

Malta[147] but the use of other motifs, such as the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea, and the Eucharist in the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament,[148] is rare and these are only lone examples. In two specific examples in Sicily and Malta, the *gloria* is used as a device to draw attention to an altar painting as it is depicted emanating from behind it. In the church of S. Francesco Saverio in Palermo, the altar painting is encased in an oval frame, comparable to the altar reredos of the church of Sant'Agata is Mdina.[149] Unlike the altar reredos in Palermo, in the Malta example the figures of the *putti* are not intertwined with rays of the *gloria* itself but are placed high up on the altar's arch – a stylistic decision in line with the standards of the late seventeenth century, when the church was rebuilt.

When it came to designing altar reredoses, one particular print was internationally widespread and popular in both Sicily and Malta, evidenced by its prolific use. Andrea Pozzo's design for the altar of St Ignatius in the church of Il Gesù in Rome was published in his *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* published in 1693.[150] There is documentary evidence for the existence of this treatise in both Sicily and Malta, which was listed in inventories and wills.[151] Its availability in Malta is also evident from its replication in the altar reredos dedicated to the Pentecoste in the parish church of the Assumption in Qrendi,[152] which adopts its compositional solution as well as its iconography for the apsidal cap decoration. This solution is not widely used in Malta and Eastern Sicily, with only one example in Malta and none in the Val di Noto churches. However, it seems to have been more popular in Palermo, where it is adopted by the designer of the main altar reredos of the church of the Gesù and the main altar reredos of the church of S. Ippolite Martire.[153] This suggests that although links between the artistic scene in Sicily and Malta did exist, their origin was both directly tied to Rome, rather than Malta being influenced indirectly by the Roman Baroque through Sicilian workshops and *scalpellini*.

---

[147] Examples are found in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix (Fig. E.80) and the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. F.84).
[148] See Fig. E.67 and Fig. E.119.
[149] See images Fig. E.60 and Fig. E.61 in Appendix E.
[150] Andrea Pozzo, *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, Rome, 1693, Figure 61. Accessed from https://archive.org/details/gri_33125008639367/page/n6 on 22 January 2020.
[151] The presence of treatises and prints is discussed *supra*.
[152] See Fig. E.2.
[153] For images, see Fig. E.1 and Fig. E.38.

Another common figure featuring in Sicilian and Maltese Late Baroque altar reredoses is the Eternal Father. This figure might have originated from Pozzo's St Ignatius altar and it seems that in some altar reredoses, this holds true. An example of this is the altar of the Crucifix in the church of S. Teresa alla Kalsa, which is not only similar in composition to the Pozzo prototype, but also very comparable in its iconography and general feeling instilled in the viewer to the altar reredos in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. E.97 – Fig. E.98). The two versions of the Eternal Father are executed almost in mirror image; the rendering of the gesturing hand in the air and the drapery folds are also close to one another; both figures have a *gloria* emanating from within; both are surrounded by a host of angels and *putti*.[154] Both sculpted Crucifixes display a *Cristo Morto*, a dead Christ on the cross sacrificed for all mankind (Fig. E.97 and E.98). The most striking difference between these two nodes of regional Baroque sculpture is the addition of a closed niche for the sculpted Crucifix in the Maltese rendition. This divider hinders the close rapport between the angels and the Crucified Christ which is more apparent and effective in the Sicilian altar reredos. Although Pozzo's altar of St Ignatius, published in his 1693 treatise, was a convenient source for the sculpted motif of the Eternal Father, *scalpellini* could have easily been in possession of Domenico de' Rossi's *Studio d'architettura*,[155] in which he published many designs of Roman altar reredoses. Among them features the altar dedicated to St Thomas of Villanova in the church of S. Agostino. Above Cafà's sculpture of the *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova*, an Eternal Father flanked by two adoring angels on the broken pediment is depicted. Many renditions of the Eternal Father in altar reredoses, both in Sicily and in Malta, hark back to this Roman example.[156]

---

[154] See Fig. E.99 and Fig. E.100.

[155] Domenico de' Rossi, *Studio d'architettura civile sopra vari ornamenti di cappelle, e diversi sepolcri tratti da più chiese di Roma colle loro facciate, fianchi, piante, e misure opera de' più celebri architetti de' nostri tempi*, Parte Seconda, Rome, 1711.

[156] Among them are two altars in the Chiesa del Gesù in Palermo (Fig. E.1 and Fig. E.20); another altar in the church of S. Caterina in Palermo (Fig. E.79); another altar in the church of S. Agostino in Palermo (Fig. E.107); the altar reredos of the Oratorio dell'Immacolatella in Palermo (Fig. E.154); the main altar of the church of S. Chiara in Noto (Fig. F.63); the altar of the Nativity in the Cathedral of S. Giovanni Battista in Ragusa (Fig. F.83); the altar of the Annunciation in the parish church of St Helen in Birkirkara (Fig. E.155); the altar of the Annunciation in the parish church of the Blessed Virgin and St Dominic in Rabat (Fig. E.23); the altar reredos of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. E.80); the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. F.84); and the altar of the Annunciation in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. F.82).

Fig. 2.33 Chiesa di San Cristofro, Siracusa. Detail.
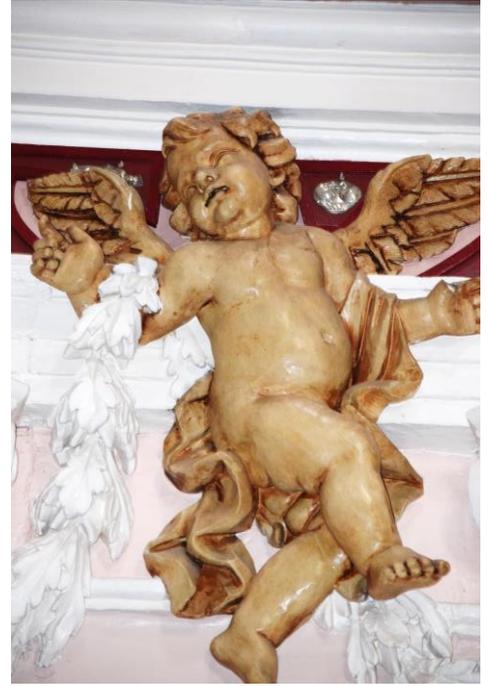
Fig. 2.34 Oratory of the Holy Crucifix. Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 2.35 Chiesa di San Cristofro, Siracusa. Detail.

Fig. 2.36 Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 2.37 Chiesa del Carmine, Noto. Detail.

Fig. 2.38 Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 2.39 Duomo di San Pietro, Modica. Detail.
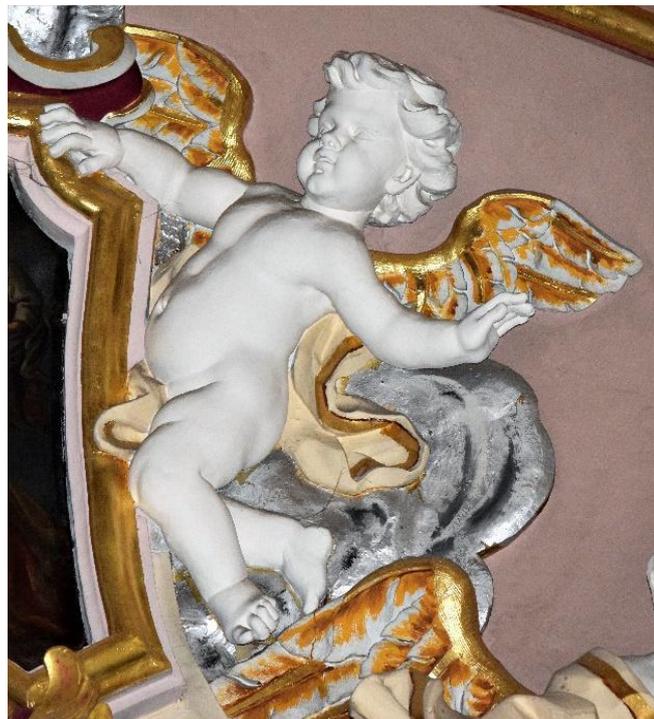
Fig. 2.40 Altar of the Virgin of the Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 2.41 Chiesa di Santa Chiara, Noto. Detail.

Fig. 2.42 Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Francis, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 2.43 Chiesa di San Carlo al Corso, Noto. Detail.
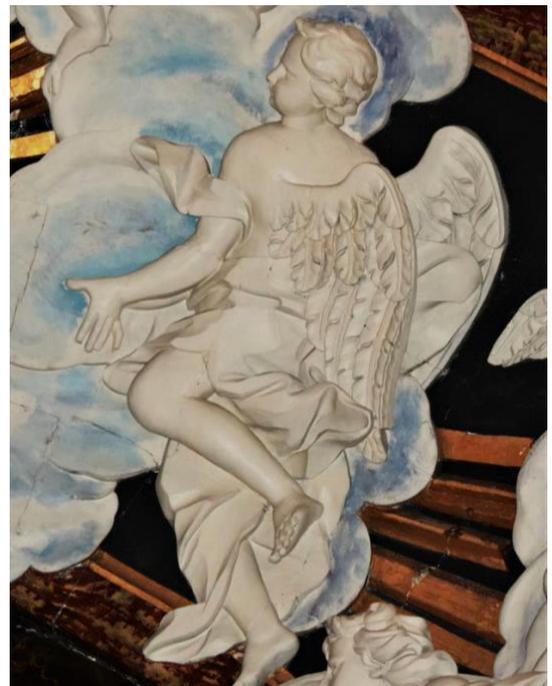
Fig. 2.44 Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 2.45 Chiesa di San Carlo al Corso, Noto. Detail.

Fig. 2.46 Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Safi. Detail.

Fig. 2.47 Chiesa di San Carlo al Corso, Noto. Detail.
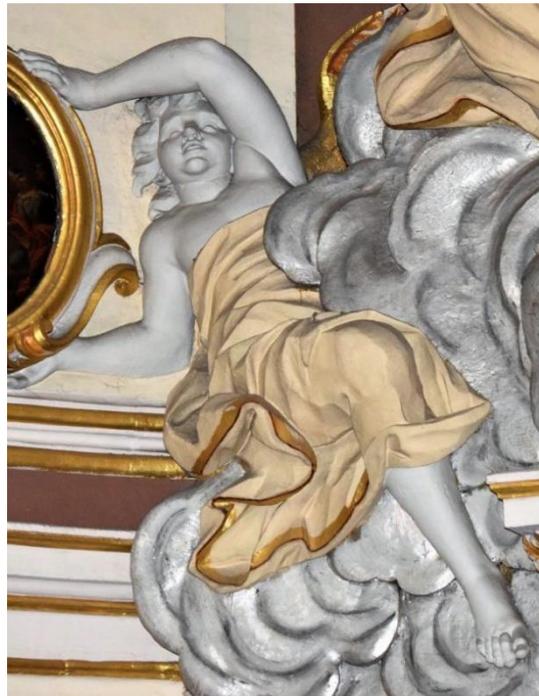
Fig. 2.48 Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Several Baroque motifs echo in the visual culture of Sicily and Malta, among them *putti*, cherub heads, and architectural sculptural themes such as shells, acanthus leaves, ribbon, clouds, scrolls, and volutes,[157] but the most effective in imparting the Berninesque impact once again, as in Lecce and Naples, is the use of angels. Angels are utilised to occupy several places in an altar reredos making numerous gestures in several different positions and to convey different emotions according to the mood set by the action happening in the altar painting. Once again, the source for many of these angels can be found in Bernini's Rome, particularly in the High Altar of the church of S. Agostino, the standing angels carrying instruments of the Passion of Christ on the Ponte S. Angelo, the adoring angels in the Cappella del Sacramento, the design for the ceiling of the church of Il Gesù, the *Cathedra Petri*, and the standing flanked angels supporting the altar painting in the church of S. Maria del Popolo. Their echoes in Sicily and Malta are close to each other and resemble Bernini's originals in their gestures, function, and postures. In terms of quality, Sicilian or Maltese regional sculpture rarely reaches Bernini's sublime effect, except in a few Palermitan exceptions of high quality, and increase from examples of the very provincial to acceptable levels of skill to more lyrical expressions of the Berninesque style.

Bernini's S. Agostino angels are the source for kneeling angels with crossed arms on their chest or with hands folded in prayer. In regional sculpture, *angeli adoranti* are often placed flanking an altar painting.[158] Angels flanking the altar painting in adoring poses or visibly reacting to its story are the most common in Sicilian and Maltese Baroque regional sculpture and examples are copious.[159] The

---

[157] The Roman Baroque and Berninesque motifs are discussed *infra* in this chapter.

[158] Examples are the altar reredos of the Annunciation in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. E.157); the main altar reredos of the church of S. Carlo al Corso in Noto (Fig. F.53); the altar of the Nativity in the Cathedral of S. Giovanni Battista in Ragusa (Fig. F.81); the altar of the Annunciation in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. F.82); the main altar reredos of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. E.98); the altar of the Crucifix in the church of S. Maria alla Kalsa in Palermo (Fig. E.97); the altar of St Catherine in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. E.139); the main altar of the Oratory of the Immacolatella in Palermo (Fig. E.156); and the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat (Fig. E.157). On the Oratory of the Immacolatella, see Palazzatto (2016), 182-187.

[159] The pointing angels in the main altar of the church of the Assumption in Safi (Fig. F.42) are easily comparable to the angels in the church of the SS. Salvatore in Noto (Fig. F.41); the adoring gesturing angels in the altar reredos of the Holy Crucifix in the Senglea Oratory (Fig. F.56) are similar to those in the church of S. Carlo al Corso in Noto (Fig. F.55); the flanked angels on the altar of the Annunciation in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. F.70) and the main altar reredos of the church of S. Chiara in Noto (Fig. F.69) support the picture frame and liaise between the holy and the devoted.

awestruck angels in the Chiesa del Gesù in Palermo can be compared to those on the altar of the Pentecoste in the parish church of the Assumption in Qrendi and on the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat (Fig. E.13 – Fig. E.14). The same format of flanking *angeli adoranti* is also used in conjunction with the Eternal Father crowning the altar painting,[160] while the same format with *putti* crowning the altar painting and angels in the same posture is also employed by both Maltese and Sicilian *scalpellini*.[161]

Angels are also used by *scalpellini* to make direct contact with the faithful as intercessors,[162] or to increase the feeling of triumphalism[163] and the dynamic nature of the Roman Baroque,[164] while others increase the piety of a composition.[165] Compositionally, angels are sometimes depicted in a sitting position, many times on a broken pediment or a sculpted cloud which is part of the altar reredos' decoration. Placed on a sculpted cloud, the angels in the altar reredos of the church of S. Carlo al Corso in Noto and the altar reredos of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in Żebbuġ Parish Church support the picture frame in a mirror image of each other, in spite of being part of not only different altar reredoses but also in different countries.[166] In terms of execution and skill, the Maltese angel is more robust in its bodily forms but retains its elegance when compared to the smaller Sicilian example. In this case, the facial typologies are entirely different; while the Sicilian angel's face is thinner and more delicate, the Maltese example has a more round facial typology with strong features. The same difference in facial typologies can be observed in the gesturing angel sitting on clouds in the altar reredos of St Catherine in Żebbuġ

---

[160] This can be observed in the altar of the Nativity in the Cathedral of S. Giovanni Battista in Ragusa (Fig. F.81) and the altar of the Annunciation in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. F.82).

[161] Examples of these can be found in the church of S. Ninfa dei Crociferi in Palermo (Fig. E.85), the altar of the Virgin of Light in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. E.86), and the main altar reredos of the church of the Virgin of Mercy in Qrendi (Fig. E.88).

[162] Examples are in the church of S. Matteo al Cassaro in Palermo (Fig. E.77) and the altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Fig. E.78)

[163] Examples are the angels in the church of S. Agostino in Palermo (Fig. E.112) and the main altar reredos of the church of the Virgin of Mercy in Qrendi (Fig. E.113).

[164] More animated and dynamic are the angels in the Oratorio di San Lorenzo in Palermo (Fig. E.160 and Fig. E.162), the altar of St Catherine in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. E.161) and the altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Fig. E.163).

[165] The pious angels in the Oratorio del Carminello in Palermo (Fig. E.138) and the altar of St Catherine in the church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. E.139) embody a similar mood to the sweet disposition of the angels in the Oratorio dell'Immacolatella in Palermo (Fig. E.156) and the altar of the Annunciation in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. E.157).

[166] See images in Appendix F Fig. F.51 and Fig. F.52.

Parish Church and the angel sitting on an arch in the cathedral of S. Giovanni Battista in Ragusa (Fig. F.89 – Fig. F.90). Both angels seem to be somewhat clumsily placed with one of their feet sticking out awkwardly. Another altar in the same church dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary includes another similar sitting angel which can be compared to the sitting angel in the main altar reredos of the church of S. Matteo al Cassaro in Palermo.[167] The counterpart of this angel in S. Matteo al Cassaro is also similar, especially in posture and gestures, to one in the apsidal cap of the altar reredos of the Virgin of Porto Salvo in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Fig. E.77 & Fig. E.78).[168]

Some angels, usually in a standing position, are depicted either holding attributes which complete the iconography of the altar reredos or else supporting picture frames or another compositional device. They seem to be more common in Palermo than in the Val di Noto area, with a number of examples coming from Palermitan churches such as the church of Il Gesù.[169] They are also used by Maltese *scalpellini*, as can be observed in the altar reredos of St Catherine in the Żebbuġ Parish Church[170] but it is safe to say that the majority of angels which flank the altar painting, both in Malta and the Val di Noto, are placed half-way up or in the lower third of the frame, sometimes on clouds but other times just suspended in mid-air. The standing angels in Malta and Palermo owe their conception to the Berninesque angels in the church of S. Maria del Popolo, executed by Antonio Raggi, Giovanni Antonio Mari, Arrigo Giardè, and Ercole Ferrata. Later executed standing angels, such as those in the transept of the church of S. Ignazio by Bernardino Ludovisi and Pietro Bracci, could have also had a bearing on the Palermitan examples in the church of S. Domenico. The most eloquent examples of standing angels in Malta are Pietro Paolo Zahra's angels carrying the instruments of the Passion of Christ in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea[171] and Troisi's design of a similar set of four angels for the Altar of Repose in Mdina (Plate 17), later executed by Zahra's

---

[167] For images refer to Appendix E Fig. E.73 and Fig. E.74.
[168] Another two sitting angels in the altar reredos of the Virgin of Charity in Żebbuġ Parish Church (Fig. E.10) and the church of Il Gesù in Palermo (Fig. E.9) are very similar in posture and in the handling of the drapery of their clothes.
[169] More examples can be found in the church of S. Domenico (Fig. E.46), the Oratorio di San Lorenzo (Fig. E.160), and the Oratorio del Carminello (Fig. E.138).
[170] See Fig. E.11 and Fig. E.13. Another example is the main altar reredos of the church of the Virgin of Porto Salvo in Qrendi (Fig. E.88 and Fig. E.90).
[171] For images, see Fig. E.47, Fig. E.49, and Fig. E.51.

son, Francesco. Clearly owing their conception and design to Bernini's angels on the Ponte S. Angelo, there is no other Late Baroque node in Malta or Sicily which is so heavily impacted by Bernini's works in the sense that the artist reproduced the figures to the best of his limited ability, including the sway of the drapery folds, the posture of the figures, and the facial expression.[172]

Angels in flight, used in both Sicily and Malta, are often more dynamic in their positions and gestures. They are often depicted supporting the altar painting;[173] supporting clouds;[174] supporting painted or sculpted roundels;[175] supporting shells, festoons, and other motifs;[176] and carrying functional items such as holy water basins.[177] Hand gestures or *affetti* of sculpted angels in altar reredoses in both Malta and Sicily are varied but adhere to five general groups: angels clasping hands to their chest; angels pointing toward the action or narration, often happening in the altar painting; angels with hands folded in prayer; angels acting as intercessors between the saint in the altar painting and the faithful; and angels gesturing their hands in their expression of amazement or pious wonder. Many Sicilian and Maltese examples of angels employing different *affetti* can be compared to Berninesque angels in Rome designed and executed by Bernini, or Berniniani.

In addition to angels in their various forms and sizes, *putti* are often utilised by *scalpellini* as the smaller counterparts of angels but their gestures and function within the composition are often related. In fact, in both Sicily and Malta they are often depicted supporting objects within the composition, flanking coats of arms or decorative scrolls, holding attributes and scrolls, pointing towards the narrative,

---

[172] The Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea and the sculpted angels carrying the Instruments of the Passion of Christ is further discussed *infra* in Chapter 3.

[173] Such as the angels in the church of S. Carlo al Corso in Noto (Fig. F.53) and the angels in the church of the Assumption in Safi (Fig. F.54).

[174] Examples are the angels in the church of S. Carlo al Corso in Noto (Fig. F.57) and the angels in the church of St Philip Neri (Fig. F.58).

[175] Such as the angels in the Oratorio di SS. Pietro e Paolo in Palermo (Fig. E.126) which is comparable to another angel in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. E.127).

[176] Examples are the angels in the church of S. Giuseppe dei Teatini in Palermo (Fig. E.64) and the altar of the Virgin of Light with St James, in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. E.65). For more on the architecture of the church of S. Giuseppe dei Teatini in Palermo, see Domemca Sutera, '"A Miracle of Architecture": The Billiemi limestone columns of the Church of San Giuseppe dei Teatini in Palermo and Domenico Fontana's method for lifting monoliths', *Construction History*, xxix, 1 (2014), 25-50.

[177] As in the case of the angel in the church of S. Giuseppe dei Teatini in Palermo (Fig. E.62).

with their hands folded in prayer, flying to create a more dynamic composition, often depicted in pairs, or with their head concealed in clouds.[178]

Other figures, such as saints and allegories, feature in Sicilian and Maltese altar reredoses and this is probably where the two regional expression of the Berninesque style differ the most in terms of portrayed subjects and each takes their own path. While figures of saints and allegories feature in some altar reredoses in Malta, the majority of churches and oratories in Sicily, particularly Palermo, boast a large number of figures in their interiors. This might be attributed to different allocated budgets and the different spending power of the patrons but it also reflects the regionalist qualities of Baroque art, especially in Giacomo Serpotta's use of traditional costume to clothe allegories in oratories.[179] In Malta, this device is never used; the Roman Baroque remained the constant inspiration and *scalpellini* strived to emulate the Berninesque tradition by copying figures which can be found in Roman churches. This is the case with the two figures flanking the altar painting of the Virgin of Charity in Żebbuġ Parish Church. The figure of Faith is inspired from the sculptural group *Triumph of Faith over Idolatry* executed by Jean-Baptist Théodon (1645-1713) for the Andrea Pozzo's altar of St Ignatius in the church of Il Gesù in Rome, of which prints were available in Malta.[180] The same inspiration must have served for the less-skilled stone worker who produced the smaller figure of Faith or Religion in the church of S. Giovanni Evangelista in Modica.[181] The personification of Hope, on the other side of the altar painting of the Virgin of Charity, is also a Berninesque figure. However, the Maltese versions pale in comparison to Serpotta's magnificent women representing various allegories and virtues.

Furthermore, many versions of allegorical figures feature on broken pediments of altar reredoses in both the Val di Noto, such as in the church of S. Cristofro in Syracuse, and in Palermo, such as in the church of S. Domenico.[182] This does not seem to be the case in Malta, where this location is reserved for *angeli adoranti* executed in the Berninesque manner, such as in the case of the altar

---

[178] Many of these postures can be observed in the Figures of Appendix E and Appendix F.
[179] For more on the traditional costumes as used by Serpotta in his Palermo oratories, see Palazzotto (2016), various mentions in the catalogue entries.
[180] See Fig. F.112.
[181] See Fig. F.111.
[182] For images, see Fig. F.35 and Fig. E.58.

of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat.[183] Nonetheless, this composition is not widely used in Malta. This altar, displaying clear influence of the Berninesque tradition, was designed by Pietro Paolo Troisi, shortly after his sojourn in Rome. The executor of the altar, Pietro Paolo Zahra, adopted the style of the flanked adoring angels but very often left out the architectural components of the altar and embraced compositions which link the sculpture with the painting more intimately.[184]

Other figures, mainly saints, are occasionally represented in regional sculpture in Malta and Sicily and many have not only similar iconography, but also very similar treatment of drapery folds, very close facial typologies and expressions, and similar treatment of hair; this is evidence of the imprint of the Roman Baroque style on both Malta and Sicily. Noto's St Peter and St Paul in front of the Duomo are comparable to the St Peter and St Paul found in Victory Street in Senglea (Fig. F.21 – Fig. F.24), very close to the parish church dedicated to the Nativity of the Virgin Mary. The *affetti* of all figures are very similar and conform to the Baroque depiction of the two saints. The St Paul in Malta is particularly comparable to Cafà's *St Paul*, which majorly influenced most of the sculptural productions of the saint in Malta. More refined than both the examples in Eastern Sicily and Malta, the sculpted St Peter and St Paul in the oratory dedicated to the two saints in Palermo display the very similar iconography, gestures, and posture; although the treatment of the drapery folds and the facial typologies are handled more delicately and with more skill (Fig. E.130 – Fig. E.133). Noto's S. Chiara,[185] one of Gagliardi's most popular works, provides a prime Eastern Sicilian example of sculpted saints which are placed on the church's oval entablature, evidently in emulation of Bernini's *Colonnata* in Vatican City. In terms of the degree of the Berninesque impact, this Late Baroque node may be compared with Senglea's Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, which is greatly impacted by Bernini's angels on the Ponte S. Angelo; both owe their entire conception to a Berninesque idea to the extent that they would be unrecognisable without it. In comparison to Bernini's

---

[183] See Fig. F.36.
[184] The work of Pietro Paolo Zahra is discussed *supra* in Chapter 1 and in more detail *infra* in Chapter 3.
[185] For more on the architecture of the church of Santa Chiara, see Marco Rosario Nobile and Maria Mercedes Bares, 'The use of 'false vaults' in 18th century buildings of Sicily', *Construction History*, xxx, 1 (2015), 53-70.

design, Noto's example is inferior in design, technical skill, and monumental scale; nevertheless, it remains one of the most important examples of the Sicilian *Tardo Barocco*.

The Berninesque tradition is evident in the depiction of saints in the Oratorio del Carminello in Palermo. The *St Theresa* is evidently executed in the manner of Bernini's female saints such as the *St Bibiana*, the *St Theresa*, and the *Blessed Ludovica Albertoni*. In their regionalist nature, they are comparable to the *St Margaret* in the church of the Blessed Virgin and St Dominic in Rabat and the *St Clare* in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta.[186] Cafà's *Ecstasy of St Catherine* might have also been an influencing factor, especially in the case of the Maltese St Clare, due to the similarity in the figure's swaying S-curved body beneath the mass of drapery. The others display a *contrapposto* and animation of drapery originating in Bernini's St Bibiana.

Similar to the diminished number of sculpted allegorical figures in Malta when compared to Sicily, the same pattern is observed in the number of sculpted saints in eighteenth-century Malta. There was certainly no shortage in the execution of free-standing saints but it seems that their inclusion in altar reredoses or oratories was not very common. This is certainly not the situation in Sicily, particularly in Palermo. A fine example of this is Serpotta's S. Lorenzo situated in the oratory dedicated to the same saint. Apart from being represented in several *teatrini* narrating the life and martyrdom of St Lawrence and placed on the side walls of the oratory, the saint is represented directly above the arch over the altar painting and acts as the intercessor between God and the faithful. While being carried on heavenly clouds by graceful angels against a *gloria* in the backdrop, his gaze pierces the viewer and his outstretched welcoming hand is executed in the true spirit of the Baroque seeking to make direct contact with the spectator.

Apart from similarities in figures and altar reredoses formats, there are several similarities between the decorative motifs used in Sicily and Malta. The shell, the acanthus leaf, cherub heads, angular ribbons, clouds, scrolls, volutes, festoons, and drapery all seem to be repeated from one altar reredos to another,

---

[186] See Fig. E.142 – Fig. E.145.

from one region to another.[187] The dove of the Holy Spirit also features extensively, especially as the central motif of a *gloria*. The occasional excessive use of these motifs imparts a more ornate quasi-Rococo style to altar reredoses. In this regard, the angels in the church of S. Orsola in Palermo and the titular altar of the church of St James in Żurrieq are surrounded by such intricate decoration.[188] Other more specific motifs, or themes, particularly those connected to the Passion of Christ, are repeated in Sicily and Malta. The motif of the Veronica's cloth bearing the image of Christ's facial features in the chiesa dell'Immacolata Concezione al Capo in Palermo and in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. E.24 – Fig. E.26); the crown of thorns features in the same Palermitan church and in the altar of St Alphonse in the parish church of the Transfiguration in Lija (Fig. E.27 and Fig. E.28); while the motif of the cross is prominently featured in the same Palermitan church, the church of St James in Valletta, and the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. E.35 – Fig. E.37).

Although similarities between Late Baroque sculpture in Malta and the Sicilian *Tardo Barocco* are abound, there are also several regional differences which give a particular Maltese or Sicilian timbre to regional sculpture. The material is perhaps the most significant variable. The use of marble in regional sculpture in Palermo is high when compared to the use of the material in Eastern Sicily and is even higher when compared to the use of marble in Malta.[189] Several altar reredoses, indeed entire churches, are cladded with marble. Stucco was also commonly used by regional sculptors in Palermo and the Val di Noto. In Palermo, it is often used to add sculptural detail to a marble base and it is extensively used in the decoration of altars and oratories executed by the Serpotta workshop. Stucco is also used in the Val di Noto for the execution of altar reredoses. Its use in Malta is limited; instead, the use of the local limestone overtakes the introduction of any other material in the Maltese Islands. Although stone was a commodity and considered a valuable source, it was plentiful and readily available from several quarries in Malta, and Maltese *scalpellini* could easily acquire it. Variation in material inevitable results in the employment of different techniques. In the case of stucco, the artist builds the sculptural decoration and there is a process of addition;

---

[187] Many of these typologies can be observed in the Figures of Appendix E and Appendix F.
[188] See Fig. E.122 and Fig. E.123.
[189] On the use of marble in Palermitan churches, see Blunt (1968), 32-33.

in the case of marble and stone, the artist takes away from the material in block form and thus engages in a process of subtraction.

The technical and stylistic skill of regional *scalpellini* also varies according to the region. In terms of quality, regional sculpture in Malta is of an average standard, especially when compared to the sometimes more provincial expressions of the Berninesque tradition in the Val di Noto. However, even the more lyrical expressions of Maltese Late Baroque sculpture do not hold enough ground when compared to the quality produced by more established artists in Palermo, particularly the output of the Serpotta workshop. Although there are occasional dips in quality where it is evident that Giacomo Serpotta left the execution of the sculptural work to other lesser talented members of his family workshop, the finest examples of his work in Palermitan oratories are one of the most supreme examples of the Sicilian Baroque. On the other hand, although the Roman Baroque timbre is evident in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture, the quality is always at a significantly lesser degree. In contrast to this, the Berninesque impact in Malta is high, especially in the emulation of particular Roman Baroque works of art.

Similar to the situation in Malta, Sicilian craftsmen were competent at creating architectural and decorative motifs but limited when it came to the design, execution, and modelling of figures. This was very often due to inadequate training.[190] This is again similar to the training of artists in Malta; *scalpellini* such as Pietro Paolo Zahra, who never left the Islands,[191] found difficulty in the sculpting of figures in spite of the fact that they consistently feature in his compositions. This gives a provincial feeling to his works, although in some other cases his figurative sculpting is of a better quality. In the case of Sicily, artists of the calibre of Giacomo Amato and Giacomo Serpotta eased this insufficiency. This is not surprising since Amato is documented to have studied in Rome and while no sufficient documentation exists to support Serpotta's travels, he was certainly familiar with art of the mainland.[192]

---

[190] The training of Sicilian craftsmen is discussed in Piazza and Vicinelli (1999), 51.

[191] Travels made by Pietro Paolo Zahra have not transpired from archival research but the possibility of finding such evidence is still open.

[192] According to Piazza, 'the activity of these artists introduced new compositional principles to the local decorative style, and the knowledge and reworking of Roman themes played an increasingly important role'. Piazza and Vicinelli (1999), 51.

Considering the parallelisms in the manner in which Sicily and Malta were imprinted with the style of the Roman Baroque and their seventeenth and eighteenth century socio-artistic contexts, it is not surprising that the resulting works of art in Malta and Sicily, especially in eighteenth-century regional sculpture, share the same nature, particularly in their Berninesque characteristics and the feeling of theatrical awe they intentionally evoke in the spectator. Nonetheless, the ensuing differences between the regional characteristics of Maltese and Sicilian Late Baroque sculpture do not cease to remind the onlooker that the local disposition of native sculptors, designers, and *scalpellini* imbued the regional sculpture with characteristics indigenous to its place of production. Regional characteristics are joined by varying levels of technical skill and fluctuating degrees of Bernini's influence on local craftsmen to create two versions of the Roman Baroque – the Sicilian and the Maltese – which are intimately related yet distinct.

CHAPTER III

The Berninesque Tradition in Regional Late Baroque Malta:

A comparative analysis with Roman Baroque works

Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

The mechanics of the spread of the Berninesque impact is analysed through the quantification of eighteenth-century altar reredoses in Maltese churches and their quality, typical characteristics, and repetitive formula are examined in this chapter. Several different typologies of the Roman Baroque manner, particularly Berninesque motifs, can be observed employed in the interior decoration of parish, filial, and countryside churches. The Roman figurative counterparts of several decorative motifs are identified either in Bernini's extensive oeuvre of works of art resulting directly from his dominant *bottega* or in other examples of Roman Baroque sculpture by *Berniniani*, who were forcefully impacted by Bernini's designs. The important role of prints, treatises, and other printed material is analysed as one of the main channels of influence on Malta's visual culture. Evidence of their availability in the Maltese Islands is also unearthed, bringing Malta on the same level as other regional centres of sculptural production in the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition.

3.1 The quantification of Berninesque altar reredoses in Malta

A quantitative survey, covering altar reredoses in major churches in Malta which were built or significantly altered in the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, was carried out. The trend of enlarging or altering churches in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries resulted in the loss of a number of Berninesque altars but this affected mostly large parish churches.[1] Countryside and filial churches were not much affected by this development; this is the reason why the Berninesque impact seems to be concentrated in smaller churches rather than the large important ones because progress did not allow for a number of Berninesque altar reredoses to survive.

---

[1] Churches which fit in the selected timeframe but had major alterations carried out in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries were excluded from the survey. Since the alterations many times involved the lateral enlargement of the church, eighteenth-century altars in the side aisles were completely destroyed. Although this is the case in the majority of churches, there are instances in which the eighteenth-century sculpture was saved, either partially such as the pieces of sculpture surviving in the Żabbar Sanctuary Museum or wholly, such as the 'Sculpture Museum' of the Xewkija Parish Church. It is sad, however, that these altar reredoses fragments have been taken out of their original context. In some fortunate cases, an old photo which shows how the altar stood within its original eighteenth-century artistic context survives and at other times, archival documentation which illustrates the lost work of art through a description in a notarial contract is uncovered.
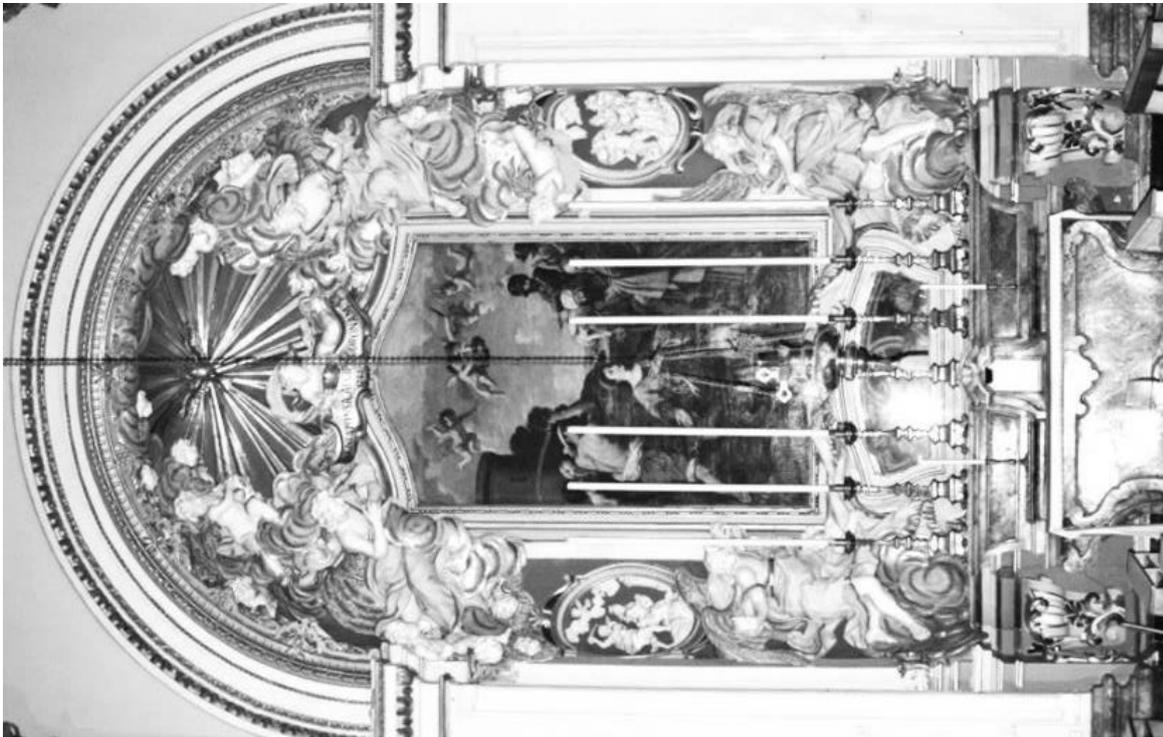
Fig. 3.2 Altar of the Virgin of Liesse, Church of the Virgin of Liesse, Valletta.

Fig. 3.1 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Catherine, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ.

Fig. 3.4 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Michael Archangel, Parish church of the Annunciation, Balzan.
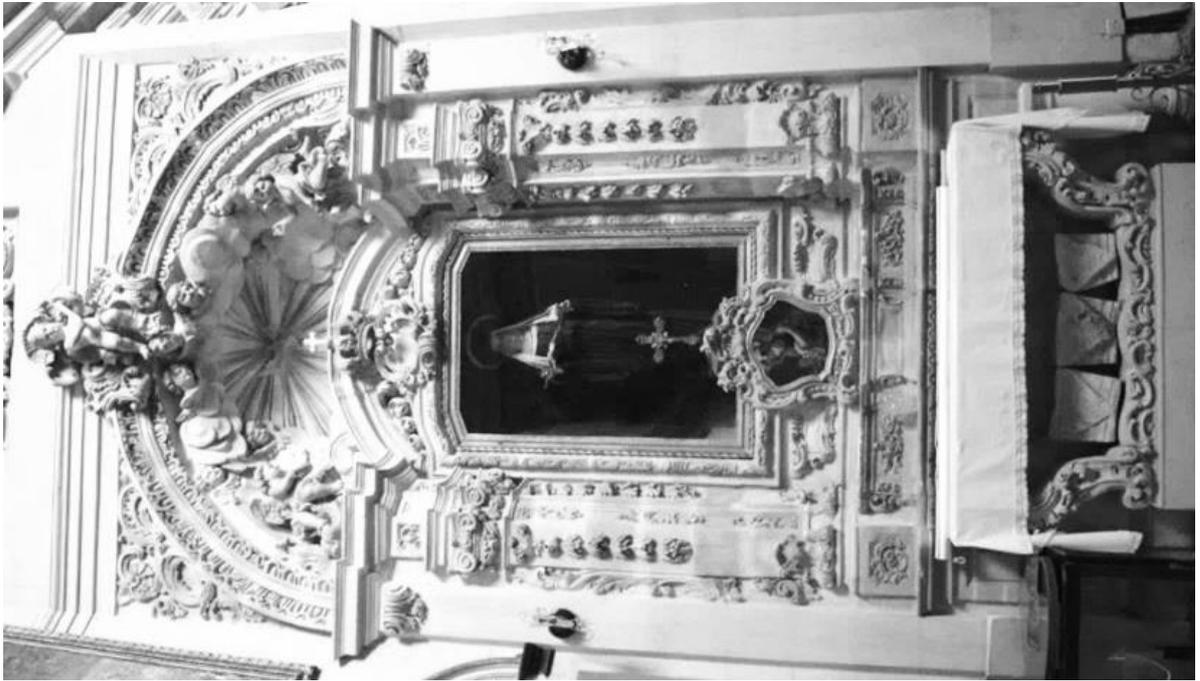
Fig. 3.3 Attributed to the Fabri family, Altar of St Rita, Parish church of St John the Baptist, Xewkija.

181

Nevertheless, a considerable number of Berninesque altar reredoses survive in parish churches to justly determine their style, number, and quality. While this survey takes only altar reredoses into consideration, that is, the sculptural decoration placed behind the altar table on the wall of the church, the Berninesque Roman Baroque imprint, in the true spirit of its *bel composto* nature, permeated all expressions of art including architecture, architectural decoration, and the decorative arts. These, although not accounted for in the survey itself, will be taken into consideration when analysing works of art.

This exercise has labelled altar reredoses with a particular style marker and sectioned them in categories. The first are altars which display Berninesque qualities accompanied with figures. *Angeli adoranti*, *putti*, saints, and other figures were all salient features of triumphant and dynamic Roman Baroque altar reredoses (see Fig. 3.1 as example). Around one third of the altars belong distinctly to this Berninesque with figures category. The second are altar reredoses which, although do not have figurative work included in their composition, still adequately show Roman Baroque influence and a Berninesque imprint. These altar reredoses are very often accompanied by cherub heads, *gloria* rays emanating from a central motif such as the dove of the Holy Spirit or the Holy Cross, and architectural sculptural decoration such as scrolls, volutes, acanthus leaves, festoons, and column or pilaster capitals belonging to the Corinthian, Ionic, or Composite orders (see Fig. 3.2 as example). Another third of the surveyed altars belongs to this category. This essentially means that 198 of 326 altars surveyed in this analysis owe their allegiance and very conception to Rome.

The same motifs are employed in the third category of altar reredoses but executed in a more frivolous and delicate manner, thus constituting the Barocchetto style – a style which has moved away from the heavier forms of the Late Baroque but is still not as detailed and intricate as the Rococo style (see Fig. 3.4 as example). This only comprises 29 of 326 surveyed altars. The fourth category is comprised of altar reredoses which are still executed in a seventeenth-century style and their sculptural decoration is determined by the architectural members of the structure of the altar reredoses. Very often, these take the shape of two or more columns supporting an entablature surmounted with a broken pediment, sometimes accompanied with *putti* and cherub heads or *gloria* motifs. In some cases, the altar

would have been present in the church from the seventeenth century; in other cases, the altar would have been executed in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century in a retardataire style, in spite of the fact that the dissemination of the Berninesque imprint in Malta had been consolidated by 1710 (see Fig. 3.3 as example). This category accounts for 73 of 326 surveyed altars. The fifth category is entitled 'other styles' to cater for altar reredoses which have been completely changed or executed later in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in churches dominated by altars displaying Berninesque impact. This only accounts for 26 of 326 surveyed altars.

A Berninesque formula which was adapted by *scalpellini* from Roman Baroque examples and popularised all over eighteenth-century Malta emerges from this survey. Although this Berninesque impact in Maltese churches is strong, the degree of quality is significantly lower than the level of skill, mastery, dexterity, and level of finesse which is accomplished in seventeenth-century Roman church interiors. Several reasons explain these limitations. While the Order of St John could afford to import well-established artists and works of art to satisfy its needs,[2] the Maltese Diocese often made use of the local talent. Therefore, the majority of Maltese churches had to make do with the skills of regional Maltese artists.

The second significant reason for the drop in quality is the likelihood that the majority of Maltese *scalpellini* did not receive formal academic training.[3] They did not study the nude figure in terms of anatomical structure;[4] they were not trained by significant artists in *botteghe* on the Continent; they were not able to enter competitions and belong to the Roman context of the *Accademia di San Luca*. Rather, like many in other regions notably Sicily, Maltese *scalpellini* studied and learned the craft of the *scalpellino* with their father or another family member, very often on the job itself.[5] Maltese *scalpellini* had large *botteghe* bustling with activity but this situation must have paled in comparison to the activity which the Bernini

---

[2] This is discussed *supra*. See Sciberras (2012) for more information on the Order of St John's commissions for works of art from Rome.

[3] This situation is similar to Sicily's circumstances where architects and sculptors were also trained in local workshops, although sometimes sent abroad to study. Giuffrè (2007), 96.

[4] Bernini's method, like many other sculptors before and after him, included the study of the nude figures. Lavin (1978), 404.

[5] This was common practice even on the Continent, but sculptors in Rome had much more artistic opportunities presented to them. For more on the training of assistant sculptors, see Montagu (1992), 1-19.

and other Roman workshops sustained. Unlike artists studying in Rome, Maltese *scalpellini* did not have personal direct contact with the work of the great masters. This naturally resulted in a lack of inventive capabilities and they copied and appropriated figures, motifs, and architectural solutions from the sources they had available, such as prints and works of art present in Malta. This situation is clearly illustrated in the case of Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra. While Pietro Paolo Troisi had a first-hand, albeit very short, experience of Rome, Pietro Paolo Zahra did not. This is reflected in their works; while Pietro Paolo Troisi introduced the *angeli adoranti* formula to the Maltese artistic scene, Pietro Paolo Zahra, although responsible for its eventually wide propagation, could only copy it without significantly developing it any further.

Two particular compositional typologies were the most popular in the execution of Maltese eighteenth-century altar reredoses. The first is the most visibly Berninesque because of the inclusion of figures, especially *angeli adoranti*. This altar reredos adopts the following formula. Two or more adoring angels rest above the *scanello* or are attached to the altar painting's frame on either side, accompanied by clouds and playful *putti* or cherub heads. They react to the narrative of the painting or interact with the spectator, acting as an intercessor between the devoted congregation and the saints in the altar painting. The altar piece is often surmounted by a decorative ensemble, many times containing a *gloria* emanating from a central motif. This is usually surrounded by flatly rendered sculpted clouds through which *putti* emerge performing multiple gesticulations. Figures in the upper part of the apse, such as the Eternal Father, are a common occurrence. Saints or other figures, such as allegories, flanking the picture frame are sometimes included. The picture frame is often decorated with an acanthus leaf theme and the general composition is embellished with further decorative sculpted motifs, such as scrolls, volutes, ribbons, crowns, shells, and cartouches. In this typology, the architectural members of the altar reredos are no longer distinguishable from the sculpture since sculpted motifs, particularly clouds, are used as a transitional element between one component and another.

The second typology used by Maltese *scalpellini* is essentially the same as the first with the notable exclusion of large figures. This might have had more to do with the lack of funds to create an extravagant altar reredos rather than the lack of

desire to do so since both results are similarly inspired by Berninesque works. Some seventeenth-century hangover elements can still be found in a smaller number of eighteenth-century altar reredoses, particularly the distinction between sculpture and architecture. All of these elements find their inspiration in Bernini's innovative solutions for various important works of art commissioned in Papal Rome.

It is not only the design formula which imparts a Berninesque style to eighteenth-century Maltese altar reredoses. Maltese *scalpellini* appropriated other necessary elements such as the abstraction of billowing drapery folds, the use of directed and concealed light, the pictorial quality of Bernini's marble palette, and most importantly the fusion of the three arts – painting, architecture, and sculpture – to create one beautiful whole, *il bel composto*. All of these elements can be found used to some extent or other in Maltese examples of eighteenth-century regional sculpture.

Drapery folds are continuously used by Maltese *scalpellini* and although they differ in shape, size, and animation from one altar reredos to another, there seems to be no distinct artistic development or progression in their execution. While Bernini's execution of drapery folds differentiates between different periods in his artistic development, this does not appear to be the case in Malta. Drapery folds in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture are generically broad, planar, and animated in the High Baroque style of Bernini. Many examples from Pietro Paolo Zahra's oeuvre brings to mind the ground-breaking drapery folds of Bernini's *St Longinus*, and his emulation of this popular work of art is reflected in many of his works. This is the case in the execution of the drapery folds which clothe the angels in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. Although Pietro Paolo Zahra was most definitely in possession of prints of Bernini's designs, he does not seem to have followed them in the execution of the drapery, modifying the original to fit his own capabilities. The same style of drapery can be observed in Pietro Paolo Zahra's other works, including its dexterous use in the angels situated in the apsidal cap of the choir of the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Plate 38). This was the last monumental work which Pietro Paolo Zahra undertook before his sudden death in 1747 and his seasoned years of experience show in the coherent composition. The drapery serves the Baroque ethos of embodying the feeling of its wearer. The Fabri family seems to have followed suit in their execution of drapery folds as can be observed from

185

their altar reredos of St James with the Virgin of Light in the church of St James and the altar reredos of St Bartholomew in the church of St Bartholomew, both in Żurrieq.

Bernini's palette of differently coloured marbles give his works of art another dimension, making three dimensional sculptural elements melt into one another to create a pictorial quality in the resulting effect. Colour also plays an important part in eighteenth-century Maltese sculpture. In general, the use of the local limestone dominates in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. Naturally this was the most available medium for *scalpellini* and, in addition to its accessibility, its malleability made it an easy stone to carve. Its sandy colour gave a warm glow to church interiors, although it was often painted or gilded but there are instances in which the stone is left bare. The profuse use of gold, earthly tones, and several shades of white dominate in the production of sculpture.[6]

The technique of faux-marbling was also popular in eighteenth-century Malta and there were specialised artists working in this field.[7] This betrays the desire to commission altar reredoses in marble, rather than stone, but financial restrictions probably held the majority of Maltese churches back from indulging in the expensive importation of a luxury material.[8] Building an altar reredos entirely out of marble would have entailed a colossal expense. This is partly the reason why the use of marble was reserved for smaller items in Maltese parish and countryside churches such as funerary monuments, the altar table itself, and smaller parts of works of art, such as cartouches and coat of arms of patrons. It is also the reason why marble works are found in much richer more important churches, such as the

---

[6] It is important to note that many altar reredoses were repainted several times since their original execution. The colours subsequently chosen many times do not reflect the original hues of the altar reredos. For example, the walls of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea have in recent years been painted a shade of pink, which mars its original context.

[7] See *supra* for more information and archival documentation for gilders and painters of altars in eighteenth-century Malta.

[8] The cost of using such an expensive material deterred patrons from commissioning works in marble even in Sicily, where it was naturally available and thus no transportation costs would have had to be taken into consideration. Giuffrè (2007), 172.

Fig. 3.5 Gian Lorenzo Bernini & Antonio Raggi, Dome decoration, Church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, Rome. Detail. (top left) Fig. 3.6 Filippo Juvarra, Dome decoration in Cappella Antamori, Church of San Girolamo della Carità, Rome. (top right) Fig. 3.7 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Dome decoration in Chapel of St Teresa of Avila, Parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked, Valletta. (centre right) Fig. 3.8 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail. (centre bottom)

Conventual Church of St John and the Mdina Cathedral. The chapel of the Sacrament (Plate 37) and the chapel of the Crucifix (Plate 38), both in Mdina Cathedral,[9] are the result of the activity of Maltese *scalpellini*, artists, and *marmisti*, and show the palette which was adopted by Maltese eighteenth-century artists. Heavily influenced by the style prevalent in seventeenth-century Rome, both of these chapels embrace several Roman Baroque motifs. It is also clear from other commissions that the selection of differently coloured marble was a concern for Maltese patrons. Documented proof shows how extra care was taken on the part of both patron and artist when it came to the importation and purchase of marble.[10]

Concealed and directed light is one of Bernini's most intelligent ways of breathing new life into the work of art which embodies a theatrical drama, with the help of natural means of illumination. In regional Maltese sculpture, light is also used as a device albeit not as intelligently as in Bernini's employment of this visual effect. One instance of concealed light can be found in the chapel of St Theresa of Avila in the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta (Fig. 3.7). The oculus in the cupoletta of the chapel bathes the Maltese limestone sculpture which surrounds the altarpiece. As a result, soft theatrical light enters the chapel and illuminates the different elements of the gilded *gloria*, *putti*, and cherub heads. The same device is used in the church of St Bartholomew in Żurrieq (Plate 12).

Unconcealed light is often used in Maltese examples. Windows are often incorporated as part of altar reredoses and usually profusely decorated. This Berninesque element of light is utilised by Maltese *scalpellini* to create a *bel composto*, particularly in large-scale works such as the altar reredos of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. 3.8), where the sculptural elements overlap the square opening. This represents the peak of theatricality imbued with the Berninesque impact as expressed in Malta's visual culture.

---

[9] These two chapels were designed by Francesco Zahra and marble works in them were produced by the Durante family of *marmisti*, more specifically Claudio Durante. For more on the chapel of the Sacrament and the chapel of the Crucifix in Mdina Cathedral, see Sciberras (2010), 100-112.

[10] This is discussed *supra* under the subtitle *1.33 Channels of the spread: The dissemination of working material.*

3.2 Berninesque typologies

3.2.1 Angeli adoranti

Angeli adoranti, utilised by Bernini in the High Altar of the church of S. Agostino (Plate 1), became extremely popular in Rome and were propagated by important *Berniniani* such as Antonio Raggi, Giovanni Antonio Mari, and Ercole Ferrata. One of the most profuse and elegant expressions of the Berninesque *angeli adoranti* is in the altars of the church of S. Maria del Popolo in Rome (Plate 2).[11] Their most sublime form can be found in Bernini's design for the Vatican's *Cappella del Sacramento* (Plate 3).[12] The motif continued being used in Rome well into the eighteenth century as can be observed from the angels on the transept altars of the church of S. Ignazio in Rome executed by Bernardino Ludovisi and Pietro Bracci. They were introduced in Malta by Pietro Paolo Troisi in his design for the altar reredos dedicated to the Annunciation in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. 3.12), which was largely executed by his collaborator Pietro Paolo Zahra. The latter, accompanied by the Fabri family of sculptors, widely propagated this motif in eighteenth-century Malta.

Before Pietro Paolo Troisi's introduction of *angeli adoranti*, Malta had already had a taste of what the Late Baroque would bring. A Berninesque imprint can be observed in seventeenth-century designs of the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament attributed to Mattia Preti.[13] This is possibly the first *gloria* executed in Malta in the

---

[11] On the angels in S. Maria del Popolo, see Jennifer Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art*, London, Yale University Press, First published 1989 (2nd edition, 1992).

[12] On the angels of the Cappella del Sacramento, see Valentino Martinelli, *L'Ultimo Bernini (1665-1680): nuovi argomenti, documenti e immagini*, Rome, 1996; Dickerson III, C. D., Anthony Sigel, & Montagu, (1992); Rudolf Wittkower, *Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*, Phaidon, 1997; Irving Lavin, 'Bernini at St Peter's' in William Tronzo (ed.), *St Peter's in the Vatican*, Cambridge, University Press, Cambridge, 2005. The *concetto* and iconography of Bernini's *Cappella del Sacramento* are also discussed in Lavin (1987).

[13] The Oratory's design is attributed to Mattia Preti. Sciberras (2012), 112.
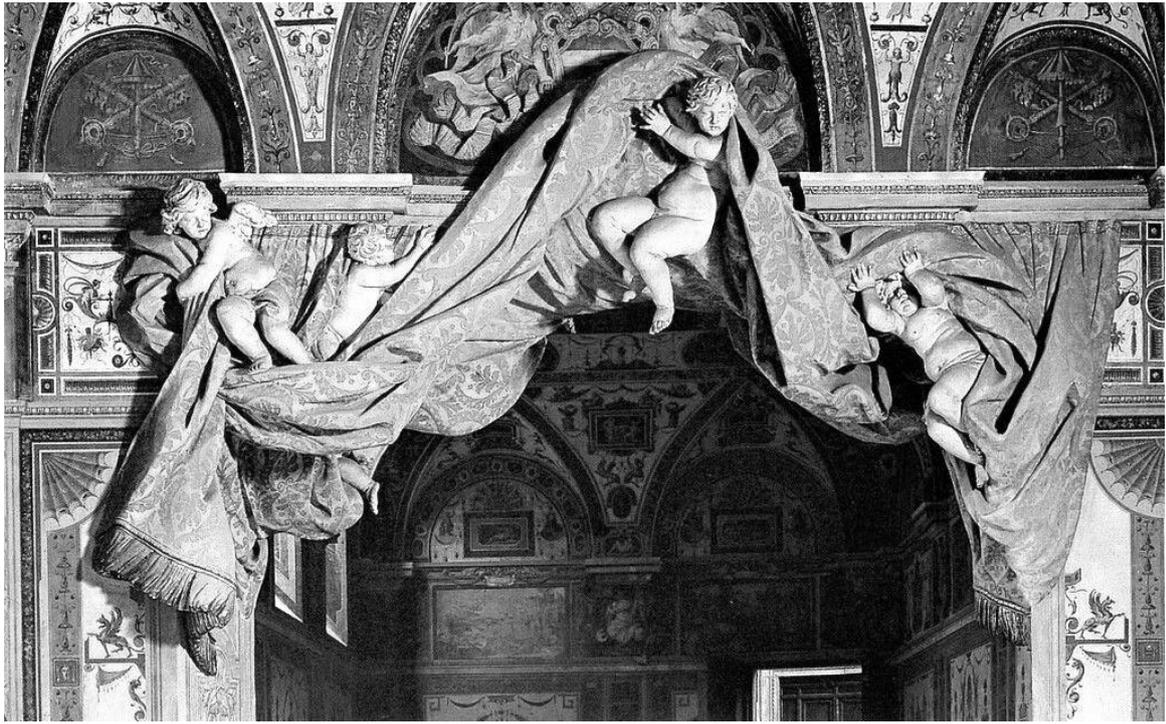
Fig. 3.9 Gianlorenzo Bernini & Antonio Raggi, Sala Ducale, Vatican Palace. Detail.

Fig. 3.10 Mattia Preti, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Sarria, Floriana.

Fig. 3.11 Altar of St Catherine, Church of St Catherine, Qrendi.

Fig. 3.12 Pietro Paolo Troisi & Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of St Francis, Rabat.

Fig. 3.13 Gianlorenzo Bernini, High altar, Church of Sant'Agostino, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 3.14 Pietro Paolo Troisi & Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Annunciation, Church of St Francis, Rabat. Detail.

style of Bernini (Plate 31). The golden *gloria* bursts from the central motif of the Eucharist placed in the apsidal cap to cover the entire space of the apse, including the space behind the altar painting. It is embellished with cherub heads and clouds while the rest of the decoration of the oratory complements its gilded aura. The close contact between important artists such as Preti and regional artists such as the Casanova family encouraged the dissemination of the Berninesque imprint.[14] Another important design by Preti for the dissemination of the Berninesque dating to the 1670s is the altar reredos of the Immaculate Conception in the Sarria church in Floriana. The altar painting is dramatically revealed to the spectator by *putti* who are pulling away drapery which would have otherwise covered it (Fig. 3.10). This *concetto* owes its origin to Bernini's decoration in the Sala Ducale in the Vatican Palace (Fig. 3.9). The palette is also Berninesque since Preti selected dark marble which contrasts with the lighter areas of the rest of the church.

Parts of the Monument to Grand Master Gregorio Carafa (Plate 39) in the Conventual Church of St John, largely executed in the same period,[15] have been tentatively attributed to local workmanship.[16] The device of *putti* revealing a scene is once again utilised by the anonymous designer and sculptor, showing some affinities with Preti's design for the Sarria altar reredos. The *putti*'s facial typology is also akin to the *putti* in the Sarria altar reredos and to other *putti* executed by the Casanova family of sculptors, possibly pointing to a link between the execution of the works of art. This scheme was translated into regional Late Baroque sculpture as can be observed in the effort of the unknown *scalpellino* who attempted to repeat the composition on a smaller scale in the church of St Catherine in Qrendi (Fig. 3.7). While the quality is vernacular, it is sufficient within Malta's visual culture to effectively deliver the dramatic feeling of the Roman Baroque style.

---

[14] Its execution was probably undertaken by the seventeenth-century Casanova family of *scalpellini*. Mallia (1975), 21.

[15] Keith Sciberras states that 'by 1690, the monument was at least in its larger parts complete, thus tallying well with the date 1688 prominently inscribes in the scroll of the sarcophagus' Sciberras (2012), 211.

[16] Lankheit first suggested a Maltese execution for the tomb and a Roman provenance for the bronze bust. Kruft dismissed this suggestion in favour of his view that the work is the result of Ciro Ferri's workshop. See Sciberras (2012), 210-211. Sciberras presents a convincing argument stating that the 'there is enough technical evidence to support the argumentation that the marble was executed by craftsmen working in Malta, or in neighbouring Sicily' while 'the bronze bust…is the work of a Roman sculptor'. Sciberras (2012), 212, 214.

Nonetheless, it was Pietro Paolo Troisi's brief study period in Rome which steered regional Maltese sculpture towards a definite Berninesque manner. The altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis is a testament to this (Fig. 3.12). Executed in 1710 by Pietro Paolo Zahra,[17] this altar is the epitome of the beginnings of the Berninesque impact in Malta, particularly because of its graceful use of *angeli adoranti*, not unlike the angels supporting picture frames in S. Maria del Popolo in Rome (Fig. 3.15 & Fig. 3.16). Their technical execution is regional; drapery folds flutter around nonsensically and do not clothe body parts in an accurate manner, but their expression is pious and their gesticulations mirror those of their counterparts in Berninesque Rome. One of the angels reacts to the narrative of the Immaculate Conception occurring in the altar painting while the other beckons to the devoted viewer and invites him to join in this religious experience of witnessing this sacred event. These *angeli adoranti* are mirrored by another two resting on the broken pediment of the altar reredos. They also react to the happenings of the altar painting and clasp their hands in prayer in reverence of the *gloria* emanating from the dove of the Holy Spirit. A counterpart of the left-hand angel can be found in the altar decoration above Melchiorre Cafà's *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova* in the church of S. Agostino in Rome (Plate 4), executed by Ercole Ferrata due to Cafà's untimely death (Fig. 3.17 & Fig. 3.18). It is perhaps not a coincidence that Bernini's first *angeli adoranti* are found in the same Roman church (Fig. 3.13 & Fig. 3.14). The analysis of the altar reredos of the Immaculate Conception in Malta points towards the strong possibility that Pietro Paolo Troisi visited S. Agostino while in Rome.

---

[17] NAV, R303, Notary Giovanni Grech, Volume 2, 1709-1710, ff. 883r-885r. See also Debono (2010), 17.

Fig. 3.15 Ercole Ferrata, Altar of the Visitation, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 3.16 Pietro Paolo Troisi & Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of St Francis, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 3.17 Ercole Ferrata & Melchiorre Cafà, *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova*, Church of Sant'Agostino, Rome. Detail. (left)

Fig. 3.18 Pietro Paolo Troisi & Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of St Francis, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 3.19 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, High altar of S. Agostino, church of S. Agostino, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 3.20 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Anthony, church of St Mark, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 3.21 Giovanni Antonio Mari, angel in the church of S. Maria del Popolo, Rome.

Fig. 3.22 Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Mercy, church of the Virgin of Mercy, Qrendi. Detail.

Fig. 3.23 Ciro Ferri, Reliquary for the Right Hand of St John the Baptist, Museum of the Conventual Church of St John, Valletta. Detail.

Fig. 3.24 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Crucifix, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 3.25 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Cathedra Petri*, Basilica of St Peter, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 3.26 Pietro Paolo Zahra, *Altar of St Catherine*, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

The same church dedicated to St Francis commissioned another altar reredos shortly after, this time designed and executed solely by Pietro Paolo Zahra.[18] The *scalpellino* slightly tweaked the composition of the altar and produced another Berninesque altar reredos, dedicated to St Anthony of Padua (Plate 5). Perhaps less aesthetically satisfactory than the altar of the Immaculate Conception, the *angeli adoranti* are supporting the picture frame on different levels. Their facial expression is not as animated and the manner in which they are attached to the frame makes them appear as if they are holding on to it rather than providing it with support. From this lack of quality, it is clear that a less experienced workshop hand must have been involved in the actual execution of the figures.[19]

The effect of the altar of the Immaculate Conception was immediate. The Berninesque tradition seems to have spread very efficiently from one Maltese church to another and the number of Berninesque altar reredoses attests to this spread. Pietro Paolo Zahra was the most effective proponent of this style. His oeuvre is extensive, amounting to over sixty altar reredoses (forty of them documented; the rest attributed on grounds of stylistic analysis),[20] and his use of adoring or supporting angels is higher than that of any other sculptor in Malta, starting in 1710 after his contact with Pietro Paolo Troisi and continuing until his death in 1747. Pietro Paolo Zahra's *angeli adoranti* accompanying the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat[21] are excellent examples for showcasing the reverberations of the Berninesque impact. They owe their conception to Bernini's *Cappella del Sacramento* angels and are their counterparts in gestures and piety, if not in terms of quality and high standards of technique (Fig. 3.19 & Fig. 3.20).

---

[18] Vincent Borg, *Marian Devotions in the Islands of St Paul 1600-1800*, Malta Historical Society, Malta, 1983, 270.

[19] The contract commissioning this altar reredos explicitly states that Pietro Paolo Zahra was allowed assistance but not in the parts where actual sculpting was involved. The *scalpellino* might have breached these terms and conditions since aesthetically, technically, and stylistically, the facial expressions of these angels do not belong comfortably in his oeuvre.

[20] For more on the documented and attributed oeuvre of Pietro Paolo Zahra, see Meli (2017).

[21] NAV, R210, Notary Ignazio Debono, Volume 40, 1718-1719, ff. 793v-795. Published in Debono (2010), 68.

The same formula is repeatedly used by Pietro Paolo Zahra as can be observed from the main altar of the church of the Virgin of Mercy in Qrendi[22] (Plate 6) in which the *angeli adoranti* are standing rather than kneeling and are thus more reminiscent of the angels supporting the frames in S. Maria del Popolo (Fig. 3.21 & Fig. 3.22). The *angeli adoranti* by Pietro Paolo Zahra in the side altars of the church of St James in Żurrieq, dedicated to the Virgin of Light[23] (Plate 7) and the Annunciation[24] (Plate 8), are particularly animated in their *affetti*. The angel with his hands folded in prayer on the altar reredos dedicated to the Annunciation mirrors the painted angel in the altarpiece, executed by Francesco Zahra. This repetition in pose not only illustrates the collaborative spirit of the eighteenth century but it also shows a certain understanding on the *scalpellino*'s part of Bernini's *concetto* of the *bel composto*.

One of Pietro Paolo Zahra's most eloquent applications of the *angeli adoranti* is in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Plate 34).[25] The entire decoration of this oratory is the result of a collaborative effort of the Zahra family workshop (Plate 9). The direct source of these *angeli adoranti* is Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John the Baptist* (Plate 10) who was inspired by Bernini's angels in the *Cappella del Sacramento* in St Peter's Basilica in Rome. At the time of Pietro Paolo Zahra, this was displayed for veneration in the Oratory of the Decollato in the Conventual Church of St John.[26] It was thus easy to access, study, and copy. Pietro Paolo Zahra's angels differ from Ferri's in their technique, since one is executed in silver and gilt-copper while the other is carved from Maltese limestone, but they also differ in their disposition (Fig. 3.23 & Fig. 3.24). Ferri's angels are delicate and graceful while Pietro Paolo Zahra's renditions are more monumental and burly. The most noticeable difference is the treatment of the drapery folds, whereas Ferri chose to depict fluttering, agitated folds,[27] Pietro Paolo Zahra's drapery style is broad and more reminiscent of Bernini's treatment of drapery in works such as the *St*

---

[22] This altar reredos is attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra on the basis of stylistic analysis. See Meli (2017), 215.

[23] NAV, R87, Notary Marc'Antonio Brancati, Volume 38, 1728-1729, f.25v-27v. See also Meli (2017), 222-226.

[24] NAV, R87, Notary Marc'Antonio Brancati, Volume 38, 1728-1729, f.25v-27v. See also Meli (2017), 222-226.

[25] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 7, 1730-1731, ff. 684-685v. Published in Debono (2010), 155. See also Meli (2017).

[26] Sciberras (2012), 157.

[27] Sciberras (2012), 156. For more on the reliquary by Ciro Ferri, see Sciberras (2012), 152-173.

Longinus. In spite of these differences, the basic composition and gestures remain the same and the Berninesque sensation of pious theatricality is achieved in both works of art.

The *Cathedra Petri*[28] seems to have been one of the most influential sources for Pietro Paolo Zahra, not only in his appropriation of the *gloria* and *putti*,[29] but also for the use of figures and their postures. The angel positioned on the left side of the altar reredos adorning the painting of St Catherine in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. 3.26) seems to take on the same posture in mirror image as one of Bernini's angels in the *Cathedra Petri* (Fig. 3.25). Both of the angels convey an aura of astonishment at the scene they are witnessing, completing the theatrical stage of the Baroque. While Bernini's angel forms part of an entire host of angels, Pietro Paolo Zahra's angel is the counterpart of a similar angel on the other side of the altar painting. In this case, Pietro Paolo Zahra seems to have somewhat reworked the setting of the composition. In terms of quality, although very difficult to compare to Bernini's sublime design, Pietro Paolo Zahra's efforts resulted in an adequately proportioned figure swathed with his usual broad and broken drapery folds.

The oeuvre of Pietro Paolo Zahra's close collaborators, the Fabri, also encompasses examples of the utilisation of *angeli adoranti*. The Berninesque imprint is inevitably absorbed by the Fabri family, especially when considering that they were working closely with Pietro Paolo Zahra.[30] This is evident in their use of *angeli adoranti* in the altar of the Virgin of Damascus in the Greek rite church of the Virgin of Damascus in Birgu, now part of St Joseph's Oratory (Plate 11). Although this node of Maltese Late Baroque does not survive in its original context, the altar reredos dates to the eighteenth century and various members of the Fabri family

---

[28] For the *Cathedra Petri* and its significant iconography, see Lavin (2005).

[29] The use of the *gloria* and *putti* in Maltese Late Baroque sculpture is analysed *infra*.

[30] Their association with Pietro Paolo Zahra is evident from their teamwork in commissions such as the one for the sculpting of the altar of the Pietà in the parish church of the Virgin of Graces in Żabbar. In 1731, Pietro Paolo Zahra designed the altar reredos which was executed by Francesco Fabri. Unfortunately, the altar reredos does not survive to this day but the contract for its commission describes the design in detail: '...*quale Altare cosi intagliato dev'essere fornito con due figure, una per parte, e coll'effigie del Padre Eterna, e con dieci Cherubini, ed altri ornamenti v'esistono in detto disegno...*' It is not specified who the two figures on either side of the altar should portray but there is a probability that these were *angeli adoranti* or saints, possibly St John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene.

Fig. 3.27 Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra, Main altar, church of St Francis de Paule, Qormi. Detail.

Fig. 3.28 Attributed to the Fabri family, Main altar, church of the Assumption, Safi. Detail.

were involved in the production of the chapel.[31] The *angeli adoranti* owe their conception to Bernini but this is where the comparison ceases. The quality is not of a high standard, and it is completely marred by the layers of paint which have been applied to it over the years. A much more proficient use of *angeli adoranti* can be observed in the church of St Bartholomew in Żurrieq (Plate 12). The works are attributed to the Fabri family on grounds of stylistic analysis, particularly the facial typologies used.[32] The *angeli adoranti* in the church of St Bartholomew, executed in the Berninesque tradition, are placed gracefully on either side of the altar painting and gesticulate appropriately towards the painting. The rest of the church's decoration, probably also executed by the Fabri family, illustrates the moving away from the heavier forms of the Late Baroque into a more delicate light-hearted Barocchetto style.

---

[31] On 17 February 1743, Francesco Fabri was commissioned by Marches Gio Pio de Piro to rebuild the altar. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1744, ff. 283-284v. Sometime later, on 10 July 1743, the same patron commissioned Giacomo Fabri to paint the entire chapel. NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1744, ff. 483v-484v.

[32] The Fabri family produced works of all degrees of quality, particularly because it was made up of several individuals with different capabilities.

Several other eighteenth-century altar reredoses in Malta, which are as yet of an uncertain attribution but which are Berninesque in their *concetto*, display *angeli adoranti*. The now destroyed altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory originally in the transept of the parish church of St Andrew in Luqa, known from a pre-WWII photograph (Plate 13), was a monumental undertaking. It incorporated *angeli adoranti* of the Berninesque tradition on either side of the altar painting and several other figures around it and in the apsidal cap. There are affinities with the oeuvre of Pietro Paolo Zahra and the Fabri and it could have easily been a joint commission. The main altar of the eighteenth-century church of St Francis de Paule in Qormi (Fig. 3.27), the main altar of the church of the Assumption in Safi (Fig. 3.28), and the main altar of the church of St John the Baptist in Għargħur (Plate 14) all showcase two Berninesque *angeli adoranti*. The latter two seem to be closer to the Fabri family in execution and design as it is similar in its overall composition and disposition, physiognomy, and treatment of the figures of the angels to the decoration on the altar of the Virgin of Light with St James in the church of St James in Żurrieq (Plate 15).

3.2.2 Standing angels

Angels were profusely utilised even in compositions outside altar reredoses. The Ponte Sant'Angelo angels, the result of Bernini's design executed by a group of talented sculptors active in Rome at the time, is one of the most devout expressions of the Passion of Christ.[33] The angels carrying the instruments of the Passion accompany the pilgrim on his journey to the Basilica of St Peter's, enabling him to contemplate on Christ's ultimate sacrifice.[34] Bernini also used angels as decorative

---

[33] On the angels of the Ponte S. Angelo, see Martinelli, (1996); Dickerson III, C. D., Anthony Sigel, & Ian Wardropper (eds.), (2013); Montagu, (1992); Mark S. Weil, 'The Angels of the Ponte Sant'Angelo: A Comparison of Bernini's Sculpture to the Work of Two Collaborators', *Art Journal*, xxx, 3 (1971); Mark S. Weil, *The History and Decoration of the Ponte S. Angelo*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University, 1974; Mark S. Weil, 'Bernini Drawings and Bozzetti for the Ponte Sant'Angelo: A New Look' in Ivan Gaskell & Henry Lie (eds.) 'Sketches in Clay for Projects by Gian Lorenzo Bernini: Theoretical, Technical, and Case Studies', *Harvard University Art Museums Bulletin*, vi, 3 (1999), 144-150; Wittkower, (1997). For the *concetto* of the angels of the Ponte S. Angelo, see Irving Lavin, 'Calculated Spontaneity: Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch', *Apollo*, cvii, 195 (1978), 404. In another publication, Lavin describes the Ponte S. Angelo angels as follows: 'the angels are epiphanic creatures, apparitions heaven-sent to convey to the present their bittersweet relics of the past. Delicately poised on white puffs, with graceful, lilting movements, they appear like momentarily congealed visions of the events they represent.' See Lavin (2005), 207-208.

[34] For an analysis and reimagining of the voyage of the pilgrim and the role of the Ponte S. Angelo angels within this scenario, see Wittkower (1997), 57.

supports for architecture as is the case in the execution of the Santa Maria del Popolo organ balconies, in this instance assisted by Antonio Raggi (Plate 16).[35]

The Ponte Sant'Angelo angels imparted the greatest effect on Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. Their first impact in Malta can be observed in Pietro Paolo Troisi's design for the Altar of Repose (Plate 17 and Plate 18).[36] Although designed early in the eighteenth century and soon after Pietro Paolo Troisi returned from Rome, the actual execution of the altar was only carried out in 1751-1752.[37] Pietro Paolo Troisi's design is heavily influenced by the Roman Baroque style and several Berninesque features are used, such as the blurring of demarcation lines between painting and architecture. The four angels standing on piers between columns holding instruments of the Passion of Christ are clearly inspired by the angels on the Ponte Sant'Angelo. It is very probable that Pietro Paolo Troisi had seen and studied these angels while in Rome, bringing back with him sketches and prints with the intention of using them in his later works back in Malta. The Altar of Repose was executed by Francesco Zahra in 1752,[38] much later than the peak of the spread of the Berninesque manner in Malta, meaning that the actual work of art could not have been responsible for such dissemination;[39] however, its design coincides with Pietro Paolo Zahra's and Pietro Paolo Troisi's collaboration. Only a while later in Pietro Paolo Zahra's career, he executed the angels holding the instrument of the Passion of Christ in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. Six angels, out of the original ten angels on the Ponte Sant'Angelo, were selected by Pietro Paolo Zahra to be emulated and placed between the bays on the side walls of the oratory. This oratory represents the epitome of the Berninesque impact in eighteenth-century Malta.

---

[35] On the angels beneath the organs in S. Maria del Popolo, see George Bauer and Linda Bauer, 'Bernini's Organ-Case for S. Maria del Popolo', *The Art Bulletin*, lxii, 1 (1980), 115-123.

[36] For more on the commission for the Altar of Repose, see Thake (1994), 72.

[37] Thake (1994), 71. See also Sciberras (2010), 87-93.

[38] See Sciberras (2010) for more on Francesco Zahra's execution of the Altar of Repose.

[39] The choice of Francesco Zahra as the artist to execute this design was not only the result of his popularity in eighteenth-century Malta but probably also because he was the son of Pietro Paolo. Nobody else would have been better equipped with the necessary knowledge for executing Pietro Paolo Troisi's design since Francesco had been exposed to this style from his earlier days in his father's workshop. It is also probable that had the Church decided to execute the altar at the time when the design was drawn up, Pietro Paolo Zahra would have been chosen to execute Pietro Paolo Troisi's work. Since both Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra were dead by 1752, the job naturally fell to Francesco.

Fig. 3.29 Antonio Raggi, Angel with the Superscription, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 3.30 Domenico Guidi, Angel with the Lance, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 3.31 Cosimo Fancelli, Angel with the Sudarium, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 3.32 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Angel with the Column, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

Fig. 3.33 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Angel with the Lance, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

Fig. 3.34 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Angel with the Sudarium, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

Fig. 3.35 Paolo Naldini, Angel with the Robe and Dice, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 3.36 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Angel with the Superscription, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 3.37 Ercole Ferrata, Angel with the Cross, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Fig. 3.38 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Angel with the Robe and Dice, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea

Fig. 3.39 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Angel with the Superscription, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

Fig. 3.40 After Pietro Paolo Zahra, Angel with the Cross, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. (original destroyed in WWII)

Fig. 3.41 Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Angeli adoranti*, Cappella del Sacramento, Basilica of St Peter, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 3.42 Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra, Christ in the garden of Gethsemane, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix (also known as tad-Duluri), Bormla. Detail.

In terms of execution, these angels fall far below the quality of Bernini's designs and the sculptural execution of his assistants and collaborators, but it is clear that they were chosen by the Maltese patrons and artists because they had an allegiance to Rome and its Baroque style, so heavily determined by Bernini. In this regard, it is not difficult to observe several parallelisms in the posture, composition, drapery folds, and gestures of the angels. On the other hand, the execution of the drapery, the treatment of facial expression, and the depiction of the figure beneath the voluminous drapery folds fall short of Bernini's graceful angels and clearly belong to a regional hand such as Pietro Paolo Zahra's (Fig. 3.29 – Fig. 3.40). The artist, however, managed to please his patrons since he received a gift for the satisfactory work which he had executed[40] and indeed, this Oratory is one of the most beautiful in Malta in its atmosphere of devotion and contemplation on Christ's ultimate sacrifice (Plate 9).

---

[40] Pietro Paolo Zahra received the substantial sum of 40 scudi as a gift for his work in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 11, 1734-1735, ff. 764-764v.

The Berninesque tradition spread to other typologies of works of art. Four groups of figures decorate the side walls of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, also known as the Oratory of the Virgin of Sorrows, in Bormla, which saw the involvement of both the Zahra and Fabri family.[41] One of them represents the scene of Christ in the garden of Gethsemane being attended to by an angel (Plate 19). The angel, although stocky in its build, is Berninesque in the treatment of its drapery, feathered wings, and wavy hair. His sweet disposition towards Christ is reminiscent of the facial expression of the angel in the Ecstasy of St Theresa. Although on a completely different level in terms of quality of execution, there is a clear effort on the Maltese *scalpellini*'s part to emulate Bernini's pious temperament. The greatest analogy in Bernini's oeuvre for this angel in Bormla's Oratory is the right-hand side angel in the *Cappella del Sacramento*, particularly in its pose and tilt of the head (Fig. 3.41 & Fig. 3.42).

3.2.3 The *gloria*

Putti feature in the majority of ecclesiastical Baroque sculpture. In Baroque sculpture, *putti* increase the charm and devotion of a sculptural group or relief through their displayed emotional state and *affetti*, and their small size makes them very adaptable to fill and balance a well-thought-out composition. *Putti* were used abundantly by Bernini and his contemporaries.[42] Perhaps their most profuse use by Bernini can be observed in the *Cathedra Petri* (Plate 20), an explosion of golden rays, clouds, angels, and *putti*, placed strategically in the eastern apse of St Peter's Basilica to be framed from the west end by the *Baldacchino*. More playful *putti* are designed by Bernini, and executed by Antonio Raggi, in the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale (Plate 21). Additionally, the *gloria*, which could be considered the quintessential element of Baroque altar reredoses, features in many prominent works of art or prints which would have been available to Maltese *scalpellini*, among them Bernini's *Cathedra Petri*, Cafà's Santa Maria in Campitelli *gloria* in

---

[41] On 22 September 1734, Giacomo Bianco received 70 scudi for his part in the construction of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Bormla. NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 17, 1734-1735, ff. 31v-32. On 15 March 1738, Gerolamo Fabri was commissioned sculptural work in the Oratory. NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 20, 1737-1738, ff. 732v-734.

[42] For more on the study of the use of *putti* by Baroque masters, see Stefano Pierguidi, '*Putti*: The Birth of a Genre', in Andrea Bacchi and Anna Coliva (eds), *Bernini*, Milano, Officina Libraria, 2017, 54-73.

Rome (Plate 22),[43] and Giovanni Giardini's *gloria* behind Giuseppe Mazzuoli's *Baptism of Christ* in the Conventual Church of St John.[44] The *gloria* is often accompanied with clouds and cherub heads, fitting elements for a heavenly theme.

These elements were translated into the Maltese visual culture of the eighteenth century. The *gloria* is incessantly used in Maltese Late Baroque sculpted altar reredoses, usually placed in their upper part as a backdrop for figures such as the Eternal Father, *angeli adoranti*, and *putti* (Fig. 3.43 – Fig. 3.49). *Putti* are used consistently by Maltese *scalpellini*, many times accompanied by a *gloria*, such as in the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the parish church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin in Rabat (Plate 23).[45] They are also used to support different elements of a composition; a picture frame such as in the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the Żebbuġ parish church (Plate 24) or in the side paintings in the church of the Porto Salvo in Ħamrun (Plate 25); the Eternal Father such as in the altar dedicated to the Pentecost in the Qrendi parish church (Plate 26); festoons such as in the altar of St Paul the Hermit in the Balzan parish church (Plate 27); or cartouches and clouds such as in the altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea (Plate 28). They are sometimes depicted on their own to decorate holy water or baptismal fonts, such as in the example from the sacristy of the church of St Margaret in Bormla (Plate 29). They also take the place of full-fledged *angeli adoranti* flanking a painting, such as in the side paintings of the church of the Virgin of Divine Providence in Siġġiewi (Plate 30). The use of cherub heads is also very widespread in the Berninesque impacted altar reredoses of eighteenth-century Malta. They are accompanied with a gilded *gloria* in the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Valletta (Plate 31) and are used by the artist to balance the composition as well as add a dose of theatricality.

---

[43] On Bernini's *Cathedra Petri*, see Martinelli (1996) and Lavin (2005); on Cafà's Campitelli *gloria*, see Sciberras (2012).

[44] On Giuseppe Mazzuoli's *Baptism of Christ* and Giovanni Giardini's *gloria*, see Sciberras (2012).

[45] For more on the Dominican church and priory, see Conrad Thake, 'The Dominican church and priory in Rabat', *Treasures of Malta*, ii, 1 (Christmas 1995), 16-21.

Fig. 3.43 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Cathedra Petri, St Peter's Basilica, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 3.44 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 3.45 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Theresa of Avila, Parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked, Valletta. Detail.

Fig. 3.46 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Annunciation, Parish church of St Helen, Birkirkara. Detail.

Fig. 3.47 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Mount Carmel, Parish church of St Helen, Birkirkara. Detail.

Fig. 3.48 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of the Girdle, Parish church of the Assumption, Qrendi. Detail.

Fig. 3.49 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Parish church of St Paul, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 3.50 Melchiorre Cafà, *Martyr Saint*, MUŻA, Valletta.

Fig. 3.51 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 3.52 Melchiorre Cafà, *St Catherine of Siena*, church of S. Caterina a Magnanapoli, Rome.

Fig. 3.53 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Mary Magdalene, church of St Mary Magdalene, Valletta. Detail.

3.2.4 Saints and allegories

Other figures, such as the Eternal Father and saints, are included in the design of altar reredoses. Inspiration for saints could have been found in Bernini's various examples such as the *St Bibiana* (Plate 32), the *St Longinus* (Plate 33), and the *St Mary Magdalene* and the *St Jerome*. Inspiration for Maltese *scalpellini* could have been found even nearer to home in the two *modelli* of martyr saints by Melchiorre Cafà.[46] The influence of these two *modelli* can be observed in the pose and the treatment of the drapery folds in the statues flanking the altar of the Virgin of Charity in the Żebbuġ parish church (Fig. 3.50 & Fig. 3.51). There are also stylistic affinities with the sculpted saints in the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament.[47] Cafà's influence on Maltese *scalpellini* also extends to knowledge of his Roman works, as there are also stylistic similarities between a sculpted saint in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta and Cafà's St Catherine of Siena in the church of S. Caterina a Magnanapoli in Rome (Fig. 3.52 & Fig. 3.53).

A lasting impact was left on the production of sculpted saints by Cafà's two works sent from Rome for Maltese churches, the *St Paul* (Fig. 3.58) at the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked, Valletta and the *Virgin of the Rosary* (Fig. 3.62) at the church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin, Rabat. The majority of sculptural depictions of St Paul in Malta in the eighteenth-century adopt the same posture and treatment of the drapery folds. Examples are the St Paul on the parvis of the Balzan parish church,[48] the St Paul included in one of the transept altars of the church of the Blessed Virgin and St Dominic in Rabat, and the St Paul in a street niche in Victory Street in Senglea (Fig. 3.59 – 3.61). The same could be said for sculptural depictions of the Virgin Mary under her many titles such as the Virgin of the Rosary at the Mosta parish church, the Virgin of Carmel in a street niche in Birgu, and the Virgin of the Rosary at the Żebbuġ parish church (Fig. 3.63 – Fig. 3.65). Two female saints in one of the transept altars of the church of the Blessed Virgin and St Dominic at Rabat have general affinities with two of Bernini's female saints. The *St Margaret* (Fig. 3.55) is similar in its swaying *contrapposto* pose to one of Bernini's landmark works of art, the *St Bibiana* (Fig. 3.54). Although the quality is

---

[46] On Cafà's martyr saints, see Sciberras (ed.) (2006).
[47] This was first suggested by Prof. Keith Sciberras.
[48] This was originally part of the altar reredos of the choir of the same church but was moved to the parvis when the choir was remodelled in the nineteenth century.

Fig. 3.54 Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Santa Bibiana*, Church of St Bibiana, Rome.

Fig, 3.55 *St Margaret*, Church of the Blessed Virgin and St Dominic, Rabat.

Fig. 3.56 Gianlorenzo Bernini, *St Mary Magdalene*, Siena Cathedral, Siena.

Fig. 3.57 *St Joanna*, Church of the Blessed Virgin and St Dominic, Rabat.

Fig. 3.58 Melchiorre Cafà, St Paul, Parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked, Valletta.
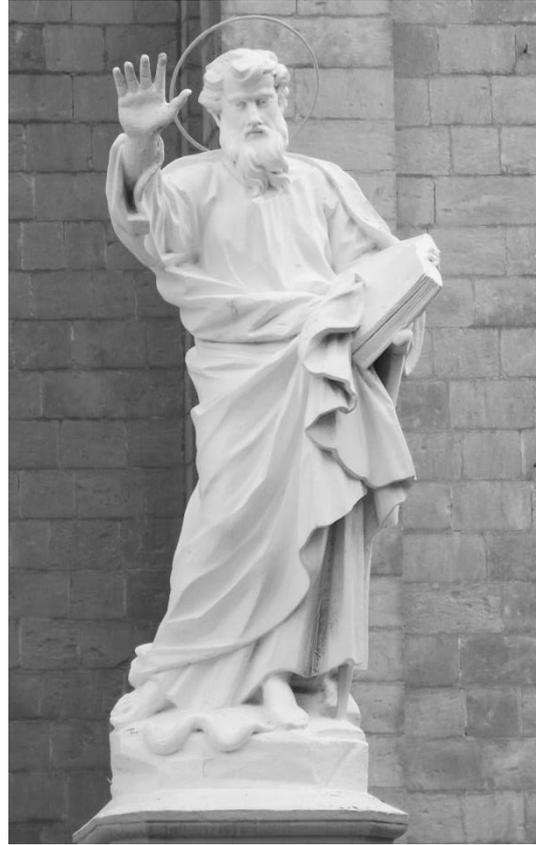
Fig. 3.59 Pietro Paolo Zahra, St Paul, parvis of the parish church of the Annunciation, Balzan.

Fig. 3.60 St Paul, Church of the Blessed Virgin and St Dominic, Rabat.

Fig. 3.61 Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra, St Paul, street niche in Victory Street, Senglea.

Fig. 3.62 Melchiorre Cafà, Virgin of the Rosary, Dominican Priory, Rabat.

Fig. 3.63 Virgin of the Rosary, parish church of the Assumption, Mosta.

Fig. 3.64 Virgin of Carmel, street niche in Birgu.

Fig. 3.65 Virgin of the Rosary, parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ.

Fig. 3.66 Andrea Pozzo, altar of St Ignatius of Loyola, church of Il Gesù, Rome.

Fig. 3.67 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption, Qrendi.

incomparable, the Maltese example still retains the spirit of Bernini's enlightened and beatific saint. There are also similarities in their sweet disposition and hand gestures. Drapery folds convey the heavenly emotions of the saints, although in the Maltese example they are broader and planar. The counterpart to the *St Margaret*, the *St Joanna* (Fig. 3.57) fails to capture Bernini's anguished state of the *Mary Magdalene* (Fig. 3.56) and seems to be more emotionally composed. The similarity in this case resides only in the gesture of the hands clasped in prayer. The drapery in Bernini's case is a clear portrayal of the interior anguish of its wearer while the drapery in the Maltese example is much calmer and generic.

Examples in Bernini's oeuvre for a sculpted Eternal Father are scarce. Cafà's designs seem to continue to dominate in this sector of Late Baroque Maltese

sculpture. His design for the chapel in S. Agostino, in which his sculpture of the Charity of St Thomas of Villanova is situated, includes a sculpted Eternal Father in a *gloria* in the broken pediment. These Roman sculptures find their counterparts in Malta. The motif of the Eternal Father as the central source of a broken pediment can be seen in the altar reredos of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Plate 34), the altar of the Annunciation (Plate 35) and the altar of the Assumption (Plate 42) in the parish church of St Helen in Birkirkara, and the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the Żebbuġ parish church (Plate 24). Another sculptural prototype for the Eternal Father is Andrea Pozzo's solution for the altar of St Ignatius of Loyola in the Roman church of Il Gesù. Pozzo's composition from the St Ignatius altar was reproduced in the altar dedicated to the Pentecost in the Qrendi parish church (Fig. 3.66 & Fig. 3.67).

3.3 The dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in Malta through treatises and prints

The dissemination of treatises and publications of prints all over Europe enabled regional artists and craftsmen, among them Maltese sculptors, who had never set foot in Rome to acquaint and familiarise themselves with the Berninesque style.[49] This printed material thus served its purpose of broadcasting the Roman Baroque style and papal propaganda and patronage; in the meantime, it sparked interest in local patrons and regional *scalpellini* who must have regarded this printed material as an opportunity to exploit new sources for their own work commissioned by the local church and nobility.[50] Fuelled by the Order of St John's

---

[49] Giorgio Vasari in the *Life of Marcantonio* states that printmakers have '*con loro fatiche giovato al mondo, e mandato in luce molte storie ed opera di maestri eccellenti, e dato commodità di vedere le diverse maniere de' pittori e coloro che non possono andare in quei luoghi dove sono l'opere principali…*' Michael Bury, 'The Taste for Prints in Italy to c. 1600', *Print Quarterly*, ii 1 (March 1985), 12-26: 14.

[50] In Sicily, Marco Rosario Nobile states that '*il possesso di modelli aggiornati era, per gli architetti come per le botteghe artigiane, una esigenza continua*'. Marco Rosario Nobile, 'Ragioni e Genesi delle Bibliotheche dell'Architetto in Sicilia', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 11-13: 12. This is also confirmed by Erik H. Neil in the same publication who confirms that, like many Maltese artists and master masons designing secular buildings, churches, and altar reredoses, 'the greatest number of architects active in Sicily never had significant experience off the island. For them, books, prints, and drawings were the means for keeping up with trends and developments in the field.' Erik H. Neil, 'Architects as Writers, Architects as Readers in Early Modern Sicily', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 14-23: 21.

desire to emulate Rome in its own propaganda and artistic commissions and accompanied by the subsequent travel of artists and patrons,[51] the dissemination of this printed material clearly constituted one of the most effective ways in which the Berninesque tradition came to be manifested in Maltese parish and countryside churches.[52]

Within this context, Andrea Pozzo's *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*[53] published in Rome in 1693 and Domenico de' Rossi's *Studio d'Architettura Civile*[54] published in Rome between 1702 and 1721 impacted the execution of regional sculpture.[55] Other de' Rossi publications were also influential, including the 1684 *Insignium Rome Templorum Prospectus Exteriores Interioresque*[56] which was published in two volumes by Giovanni Giacomo de' Rossi, and most importantly, *Disegni di vari altari e cappelle nelle chiese di Roma*[57] published in 1713 by Domenico de' Rossi which added some prints to the first edition published by the father.[58] Both continued to disseminate the Roman Baroque style to the rest of the international artistic community.[59]

---

[51] Publishers of prints in Rome were not only commissioned by the Church and the nobility but they also targeted visitors, pilgrims, and tourists. Eckhard Leuschner, 'The Papal Printing Privilege', *Print Quarterly*, xv, 4 (December 1998), 359-370: 360.

[52] Anthony Griffiths states that 'underlying all distribution was the movement of people which established the basic requirements of trust and credit…fragments of evidence constantly remind us that people moved far more often than we might expect'. Anthony Griffiths, *The Print Before Photography: An Introduction to European Printmaking 1550-1820*, The British Museum, London, 2016, 286.

[53] Andrea Pozzo, *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, Rome, 1693.

[54] Domenico de' Rossi, *Studio d'architettura civile sopra gli ornamenti di porte e finestre tatti da alcune fabbriche insigni di Roma con le misure piante modini, e profili. Opera de piu celebri architetti de nostri tempi*, Rome, 1702; *Studio d'architettura civile sopra varj ornamenti di cappelle, e diversi sepolcri tratti da più chiese di Roma colle loro facciate, fianchi, piante, e misure. Opera de' più celebri architetti de' nostri tempi*, Rome, 1711; *Studio d'architettura civili sopra varie chiese, cappelle di Roma, e palazzo di Caprarola, et altre fabriche con le loro facciate, spaccati, piante, e misure. Opera de' piu celebri architetti de' nostri tempi*, Rome, 1721.

[55] In the prologue of his edited book, Antinori states: '*L'offerta di questo tipo di stampe, che diversamente dale vedute fornivano del soggetto dati metrici esatti, si rivolgeva in Italia e in Europa non più soltanto agli ammiratori dei fasti del Cattolicesimo o agli aristocratici nostalgici del proprio grand tour, ma anche a un ben più vasto pubblico di operatori dell'architettura: in primo luogo studenti, cultori e professionisti della disciplina a ogni livello, e poi maestri di scalpello, artisti della decorazione a stucco a apparatori.*' Aloisio Antinori, 'Premessa', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 7-8: 7.

[56] Giovanni Giacomo de' Rossi, *Insignium Romæ templorum prospectus exteriores interioresque: a celebrioribus architectis inventi: nunc tandem suis cum plantis ac mensuris*, Rome, 1684.

[57] Giovanni Giacomo de' Rossi, *Disegni di vari altari e cappelle nelle chiese di Roma con le loro facciate fianchi piante e misure de piu celebri architetti*, Rome, 1713.

[58] The significance of de' Rossi's *Disegni di vari altar e cappelle* and *Insignium Romae Templorum* is highlighted by Domenica Sutera: '*Queste pubblicazioni indubbiamente assolvevano una reale*

Emulation of Rome was not exclusive to the Maltese Islands or the Order of St John; it is clear that Europe looked up at the Eternal City for guidance and inspiration. Printed sources, especially important publications such as De' Rossi's *Studio d'Architettura Civile*, also served as authorities of taste and moulded the good taste of several political figures, the nobility, artists and architects, and any cultured person.[60] Although travel of artists and patrons contributed greatly to the dissemination of influence from Rome to regional centres, the international significance of printed material cannot be understated.[61] The dissemination of printed material served many purposes: to get acquainted with works of art and architecture before an artist or a patron travelled; as a souvenir of sorts after they travelled to a particular place; and most importantly, to travel without the need to physically move.[62] Printed material also served as a re-activation of memory for artists who had spent some time in Rome but returned to their country of origin never to return to the Eternal City ever again.[63]

---

funzione di aggiornamento per gli architetti siciliani del tempo, per la progettazione di edifici religiosi e per la riconfigurazione interna di chiese e oratori (altari, cappelle, sepolcri e tabernacoli).' Domenica Sutera, 'Teoria e Architettura nell'Italia d'Età Barocca', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 89-135: 91.

[59] Added to these publications, other books of prints such as Giovanni Giardini's *Disegni Diversi* (*Disegni diversi inventati e delineati da Giovanni Giardini da Forlí, argentiere del Palazzo Apostolico, e fonditore della Reu-Camera: intagliati in Roma*, Rome, 1714) and Filippo Bonanni's *Numismata Pontificum Romanorum* (*Numismata pontificum romanorum quae a tempore Martini V. usque ad annum M.DC.XCIX: vel authoritate publica, vel privato genio in lucem prodiere, explicata, ac multiplici eruditione sacra, & prophana illustrata*, Rome, 1699) continued to disperse the new style. Prints of works of art in progress commissioned by proud patrons with the intention of political propaganda also added to this dissemination of the Berninesque style.

[60] This is divulged upon by Rodríguez Ruiz (2012), 115. He continues to discuss the influence of the disseminated prints: '…*le stampe potevano servire all'architetto, all'artista o al cultore della disciplina per avere presenti, come ricordi disegnati pronti per la giusta occasione, edifice e ornate di luoghi lontani d aprendere a modello per affinare il gustor o per creare invenzione e progett senza bisogno di viaggiare e prendere appunti dal vero.'* Rodríguez Ruiz (2012), 117.

[61] Christine Salge, 'The reception of the De Rossi books in eighteenth-century Germany and Austria', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 165-183: 169.

[62] Delfín Rodríguez Ruiz, 'Lo *Studio d'Architettura Civile* di Domenico de Rossi e la sua influenza in Spagna', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 115-141: 115: '…*cioè per conoscere prima di viaggare o per ricordare dopo il viaggio, ma anche per viaggiare senza muoversi*'; 116: '…*erano cioè sopratutto utili per le* invenzione *di quanti non avrebbero mai compiuto un viaggio a Roma…*'

[63] Olin states that the printed material were not simply sources for a particular German-born artist active in Sweden, Nicodemus Tessin the Younger, but it served as 'a compensation for the crippling absence from the Eternal City.' Martin Olin, 'Nicodemus Tessin the Younger and the De Rossi books: a vision of Roman architecture in eighteenth-century Sweden', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio*

Maltese artists who did not visit Rome, such as members of the Zahra and Fabri families in Malta and countless others on the Continent, must have welcomed these prints with open arms for the Roman Baroque examples they provided, whether they served for rigorous study or simply for appropriating themes, figures, and motifs.[64] The resulting works of art, whether architecture or sculpture or a combination of the two disciplines, gives the impression that the artist had been to Rome, when in fact he had travelled virtually through printed material.[65] It is in this manner that the consistent use of printed material in Malta especially by local *scalpellini* and master masons can be observed, especially when observing the repetitions in the design of Maltese Late Baroque designs for altar reredoses.[66] The utilisation of such prints was also available to regional more provincial artisans and craftsmen who probably only possessed grassroots knowledge of the Roman Baroque and its major protagonists. This situation is paralleled in other regional sculptural centres.[67]

In certain regional centres of sculptural production, such as Germany, engravings were not only brought over from Italy as reference material but there also was a reproduction trade of these engravings, very often in smaller size which

d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 185-211: 185.

[64] Rodríguez Ruiz states: '*E non è difficile immaginare un architetto come Ventura Rodríguez (e molti altri che come lui non visitarono mai Roma) circondato da decine di tavole sulla Roma barocca – da Bernini, Pietro da Cortona e Borromini a Carlo Fontana o Rainaldi – per dar forma ai progetti avvalendosi della propria cultura visiva, ma anche di uno stuio rigoroso dei modelli condotto grazie a quelle rappresentazioni architettoniche*'. Rodríguez Ruiz (2012), 117.

[65] This is also apparent in other regional centres. Rodríguez Ruiz states that '...*egli fa riferimento a chiese, baldacchini e altari romani con tale sicurezza che sembra che li abbia visti direttamente...*' Rodríguez Ruiz (2012), 118.

[66] Rodríguez Ruiz states: '*E quei modelli furono poi usati, come si è visto, con un'assiduità quasi routinaria e canonical da artisti e architetti spagnoli o italiani attivi in Spagna, specialmente nella prima metà del secolo e fino agli anni sessanta inoltrati...*' Rodríguez Ruiz gives a valid example of this influence, citing Bernini's Cappella Alaleoni in SS. Domenico e Sisto (reproduced in *Disegni di vari Altari e Cappelle*) as the model for the major altar reredos of the church of the Mercedarias de la Purísima Concepción di Madrid, designed and executed by Diego Martínez de Arce. Rodríguez Ruiz (2012), 125.

[67] Rodríguez Ruiz states: '*Non fu rare che anche i maestri minori... potessero avere accesso a quelle immagini, sia in occasione di discussioni o relazioni su determinati progetti o di consulenze e interventi nelle fabbriche, sia attraverso i suggerimenti di colleghi più aggornati.*' Rodríguez Ruiz (2012), 126. The same happened in eighteenth-century Malta, with Pietro Paolo Troisi's knowledge of Roman Baroque sculpture being passed on to Pietro Paolo Zahra, a more regional, yet still important, scalpellino and *architetto*.

Fig. 3.70 Pietro Paolo Zahra, *Angel with the Column*, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

Fig. 3.69 Pietro Paolo Troisi, Design for the Altar of Repose, Mdina Cathedral Museum. Detail.

Fig. 3.68 After Antonio Raggi, *Angel with the Column*, Prints published in Filippo Bonanni, *Numismata Pontificum Romanorum*, 1699.

was considered more practical for artists and craftsmen.[68] It was also cheaper to acquire and it presented to the German-speaking craftsmen the opportunity to acquaint themselves with the architecture and sculpture of Bernini, Borromini, and other significant figures.[69] Although there is no evidence of reproduction of such engravings in Malta, the printed material which was available to Maltese artists through travel and distribution of prints served the same end purpose.

The stylistic knowledge of a designer distinguished him from a mason;[70] however in Malta's scenario, as exemplified in Chapter 1, the builder and the designer were sometimes the same person. Although certain individuals' work did not require intellectual activity or design effort of any kind since they mainly carried out manual labour, many other commissions record *scalpellini* who had never received official architectural or sculptural training being heavily involved in designing altar reredoses and even entire churches. The tendency for builders with no formal education to learn onsite was also common on the Continent.[71] In this scenario, printed sources proved to be highly indispensable to augment the builders' and the *scalpellini*'s grassroots knowledge of Roman Baroque trends.[72]

These volumes were also circulated in Malta. For example, Andrea Pozzo's second volume of *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* is specifically mentioned in the inventory of the possessions of Alessio Erardi, who had travelled to Rome for a study period;[73] this makes it clear that these internationally relevant publications were present in Malta, probably brought back to Malta in travellers' luggage from Rome with *scalpellini* continuously referring to it in their execution of works of art in Maltese churches. The notary also lists '*un altro libro per traverso, con la stampa delle sette chiese di Roma*',[74] an inclusion which continues to support the idea that Maltese artists had access to this printed material (Fig. 3.72). Another

---

[68] Salge focuses on the reproduction engraving of the first volume of de' Rossi's *Studio d'Architettura Civile* as reproduced by Johann Ulrich Kraus in 1716. Salge (2012), 165-166.

[69] Salge (2012), 168.

[70] Giuffrè (2007), 224.

[71] This was common in Sicily as confirmed by Maria Giuffrè: 'in south-eastern Sicily, notably, after the earthquake of 1693, throughout the years of the late Baroque, designers with a craft background assumed a central role'. Giuffrè (2007), 224.

[72] Bury (1985) quotes Giorgio Vasari when he states that the availability of prints was crucial to serve as models for lesser artists: '*acciò i poveri pittori che non hanno molto disegno, se non potessero ne' loro bisogni servire*'. Bury (1985), 19, 19 n. 43.

[73] NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 988-989. This is discussed *supra* in Chapter 1.

[74] NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 988.

significant inventory belongs to Lorenzo Gafà, Melchiorre Cafà's brother, who died in 1703. Several printed sources are listed amongst his possessions, including '*undeci libri d'architettura in folio, altri sei più piccoli, altri venti sette libri più piccoli del sud[ett]o, venti libri più piccolo,… una quantità di carte di disegni posti sotto una tavola con alcuni libri d'architettura*' (Fig. 3.71).[75]

There are other examples. A number of treatises are listed in an inventory of books once belonging to Francisco Joaquín Fernández de Portocarrero y Mendoza.[76] One of his greatest contributions was the donation of his library to the Order of St John. Amongst this list of publications, there are listed Giovanni Amico's *L'Architetto Prattico*,[77] Andrea Palladio's *Quattro Libri dell'Architettura*,[78] Alberti's *De re aedificatoria*,[79] Giovanni Giardini's *Disegni Diversi*,[80] and Filippo Bonanni's *Templorum Vaticanum*,[81] amongst other significant publications.[82] The latter publication must have been in circulation in Malta before this inventory was drawn up since it was most probably one of the sources for Pietro Paolo Zahra's knowledge of Bernini's design of the angels on the Ponte S. Angelo.[83] The print showing angels holding back drapery to reveal text, which was discovered being used a stiffener for a volume's parchment cover at the Notarial Archives and which is discussed in Chapter I, was also commissioned by Portocarrero and might have once formed part of his collection.

There are other treatises in the National Library of Malta testifying to this circulation of publications in Malta. These are publications which would have entered the collection of the archives of the Order of St John through the patronage

---

[75] National Archives of Malta (NAM), Magna Curia Castellania, Mdina, Reg. Bon. Volume 1 (1700-1715), f. 98.

[76] An important personality, Francisco Joaquin Fernández de Portocarrero y Mendoza was a Spanish cardinal who was also a member of the Order of St John and served as its ambassador in Rome.

[77] NLM, Library Manuscript 264, f. 12: '*Amico architetto prattico 2 tom. fol. Palermo 1726*'.

[78] NLM, Library Manuscript 264, f. 134: '*Palladio Andrea L'Architettura con note francese e volgare fol: to: 6 Vol. 3 Ven: 1740*'.

[79] NLM, Library Manuscript 264, f. 12: '*Reitratio in x Libri di architettura trad. dal Barbaro fol. Vinegia Marcolini 1556*'.

[80] NLM, Library Manuscript 264, f. 84: '*Giardini Disegni Diversi fol: Roma: 1714*'.

[81] NLM, Library Manuscript 264, f. 144: '*Bonanni Templorum Vaticanum fol: Rome 1715*'.

[82] NLM, Library Manuscript 264, f. 58: '*Guarini del misurare le Fabbriche 1674*'; f. 58: '*Bartoli del misurare le distanze 1614*'; f. 59: '*Taylor elementi di perspettiva da P. Jacquier*'; f. 61: '*Dictionaire de peinture et architecture Paris 1746*'; f. 71: '*Bottari Pitture e Sculture Sagre de Cimiteri di Roma fol. tom. 3 Rom. fig. 1737*'; f. 84: '*Basilica Vaticano Descriptio fol: Roma: 1646*'; f. 129: '*Roma antica e moderna 1727*'.

[83] This is discussed *supra* in this Chapter and in more detail *infra* in Chapter IV.

of Grand Masters and other members of the Order of St John throughout its occupation of Malta. Among many mathematical and military treatises, significant architectural treatises such as Sebastiano Serlio's *Sette Libri dell'Architettura* and Jacopo Vignola's *Regola delli Cinque Ordini d'Architettura* were amongst the most influential publications on Maltese architecture.[84] In terms of ecclesiastical architecture and sculpture, Giovanni Giacomo de' Rossi's *Il Nuovo Teatro delle Fabbriche et Edifici in Prospettiva di Roma Moderna* provided vistas of Rome's piazzas and church façades and, most importantly, it also contained two significant prints – the *Cathedra Petri* and the *Scala Regia*. The *Cathedra Petri* served as the model for every *gloria* executed in Malta while the triumphant angels blowing trumpets on the arch of the entrance to the Vatican appear in Domenico Guidi's Monument to Nicolas Cotoner in the Conventual Church of St John and in the Fabri's decoration above the portal of the Vilhena Palace in Mdina. The existence and availability of these publications in the National Library of Malta, including those extant to this date and those mentioned in Portocarrero's inventory, is further evidence of their influence on the local production of architecture and sculpture.
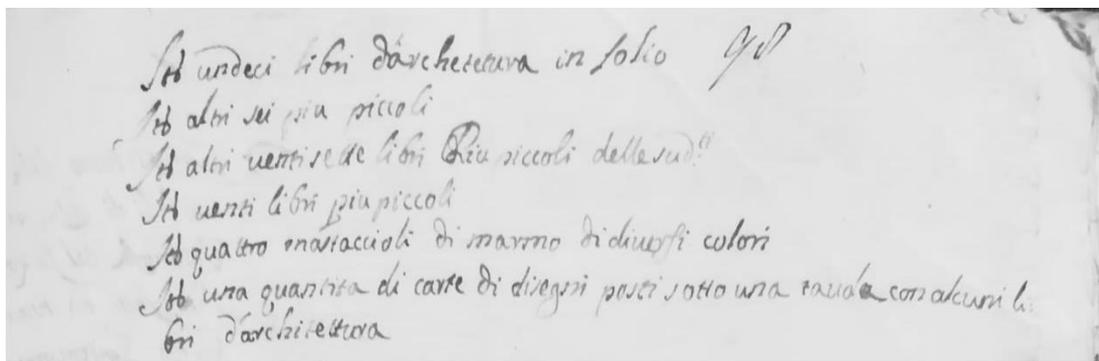
Fig. 3.71 National Archives of Malta, Lorenzo Gafa's will, Magna Curia Castellania, Mdina, Reg. Bon., Volume 1 (1700-1715), f. 98. Detail.

---

[84] For more information on the available and still extant military and architectural treatises in the National Library, see Lisa Galea, *The Architect's Library: Architectural Texts and Treatises from the Archives of the Order of St John*, published by author, Malta, 2016.

Vestigie dell'antichità di Roma, Tiuoli, Puz=
zuolo, ed altri luoghi libro per trauerso.
Un'altro Libro per trauerso con La stampa
delle sette Chiese di Roma, e Le figure
di Rafele d'Urbino impresse nella Log=
gia del Vaticano.
Libro di diuerse figure antiche lasciue.
Libro à trauerso d'alcune, è diuerse marine.
Un'altro Libro con stampa di diuerse Istorie
antiche.
La seconda parte del trattato di Prospectiue
in Lingua Francese.
Libro d'architettura di Sebastiano Serlio
bolognese.
Il tempio della uirtù, e dell'onore in Lode del
Ser.mo Prencipe Carafa duplicato.
Ragionamenti del Sig.r Caual.r Giorgio Uasari
Pittor, et Architetto.
Genealogia degli Dei di Giouanni Boccaccio.
Vite degl'Imperatori Romani
Iconologia, e descrizzione di diuerse Imagini
antiche di Cesare Ripa Perugino.

Fig. 3.72 Notarial Archives Valletta, Inventory of Alessio Erardi's possession drawn up after his death, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, R428, Volume 41, ff. 989v. Detail.

The circulation of prints and treatises was internationally wide. Significant publications are also mentioned in other regional centres, such as Germany, where De Rossi's publications, Pozzo's *Perspectiva*, and Giovanni Battista Faldi's work of Roman palaces are found in several architects' libraries.[85] In other fortunate instances, such as the case of the German-born Nicodemus Tessin the Younger in Sweden, quotes by artists championing the importance, usefulness, and intellectual aspect of prints and engravings have been recorded for posterity.[86] Mentions of printed material also abound in Sicily where several copies of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century treatises still exist in public and private libraries, attesting to their important didactic role.[87] Particularly popular were the treatises of Vitruvius and that of Serlio, both of which are mentioned in inventories in Sicily.[88] For example, Alessio Erardi's belongings also contained a copy of Serlio's treatise[89] and this record in the notarial acts opens up the possibility that other Maltese artists possessed similar reference libraries. Similar to Alessio Erardi's will, Giacomo Amato's will lists over three hundred books and it included editions of treatises by Vitruvius, Alberti, Leonardo, Vignola, Palladio, the *Vite* of Bellori, the *Perspectiva* of Andrea Pozzo, and prints by Domenico de' Rossi.[90] Publications by the latter two, Pozzo and de' Rossi, were widely disseminated in Sicily[91] and their influence determined the outcome of many church interiors and altar reredoses.[92] Examples

---

[85] Salge (2012), 169.

[86] Olin quotes a letter by Nicodemu Tessin the Younger recording his enthusiastic reaction that his monarch seemed to be interested in his vast collection of prints and engravings: '… turning over the leaves in my volumes of prints and engravings, where the various subjects provide a thousand topics for discourse…' Olin (2012), 187.

[87] Giuffrè (2007), 224.

[88] Giuffrè states that copies of Vitruvius are mentioned in inventories as early as 1484. She also quotes Manfred Tafuri's opinion that Serlio's treatise was the most influential monument of theory of its time and Fulvia Scaduto who has shown the impact which Serlio's treatise had on every part of Sicily from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. Giuffrè (2007), 224-225.

[89] '… *la seconda parte del trattato di Prospettive in lingua Francese; libro d'architettura di Sebastiano Serlio Bolognese...*' NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725, ff. 988-989.

[90] Giuffrè analyses Amato's will in Giuffrè (2007), 228-229. Alessio Erardi's will is analysed in more depth *supra* in Chapter 1.

[91] Their popularity is also confirmed by Stefano Piazza in his essay on the influence of Roman engravings on eighteenth-century architecture in Sicily. He states that their presence in Sicily is also attested to by their inclusion in inventories of private libraries. Stefano Piazza, 'L'influenza delle incisioni Romane nell'architettura Siciliana del Settecento', in Stefano Piazza (ed.), *Testo, immagine, luogo: La circulazione dei modelli a stampa nell'architettura di età moderna*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2013. Neil also confirms the popularity of Pozzo's *Perspectiva*, stating that 'there are several examples of altar designs pulled straight from the prints of Andrea Pozzo and not just in Jesuit institutions'. Neil (2007), 22.

[92] This is confirmed by Sutera when she states: 'La cupola "virtuale" nella chiesa di S. Marco ad Enna, i frontoni a spioventi curvi nei portal laterali e la terminazione a cipolla dei campanili nella

from Spain are the artists Tornando and Vicente Acero, who possessed treatises by Vitruvius, Serlio, Palladio, Vignola, and Pozzo.[93] Artists' access to printed material of this kind was further enhanced by their close connections to the clergy and nobility, which made up the greatest percentage of their patrons, who also were often in possession of well-stocked updated libraries.[94]

The number of surviving prints in Malta seems low when compared to their impact on local artists and craftsmen; this situation is not only found locally.[95] In fact, it has been suggested that the general low rate of their survival over the centuries is due to the fact that they were highly desirable as sources, and artists would have destroyed them as soon as they served their purpose to stop competitors from gaining an advantage.[96] This would explain the fact that many inventories list prints or books which have now been lost or misplaced. In spite of the fact that competitive artists might have not shared their sources, other artists would still have had access to the finished work of art inspired from a printed source. This effectively created a ripple effect of new style from one church to another.[97] This transmission of the style has also been recorded in notarial acts, in which patrons specify that the altar reredos which they were commissioning had to be similar to another altar reredos, either in the same church or a completely different one.

Although the recording of available books of prints and treatises is valuable information to determine which publications artists were looking at, the resulting works of art, in this case altar reredoses by Maltese *scalpellini*, are enough to strongly suggest that printed sources were one of the main means through which they kept up with trends and styles on the Continent. Late works by Bernini, such as the *Cathedra Petri*, the *Cappella del Sacramento*, and Ponte S. Angelo angels were the most influential in Malta; but not only, since it is apparent in the execution of regional sculpture that other artists were represented, such as Andrea Pozzo's Altar

chiesa madre di Castellammare del Golfo, la cappella del Crocifisso nella chiesa del Purgatorio a Ragusa, il portale al piano nobile della villa Palagonia a Bagheria, gli altari nelle chiese dei gesuiti di Catania e di Siracusa, sono solo alcuni esempi dell'influenza esercitata dal trattato di Pozzo sull'architettura siciliana del Settecento.' Sutera (2007), 93-94.

[93] Rodríguez Ruiz states that although the *Studio* by de' Rossi was not included in this inventory, they certainly had access to the publications as evidenced by its influence on their works. Rodríguez Ruiz (2012), 125-126.

[94] The same situation is observed in Sicily by Giuffrè. See Giuffrè (2007), 228.

[95] The very small number of surviving prints in Malta is discussed *supra* in Chapter 1.

[96] Giuffrè suggests that this is the case in Giuffrè (2007), 230.

[97] For more on the ripple effect and the use of buildings as models in Sicily, see Giuffrè (2007), 230.

of St Ignatius in the Gesù church and Melchiorre Cafà's *Ecstasy of St Catherine* in S. Caterina a Magnanapoli, the *gloria* in S. Maria in Campitelli, and the *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova* in S. Agostino. This is evident in the execution of the works of art for Maltese churches. An investigative analysis of altar reredoses produced in eighteenth-century Malta clearly illustrates how Maltese *scalpellini* were borrowing elements and motifs from available prints to augment their sculptural compositions. Many designs became a recurring theme in the oeuvre of these *scalpellini*, a good indication that they were received well by patrons and found considerable success within the community at large – a fact which is corroborated by the demand emanating from different localities for these sculptural works of art, both for parish and filial churches. Eighteenth-century altar reredoses by the Troisi, Zahra, and Fabri families are particularly indebted to these prints and from comparisons it is unimaginable that these *scalpellini*, many of whom had never set foot in Rome, would have composed their altar reredoses without these visual aids.

Ephemeral structures, built specifically for particular occasions such as the Holy Week, became an essential mode of displaying religious fervour in Baroque Rome.[98] The tradition of the Baroque *macchina* quickly became widespread and printed sources played an important role in the dissemination of their popularity. Their transition from ephemeral spectacles to permanent altars by Bernini, as clearly seen in the theatre of the *Ecstasy of St Theresa* in the Roman church of S. Maria in Vittoria, highly impacted the production of regional sculpture which picked up several elements, predominant amongst them, the *gloria*. Nonetheless, ephemeral structures with clear Roman Baroque influences were also commissioned in eighteenth-century Malta. Among them, Pietro Paolo Troisi's design for the Mdina Altar of Repose was probably the most significant for the development of ecclesiastical Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. Although Pietro Paolo Troisi had studied in Rome and inevitably observed and studied the works of High Baroque artists, several prints which showcased these ephemeral altars were available for reference. Pozzo's *Perspectiva* included prints of several ephemeral structures which could have been used as a reference. Pietro Paolo Troisi's other designs for ephemeral structures, including his designs for the triumphal arches of Grand

---

[98] Jennifer Montagu has an entire chapter dedicated to the discussion and analysis of ephemeral structures in Baroque Rome. See Montagu (1989), 173-197.

Master Zondadari and Grand Master Vilhena (Plate 42 and 43), are also the result of this Roman Baroque influence transmitted not only first-hand through Pietro Paolo Troisi's visit to Rome, but also via the impact of circulated printed material.[99]

Specific elements in the Altar of Repose, such as the figure of Religion which is perched at the apex of the ephemeral altar (Fig. G.159) and the angels holding the instruments of the Passion of Christ at the sides of the altar, owe their conception to Bernini and the dissemination of his High Baroque style by the *Berniniani*. The figure of Religion features in many prints, including in the print of the high altar of S. Agnese in Agone in de' Rossi's *Disegni di vari altari* (Fig. G.158), to which the Altar of Repose Religion is highly comparable in posture. The same figure of Religion, although this time more animated and caught in action, is repeated in Pozzo's Altar of St Ignatius in the Gesù church, published in the second volume of his *Perspectiva* (Fig. G.185). The personification of Religion appears also in Giardini's *Disegni diversi*, opposite the figure of Hope, as part of a design for a sanctuary lamp (Fig. G.164).[100] The same combination of personifications is replicated by Pietro Paolo Zahra in his design and execution of the altar of the Virgin of Charity in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. 3.73 – Fig. 3.76). The probability of Pietro Paolo Zahra possessing at least some of Giardini's prints is very high since even the top part of the altar, the *sopra quadro*, seems to be inspired by one of Giardini's designs (Fig. G.200 – Fig. G.202).[101]

---

[99] The triumphal arches of Grand Master Zondadari and Grand Master Vilhena are analysed in Conrad Thake, 'Architectural Scenography in 18th-Century Malta', S. Fiorini (ed.) *Proceedings of History Week*, The Malta Historical Society, 1996, 63-76.

[100] The *Disegni Diversi* by Giovanni Giardini was also available and popular in neighbouring Sicily. It is analysed in Fulvia Scaduto, 'Le Avventure della Decorazione', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 115-135.

[101] This was first noted in Meli (2017).

Fig. 3.73 *Disegni diversi inventati e delineati da Giovanni Giardini*, pl. 43, 1714. Detail.

Fig. 3.74 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ, 1736. Detail.

Fig. 3.75 *Disegni diversi inventati e delineati da Giovanni Giardini*, pl. 43, 1714. Detail.

Fig. 3.76 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ, 1736. Detail.

229

The angels holding the instruments of the passion of Christ appear in the Altar of Repose placed in between the outer columns of the ephemeral structure. Although the altar was executed in the mid-eighteenth century by Francesco Zahra, Pietro Paolo Troisi had designed it in 1727-1728, and it is to date the earliest reference to this typology of angels in Malta. Pietro Paolo Troisi chose three of Bernini's Ponte S. Angelo angels: the Angel with the Sudarium; the Angel with the Column; and the Angel with the Crown of Thorns. However, he also included a fourth angel for which a Berninesque typology is not present on the Ponte S. Angelo; an angel supporting a ladder. Pietro Paolo Troisi might have added this angel to the typology as his own personal preference, perhaps displaying his inventive powers. Pietro Paolo Troisi, considering his short period in Rome, could have easily been in possession of drawings or prints of the Ponte S. Angelo angels.

Pietro Paolo Troisi's collaboration with Pietro Paolo Zahra further disseminated this angel typology in Malta and its most profuse use can be found in the angels on the side walls of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea.[102] Commissioned in 1737, six angels of the eight original ones are represented by Pietro Paolo Zahra, but in this case there is no attempt at introducing a different angel or adapting the posture of the original ones. It is clear, from the striking similarities and in spite of the apparent lower quality, that Pietro Paolo Zahra was in possession of printed material which he used as his only source (Fig. G.43 – Fig. G.54).

When Pietro Paolo Troisi's Altar of Repose was finally constructed in 1751-1752, Francesco Zahra was entrusted with the direction of the works.[103] Pietro Paolo Zahra, Francesco's father, had died by this date and would have probably been the chosen artist to direct or execute the sculptural part of the altar had he still been alive. Francesco, an established artist and the son of a popular *scalpellino*, must have been the natural replacement. It is clear that in Francesco Zahra's execution and direction of the angels holding the instruments of the Passion of Christ, he was influenced by his father's execution in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix. Francesco excludes the Angel with the Column and Pietro Paolo Troisi's own invention, the angel with the ladder and instead introduced two angels, the

---

[102] See Catalogue Entry IV *infra*.
[103] See Sciberras (2010) for more on the Altar of Repose.

Angel with the Lance and the Angel with the Superscription, both of which are represented in the same manner in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix. The reason behind these changes is not clear; perhaps it was easier for Francesco's assistants to copy the angels from a three-dimensional example than from Pietro Paolo Troisi's design. Francesco might have also been in possession of his father's workshop sketches and *bozzetti*, which would have also made it easier for the artist to execute the work.

Printed material must have certainly also played an important role in the incorporation of *putti* in designs. Flanked *putti* supporting a *tondo* are a commonly used device in Maltese churches and oratories, with similar postures and expressions.[104] The *tondo* is often replaced by an inscription or a shell motif placed at the top of the altar painting (Fig. G.92).[105] It is also replaced by coats of arms, such as in the case of Algardi's Tomb of Pope Leo XI published by de' Rossi in *Studio d'architettura civile* (Fig. G.102), to which the *putti* in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix are comparable (Fig. G.111). More animated *putti* can be found on Bernini's Tomb of Pope Urban VIII, also published in de' Rossi, which influenced Maltese *scalpellini* (Fig. G.140 & Fig. G.142). Similar to the Cappella de Sylva in S. Isidoro in Rome (Fig. G.107), a lone *putto* upholds a *tondo* in the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. G.108).

Putti are also utilised by Maltese *scalpellini* to flank altar or side paintings. The use of this typology is akin to prints in de Rossi's *Studio d'architettura civile* which show *putti* flanking apertures (Fig. G.105) or altars (Fig. G.126). In the church of the Virgin of Providence in Siġġiewi, similar *putti* are placed on either side of the side paintings crowding the octagonal church. *Scalpellini* might have opted for *putti* for two different reasons: the first is that *putti* were more suited for smaller churches, especially when there was more than one painting frame to decorate; the second is that the expense would have been lesser for smaller figures rather than larger *angeli adoranti*. Indeed, there are cases in which the *putti* utilised

---

[104] Examples are the *putti* in the Oratory of the Crucifix (Fig. G80) and the *putti* in the Raimondi chapel in S. Pietro in Montorio in Rome (Fig. G79).

[105] See the altar of the Virgin of the Girdle in the parish church of the Transfiguration in Lija (Fig. G93) or the altar of St Anthony of Padova in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. G94) for examples.

seem to be larger and more robust than standard *putti* but still too small to qualify as angels. Examples of this typology in Malta include the titular altar in the church of the Immaculate Conception in Naxxar (Fig. G.127) and the titular altar in the church of St John the Baptist in Għargħur (Fig. G.36).

Putti upholding several attributes or objects are common in Malta's eighteenth-century visual culture. Bernini's Baldacchino includes two *putti* lifting up a crown (Fig. G.83) which is repeated many times in Maltese regional sculpture (Fig. G.94 – Fig. G.86). *Putti* bearing a crown are also shown in Bernini's design for the Tomb of Countess Matilda of Tuscany in St Peter's Basilica (Fig. G.118) while the same theme is repeated in Maltese sculpture.[106] A set of two *putti* simultaneously bearing a crown on the altar of the Crucifixion in the parish church of the Transfiguration in Lija (Fig. G..34) is particularly comparable to the *putti* on the high altar of S. Maria in Via Lata in Rome, published by de' Rossi in the third volume of *Studio d'architettura* (Fig. G.33).

Bernini's design for the Allaleona chapel in S. Domenico e Sisto in Rome included *putti* supporting a large cross (Fig. 3.79). The theme is appropriated by Pietro Paolo Zahra in the design of his *contrafacciata* for the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. 3.80). Other attributes borne by *putti* which seem to have been reproduced from prints include *putti* carrying books (Fig. G.114 & Fig. G.115) and others holding the palm of martyrdom (Fig. G.116 & Fig. G.117). *Putti* with festoons are used profusely by Maltese *scalpellini* and Bernini's designs, available to them through printed material, are effectively copied. The *putti* in the dome of the church of S. Andrea al Quirinale in Rome, designed by Bernini but executed by Antonio Raggi, are reproduced in the first few folios of the second volume of de' Rossi's *Studio d'architettura civile* (Fig. G.102). The same typology of *putti* with festoons is used in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. 3.78) and in the altar of St Anthony of Padova in the church of St Francis in Rabat (Fig. G.123).

---

[106] See the chapel of St Theresa of Avila in the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta (Fig. G119) and the altar of the Virgin of Carmel in the parish church of the Assumption in Qrendi (Fig. G121) as examples.

Fig. 3.77 *Studio d'architettura civile*, II, pl. 41, detail: Dome, S. Andrea al Quirinale, Rome, 1711.

Fig. 3.78 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Interior decoration, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea, 1716. Detail.

Fig. 3.79 *Disegni di vari altari e cappelle nelle chiese di Roma*, pl. 20, detail: Allaleona Chapel, S. Domenico e Sisto, Rome, 1713.

Fig. 3.80 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea, 1716. Detail.
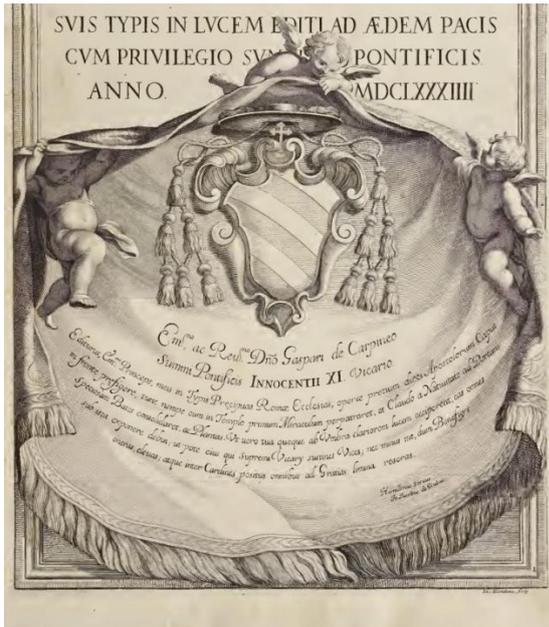
Fig. 3.81 *Insignium Romae templorum*, front folio, detail, 1684.

Fig. 3.82 Mattia Preti, Altar of the Annunciation, Church of the Annunciation, Sarria, Floriana, c. 1670s.

They are also used in the interior decoration of the church of St James in Valletta (Fig. G.104) but, since this decoration predated the publication of the engraving, Romano Carapecchia must have drawn from his personal knowledge of Rome, rather than from de' Rossi's prints.

Putti with festoons also feature prominently in Giovanni Giardini's *Disegni diversi* (Fig. G.148), which are comparable to examples in Maltese regional sculpture (Fig. G.149). The festoon is sometimes replaced with other objects such as a banner bearing words of praise towards God or a particular saint. This is the case with the *putti* on the titular altar of the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta (Fig. G.134 & Fig. G.135) which is comparable with a printed source in Pozzo's second volume of the *Perspectiva* (Fig. G.133). Another analogous example in Malta is the altar of the Virgin of Light in the church of St James in Żurrieq and the side walls decoration of the chapel of St Theresa of Avila in the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta.

Putti and drapery are also a common combination which can be observed both in Bernini's designs such as the Sala Ducale in the Vatican Palace (Fig. G.150) and in the front folio of Giovanni Giacomo de' Rossi's *Insignium Romae templorum* (Fig. 3.81). In Malta, Mattia Preti's design seems to have been the first to take inspiration from this composition, even before the publication of this print.

In the church of the Immaculate Conception (Ta' Sarria) in Floriana (Fig. 3.82), five *putti* surround the altar painting revealing the theatre of the Immaculate Conception by holding up the drapery which would have otherwise concealed it. The scheme is repeated in the provincial church of St Catherine in Qrendi (Fig. G.101).

The *putto* holding up the drapery above his head (Fig. G.152) seems to have taken hold in Maltese regional sculpture and appears in different designs of altar reredoses.[107] The popularity of this *putto* might have also stemmed from the print after Melchiorre Cafà's altar of the Charity of St Thomas of Villanova (Fig. G.204). The upper part of the print displaying two *putti* upholding an inscription is repeated in Pietro Paolo Zahra's altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat (Fig. G.204). Although the inscription is missing, the stark similarities in the poses and animation of the angels are undeniable.

Cherub heads are often used in place of *putti*, perhaps to mitigate the cost of the work of art or due to space restrictions. Several examples could be quoted from seventeenth-century prints including examples from de' Rossi (Fig. G.81) which is comparable to several uses of cherub heads amidst masses of clouds by Maltese *scalpellini*, including the example on the titular altar of the church of the Virgin of Mercy (Fig. G.82) and the altar of the Virgin of Carmel in the parish church of the Assumption in Qrendi (Fig. G.121), both in Qrendi. Cherub heads are also used in more rigid decorative schemes, such as in the case of the altar of St Elijah in the church of the Annunciation in Mdina (Fig. G.191), in which cherub heads are part of the decorative Baroque scrolls on the bases of the columns and pilasters. A very similar decorative scheme appears in the lower part of an altar reredos published by Pozzo (Fig. G.190).

In more impressive altar reredoses, sculpted angels are added to the composition. It is in this typology that the Berninesque manner seems to be the most pronounced in its impact on regional Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. This is

---

[107] There are several examples of this including the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. G153), the altar or the Holy Crucifix in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. G154), and the titular altar of the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta (Fig. G155).

Fig. 3.83 After Melchiorre Cafà, Altar of the Charity of St Thomas of Villanova, S. Agostino, Rome, 1660s. Detail.

Fig. 3.84 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Anthony of Padova, Church of St Mark, Rabat, 1719. Detail.

due, not only to the far-reaching influence of Bernini and the circulation of prints which served as sources for *scalpellini* who had never set foot in Rome, but also because *angeli adoranti* were included in one of the very first works by Pietro Paolo Troisi after his return from Rome. Pietro Paolo Zahra, the *scalpellino* who assisted Pietro Paolo Troisi in the execution of this altar reredos, successfully adopted the style and disseminated the Berninesque idiom in many parish, filial, and countryside churches of the Maltese Islands. Rivalry between, and even within, parishes helped the dissemination of the style and it was embraced by other *scalpellini* families, such as the Fabri.

Angels in theatrical action of devotion or awe owe their conception to Berninesque typologies. The angels of the *Cathedra Petri* (Fig. G.11) are repeated in the altar reredos dedicated to St Catherine in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ (Fig. G.12). A very common typology of angels in Roman Baroque sculpture, first used by Bernini in the high altar of S. Agostino, are flanked *angeli adoranti* strategically positioned on the entablature level of an altar reredos. This typology can be observed in the high altar of S. Maria del Popolo (Fig. G.95). The most significant example of this typology in Malta is the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat, which was executed in 1710 to 1711. This is precisely the altar designed by Pietro Paolo Troisi but executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra; it seems that Pietro Paolo Zahra in his subsequent designs appropriated the *angeli adoranti* flanking the altar painting but included their counterparts on the entablature level less often. The angel holding his hands in prayer is also unmistakeably similar to another use of *angeli adoranti* at entablature level, in this case designed by a fellow Maltese artist working in Rome, Melchiorre Cafà, in his Altar of St Thomas of Villanova in S. Agostino (Fig. G.23). In other altar reredoses, the *angeli adoranti* are substituted by *putti* serving the same end purpose (Fig. G.96).

Another example of this typology of *angeli adoranti* can be observed on the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the Żebbuġ parish church but, since this is the one of the largest Maltese Late Baroque reredoses, the *angeli adoranti* on the entablature flanking the Eternal Father are somewhat lost within the dramatic flourish of decoration and other figures in action. Other Roman Baroque examples are provided by Pozzo in *Perspectiva* (Fig. G.40) where the angels are sitting rather

than flying or standing on the entablature. This formula is less common in eighteenth-century Malta but the *scalpellino* of the altar reredos of the Virgin of Charity in Żebbuġ parish church (Fig. G.41 & Fig. G.42) adopts this solution by placing two gesticulating sitting angels on clouds one either side at the top of the altar painting.

Angels supporting frames or clouds, similar to Bernini's angels in the Fonseca chapel supporting the oval altar painting's frame (Fig. G.13) and even to the angels on the façade of S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (Fig. G.17), are also recurrent in eighteenth-century Malta. The similarities extend to their outstretched hands holding up the object (Fig. G.15), the fluttering drapery they are clothed with and the weightless clouds surrounding them (Fig. G.14), and their long limbs in comparable postures, very often with both knees bent – one more than the other – to mimic their suspended mid-air position (Fig. G.16).

De' Rossi's *Insignium Romae templorum* features the interior façade of the Oratory of St Philip Neri in Rome (Fig. G.19). The composition of the upper part of the façade is highlighted by the use of the Crucified Christ flanked by two *angeli adoranti*. This composition is used in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Malta, although in this case the crucifix is encapsulated in a niche (Fig. G.20). However, the closest counterpart in Bernini's oeuvre to the angels in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix is the *Cappella del Sacramento* (Fig. G.29). Pietro Paolo Zahra's angels, although immensely inferior in quality to Bernini's examples, mimic the Berninesque idiom of piousness sobriety in their kneeling posture, devout facial expressions, and Baroque *affetti* (Fig. G.26 & Fig. G.28). The same composition is adapted by the Zahra and Fabri family of *scalpellini* many times in their years working in Maltese churches. Another example, clearly influenced by Bernini's composition of the *Cappella del Sacramento*, is the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat (Fig. G.30). This altar reredos amalgamates two popular Roman Baroque sculptural altars, both widely disseminated through their publication in prints; while the lower part is inspired by Bernini's *Cappella del Sacramento*, the upper part is inspired by the top part of Cafà's print of the *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova* (Fig. 3.83 & Fig. 3.84).

Published by de' Rossi in the second volume of *Studio d'architettura civile*, there are clear stylistic affinities between the altar of St Thomas of Villanova and eighteenth-century Maltese examples for sources of a sculpted Eternal Father.[108] Other prints which included the Eternal Father exist, such as Pietro Testa's *The Dream of St Joseph*[109] (Fig. G.67) in which the Eternal Father's drapery billows over his head, similar to the execution of this typology in Maltese altar reredoses (Fig. G.68 – Fig. G.70). Additional prints which constituted a source for Maltese *scalpellini* are published in Pozzo's *Perspectiva* (Fig. G.74), which is replicated in Qrendi Parish Church's altar of the Pentecost (Fig. G.76), the *Sanguis Christi* print after Bernini (Fig. G.77), and the print of the high altar of S. Agnese in Agone, published in de' Rossi's *Disegni di vari altari* (Fig. G.57).

In some instances, the figure does not represent the Eternal Father, but a saint, such as in the case of the altar of S. Francesco Saverio in the Gesù church in Rome, also published in de' Rossi's *Disegni di vari altari* (Fig. G.61). The saint's position and the backdrop of the *gloria* are identical to the Eternal Father executed on the altar of the Annunciation in the parish church of St Helen in Birkirkara (Fig. G.62). Several of the figures in circulated prints are set against a backdrop of a *gloria* of rays and clouds but the most significant example in this regard is the print of the *Cathedra Petri* (Fig. G.1), which impacted almost each and every altar reredos executed by the Fabri and Zahra families, since it features repeatedly, whether prominently or less pronounced, in their corpus of works (Fig. G.2 – Fig. G.5).

---

[108] Examples are such as the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in Żebbuġ parish church (Fig. G64), the main altar in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea (Fig. G65), and the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St James, Żurrieq (Fig. G66).

[109] This print is present in the MUŻA collection but no information on its provenance is available and thus, it cannot be confirmed that it was present in Malta in the eighteenth century.

Fig. 3.85 *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, II, fig. 67, 1700, detail.

Fig. 3.86 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ, 1736. Detail.

Sculpted saints or allegories also feature in Maltese eighteenth-century altar reredoses, although not as prominently as angels, *putti*, and the Eternal Father. In seventeenth-century altar reredoses, such as the titular altars of the parish church of the Assumption in Attard and the parish church of St Bartholomew in Għargħur, standing sculpted saints are allocated in between the columns of the altar reredos. Similar to this is the lone example in Pietro Paolo Zahra's oeuvre in which he utilises two figures representing Religion and Hope flanking the altar of the Virgin of Charity in Żebbuġ parish church. Printed materials were certainly used in this

Fig. 3.87 *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, II, fig. 60, 1700, detail.

Fig. 3.88 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption, Qrendi., early to mid-18th century. Detail.

altar reredos, as evidenced by the close affinities between the upper part of the reredos and Giovanni Giardini's *Disegni diversi*,[110] but similarities with figures printed in Pozzo's *Perspectiva* also emerge, especially in the manner in which the hand is placed upon the chest and the gaze of the figure is directed upwards (Fig. 3.85 & Fig. 3.86).There are also similarities in the depiction of the drapery folds, which appear to be in mirror image to each other.[111]

Saints are also depicted on clouds, supported by *putti* and angels, and adopting pious expressions and embracing Baroque *affetti* (Fig. G.161). Printed sources in this regard must have also provided visual sources for Maltese *scalpellini*, as can be observed from Pozzo's *Perspectiva* (Fig. G.160). However, the greatest affinities in this typology exist between two saints on clouds executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta (Fig. G.169 & Fig. G.170) and the Ecstasy of St Catherine by Melchiorre Cafà in the church of S. Caterina a Magnanapoli in Rome. Unfortunately, the existing print after Melchiorre Cafà by Simon Francis Ravenet (Fig. G.168) dates to 1729-1740, that is, at least three years later than the execution of Pietro Paolo Zahra's saints. However, although it would have been impossible for Pietro Paolo Zahra to have been in possession of this print at the time of executing the works, he must have had knowledge of Cafà's *St Catherine* via other means, such as drawings. The clear affinities in the devoted facial expressions, the placing of the elegant hands, the fluttering drapery folds, and the S-curve of the figure are testament to Cafà's influence on Pietro Paolo Zahra.

Three particular altar reredoses compositions show how *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum* was an important source for Maltese *scalpellini*. In the second volume of Pozzo's publication, a particular apsidal cap is sectioned in three parts, effectively divided by decorative festoons and punctured by a round or oval window (Fig. G.181). The same composition is repeated in Maltese eighteenth-

---

[110] This is discussed *supra*.

[111] It is not the first time that the *scalpellino* who designed this altar reredos, Pietro Paolo Zahra, used prints in mirror image. One of the most significant is the copy of Bernini's *Angel with the Superscription* in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea, which is discussed *supra* and in Chapter 1.

century altar reredoses at least three other times.[112] The curvilinear concave and convex forms of Pozzo's altar of St Aloysius Gonzaga in S. Ignazio in Rome are repeated in the altar reredos of St Michael and the corresponding altar dedicated to St Paul the Hermit in Balzan parish church (Fig. G.187 & Fig. G.189). However, the most powerful impact, not only in Malta but also in Europe, was made by the altar of St Ignatius in the Gesù church, also published by Pozzo (Fig. G.185). The composition at the top of the altar reredos with a central *gloria* of the Holy Spirit flanked by Christ with the Cross and the Eternal Father supported by *putti* and angels (Fig. 3.87) is repeated in the altar of the Pentecost in Qrendi parish church (Fig. 3.88) and the altar of the Virgin of the Rosary in Żebbuġ parish church (Fig. G.73).[113] Differences in the quality of work and dexterity of the sculptor are evident but the stylistic Berninesque impact remains.

As discussed *supra*, this situation was not exclusive to Malta; rather, the use of printed material in the Late Baroque sculpture of other regions is also apparent, most particularly in the use of most widespread prints of famous Roman Baroque works. Inventories, wills, and libraries which included books of prints and popular treatises continue to enforce the validity of this phenomenon. Although the means in which the Roman Baroque style and the Berninesque manner were communicated to regional centres of sculptural production are very similar from one location to another, the tradition of a particular place imbued Bernini's style with regional characteristics.[114] The consolidation of the Berninesque expression in Malta's visual culture is analysed in the following chapter.

---

[112] As examples, see including the titular altars of the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Żejtun (Fig. G182), the church of St Margaret in Bormla (Fig. G183), and the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta (Fig. G184).

[113] It must be noted that the altar of the Virgin of the Rosary in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ was altered in the nineteenth century and it is not yet clear which parts are original and which are reconstructed and whether these replicate what the altar looked like originally as executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra.

[114] The local tradition gave a new interpretation to Bernini's Roman Baroque models. Antinori states: '*Talvolta le forme importate si sovrapposero con esiti originali a quelle della tradizione locale, come accadde in certe regioni dell'area iberica.*' Aloisio Antinori (2012), 8.

CHAPTER IV

The Consolidation of the Berninesque Impact in Malta: A catalogue of works

Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

T his chapter anchors the main argument of this thesis through a detailed analysis of twenty-five Berninesque ensembles executed by regional *scalpellini* in eighteenth-century Malta. These catalogue entries, representative of Malta's visual culture at the time, are divided into three sections according to their typology: entire ensembles; large altar reredoses; and small churches. When speaking about entire Berninesque spaces, large areas within a church, such as transepts, choirs, or two altars facing each other in a nave, or an entire oratory, are taken into consideration. The subsequent section analyses large Berninesque altar reredoses which are often stand-alone altars in large parish churches while the last section discusses small churches, very often in village cores or in the countryside outskirts, which either only have one Berninesque main altar or an addition of two small side altars which also display the Berninesque imprint. These catalogue entries represent a selection from Berninesque altars in Malta due to their high degree of *Berninismo* and also engage with altars which have been destroyed and are only known through photos.

4.1 The consolidation of the Berninesque imprint in Malta

The works analysed in this catalogue constitute some of the most important regional examples of the eighteenth century. They are the most representative of the Berninesque visual culture in the Maltese Islands due to their scale, intensity of comparisons with Roman Baroque works of art, and their quality. The first catalogue entry, which is the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament[1] in the ecclesiastical complex of the Dominicans in Valletta, belongs to the seventeenth century and is seminal since it is the first executed *gloria* in Malta, which made it an essential point of reference for regional *scalpellini*. The fact that it was probably designed by Mattia Preti confirms the clear understanding of Bernini's *concetto* of the *gloria*, and adding to this, the fact that it was executed in an ecclesiastical setting probably by the Casanova family of sculptors, very much active in the seventeenth century and pioneers of regional sculpture in stone in Malta, ensured that it was easily accessible to other regional *scalpellini* for consultation.[2]

---

[1] See Catalogue Entry I for more on the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Valletta.
[2] This is discussed in Chapter I and III of this dissertation.

In addition to the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Valletta, the works analysed in these catalogue entries are all vital in the examination of the Berninesque imprint on the regional sculpture of eighteenth-century Malta and contribute to the discussion in their own way; indeed, they all offer significant comparisons with Roman Baroque works of art.[3] The large Berninesque spaces, which are analysed in the first category of catalogue entries, immerse the viewer in the spirit of the Roman Baroque and are most probably the most comparable with Bernini's works. The church of St Francis marks the important collaboration between Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra;[4] the choir and transepts of the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ are notable for their great scale and several quotations from Bernini's works and those of his followers;[5] and the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix makes direct reference to the Ponte S. Angelo and the adoring angels of S. Agostino.[6]

The large Berninesque altars, analysed in the second category, prove that the Berninesque spirit was powerful enough to enter churches which did not embody the style at large. There are several excellent examples of how the Berninesque spirit managed to successfully infiltrate even remote village churches. This dissemination also indicates that patrons and *scalpellini* were aware of the spiritual intensity of this 'new' style and desired to include it in their parish churches. The fact that many parish churches were being enlarged or rebuilt from the late seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century also provided them with the perfect blank canvas to introduce sculpture of a Berninesque spirit. In this category, it is essential to note that the *scalpellini* almost always included *angeli adoranti* flanking the altarpiece, in the manner of the S. Agostino angels and the angels in the church of S. Maria del Popolo in Rome.[7] *Scalpellini* also had Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary for the Right Hand of St John* in Malta which clearly influenced many designs, especially

---

[3] This analysis enhances the comparative analysis which is made in Chapter III of this dissertation between works in Malta and Roman Baroque works of art and working material.

[4] See Catalogue Entry III for the analysis of this altar reredos.

[5] Refer to Catalogue Entry V for an analysis of the transept altars of the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ.

[6] This is analysed in Catalogue Entry IV.

[7] Examples of this can be observed in the altar reredos of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat (see Catalogue Entry VI) and the altar reredoses dedicated to the Virgin of Carmel and the Assumption of the Virgin in the parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Qrendi (see Catalogue Entry XI), amongst many others.

by Pietro Paolo Zahra.[8] In the sole case in this section of catalogue entries where there are no angels or *putti* in adoration, it has been uncovered from discovered documents that originally the altar design – of the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta[9] – did include two large *angeli adoranti*, which were then scrapped from the design by the patron in question. *Putti* in the apse, however, still remain.

The third category of the catalogue entries engages with small-scale churches, which are very often either in the urban fabric of towns in Malta[10] or in the outskirts in the countryside,[11] that owe their interior decoration to the Berninesque tradition. A perfect example of a church heavily doused in the Berninesque spirit is found very close to the parish church of St Catherine of Alexandria in Żurrieq, and is dedicated to St James. This church, architecturally and sculpturally designed by Pietro Paolo Zahra, saw the collaboration of the Zahra and Fabri family in its execution. On the other hand, the church of the Virgin of Mercy remains to this day on the outskirts of Qrendi in the countryside between this village and Żurrieq. Its interior, especially the sole altar reredos, is completely inspired by Berninesque designs, with particular reference to the angels flanking the altars in the transepts of the church of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. These *scalpellini*, through their designs for the churches in this category, ensured that the infiltration of Bernini's spirit descended also on the less cosmopolitan villages of the Maltese Islands.

The Berninesque tradition did not only impact altar reredoses, or for that matter, only works of art in stone. Similar to what happened in Rome and other regional centres, the Berninesque spirit engulfed sculpture in marble and stucco and other *objets d'art*, such as woodwork and altar furnishings. For the scope of this thesis which is focused on the stone tradition, there are also important stone sculptures, which are not classified as altar reredoses, which need to be mentioned

---

[8] This influence is apparent in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea which is analysed in Catalogue Entry IV and in the altar of St Anthony in the church of St Mark in Rabat which is analysed in Catalogue Entry VI.

[9] For more details on the main altar reredos of the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta, see Catalogue Entry VII.

[10] An example of a church in the urban fabric of Żurrieq is the church of St James which is analysed in Catalogue Entry XIII.

[11] The church of the Virgin of Mercy (analysed in Catalogue Entry XII) is an excellent example of a church which, although in the outskirts of a small quiet village, is doused in the Berninesque spirit.

in respect of their Berninesque inspiration.[12] Some important works of art of this nature are analysed in the fourth part of the catalogue entries of this chapter.

Apart from the debt to Bernini and the Roman Baroque style, three distinct regional characteristics emerge: the medium, the quality, and the type and amount of motifs used by the Maltese *scalpellini*. The medium, Maltese limestone, gives the greatest regionalist element to Maltese Late Baroque sculpture. The stone, whether left bare or painted and gilded as in many cases around the Maltese Islands, is immediately recognisable. Marble was expensive and completely naturally unavailable in Malta, and thus any marble which was imported was reserved for the most important piece of furnishing in the church – the altar table. The rest, the altar reredos and any other architectural decoration, were executed in stone. This was readily available from Maltese quarries and, although it was still a commodity – a fact which clearly emerges from the reutilisation of old stone and payments made with stone,[13] it was a much more viable option for *scalpellini* who were engaged to create altar reredoses in Maltese churches. The continuous references to stone in notarial contracts commissioning works by *scalpellini* highlight its importance in the execution of architecture and sculpture and are also proof of the thriving industry of the art in eighteenth-century Malta.[14] As in other industries of art, such as marble,[15] contacts with the owners of quarries and individuals engaged for the transportation of stone were common for Maltese *scalpellini*.[16] Use of stone for ecclesiastical sculpture is however not exclusive to Malta. As discussed in the previous chapters, stone is one of the most major idiosyncratic characteristics of Lecce's Baroque altars, and even in Sicily stone is used in combination with marble and stucco. In spite of this parallelism, Maltese stone, like Lecce's stone, has its own characteristic softness and yellowish tones which make it ideal for carving and for its utilisation in façades due to its golden colour. In spite of these similarities

---

[12] This includes architectural decoration which is Berninesque in nature and even figurative sculpture on church façades, such as that found on the façade of the parish church of St Bartholomew in Għargħur (analysed in Catalogue Entry XV).

[13] See Meli (2017), 262-263. NAV, Notary Giuseppe Bonavita, R62, Volume 3, ff. 270v-272v. See also Debono (2010), 33.

[14] On the importance of stone and its provisions in notarial contracts, see Meli (2017), 260-263.

[15] The acquiring and transportation of marble, among many other workshop mechanics, is deeply analysed by Montagu (1989) in her landmark publication on the industry of the art of Roman Baroque sculpture. See also Meli (2017) for the same concepts in the Maltese eighteenth-century scenario. Meli (2017), 252-278.

[16] Acquiring stone in eighteenth-century Malta is analysed in Meli (2017), 260-263.

with Lecce, painting and gilding of the stone in altar reredoses in Lecce seems to be almost inexistent while it is almost common practise in Malta[17] and in the south of Sicily.

The resulting quality from the Maltese *scalpellini*'s stone carving varies from a degree of provincialism to the other side of the spectrum in the case of more skilled works of art. The vernacular nature of works by unknown *scalpellini* is apparent in the church of St Catherine in Qrendi, but only a stone's throw away, in the church of the Virgin of Mercy on the outskirts of the same village, Pietro Paolo Zahra displays an adequate knowledge not only of the Roman Baroque style and Berninesque designs but also of a skill he had learnt from his early years. In the nearby village of Żurrieq, a pleasant church dedicated to St James offers a *paragone* of the quality produced by two different *scalpellini* families.[18] While the main altar reredos was probably executed by the Fabri and displays an inclination towards vegetative and floral decoration, the side altars were executed by Zahra, with a more prominent emphasis on the figurative elements. In addition to the Berninesque nature which this imparts to the work of art, the skill of carving the human body and facial features are superior in Zahra's works, especially in comparison to the two small awkwardly-carved angels in the main altar reredos. This is not to say that the Fabri family does not have any good quality works of art in their portfolio. All of the interior decoration in the church of St Bartholomew in Żurrieq and the figurative decoration above the main portal of Palazzo Vilhena in Mdina are proof of their technical experience and ability.[19] Since they were a vast family made up of several different *scalpellini*, quality differs from one work to the other.[20] Indeed, even in Zahra's works, the workshop hand's work is at times easily detectable from the work done by Pietro Paolo himself – this is apparent in the altar reredos of St Anthony of Padova in the church of St Francis in Rabat.[21] The quality of Malta's altar reredoses is incomparable to the superiority of Bernini's works but on the

---

[17] See the altars dedicated to the Holy Family and the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the parish church of St Paul in Rabat (Catalogue Entry X) as an example of polychromy and gilding in Maltese eighteenth-century altar reredoses.

[18] For an analysis of this *paragone*, see Catalogue Entry XIII.

[19] The main altar of the church of St Bartholomew in Żurrieq is analysed in Catalogue Entry XVII.

[20] Lesser quality can be observed in the altar reredos of the Virgin of Damascus in the church of the same dedication, now in the Oratory of St Joseph in Birgu. This is analysed in Catalogue Entry XV.

[21] See Catalogue Entry III for an analysis of the altar of St Anthony of Padova in the church of St Francis in Rabat.

other hand, it is much more adequate to compare its quality with other regional expressions of the style. Comparing it with the Neapolitan Baroque, the quality of Maltese Late Baroque sculpture suffers. It is somewhat on the same level as Palermo's and Lecce's output, all having their highs and lows in different churches, if Serpotta's oeuvre is excluded. Compared with the *Tardo Barocco* of the Val di Noto, Malta's sculptural altar reredoses show equal or, at times, superior quality.[22]

The type and amount of motifs used in the execution of Maltese Late Baroque sculpture are also indicative of its regional nature. Maltese *scalpellini* took on board a number of Roman Baroque motifs and included most of them in their designs of altar reredoses. The addition of Berninesque motifs,[23] such as drapery, ribbon, *putti*, *angeli adoranti*, the Eternal Father, the instruments of the Passion of Christ, clouds, and the *gloria*, injects these altar reredos designs with a simulation of the spirit and emotion of the Eternal City. Such an intense familiarity begs the question: did these Maltese *scalpellini*, active in eighteenth-century Malta, understand Bernini and his works? Documented proof to reveal whether Pietro Paolo Zahra or one of the many Fabris comprehended the complexity of Bernini's *concetti* is unfortunately scarce. What is clear, from the eighteenth-century context discussed in the first chapter of this dissertation, is that Maltese *scalpellini* were aware of the superiority which Rome enjoyed in social, political, religious, and artistic matters in the vast Catholic world. That is the reason behind Pietro Paolo Troisi's trip to Rome, similar to many other Maltese and European artists throughout the centuries. They were also aware of the immense possibilities which working material disseminated from the Eternal City offered their designs for Maltese churches. Patrons were also aware of this, and it is incomprehensible that the clergy, which was involved in so many of the commissions which *scalpellini* were awarded, did not offer its guidance and probably also impose its didactic designs on them. It is for these reasons why a church in Safi or Għargħur might impart to the spectator immediate sensations of Bernini's Rome.

---

[22] Refer to Chapter II of this dissertation for a comparative analysis of the regional Late Baroque sculpture of Malta, Naples, Lecce, Palermo, and the Val di Noto.

[23] See Chapter III for an analysis of the typologies used by Maltese *scalpellini* in the design of their altar reredoses.

4.2 Catalogue of Works: Entire Ensembles

I. Attributed to Mattia Preti and the Casanova family,
Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament,
Dominican Priory, Valletta, 1694-1696

Plate 31

The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament attached to St Dominic's Priory in Valletta is largely significant for being the earliest sculpted *gloria* in Malta which invades the entire altar reredos in the Berninesque tradition. Stimulated by the instalment of the *gloria* by Giovanni Giardini behind the *Baptism of Christ* by Giuseppe Mazzuoli in the eastern apse of the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta, this *gloria* constitutes its first expression of the Berninesque influence infiltrating Maltese popular visual culture. Most importantly, it represents a total work of art in the Berninesque tradition which saw the involvement of established artists such as Mattia Preti with regional artists, an occurrence which continued to emphasise the dissemination of the style.

The Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament was established in the parish of St Dominic on 19 February 1575 on the visit of Mons. Dusina to the Dominican's church.[24] It was officially recognised and affiliated by the first Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament to be approved by the Pope established in the Aldobrandini chapel in Santa Maria sopra Minerva in Rome.[25] The Confraternity established in Valletta remained active throughout the centuries and in true Baroque form, ceremonies such as the sombre celebration on Maundy Thursday, the day of the institution of the Eucharist, were performed with pious processions befitting the

---

[24] Filipp Mallia, *Il-Fratellanza tas-SS.mu Sagrament fil-Parroċċa ta' S.M. tal-Portu Salvu, il-Belt, 1575-1975*, Malta, 1975, 16. Vince Galea, 'L-Arċkonfraternità tas-SSmu. Sagrament', *Missierna San Duminku*, Valletta, 2005, 67-72: 67.

[25] Galea (2005), 67.

occasion.[26] In 1671, the Dominicans yielded a piece of land attached to the church to the Confraternity for the construction of an Oratory which was terminated in 1673, the same year in which Mattia Preti was commissioned to paint the *Institution of the Holy Eucharist* for the Oratory's altar.[27] In 1684, Gio Maria Gilibert executed stucco works in the Oratory and later in 1729, gilding work of the statues, angels, and frames was carried out by Erasmo Azzopardi.[28] In 1694, Giuseppe Arena was commissioned four large lateral paintings[29] and in 1711, Alessio Erardi painted the ceiling, completing the narrative and iconographical power of the Oratory.[30] Construction works were on-going in the apse of the Oratory from 1694 to 1696 and it was at this time that the Oratory was enlarged and the altar reredos commissioned and executed.[31] The eight statues on the Oratory's side walls were executed between 1703 and 1733 and represent Christ, St John the Baptist, St Peter, St Paul, St John the Evangelist, St Matthew, St Mark, and St Luke.[32]

It is clear from the documented history of the building and embellishment of the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament that all levels of artists were employed by the Confraternity, from Mattia Preti and Giuseppe d'Arena to regional artists such as Alessio Erardi, Gio Maria Gilibert, and Erasmo Azzopardi. While painting commissions seemed to be awarded to established artists present in Malta, sculpture for the Oratory seemed to have been executed by lesser known local artists. The

---

[26] For more on the celebration of Maundy Thursday by the Confraternity of the Blessed Sacrament, see Mallia (1975), 184-196 and Galea (2005), 67-72.

[27] Keith Sciberras, *Mattia Preti: The Triumphant Manner*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2012, 112. For the history of the Oratory's construction, see 50-63. See also Galea (2005), 71. The archives pertaining to the building and the commissioning of works of art for the Oratory were destroyed in efforts to control the plague which hit Malta in 1676. The main sources for dating works of art and architectural interventions are two history publications: Filipp Mallia, *Il-Fratellanza tas-SS.mu Sagrament fil-Parroċċa ta' S.M. tal-Portu Salvu, il-Belt, 1575-1975*, Malta, 1975, and E.V. Borg, *The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament*, P.E.G., Malta, 1988.

[28] Mallia (1975), 54 and 68. See also Galea (2005), 71.

[29] Two of these paintings, *Raising of Lazarus* and *Agony in the Garden*, are no longer in the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament because they were replaced by another two paintings by Salvu Barbara in 1859. Mallia (1975), 59-60. See also Galea (2005), 71.

[30] Mallia (1975), 64-68. See also Galea (2005), 71. For information on the ceiling decoration by Alessio Erardi, see Andrei Azzopardi, 'Alessio Erardi's Ceiling Decoration for the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, Dominican Priory, Valletta', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, 2018. Another undergraduate dissertation has been carried out on the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament: Hannah Portanier, 'The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Dominic's Priory, Valletta. A Total Work of Art', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, 2017.

[31] This information has been obtained from Mallia (1975). The archives do not provide any information on the authorship of the design or execution of the *gloria*.

[32] The archives do not provide information on the authorship of these free-standing sculptures.

reason behind this anomaly is the fact that the Maltese Islands did not enjoy the residency of a distinguished sculptor in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and thus, other established artists had to pick up the slack when it came to the design of sculpture in important places. The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament is one of the best examples in this regard.

There is sufficient stylistic and contextual proof to consider that Mattia Preti's was involved in the design of the sculpted *gloria*, when he was commissioned the altar painting of the *Institution of the Holy Eucharist*.[33] The Giovanni Giardini *gloria* had been installed behind Mazzuoli's *Baptism of Christ* in the Conventual Church of St John which provided a significant example of Bernini's Rome in the heart of Valletta. What is most significant is the fact that Mattia Preti would not have sculpted the altar reredos of the Oratory himself and therefore, a local *scalpellino* would have been engaged to physically execute the work, providing the ideal setting for the dissemination of this Berninesque work among the local *scalpellini* and other craftsmen. The Casanova family, an already established family of architects, master masons, and *scalpellini* from Birgu who were commissioned by the Order of St John and the Diocese for numerous works, were probably the best choice for the sculpting of the Oratory's design. In addition to their dominance in the scene of seventeenth-century stone work in Malta, they had already been involved in sculpting work in the church of the Dominicans in the late seventeenth century.[34]

The altar painting of the Institution of the Holy Eucharist is encased in a heavy moulded gilded frame which is overlapped with multiple cherub heads, mostly in pairs and set on flatly-rendered white clouds that provide a stark contrast with the gold background. In spite of the commanding work by Preti, the focal point of the altar reredos seems to be the monstrance atop the altar painting in the apsidal cap from which the rays of the radiating *gloria* emanate to invade the entire wall of the apse, broken only by the side portals and the decoration and paintings above them. The rest of the decoration of the apsidal cap is kept to a minimum in variety

---

[33] Keith Sciberras, *Mattia Preti: The Triumphant Manner*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2012, 112. Meli (2017

[34] Mallia (1975), 21.

Fig. 4.1 Gianlorenzo Bernini, *Cathedra Petri*, St Peter's Basilica, Rome.
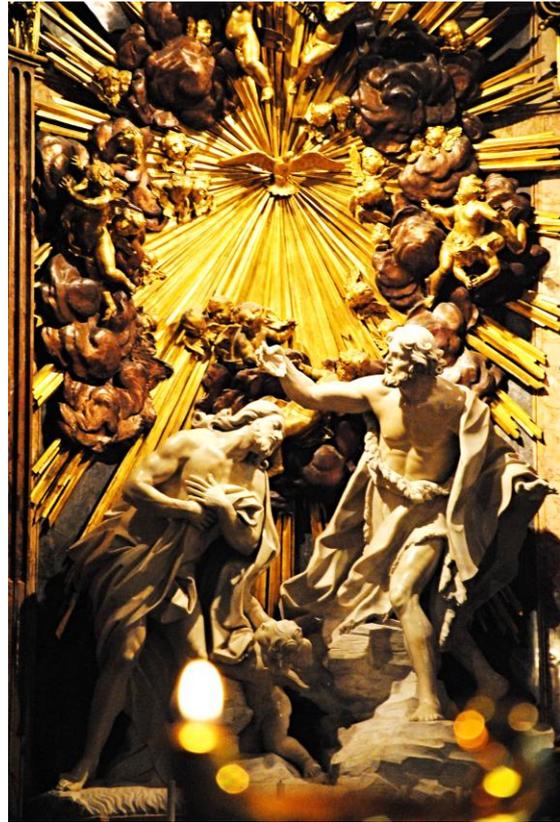
Fig. 4.2 Giuseppe Mazzuoli and Giuseppe Giardini, *Baptism of Christ*, Conventual Church of St John, Valletta.

Fig. 4.3 Melchiorre Cafà, *Gloria*, Santa Maria in Campitelli, Rome.

Fig. 4.4 Mattia Preti and Casanova family, Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, Valletta.

Fig. 4.5 Mattia Preti and Casanova family, Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, Valletta.

and it echoes the same cherub heads and heavenly clouds from the lower part of the composition. The highlight of the altar reredos is the *gloria* which is striking in its simple but effective design. The gilding ensures that the vision is of a divine nature, creating a simultaneously pious and dramatic effect. The Berninesque nature of the design is apparent in all of these qualities. The designer of the work, whether it was Preti or another unknown artist, must have been familiar not only with Giardini's work but also with Bernini's *Cathedra Petri* and most probably, Melchiorre Cafà's Campitelli *gloria* (Fig. 4.1 – Fig. 4.4). The *gloria* at the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament owes its conception to these predecessors.

The side walls of the Oratory are articulated with alternate statues in niches and paintings accentuated with architectural Baroque decoration on either side (Fig. 4.5). The motifs used in the design, including the robust shell motif, the festoons, the curling acanthus leaves, the folding ribbon, and cherub heads are all of Roman Baroque origin and are comparable to the Casanova family's work in other oratories in Valletta, including their work in the Oratory of the Onorati and the Oratory of the Immaculate Conception at the Jesuit Church.[35] The eight statues standing in the

---

[35] For more on these oratories, see Paul Cassar, 'The Oratories of the Onorati and the Immaculate Conception at the Jesuit Church, Valletta', unpublished dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, 2014.

niches lend a more solemn aura to the Oratory and owe their dramatic drapery folds, pious expressions, and animated movements to the Roman Baroque style.

The repercussions of the design of the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, particularly the motif of the *gloria* can be seen all around the Maltese Islands, with the quality of its execution ranging from impressive to more vernacular versions. The local *scalpellini*, particularly Pietro Paolo Zahra – heir to the local tradition of the Casanova family and related to them through his marriage with Agostina – disseminated the motif and utilised it repeatedly in his designs imprinted by the influence of the Roman Baroque and Berninesque traditions. Others, like the Fabri family, followed Zahra and the motif continued to infiltrate the local parish and countryside churches.

**II. Mattia Preti,
Altar of the Immaculate Conception,
Church of the Immaculate Conception,
Ta' Sarria, Floriana, c. 1676**

Plate 44

The focal point of the church of the Immaculate Conception in Floriana, known as Ta' Sarria, is Mattia Preti's altar painting of the Immaculate Conception surrounded by a unique sculpted altar reredos in Malta.[36] This style of altar reredos, although rarely used in its entirety by local *scalpellini*, introduced the local craftsmen to another dramatic Berninesque composition. Echoes of its *putti* holding up drapery and caressing the altar painting's frame can be found in Malta's numerous churches.

The design is attributed to Mattia Preti on contextual and stylistic basis; the church was designed by the artist and the *putti* are sculpted versions of Preti's painted angels in the altar painting and in other instances within his extensive oeuvre (Fig. 4.6 and Fig. 4.7).[37] Knowledge of Bernini here is undeniable. The work quotes Bernini's treatment of the Sala Ducale in the Vatican Palaces, a work which was executed by Bernini's assistant, Antonio Raggi, and which was available as a print and therefore accessible to artists who were resident in Malta and anywhere on the Continent. The Baroque *concetto* in itself is Berninesque in its dramatic effect of the *putti* drawing back the drapery to the benefit of the spectator's view of the painting. The *affetti* and positioning of the angels also echo Bernini's design (Fig. 4.8 and Fig. 4.9). The fringed dark drapery, another nod to Bernini's design, adds to the movement of the composition and gives the impression that the spectator has just caught the angels in their act of revealing the narrative of the Immaculate Conception.

---

[36] For more on the works of Mattia Preti, see Keith Sciberras, *Mattia Preti: The Triumphant Manner*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2012.
[37] This was suggested in Meli (2017), 74.

Fig. 4.6 Mattia Preti, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Ta' Sarria, Floriana. Detail.

Fig. 4.7 Mattia Preti, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Ta' Sarria, Floriana. Detail.

Fig. 4.8 Gianlorenzo Bernini and Antonio Raggi, Decoration of Sala Ducale, Vatican Palaces, Rome. Detail of print.

Fig. 4.9 Mattia Preti, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Ta' Sarria, Floriana. Detail.

The church was built by Lorenzo Gafà, Melchiorre Cafà's brother, but no information has yet surfaced on the execution of the sculptural detail around the altar painting, although the Casanovas are possible candidates based on stylistic similarities and the fact that they were the leading *scalpellini* at the time of the production of this important altar reredos. Although the work must have been produced by regional *scalpellini*, the entire composition is only repeated in one instance in regional Maltese eighteenth-century sculpture – in a countryside church

260

Fig. 4.10 Unknown artist, Altar of St Catherine, Church of St Catherine, Qrendi.

Fig. 4.11 Mattia Preti, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of the Immaculate Conception, Ta' Sarria, Floriana. Detail.

Fig. 4.12 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Church of the Virgin of Carmel, Birgu. Detail.

in Qrendi dedicated to St Catherine of Alexandria.[38] Even then, the execution is extremely weak and provincial (Fig. 4.10). The reason behind this unpopularity is yet unknown.[39] Nonetheless, within the oeuvre of Pietro Paolo Zahra there are numerous quotations of individual sections of the altar reredos at Ta' Sarria church (Fig. 4.11 and Fig. 4.12), which attests to the fact that foreign artists working in Malta in the seventeenth century served as catalysts of the Roman Baroque and Berninesque style from Rome to Malta.

---

[38] For more on this altar reredos, see Camilleri (2002).
[39] This was suggested in Meli (2017), 74.

III. Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra,

Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Altar of St Anthony of Padova,

Church of St Francis, Rabat, 1710-1711

Plates 45 and 5

The significance of the design of the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat lies in the fact that it is the one of the earliest most impactful expressions of the Berninesque tradition in Maltese regional Late Baroque sculpture. The stylistic reverberations of Pietro Paolo Troisi's design inspired by Berninesque typologies can be observed very clearly in the subsequent works of Maltese *scalpellini*, particularly the Fabri and Zahra families. The same typologies are repeated in the altar of St Anthony of Padova, situated in the same church opposite the altar of the Immaculate Conception, which is attributed to Zahra.

The altar of the Immaculate Conception, designed by Pietro Paolo Troisi but executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra, represents the first documented connection between the two artists and the dissemination of Troisi's knowledge of Rome and Berninesque works of art to a scalpellino who is never recorded to have left the Islands. Pietro Paolo Zahra was commissioned by Doctor of Medicine Filippo Giacomo Gauci on 7 July 1710 to build and sculpt the altar of the Immaculate Conception, according to a design and a *modello* drawn up by Troisi, for the sum of 250 scudi.[40] A number of conditions were set between the parties. Good quality stone for the execution of the altar reredos had to be sourced and produced by Zahra

---

[40] NAV, Notary Giovanni Grech, R303, Volume 2, ff. 883-885. Debono (2010), 20. See Meli (2017), 207. 90 scudi were paid upfront; 50 scudi were to be paid to the scalpellino after two months of working on the altar; another 50 scudi after another two months of work; the rest of the sum, that is, 60 scudi on completion of the work to the satisfaction of Pietro Paolo Troisi. These details are found in the notarial contract.

from Casal Lija, Siġġiewi, or Żebbuġ, not from the Vittoria area.[41] The fact that Troisi was regarded as *Architetto* and considered the supervisor of Pietro Paolo Zahra in this commission leads to two observations: the first was that Pietro Paolo Zahra, at the age of 25, was being commissioned the sculpting of a large altar reredos and Troisi was considered experienced enough to supervise him; the second was that the fact that Troisi had spent a brief period of study in Rome was held in great regard by his Maltese patrons, since Troisi was the same age as Zahra but naturally more experienced due to his sojourn abroad.

While the altar reredos of the Immaculate Conception retains its architectural framework, it is dominated by four larger-than-life-size figures of angels. The painting of the Immaculate Conception, which is encased in an acanthus-leaf stone frame surrounded by festoons, is situated between pilasters with gilded Composite capitals. The gilding is carried on in details in the two *angeli adoranti* flanking the frame, including their hair, wings, clothes' trimmings, and sandals. While one beckons to the spectator, the other gazes piously at the narrative in the painting. They are executed in the Berninesque manner of the standing angels flanking the altars in the transepts of the S. Maria del Popolo in Rome (Fig. 4.13 and Fig. 4.14). Their drapery folds are also descended from Bernini's treatment of folds which embody the drama and emotional state of the figures; Filippo Baldinucci, one of his biographers, comments on Bernini's ability to model marble as if it is wax and make his drapery folds remarkable:[42]

> Non fu mai forfe auanti a' noftri, e nel fuo tempo, chi con più facilità, e franchezza maneggiaffe il Marmo. Diede all'opere fue vna tenerezza marauigliofa, dalla quale apprefero poi molti grandi Vomini, che anno operato in Roma ne' fuoi tempi; e fe bene alcuni biafimauano i panneggiamenti delle fue Statue, come troppo ripiegati, e troppo trafitti, egli però ftimaua effer quefto vn pregio particolare del fuo scarpello, il quale in tal modo moftraua auer vinta la gran difficultà di render, per così dire, il marmo piegheuole, e di fapere ad vn certo modo accoppiare infieme la Pittura, e la Scultura, ed il non auere ciò fatto gli altri Artefici, diceua dependere dal non effer dato loro il cuore di rendere i faf-
>
> I 2   fi

---

[41] NAV, Notary Giovanni Grech, R303, Volume 2, ff. 884-884v.
[42] Filippo Baldinucci, *Vita del cav. Gio. Lorenzo Bernino,* Firenze, 1682, 67.

It could be argued that the more nervous treatment of the drapery folds by the regional scalpellino betray his more provincial training. This lack of training is also apparent in the sculpted portrayal of the arm of the angel on the left which is held up on the frame in an awkward twisted unlifelike manner.

The adoring angels perched on top of the entablature of the altar reredos descend from Bernini's typology of the *angeli adoranti* as first used in the high altar of the church of S. Agostino in Rome. Several similarities can also be observed between subsequent Berninesque expressions of adoring angels and the angels on the altar of the Immaculate Conception, amongst them the angel on the altar of St Thomas of Villanova, in the same church of S. Agostino, designed by Melchiorre Cafà but executed by Ercole Ferrata (Fig. 4.15 – Fig. 4.17).

The introduction of other Berninesque elements in regional eighteenth-century Maltese sculpture can be observed in the design of this significant altar reredos. The sense of theatricality in the drawn-back drapery folds below the frame revealing a niche with a statue is inherently Berninesque. The *gloria* is in this altar reredos a faint expression of what it was to become in regional eighteenth-century Maltese sculpture, where its dominance very often takes over the composition of the altar reredos. Here, it is encased in an oval frame with the dove of the Holy Spirit at its centre but subsequent examples of altar reredoses, especially designed and executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra, give more prominence to this Berninesque element, not only in its placement but also in its scale.

The altar reredos dedicated to St Anthony of Padova, situated in the same church opposite the altar of the Immaculate Conception, continued the visual of angels flanking the altar painting in the Berninesque tradition. The commission of this altar was also given to Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra[43] but the finished work of art is less successful in term of design, technique, and execution. The sculpting of the angel's and *putti*'s faces differs in quality from those which can be observed in the altar reredos of the Immaculate Conception, which points

---

[43] Bonnici (1983) states that this altar reredos was commissioned to Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra after their patrons were satisfied with the altar of the Immaculate Conception. Bonnici in Vincent Borg, *Marian Devotions in the Islands of St Paul 1600-1800*, Malta Historical Society, Malta, 1983, 270. Quoted also in Meli (2017), 209.
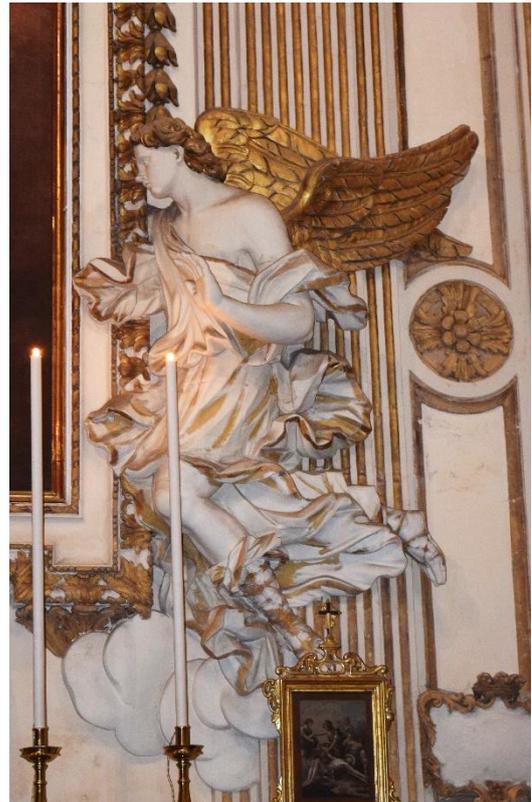
Fig. 4.13 Ercole Ferrata, Altar of the Visitation, Church of Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Detail. (top left)

Fig. 4.14 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of St Francis, Rabat. Detail. (top right)
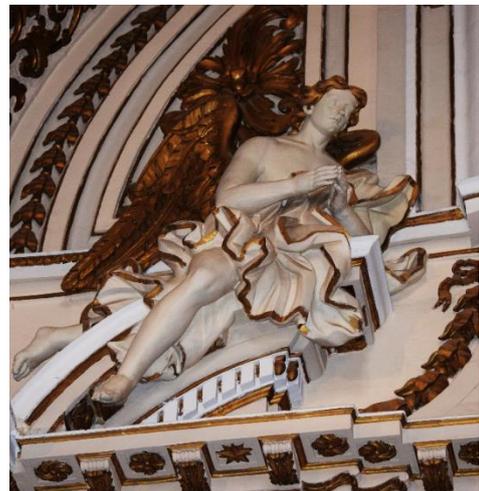
Fig. 4.15 Gianlorenzo Bernini, High Altar, Church of San Agostino, Rome. Detail. (top left)

Fig. 4.16 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Church of St Francis, Rabat. Detail. (top)

Fig. 4.17 Melchiorre Cafà, Altar of St Thomas of Villanova, Church of San Agostino, Rome. Detail. (bottom left)

towards the possibility of the participation of workshop assistants in the execution of the altar of St Anthony of Padova.[44]

The architectural framework of the altar reredos is given less prominence in this design; the pilasters are completely plain and their capitals are almost completely hidden by the figure of the flanked angels. While only two *putti* appear in the altar of the Immaculate Conception, the number of *putti* in the altar reredos of St Anthony of Padova increases to six, apart from the two angels at the sides of the altar painting. This time, these *angeli adoranti* are not placed at the same level but create a diagonal movement in the composition. The same diagonal drive is repeated through the placement of the two *putti* supporting the festoons on either side. The altar is additionally embellished with more of the same motifs found also on the altar of the Immaculate Conception, like scrolls, volutes, festoons, acanthus leaves, and palm fronds. The drapery motif beneath the altar painting of the Immaculate Conception is repeated in the opposite altar reredos with the addition of two *putti* holding up parts of the drapery, similar to the *putti* seen in the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the Sarria church in Floriana, themselves inspired by Bernini's designs for the *Sala Ducale* in the Apostolic Palace.

Both the altar reredos of St Anthony of Padova and the altar reredos of the Immaculate Conception are significant for their early expression of the Berninesque tradition in Maltese Late Baroque regional sculpture and the significance of the documented link between Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra. Both of the altars are in a good state of preservation.

---

[44] This was first suggested in Meli (2017), 209-210.

IV. Pietro Paolo Zahra,
Oratory of the Holy Crucifix,
Senglea, 1727-1737

Plate 46

The Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea[45] is the pinnacle of the Berninesque tradition in regional eighteenth-century Maltese Baroque sculpture for its profuse use of Berninesque designs, motifs, theatrical techniques, and emotive narrative. Almost completely designed by the popular scalpellino Pietro Paolo Zahra, it was executed at the height of his artistic career and its sculptural decoration is the direct result of the dissemination of the Berninesque style from Rome to regional centres of sculptural production.

The history of the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix and the Virgin of Charity and its Oratory of the Holy Crucifix has been revealed from the uncovering of notarial documents and parish archives. Since the surrounding area of the parish church of Senglea had already been built, the newly set-up Confraternity had to resolve the issue of where to build their new oratory. The answer came in the form of two houses attached to the right-hand side of the parish church which the

---

[45] On the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, see Alexander Bonnici, *L-Isla Fi Ġrajjiet il-Bażilika-Santwarju ta' Marija Bambina Volume II*, Senglea, Parroċċa tal-Isla, 1986; John Debono, *Documentary Sources on Maltese Artists: Pietro Paolo Zahra (1685- 1747) and his son Francesco Vincenzo (1710-1773)*, Malta, published by author, 2010; Ivor Robinich, 'The Fraternity of the Crucifix and its Oratory in Senglea', unpublished diploma dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2008; Keith Sciberras, *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His life and art in mid-18th century Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2010; Gabrielle Agius, 'Pietro Paolo Zahra and the Roman baroque manner at the Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2014; Christina Meli, 'From the Eternal City to Malta: The Roman Baroque Imprint on the Regional Late Baroque Sculpture of Pietro Paolo Zahra', unpublished MA dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, University of Malta, 2017; and Christina Meli, 'Pietro Paolo Zahra's Late Baroque Sculpture in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea: Art-historical Considerations and Insights from the Notarial Archives', in Alex Attard, Joan Abela, Emanuel Buttigieg (eds), *Parallel Existences. The Notarial Archives. A Photographer's Inspiration*, Birkirkara, Kite Group, 2018, 223-235.

Confraternity, after filing an official request to the bishop, bought on 2 December 1726 in order to demolish and in their stead build the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix.[46] A mere six months later, on 6 July 1727, the procurator of the Confraternity, Gregorio Psaila, commissioned Giacomo Bianco to demolish the two houses acquired by the Confraternity.[47] In the vacant space, Giacomo Bianco was commissioned to build a sizeable oratory for the Confraternity which was to be ready within one year for the considerable sum of 1220 scudi.[48]

Although it has been traditionally held throughout the years that the *inginiere* and *marmista* Claudio Durante and the architect Francesco Zerafa were responsible for the design and building of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix,[49] it is Pietro Paolo Zahra which continuously appears as *Architetto* in this commission contract. Durante and Zerafa, like Zahra, had affiliations with the Confraternity[50] and it is thus possible that they truly contributed to the design of the Oratory. However, from the notarial contract, it seems that Pietro Paolo Zahra was the most determining factor in terms of design of the Oratory, even from its very conception. This is confirmed by the mentioning of Zahra's name in three instances: '*fare le fenestre, che sarann'ordinate dall'Architetto Paulo Zahra*';[51] '*far un balcone da servire per l'organo con quelle sagliature accompagnate con risalti secondi sarà ordinate da detto Architetto Zahra*';[52] and '*maestro Giacomo dovrà fornire il prospetto dell'Altare di risalti, e così questi, come tutti gl'altri risalti delle facciate, e lati dell'Oratorio dovranno farsi coll'assistenza, consegno, e beneplacito del dett'Architetto Zahra*'.[53]

Continuing to confirm the design of Pietro Paolo Zahra, from the very beginning of the Oratory's planning stages, the contract continues to say: '*alla*

---

[46] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 227-235.

[47] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 884-888v.

[48] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 885v. The commission contract is very extensive and includes precise dimensions of the Oratory and several other instructions and obligations imposed on the master mason for the building and finishing of the Oratory.

[49] Their contribution is mentioned by Bonnici (1986), 225-226. Archival references confirming their input and the degree of their participation have yet to be discovered. Their input is, however, not impossible, since the majority of the Confraternity's archival records have been unfortunately destroyed over the years.

[50] Claudio Duranti was also a member of the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix and the Virgin of Charity. SPA, E.P1.09 *Annualità SS. Crocifisso*, f. 23v. See Meli (2017), 230.

[51] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 885.

[52] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 886-866v.

[53] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1726-1727, ff. 886v.

riserva solamente delle sei figure, che si veggono in detto disgno, le quali lo stesso maestro Giacomo non sara tenuto fare'. This confirms that the six angels, to be carved by Zahra in ten years' time, were included in the original design for the Oratory. Since it is clear from the commission contracts of the decoration of the Oratory, including the angels, that these were Zahra's designs, it is also probable that the entire Oratory was completely or at least a considerably large part, drawn up by Zahra. Entirely non-coincidentally, the Altar of Repose set up for Maundy Thursday week at the Mdina Cathedral, designed by Zahra's collaborator Pietro Paolo Troisi and executed by Zahra's son Francesco Zahra, also included four angels carrying Passion instruments and was designed in 1727, that is, the same exact year where the earliest archival reference to the six angels carrying the instruments of the Passion of Christ executed ten years later by Zahra in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix is found. This confirms Pietro Paolo Zahra's collaboration with Troisi as well as the latter's influence on Zahra in utilising Berninesque figures and motifs, a tendency which Zahra carried with him throughout his artistic career.

In August 1728, the construction of the Oratory was nearing completion.[54] Indeed, the Confraternity was also commissioning decorative arts for the Oratory by 13 May 1728, when the Confraternity paid Margerita Tornò from Senglea 140 scudi for the production and material of a *vent'altare* made of velvet and embroidered with gold and silver.[55] It was certainly complete by 5 January 1729, when Giacomo Bianco received a further 100 scudi for some concluding general works in the Oratory.[56]

Decoration of the Oratory started in 1731. Pietro Paolo Zahra was commissioned on 16 February 1731 to carve and sculpt the entire interior of the Oratory, including the altar reredos and the side walls but excluding the six figures already mentioned in the contract commissioning the building of the Oratory.[57] Zahra was paid 400 scudi for this work, although in view of his '*gran divozione, chè ha verso il Santissimo Crocifisso, e Nostra Signora della Carità e per essere*

---

[54] This is confirmed by a contract at the Notarial Archives in which the procurators of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix submitted a request to the procurator of the parish church of Senglea in relation to an architectural change in the plan to open a window in the Oratory. The request was acceded to. NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 4, 1727-1728, ff. 899v-901.
[55] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 4, 1727-1728, ff. 725-726.
[56] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 5, 1728-1729, ff. 349-349v.
[57] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 7, 1730-1731, ff. 684-685v.

fratello, e secondo assistente di detta Confraternita',[58] he agreed that if he were to incur more expenses in the execution of the work, there will be no extra charges and, in turn, if he were to spend less than 400 scudi, he would return the extra scudi to the Confraternity. In reality, not only did Pietro Paolo Zahra not return any extra scudi, but he was also awarded a gift of 40 scudi by the Confraternity for the '*buon travaglio da esso lui fatto nella scoltura dell'Oratorio*'.[59]

Before the Confraternity directed funds towards the completion of the sculptural decoration of the Oratory, its procurators prioritised the commission of the Oratory seating. Indeed in 1735, the carpenter Giuseppe Borg, who was also a member of the Confraternity, was commissioned to manufacture and carve the seating and other woodwork for the Oratory.[60] Borg had already collaborated with Pietro Paolo Zahra on the woodwork for the choir stalls of the parish church of Senglea,[61] and although this time he was the craftsman entrusted also with the carving of the sculpture, he had to do so '*secondo il disegno*'[62] as approved by the Bishop. It is very probable, given their previous collaboration and Zahra's great involvement in the design of every aspect of the Oratory, that he had also designed its seating.

The Oratory's sculptural programme was finally completed in 1737, when Pietro Paolo Zahra was given the commission to execute with the superior stone of the quarry in Santa Vennera '*sei statue d'Angeli portando nelle mani stromenti della passion di Nostro Signor Giesù Christo*'[63] for the total sum of 150 scudi. The angels, which were to be six and a half *palmi* tall, can still be seen today in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea, except for the *Angel with the Cross*, which was destroyed when a WWII bomb entered from the roof to the basement of the Oratory. No mention of Bernini's Passion angels on the Ponte S. Angelo is made in the archival reference, although a stylistic and comparative analysis of the Oratory's entire decoration makes the link very apparent. Apart from visual aids, the patrons

---

[58] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 7, 1730-1731, f. 685.
[59] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 11, 1734-1735, ff. 764-764v: f. 764v.
[60] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 11, 1734-1735, ff. 1282v-1284.
[61] Pietro Paolo Zahra's supervised the execution of the choir stalls executed in wood by Giuseppe Borg, who had to leave them bare for Zahra's later carving of the sculptural decoration. NAV, Notary Francesco Alessi, R14, Volume 5, 1728-1729, ff. 75r-77v. Meli (2017), 197. See also Debono (2010), 127.
[62] NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 11, 1734-1735, ff. 1283.
[63] NAV, R343, Notary Vincenzo Marchese, Volume 36, 1736-1737, ff. 752-753: f. 752.

and artists involved in the commission could have been aware of the writings on Bernini's works:[64]

que , sopra le quali eſſo felicemente camina . Sù queſti poggi ſi alzano cinque proporzionati Piedeſtalli per parte , ſopra a i quali maeſtoſamente poſano altrettante gran Statue di Angeli , e ciaſcun d'eſsi con divote attitudini ſoſtiene in mano un particolare Iſtrumento della Paſsione di Noſtro Signore : Due di queſti volle il Cavaliere tirar tutti di ſua mano , cioè uno , che ſoſtiene il titolo della Croce , e l'altro la corona di Spine . Ilche riſaputo da Clemente , portòſsi con riguardevole accompagnamento alla Caſa di lui , e non altrimente volle , che Opere coſì belle rimaneſſero eſpoſte alle ingiurie del Tempo , & ordinò , che due Copie ſe ne faceſſero , per doverle poi in vece loro far collocare ſu'l Ponte . Mà non volendo permettere il Cavaliere , che un'Opera di un Pontefice tanto ſuo amorevole rimaneſse ſenza qualche fattura di ſua mano , ne ſcolpì un'altro ſecretamente della medeſima grandezza de' primi , & è quello , che ſoſtiene il Titolo della Croce , che frà gli altri fù collocato ſu'l Ponte . Perlocche hebbe contento il Papa di queſta ſua diſubidienza , e quanto ſol gli diſse , *In ſomma , Cavaliere , voi ci volete neceſſitare a farne fare un'altra Copia* . E ciò , che agl'intendenti dell'Arte fù

Sua Deſcrizione .

Et andata del Papa a Caſa delCavaliere .

Fig. 4.18 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Side walls, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.

[64] Domenico Bernini, *Vita del cavalier Gio. Lorenzo Bernino*, Rome, 1713, 159.

271

The Oratory of the Holy Crucifix is dominated by the regional expression of the Berninesque tradition and is one of the best examples of the style in Malta. Executed in the height of Pietro Paolo Zahra's career, it exemplifies his mature style which can be easily described as pious, dramatic, and evoking Catholic fervour and emotion. His technique of stone carving reaches its relative high point in the decoration of this Oratory, having improved in dexterity, narrative, and figurative depictions but his style – and inspiration – essentially remain the same: the Roman Baroque and the Berninesque style. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, which is probably a unique space in Malta in its number of references to Bernini's works, starting from the *Cathedra Petri* to the angels carrying the instruments of the Passion of Christ on the Ponte S. Angelo.

The side walls of the Oratory are divided into three bays with the use of twin Ionian pilasters, in the middle of which six angels carrying the instruments of the Passion of Christ are placed on high pedestals (Fig. 4.18). On each side wall two paintings by Francesco Zahra, encased in stone frames and representing the Passion, fill the gaps left by the pilasters. Atop each bay, *putti* frolic around, making contact with the spectator and directing him towards the narration of the Oratory's artistic programme. Pietro Paolo Zahra's typical foliage, inspired by the Roman Baroque and ranging from acanthus leaves to scrolls and from cherub heads to thick festoons, fills empty wall space. At entablature level, oval paintings encased in stone frames and supported by *putti* alternate with stone-framed windows which flood the Oratory with natural light. At each corner of the Oratory at entablature level, pairs of *putti* hold up different coat of arms, among them that of Pope Urban VIII, Maffeo Barberini (Fig. 4.19 and Fig. 4.20).

The west wall of the Oratory supports the balustrade balcony which houses the organetto, commissioned from Giuseppe Turriglio in 1741,[65] shortly after the entire sculptural programme of the Oratory had been terminated (Fig. 4.21). Above the balcony, a carved simple Crucifix mirroring the larger one in the niche on the east wall, is decorated with a hung Crown of Thorns and surrounded by flatly-rendered sculpted clouds and cherub heads which contracts with the more

---

[65] The *organetto* was commissioned on 13 July 1741 from Giuseppe Turriglio from Valletta and cost 100 scudi. NAV, NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 17, 1740-1741, ff. 784-785.
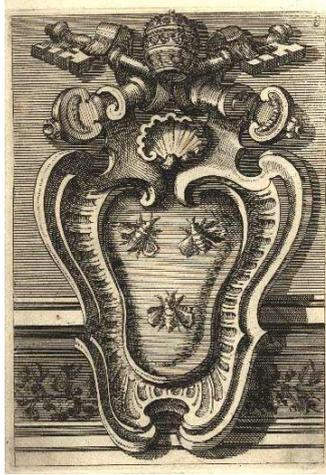
Fig. 4.19 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Tomb of Urban VIII print, Detail. (left).

Fig. 4.20 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail. (right)

three-dimensional *putti* at each side of the Crucifix taking on the *angeli adoranti* role of their adult counterparts on the east wall.

The most striking element on the side walls is the utilisation of the Passion angels in the style of Bernini. Only six of the original ten angels on the Ponte S. Angelo are replicated by Pietro Paolo Zahra, perhaps due to the smaller size of the Oratory and therefore, the lack of space. Zahra could also have had disadvantaged awareness of Bernini's design, since he had access to the Roman Baroque only through printed sources and not through first-hand knowledge and experience. This elimination of the *Angel with the Sponge*, the *Angel with the Nails*, the A*ngel with the Crown of Thorns*, and the *Angel with the Scourge* somewhat imposes a compromise on the narrative quality which Bernini imbued in his design on one of the most important bridges of Rome, but Zahra manages to retain the dramatic theatricality of the Roman Baroque style and the idea of the *Via Crucis* in his design.

Comparative analysis of Zahra's angels with the Bernini-designed angels on the Ponte S. Angelo, commissioned by Pope Clement IX and executed by the most important sculptors of seventeenth-century Rome, highlights the regional quality of the Oratory's sculpture (Fig. 4.22). The disadvantages of Zahra's regional training, as compared to his Roman counterparts, is emphasised in his technique and mostly in his rendition of the proportions of the human body and facial features. It is to be

Fig. 4.21 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail. (right)

noted, however, that although Zahra might have not had the dexterity of a Roman-trained sculptor, his regional expressions of the Roman Baroque and the Berninesque tradition hold up considerably when compared to regional sculpture in Malta's neighbouring island, Sicily.

The lack of academic training of regional *scalpellini* are apparent in the *Angel with the Column*. Compared with Antonio Raggi's rendition of the same angel on the Ponte S. Angelo, Zahra's angel is stocky, heavy, and falls short of the ethereal being created by Bernini's designs. Instead, the proportions of Zahra's angels seem to belong more to an earthly, rather than a heavenly, being. The same applies to the rest of the angels in the Oratory. The *imitatio* of Pietro Paolo Zahra is most apparent in the way he follows the technical style and personal rendition of each sculptor's interpretation of Bernini's design. Indeed, the deep spirituality which Bernini imbued in his *Angel with the Superscription* is missing in Zahra's rendition of the same angel in the Oratory.[66] It is interesting that this is the only angel who is depicted in mirror image to the original; perhaps the print or drawing which Zahra was following depicted the original angel in mirror image. A more

---

[66] Lavin describes this angel perfectly: 'The Angel with the Superscription, with its delicate features, curly locks, and downcast, watery eyes, stands passively and unfurls the scroll hesitantly, almost with reluctance: a distinctly interior, feminine sensibility.' See Lavin (2005), 207.
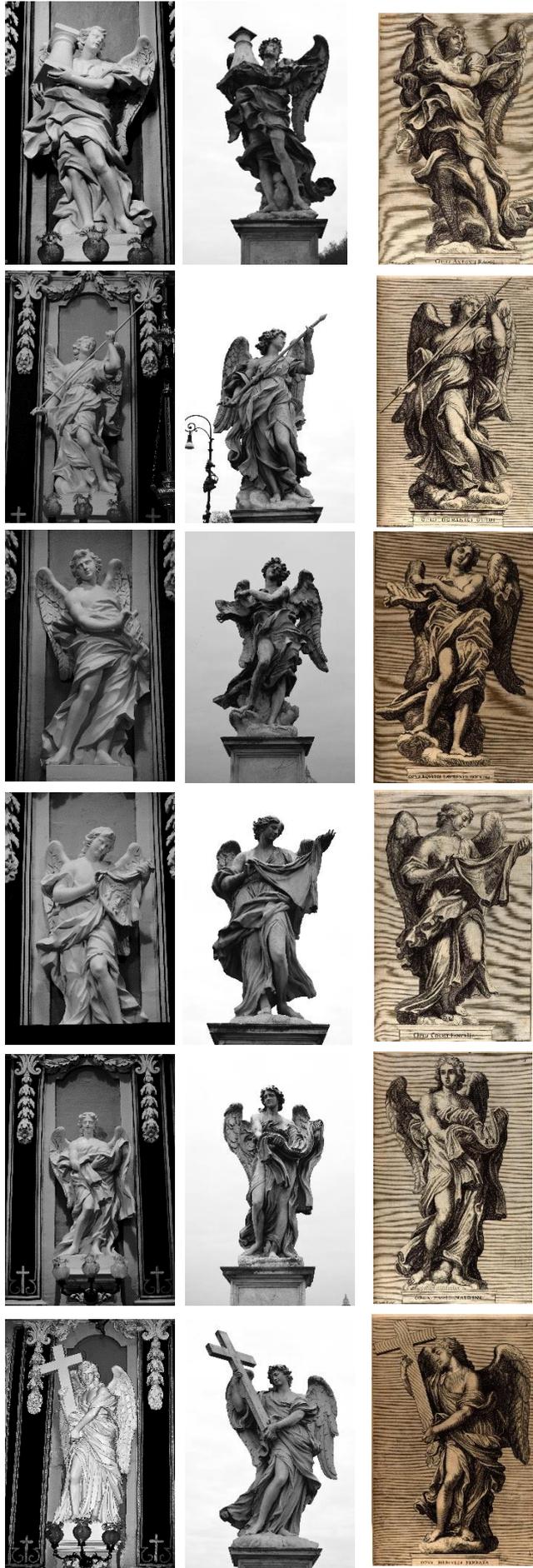
Fig. 4.22

Left column: Pietro Paolo Zahra, Passion angels, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea.*

Centre column: Gianlorenzo Bernini and others, Passion Angels, Ponte S. Angelo, Rome.

Right column: Prints after Gianlorenzo Bernini, published in Filippo Bonanni, *Numismata Pontificum Romanorum*, 1699.

*The Angel with the Cross is a 20th century reconstruction, as Zahra's original was destroyed in WWII.

plausible explanation is that Zahra purposefully changed the orientation of the angel's Superscription so that it matched the symmetry of the other angels on the same side wall, that is, the *Angel with the Sudarium* and the *Angel with the Robe and Dice*.

Pietro Paolo Zahra's derivative knowledge of the Roman Baroque and its essence betrays him in his interpretation of drapery folds. The emotion-evoking drapery folds as revolutionised by Bernini in the *St Longinus* are repetitively used by Zahra, not only in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, but throughout his oeuvre. However, the logic behind the placement of these gravity-defying drapery folds can be sometimes questioned and considered as senseless. The drapery folds of the Passion angels exemplify Pietro Paolo Zahra's exact copying even of the location of the drapery folds. Raggi's *Angel with the Column* and Pietro Paolo Zahra's rendition of the same angels shows how Zahra imitated where the drapery falls, where it breaks, where it folds, and where it escalates. Conversely, Zahra's regional training naturally shows in his clumsier planar folds as opposed to the nervous flickering drapery folds executed by Antonio Raggi.

The same can be observed in the case of the *Angel with the Lance*.[67] Although this angel might be Zahra's most successful one when compared with the other angels in the Oratory, the contrast with Domenico Guidi's more supple, longer, and graceful angel emphasises the provinciality of Zahra's version. Guidi's fluttering overlapping drapery folds are transformed into a generic and haphazard pattern in Zahra's angel. However, in his regional expression of the style, the Maltese scalpellino still manages to convey the drama of the genre and the solemnity of the occasion through the angel's pious and wounded expression. The hands are particularly close in their position to the original version, again confirming that Zahra must have had prints after the angels of the Ponte S. Angelo made available to him without leaving the Maltese Islands.

The facial expressions of Zahra's angels range from the emotive, such as the *Angel with the Lance*, to the unfitting smiling *Angel with the Robe and Dice*. Comparing the latter with Paolo Naldini's original on the Ponte S. Angelo, the tall ethereal S-curved body of the angel is once again transformed into a shorter stockier

---

[67] See Meli (2017) for a detailed analysis of the Passion angels in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix.

version in Zahra's rendition, although the characteristic S-curve of Bernini's late designs is retained. The robe the angel is carrying is clumsier in Zahra's version and quite disproportionate with the angel's body. The most striking difference is in the facial features of Zahra's angels; the slightly upturned corners of the angel's mouth ruins the pious mood and makes the angel seem almost cheeky rather than sombre. Better facial features and expressions can be observed in Zahra's *Angel with the Sudarium*, which is faithfully reproduced in posture and mood from Cosimo Fancelli's angel on the Ponte S. Angelo. The most noticeable difference in Zahra's rendition is the depiction of Christ's face on the cloth, which is left tastefully missing from Bernini's designs. This inclusion by Zahra is further confirmation that he had prints after Bernini since this is how it appears in Filippo Bonanni's *Numismata Pontificum Romanorum*.

The drama of the side walls reaches its peak in the Oratory's sole altar reredos (Plate 34). The preparation of the '*Via Crucis*' of the Passion angels leads the faithful towards Christ on the Cross in a niche,[68] flanked by two pious *angeli adoranti* accompanied by gesticulating *putti* and surmounted by the Eternal Father, in radiant *gloria* of rays and *putti*, with open arms awaiting the ascension of his son. The element of the *gloria*, ultimately emanating from Bernini's *Cathedra Petri*, is a continuous motif in Zahra's oeuvre. In addition to printed motifs of Roman examples, the first *gloria* executed in an altar reredos in Malta in the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament in Valletta[69] and attributed in design and execution to Mattia Preti and the Casanova family respectively, must have served as a model for Zahra's designs.[70]

The facial expressions of the figures are apt for the solemn setting. Their garments' drapery folds, in imitation of the Berninesque style, do not follow the laws of gravity, but rather try to convey the appropriate emotion that such a circumstance should evoke. Although successful to a certain degree, Pietro Paolo Zahra's regional roots betray him in his technique; when compared to Bernini's angels in the *Cappella del Sacramento*, who sway with an injection of raw emotion, Zahra's *imitatio* is only an echo of this manifestation. Zahra, in addition to printed

---

[68] This idea of the journey of the pilgrim is analysed in Wittkower (1997), 57.
[69] See Catalogue Entry I *supra*.
[70] Meli (2017), 112.

Fig. 4.23 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Kneeling Angel, Cappella del Sacramento, Rome.

Fig. 4.24 Gianlorenzo Bernini, Kneeling Angel, Cappella del Sacramento, Rome.

Fig. 4.25 Ciro Ferri, Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John, Conventual Church of St John, Valletta. Detail.

Fig. 4.26 Ciro Ferri, Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John, Conventual Church of St John, Valletta. Detail.

Fig. 4.27 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 4.28 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail.

material, also had access to Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John the Baptist* in the Conventual Church of St John, which served as a catalyst of the Berninesque style in Malta (Fig. 4.23 – Fig. 4.28). Sources for Zahra's Eternal Father in the upper part of the reredos could easily stem from Melchiorre Cafà's designs for the decoration above the *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova* in the church of S. Agostino in Rome. Zahra also had several painted sources of the Eternal Father which could have influenced his repetitive depiction of this theme in the apsidal cap of altar reredoses. Amongst other examples, the motif appears in Francesco Romanelli's *Christ appearing to St Ignatius of Loyola* in the Jesuit Church in Valletta, Mattia Preti's decoration of the vault of the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta, and Lucas Garnier's *Holy Souls with Trinity in Purgatory* in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ.[71] Not incidentally, the decoration of the latter's altar reredos was executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra and his workshop and constitutes his largest documented altar reredos.[72]

Although the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix suffered damage to its ceiling and floor during the Second World War when a bomb went right through it, it survived almost intact. The altar reredos is the original Zahra while only one of the standing angels on the side walls of the Oratory – the *Angel with the Cross* – was destroyed and was later reconstructed. Apart from several layers of paint which have changed the original look of the Oratory, it is in a good state of preservation.

---

[71] These links and influences were first suggested by Meli (2017), 123. On Lucas Garnier, see Marie Claire Finger, 'The Knight Artist Lucas Garnier: His Role in Mid-Seventeenth Century Painting in Malta', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2015.
[72] See Catalogue V *infra*.

V. Pietro Paolo Zahra,

Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, 1737-1742
Altar of the Virgin of Charity, 1736
Altar of St Catherine, 1742

Parish Church of St Philip of Agira,
Żebbuġ

Plate 24,
47, 48

One the most important examples of a Maltese church immersed in the Roman Baroque style and exponent of the Berninesque tradition is the parish church dedicated to St Philip of Agira situated in Ħaż-Żebbuġ.[73] Four altars in its transepts, dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory, the Virgin of Charity, St Catherine, and the Virgin of the Rosary are excellent examples of the regional Berninesque tradition in Malta.[74]

The most commanding of the altars is the one dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory which is probably the largest regional altar reredos commissioned in

---

[73] On this altar reredos, see Sciberras (2010) and Meli (2017). See also Briffa (2009).
[74] The latter, the altar of the Virgin of the Rosary, has unfortunately been altered over the years and since it is not clear which parts are original to the eighteenth century, it is not being considered in this catalogue entry.

Fig. 4.29 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 4.30 Arrigo Giardè, Altar of the Visitation, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Detail.

eighteenth-century Malta, with over thirty-five sculpted figures, excluding cherub heads and other sculpted motifs and architectural sculpture. This altar's main sculptor was Pietro Paolo Zahra, as a contract for payment of 695 *scudi* by Giovanni Maria Psayla, the procurator of the Sodality of the Agony, attests.[75] However, considering the nature and scale of the altar reredos and the otherwise busy workshop of Pietro Paolo Zahra, it is safe to conclude that other *scalpellini* were employed by the sculptor to work on the execution.[76] The design is true to Pietro Paolo Zahra's style, completely immersed in the Berninesque imprint, and on the basis of stylistic analysis accompanied with the archival documentation discussed above, it has been attributed to the well-known *scalpellino*.

---

[75] NAV, Notary Archangelo Pullicino, R408, Volume 26, ff. 218v-219. See Debono (2010), 195. See also Meli (2017), 237.

[76] According to Salv Ciappara, Gerolamo, Francesco, and Carlo Fabri were all involved in the execution of this work. Ciappara (1882), 41-42. See also Meli (2017), 238.

Fig. 4.31 Il Gesù, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 4.32 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

It has been suggested by other authors that the design of this altar reredos was carried out by Pietro Paolo Troisi.[77] However, the archival documentation points towards a design by Pietro Paolo Zahra. Although Troisi's influence still lingers on Zahra's designs, especially in the two large *angeli adoranti*, flanking the base of the altar painting, Pietro Paolo Zahra's workshop at this point in time was in its peak of maturity and it is completely plausible that he designed the work without any assistance from other artists. Stylistically, the motifs in the altar reredos of the Holy Souls in Purgatory are all repeated within Pietro Paolo Zahra's oeuvre, whether executed before or after this late work.[78]

The altar painting by Lucas Garnier is encased in an acanthus leaf-motif frame and flanked by two of the most elegant standing angels in Pietro Paolo Zahra's oeuvre, executed in the style of Bernini as seen in the altars at the church of S. Maria del Popolo in Rome (Fig. 4.29 and Fig. 4.30). Both react to the narrative in the painting and the design utilises Baroque *affetti* to perfection. The same *affetti* are employed by the rest of the figures in the lower part of the composition, namely flying angels and *putti* who hold up oval framed paintings, emblems, and clouds, and who gesticulate with their unoccupied hands to direct the spectator's glance through the several compositional links employed by the design. These angels also find their counterparts in Roman Baroque sculpture (Fig. 4.31 and Fig. 4.32). The altar painting is crowned by a sculpture of the Eternal Father, echoed from the

---

[77] See Briffa (2009), 82.
[78] This argument was first presented by Meli (2017), 237-238.

Fig. 4.33 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 4.34 Ceiling of Il Gesù, Rome. Detail.

painted version in the altarpiece. He is flanked by two angels sitting on the scroll pediment, comparable to the angels in several Roman churches. The divine light of the *gloria* bursts from behind the figure of the Eternal Father who awaits with his arms wide open while being supported by flying *putti*. Another *gloria* with the dove of the Holy Spirit at its centre is the focal point of the large apsidal cap in the top part of the composition, accompanied by another host of angels which are a regional echo of the stucco and painted decoration in the church of Il Gesù in Rome (Fig. 4.33 and Fig. 4.34).[79]

The same style is adopted by Pietro Paolo Zahra in the two other significant altars in the transept of the Żebbuġ Parish Church. The altar dedicated to the Virgin of Charity exemplifies not only Berninesque elements but also other motifs which are taken from other sources of Roman Baroque sculpture, particularly Giovanni Giardini's designs which were being circulated in print form. The altar reredos was designed and executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra when he was commissioned by the procurators of the Confraternity of the Virgin of the Charity for the sum of 150 *scudi*.[80] This commission represents regional painters and sculptors working together since the painter of the altarpiece, Gio Nicola Buhagiar, could request

---

[79] For more on the design of Il Gesù ceiling and drawings for Baciccio's fresco, see Jennifer Tonkovich, 'Two Studies for the Gesù and a 'Quarantore' Design by Bernini', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxl, 1138 (1998), 34-37.

[80] NAV, Notary Archangelo Pullicino, R408, Volume 21, ff. 44-45. See Debono (2010), 189. See also Meli (2017), 234. The design is confirmed to have been drawn up by Pietro Paolo Zahra in the contract: '*in conformità del disegno già fatto da detto Maestro Paolo*'. NAV, Notary Archangelo Pullicino, R408, Volume 21, ff. 44. The procurators were Petruzzo Debono, Salvatore Micallef, and Pietro Paolo Grima. See Meli (2017), 234.

changes to the design. This was included as a written provision of the commission contract and it shows that care was being taken to create an entire work of art, a *gesamtkunstwerk*.

The altar painting of the Virgin of Charity is flanked by two allegorical figures standing on pilaster bases, Faith and Hope, recognisable from the inclusion of their attributes – the chalice and the anchor respectively. The conscious choice of these two particular allegories complements the iconography in the altar painting of the Virgin of Charity since the allegory of Faith, Hope, and Charity was a prominent iconographical symbol used in the eighteenth century. Pietro Paolo Zahra designed the altar reredos as stated in the notarial document commissioning the work, probably with guidance on iconography from the patrons, who were the procurators of the altar of the Virgin of Charity, Petruzzo Debono, Salvatore Micallef, and Pietro Paolo Grima, and the parish priest of Żebbuġ Parish Church, Rev. Giovanni Battista Sagnani. The figures are executed in a manner inspired by the Roman Baroque style, especially in the posture, the pious facial expressions, and the execution of the dynamic drapery folds. The upper part of the altar reredos is dominated by a Berninesque composition articulated with two seated gesturing angels on hovering clouds at either top side of the frame, which is also surmounted by a *sopraquadro* flanked by two *putti* utilising Baroque *affetti*. The frame encasing the painting and the playful *putti* is reminiscent of Giovanni Giardini's designs (Fig. 4.35 and Fig. 4.36).[81] The seated angels find their counterparts in Roman Baroque sculpture (Fig. 4.37 – Fig. 4.40) and other regional expressions of the style.[82]

In comparison to the altar of the Virgin of Charity situated in the left transept of the same parish church, the altar reredos of St Catherine is more dynamic in the movement of the figures in the lower part of the composition. Commissioned in 1742 by the parish priest of the Żebbuġ Parish Church, the design was once again executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra. In this altar reredos, the allegorical figures are replaced by a set of two animated angels, who use Baroque *affetti* to

---

[81] Meli (2017), 235.

[82] See Chapter II *supra* for a comparative analysis of this typology of angel in Malta and in Sicily.

Fig. 4.35 Giovanni Giardini, *Disegni diversi inventati e delineati da Giovanni Giardini*, 1714. (left)

Fig. 4.35 Giovanni Giardini, *Disegni diversi inventati e delineati da Giovanni Giardini*, 1714. (left)

Fig. 4.37 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail. (left)

Fig. 4.38 Nave decoration, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Detail. (right)

Fig. 4.39 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Charity, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail. (left)

Fig. 4.40 Nave decoration, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome. Detail. (right)

Fig. 4.41 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Catherine, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

guide the spectator's gaze through the compositional links employed by the sculptor. The angel on the left visibly reacts to the narrative in the altar painting while the angel on the right makes direct contact with the spectator. Atop the angels, the vibrant composition is cut through with the use of sculpted roundel with scenes from the life and martyrdom of St Catherine. The upper part of the altar reredos echoes the use of angels and *putti* in the altar of the Virgin of Charity, with one notable difference – the inclusion of a *gloria* in the style of Bernini's *Cathedra Petri* and Bernini-inspired versions by other artists, such as Cafà's Campitelli *gloria* (Fig. 4.41). The angels once again find counterparts in prints and regional sculpture in Sicily.[83]

The altar of the Virgin of the Rosary, situated directly opposite the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, has been unfortunately restored and changed throughout the years but it is certain that its original style complemented the rest of the altars in the church's transept. Nonetheless, the transepts of the parish church of St Philip of Agira remain the apex of the powerful imprint left by the dissemination of the Berninesque style on Maltese *scalpellini* and their numerous works in churches on the Islands.

---

[83] See Chapter II *supra* for a comparative analysis of this typology of angel in Malta and in Sicily.

4.3 Catalogue of Works: Large Altar Reredoses

VI. Pietro Paolo Zahra,
Altar of St Anthony the Abbot,
Church of St Mark,
Rabat, 1719-1722

Plate 49

The altar of St Anthony the Abbot is situated in the imposing church dedicated to St Mark, which is attached to the Augustinian Priory in Rabat.[84] Executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra at the start of his maturity in his artistic career, the altar reredos reflects the Berninesque ideals which were prevalent in eighteenth-century altar design in Malta. Although the altar is executed on a smaller scale, the eloquent sculpting of the figures' faces and hands showcase Zahra's advancing abilities in emulating the Berninesque tradition. The upper part of the altar reredos also demonstrates the effect of other artists on Pietro Paolo Zahra, in this case, Melchiorre Cafà.

The scalpellino was commissioned by the Augustinian Friars in 1719 to dismantle the altar, rebuild it, and sculpt it for the sum of 110 *scudi*.[85] Some enlightening provisions are made in the contract of commission. Although Zahra could employ workshop hands in the execution of the design for the altar reredos, he was bound to execute the sculpting himself: '…*alli riserva però della scoltura, che solo dovrà farsi, e passere dale sua proprie mani…*'[86] Such a constraint inserted in the actual commission contract results in a number of plausible implications: first, Pietro Paolo Zahra must have had a busy bottega since he needed workshop hands to help him with the work; second, the patrons were aware of this

---

[84] On the Augustinian church and complex, see Jessica Borg, 'An artistic analysis of the Augustinian church and convent, Rabat', unpublished MA dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, University of Malta, 2010.

[85] NAV, Notary Ignazio Debono, R210, Volume 40, f. 793v-795. See also Debono (2010), 68 and Meli (2017), 212.

[86] NAV, Notary Ignazio Debono, R210, Volume 40, f. 793v.

Fig. 4.41 and Fig. 4.42 Ciro Ferri, Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John, Conventual Church of St John, Valletta. Details.

Fig. 4.43 and Fig. 4.44 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Mark, Rabat. Details.

fact and showed concern that their work be given the utmost priority by Pietro Paolo Zahra himself; third, the work previously carried out by Zahra, possibly in Rabat churches as well, was well-known for its good quality. In addition to this requirement, the Augustinian friars also insisted in the contract that the stone had to be acquired from the quarry in Żebbuġ or Lija.[87]

The altar reredos is dominated by the two elegant *angeli adoranti* flanking the altar painting. It is clear from the angel's *affetti* and kneeling posture that they completely belong in the Berninesque tradition, in this case probably transmitted to Zahra through the presence of Ciro Ferri's *Reliquary of the Right Hand of St John the Baptist* in the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta. The pose of the angel on the right, with the hands clutching fervently at the chest in adoration, is a mirror

---

[87] NAV, Notary Ignazio Debono, R210, Volume 40, f. 794v.

Fig. 4.45 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Mark, Rabat. Detail.

image of Ferri's left angel (Fig. 4.41 – Fig. 4.44). The angel on the left of the altar painting is also a mirror image of Ferri's right angel, although Zahra modified the position of the hands and head slightly to fit the purpose of the angel making direct contact with the faithful. The gilt motifs of the wings and drapery of the angels are also carried on in Zahra's design, with the faces, hands, and feet left bare as Ferri's design leaves them unadorned in silver. In place of Ferri's volutes, Zahra opted for his usual device of stone-carved flatly-rendered clouds. Another Berninesque device used by Zahra is the drapery which reveals the *sotto quadro* of St Rita (Fig. 4.45). This Baroque motif could have been transmitted to Zahra not only through the dissemination of prints, but also through Mattia Preti's use of the design in the altar of the Immaculate Conception in the Sarria Church at Floriana (Plate 44).

The Berninesque influence in this altar reredos is accompanied with clear influence from Melchiorre Cafà's print of the *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova*. The composition from above the angels' heads is replicated from Cafà's work, which was then completed by Ercole Ferrata in a different manner after the artist's untimely death. The cherub heads at the left side of the altar are also included on the right side by Zahra and the *putti* supported by the architrave are executed in the exact same posture as Cafà's design. The festoon is also replicated in the upper part

Fig. 4.46 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Anthony, Church of St Mark, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 4.47 After Melchiorre Cafà, Print of altar of St Thomas of Villanova in San Agostino, Rome. Detail.

of the altar reredos, and the only compositional difference between Cafà's and Zahra's design is the removal of the banner in favour of a cartouche surmounted by a shell motif and encapsulating the Augustinian emblem of the flaming heart, a representation of the patrons' affiliation (Fig. 4.46 and Fig. 4.47).

In terms of quality, this altar reredos is one of the more aesthetically pleasing, even though the more vernacular expression of the Berninesque style is highlighted by the use of regional limestone and polychromy. When compared to the more eloquent and superior quality of Bernini's sculptural works or Ferri's execution, it naturally falls short; however, when compared to regional works of art in Malta as well as in Sicily, it remains one of the most articulate altars executed in the Berninesque tradition in Malta. Above all, it manifestly displays the patrons' knowledge of the style on the Continent and their desire to emulate the Eternal City.

VII. Pietro Paolo Zahra,
Altar of St Mary Magdalene,
Church of St Mary Magdalene,
Valletta, 1725-1727

Plate 50

The eighteenth-century main altar reredos of the church of St Mary Magdalene situated in the lowest part of Valletta is an excellent example of the combination of the Berninesque tradition with apparent influences stemming from Melchiorre Cafà's work. The fact that this was designed by Maltese *scalpellini* with very probable input from the patrons, the Magdalene nuns, shows the extent of their knowledge of the Roman Baroque style prevalent in seventeenth-century Rome.

The church was originally built by Grand Master Fra Antoine de Paule (1623-1636) but changes were made to its fabric in the late seventeenth to mid-eighteenth century.[88] Executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra between 1726 and 1727, this work represents one of the *scalpellino*'s grandest designs carried out at the apex of his prolific career. Only a year before this commission, Antonio Fabri had been commissioned by Fra Melchiorre Alvaro Pinto to '*rifabricare la facciata dell'Altare Maggiore delle V[eneran]da Chiesa del Monasterio de Converite di questà Città Valletta, et inagliarla secondo il disegno*'.[89] The contract continues to state that Fabri had to dismantle only the part which he had to newly rebuild, making use of the existing columns and the altar painting's frame. Fabri had to work under the direction of the architect Romano Carapecchia, who is here confirmed to have been the designer of the church of St Mary Magdalene.[90] Fabri was promised 100 scudi for his work which was to be finished in three months,

---

[88] For more information on the Magdalene nuns and their convent and church in Valletta, see Christine Muscat, *Magdalene Nuns and Penitent Prostitutes, Valletta*, San Ġwann, BDL Publications, 2013.
[89] NAV, R182, Notary Gasparre Domenico Chircop, Volume 28 (1725-1726), ff. 228v-229v.
[90] NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 36 (1726-1728), ff.168v-170.

which shows the diminished scale of the work when compared with Zahra's complete refurbishment of the altar reredos only five months later on 1 April 1727. The mention of columns in the Fabri contract gives a hint of what the previous altar reredos looked like, most probably a typical seventeenth-century Maltese Baroque altar reredos in the style of the Casanova family. This style, dominated by intricately carved columns and placement of statues in between, can still be seen in many churches in the Maltese Islands – the titular altars of the parish church of St Bartholomew in Għargħur and the parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Attard are just two examples.

On 1 April 1727, the master mason Michele Micallef was commissioned to superficially completely dismantle the sculptural elements of the altar reredos and rebuild it, including the '*lanternina*' above and the cornices, according to the design.[91] His work had to be approved by the architects Giovanni Bonavia and Pietro Paolo Zahra, and he was paid 250 *scudi* to finish the work in 60 days. On the same day, Pietro Paolo Zahra was commissioned to sculpt the altar reredos which was to include two large angels on each side of the altar painting's frame for the total sum of 290 *scudi*.[92] The two *angeli adoranti* listed in this contract do not appear on the altar reredos as it stands today – they must have been excluded from the design later and therefore never sculpted.[93] On the other hand, Pietro Paolo Zahra was also involved in sculpting additional parts of the same church, as a payment contract from 22 February 1727 shows.[94] Zahra received a payment of 460 *scudi* for his sculptural work in the church, which included work on the altar reredos, the nave, and the *contrafacciata*.[95] Pietro Paolo Zahra's commissions in this church utilised all of his talents, since he was also commissioned the design and manufacturing of the altar gradine, the tabernacle, six candlesticks, and a monstrance with four angels on its side for a total of 152 *scudi*.[96] Although this monstrance has not been identified, it is clear even from the description in the

---

[91] NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 35 (1725-1726), ff. 425-426r.
[92] NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 35 (1725-1726), ff. 427-428.
[93] See Meli (2017), 218-221.
[94] NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 36 (1726-1728), ff. 351-352r. See Debono (2010), 122. See also Meli (2017), 218-221.
[95] NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 36 (1726-1728), ff. 352.
[96] NAV, Notary Giuseppe Callus, R126, Volume 36 (1726-1728), ff. 351-352v. See Debono (2010), 124. See also Meli (2017), 219. The tabernacle still exists but is now situated in the church of the Monastery of St Catherine in Valletta.

Fig. 4.48 After Melchiorre Cafà, Print of altar of St Thomas of Villanova in San Agostino, Rome. Detail. (left)

Fig. 4.49 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Church of St Mary Magdalene, Valletta. Detail. (right)

contract alone that the Berninesque impact in this case was also transferred to the execution of decorative arts.

The main altar of the church of St Mary Magdalene is described by Bishop Alpheran de Bussan as '*splendide ornatum*'.[97] It is easy to observe why; from the grand scale to the quality of the sculpted figures, this is one of Pietro Paolo Zahra's most lyrical works. The two large *angeli adoranti* planned in the original design would have increased the Berninesque imprint on this work but even as it stands, there are several elements taken from the artist's oeuvre, including the *gloria* in the apsidal cap, the angels and *putti* surrounding the clouds and the rays, and the element of decorative drapery.

However, there is also a pronounced Melchiorre Cafà imprint on this work. The *putto* upholding the drapery underneath the altar painting's frame is taken from the print of Cafà's *Charity of St Thomas of Villanova* and Zahra had already used this posture around three years earlier in the altar of St Anthony the Abbot in the church of St Mark in Rabat (Fig. 4.48 and Fig. 4.49).[98] The two large stone-sculpted figures in niches on either side of the altar painting are very reminiscent of Cafà's *Ecstasy of St Catherine of Siena* in the church of Santa Caterina di Siena a Magnanapoli in Rome. Their similarities are most pronounced in the S-curve of the figure underneath the billowing drapery, especially in the manner which the leg is

---

[97] ACM, Misc., Volume 191, Alpheran de Bussan, f. 258v. Muscat (2013), 161.
[98] See Catalogue Entry VI *supra*.

Fig. 4.50 Melchiorre Cafà, *Ecstasy of St Catherine*, S. Caterina a Magnanapoli, Rome. (left)
Fig. 4.51 and 4.52 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Saints, Church of St Mary Magdalene, Valletta. Details. (centre and right)

extended to the side of the figure, the pious facial expression on the saint's upturned head catching the heavenly light, and the way in which the hands rest on the chest in saintly devotion (Fig. 4.50 – Fig. 4.52).

Unlike the adjoining monastery which was destroyed in the Second World War, the church of St Mary Magdalene escaped unscathed. After years of plundering and defacing of coats of arms by the French, mistreatment, and abandonment, the church of St Mary Magdalene was restored in 2015. It stands today as one of the few eighteenth-century designs which sway from the Pietro Paolo Zahra standard solution for altar reredoses.

**VIII. Attributed to
Pietro Paolo Zahra and the
Fabri family,
Altar of the Agony,
Parish Church of St Andrew,
Luqa, c. 1734-1745**

Destroyed

Plate 13

The altar reredos of the Sodality of the Agony could have been found in the transept of the parish church of St Andrew in Luqa, previous to the altar's damage resulting from the Second World War and eventual complete destruction by its taking down when the church underwent post-war 'restoration' works. [99] The altar dedicated to the Virgin of the Rosary, which was situated opposite in the other transept of the parish church, suffered the same fate, although no photograph has been yet unearthed to uncover what this altar reredos looked like. The importance of the altar of the Sodality of the Agony lies in what was its monumental scale and displaying of several aspects and motifs of Berninesque nature, probably acquired by the scalpellino through the disseminated prints available in Malta.[100]

The altar reredos dates to the third decade of the eighteenth century. In 1737, the pastoral visitation report stated: '…*totus prospectus Cappella actu Celatur nobili sculptura in Lapide, adhuc autem non est perfectus…*';[101] this essentially meant that the sculpture in stone was not yet as perfect as it should be and was probably still in mid-execution. The pastoral visitation of 1745 once again mentions the altar reredos, calling it magnificent, and states that the altar painting

---

[99] Meli (2017), 240-242. Acknowledgements are due to Neil Zammit for providing me with this photograph.
[100] Meli (2017), 240.
[101] Meli (2017), 240. AAM, VP XXXIII, Alpheran de Bussan, 1736-1740, ff. 956-957: '…*totus prospectus Cappella actu Celatur nobili sculptura in Lapide, adhuc autem non est perfectus…*'

Fig. 4.53 and Fig. 4.55 Altar of the Agony, Parish church of St Andrew, Luqa. Destroyed. Details.

Fig. 4.54 and Fig. 4.56 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Oratory of the Holy Crucifix. Details.

was 'positioned between the imposing stone sculptures which filled the entire prospective of the altar'.[102]

On the limited stylistic analysis from the only photograph available, the altar dedicated to the Sodality of the Agony could have been executed by either the Zahra family or Fabri family of sculptors. Although its large scale and typical composition could be attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra's typical style, such as that found in the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ or the main altar of the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta, the participation of the Fabri family cannot be ruled out completely in the absence of documented proof. There is also the possibility of this having been a joint commission, as were many others in the collaborative spirit of the eighteenth century.

---

[102] Meli (2017), 240. AAM, VP XXXIV, Alpheran de Bussan, 1744-1751, f. 334v: '…*collocatam inter magnificas sculpturas lapideas totum prosepctum implentes: subtus dictam Iconam extat qusque immissa inter celatruas Icona reference S. Julianum antiquum titulum Altaris*'.

Fig. 4.57 Altar of the Agony, Parish church of St Andrew, Luqa. Destroyed. Detail.

Fig. 4.58 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

The attribution of the altar reredos to Pietro Paolo Zahra is also supported by considerable comparisons to the sculptor's documented oeuvre. Although the *gloria* is missing, the apsidal cap sectioned in three parts and decorated with Pietro Paolo Zahra's typical motifs is reminiscent of another apsidal cap in the sculptor's oeuvre, that of the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta.[103] The *angeli adoranti* which flank the altar's frame and react to what would have been the narrative in the altar painting also belong comfortably in the sculptor's oeuvre, with particular parallels with the angels on the altar of St Catherine in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ.

There are also similarities in the poses of *putti* to those in the Senglea Oratory of the Holy Crucifix (Fig. 4.53 – Fig. 4.56). The placement of the cherub heads above the altar painting and directly below the Eternal Father is also typical of Zahra's style as well as the image of the Eternal Father itself, used multiple times in the sculptor's oeuvre, including in one of his most important works in Żebbuġ parish (Fig. 4.57 and Fig. 4.58). In general, the altar of the Sodality of the Agony at Luqa is reminiscent of the Żebbuġ altar dedicated to the Holy Souls in Purgatory, especially in its composition and placing of figures. The Luqa altar is a stripped-down version of the more complex over-the-top Żebbuġ altar, suggesting that these two altar reredoses were probably executed in the same mature period during Pietro Paolo Zahra's career.[104]

---

[103] See Catalogue Entry VII.
[104] Meli (2017), 242.

**IX. Pietro Paolo Zahra,
Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo,
Church of St Philip Neri,
Senglea, 1746**

Plate 28

The altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo in the church of St Philip Neri in Senglea is an ideal example of the Berninesque spirit as manifested in Malta in the eighteenth century.[105] Executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra in his hometown, the apse of this altar reredos is a regional descendent of the decoration typology in the ceiling of Il Gesù in Rome, designed by Bernini and Giovanni Paolo Oliva and executed by Giovanni Battista Gaulli (Il Baciccio) and Antonio Raggi.

The commission of this altar reredos is documented to have been awarded to Zahra on 12 July 1746 by Don Francesco Saverio Politano, the provost of the Oratorians, the Order to whom the church belonged, for the sum of 225 *scudi*.[106] This altar reredos proved to be one of Zahra's last works to be executed in Senglea after having been entrusted to design and sculpt the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, altars in the Senglea Parish Church, and the Oratory of St Philip Neri. The ornate decoration of the apsidal cap of this altar reredos suggests that the walls of the choir beneath it were also decorated in a similar style. In order to complete Pietro Paolo Zahra's standard typology, two other *angeli adoranti* would have been placed flanking the altar painting at its base, with a vast number of *putti*, clouds, and cherub heads invading the pilasters of the architectural definition. This typical design is missing in this altar reredos, which might suggest that the altar was modified at some point after its execution. On the other hand, since Zahra died a

---

[105] For more on the church of St Philip Neri, see Christina Meli, 'The Church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo and the Congregation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri at Senglea: An Architectural Appraisal', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2015.
[106] NAV, Notary Francesco Pisano, R395, Volume 6, ff. 464v-467v. See also Debono (2010), 234-236 and Meli (2017), 246-249.

Fig. 4.59 Gianlorenzo Bernini and Antonio Raggi, Church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 4.60 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 4.61 Giacomo Serpotta, Oratory of San Domenico, Palermo. Detail.

Fig. 4.62 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

mere one year after the commission of this altar reredos, in 1747, it might also be the case that he did not finish the entire reredos, leaving the lower part to be clad in marble. Unfortunately, the notarial contract is not exhaustive enough to confirm these details, although it does mention that 'all the projecting stones, the figures, the four pedestals and the entablature with its architraves, friezes and cornice, wherever carving is required'[107] had to be completed by Zahra.

As one of his most mature works, the apse of the altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo is akin to his other late works, including the altar of the Holy Souls in

---

[107] NAV, Notary Francesco Pisano, R395, Volume 6, ff. 464v-467v. See also Debono (2010), 234-236 and Meli (2017), 246-249. The original deed states: '*s'obliga di scolpire, ed intagliare tutti quelli risalti di pietra, ch'à questo effetto vi sono fabbricati in detta facciata, e della loro machine fare tutte quelle figure, e tutti quei altri lavori, e guarnimenti, che nella medesima facciata domandano di dovervi essere*'.

Fig. 4.63 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 4.64 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.

Fig. 4.65 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Porto Salvo,
Church of St Philip Neri, Senglea. Detail.
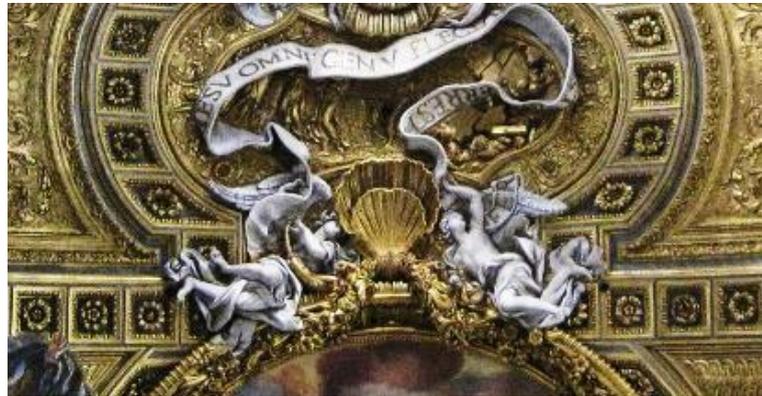
Fig. 4.66 Ceiling of Il Gesù, Rome. Detail.

Purgatory in the Żebbuġ Parish Church,[108] which display larger figures of angels
and more figures than his earlier simpler designs. Two sets of *gloria* appear in the
apse, similar to the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, one displaying the dove of
the Holy Spirit and the other with a flaming heart at its centre, part of the
Oratorians' emblem which is then continued with the inclusion of a star a bit further
down between two cherubs. Flatly rendered clouds adorn the negative space of the
apse and numerous *putti* frolic amongst them. Their *affetti* show Pietro Paolo
Zahra's familiarity with Bernini's designs for the church of San Andrea al
Quirinale, which were also executed by Antonio Raggi (Fig. 4.59 and Fig. 4.60).[109]
Another *putto*, with his head hidden behind the clouds, is repeated in Zahra's

---

[108] See Catalogue Entry V.
[109] On the church of S. Andrea al Quirinale and its Baroque *concetto*, see Joseph Connors, 'Bernini's
S. Andrea al Quirinale: Payments and Planning', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*,
xli, 1 (1982), 15-37.

oeuvre in Malta (Fig. 4.61 and Fig. 4.62), as well as in designs by the more prominent sculptor active in Sicily, Giacomo Serpotta.[110]

The four fully-fledged angels in the composition are perhaps amongst Zahra's most proficient and eloquent expressions of this typology. Their polished exterior is intended to make them look like marble and the lack of polychromy, unlike many other of his works which are painted and gilded, succeeds in making them look less provincial. The angular spirited drapery folds of the two angels on the architrave reflect their spiritual state-of-mind, while their posture pushes them forward as if they are taking flight. Their *affetti* create a compositional link between the faithful in the church and the sculptural composition, and are completely executed with knowledge of the Berninesque tradition in mind (Fig. 4.63 and Fig. 4.64). The two angels at the uppermost part of the apsidal cap hold up the clouds surrounding the *gloria* in a manner visibly very comparable to the angels in the ceiling of the church of Il Gesù (Fig. 4.65 and Fig. 4.66).

In this altar reredos, Zahra succeeds in creating a regional Berninesque work of art in Senglea, which imparts to the viewer a similar feeling that comes close to the aura of a Roman Baroque church. In this case, the input of the Oratorians, who were definitely aware of the developments in the Roman Baroque style,[111] must have augmented Zahra's already acquired knowledge of the Berninesque tradition.

---

[110] The work of Giacomo Serpotta is analysed in Chapter II *supra*.
[111] For more on this, see Christina Meli, 'The Church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo and the Congregation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri at Senglea: An Architectural Appraisal', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2015.

X. Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Family, Altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Parish Church of St Paul, Rabat, 1741-1743

Plates 51 and 52

The altar of the Holy Family and the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus in the parish church of St Paul in Rabat are situated facing each other in the central nave of the church. These two altars are worthy examples of the Roman Baroque impact in Malta as manifested in multiple small altars within one space, and they clearly show the significance that the Berninesque imprint had on the typical design of the Maltese Late Baroque style. While the altar of the Holy Family is documented to be the work of Pietro Paolo Zahra, the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is attributed to the sculptor on strong contextual and stylistic basis.

The altar of the Holy Family was commissioned by the clergy and deacons of the parish church of St Paul in order to replace the old altar reredos, which was deemed as substandard when compared to the others.[112] This leads to the possibility that the altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which is attributed to Zahra, was executed before the altar of the Holy Family. The new altar of the Holy Family was designed to complement the altar opposite to it. The payment of 175 *scudi* also included four paintings by Zahra's son, Francesco, an amount which reflects the small scale of the work. Indeed, Zahra's standard typology of the Berninesque *angeli adoranti* is not utilised in this altar reredos, and the sculptor instead opted for larger-than-life-size *putti*. The same pattern is repeated in the altar dedicated to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. Two sets of two *putti* on flatly-rendered clouds flank the altarpiece, framed in an elaborate gilded undulated spiral and an egg-and-dart motif;

---

[112] NAV, Notary Ignazio Debono, R210, Volume 79, ff. 415-417v. See Debono (2010), 218. See also Meli (2017), 243-245.

Fig. 4.67 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, Parish church of St Paul, Rabat. Detail.

Fig. 4.68 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Light, Church of St James, Żurrieq. Detail.

all gesticulate in a theatrical manner to draw the spectator's attention to the narrative of the painting. The altar painting's frame is crowned by a shell motif and an acanthus-leaf festoon while the sides of the altar painting are connected to the apsidal cap with the use of two large scrolls attached to the painting's frame, very similar to Zahra's use of the same element in the lateral altars of the church of St James in Żurrieq (Fig. 4.67 and Fig. 4.68). The rays of the *gloria* amongst clouds

and *putti* perched on the volutes of the altar painting's frame complete the Berninesque composition.

The colour palette of the work is an obvious attempt to mimic marble, although the medium used is Maltese limestone, with gilded areas, such as the *gloria* and the angels' wings, hair, and drapery. The polychromy of this altar is very close to another work in Rabat by Pietro Paolo Zahra, the altar of St Anthony the Abbot in the church of St Mark. Although the regional expression of the Berninesque tradition is compromised in terms of quality of the work, it is apparent in the altars of the Holy Family and the Sacred Heart of Jesus that the spirit of the Roman Baroque style as influenced by Bernini significantly changed the interior of this church.

XI. Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra,

Altar of the Holy Spirit, Altar of the Virgin of Carmel,

Parish Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Qrendi, First half of the 18th century

Plates 26 and 53

The altars in the transept and the nave of the parish church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin in Qrendi are an ideal example of the Berninesque impact on Malta's regional style.[113] Although no documents have yet been discovered to secure an attribution to a specific *scalpellino*, the style of the stone works surrounding the altar paintings definitely points to an execution in the early to mid-eighteenth century, possibly by one of Malta's most prominent *scalpellini*, Pietro Paolo Zahra.

The present parish church was built between 1685 and 1712 to the design of the Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà,[114] and stylistically the sculptural decoration on the altar reredoses belong firmly to the first half of the eighteenth century. The altar of the Holy Spirit, situated in the transept of the parish church, seems to be unique in Malta in its depiction of the Holy Trinity in its uppermost part which is directly impacted by Andrea Pozzo's design for the altar of St Ignatius in Il Gesù in Rome. Prints of this altar were widely disseminated and also available in Malta where they were used by regional *scalpellini* for design purposes (Fig. 4.69 – Fig. 4.71). Although this composition is often utilised in neighbouring Sicily, to the author's knowledge, the altar of the Holy Spirit at Qrendi is the only instance where Pozzo's design is replicated in Malta.

---

[113] On the village of Qrendi and its parish church, see Frans Ciappara, *The Social and Religious History of a Maltese Parish: St Mary's Qrendi in the Eighteenth Century*, Malta University Press, Msida, 2014.

[114] Leonard Mahoney, *A History of Maltese Architecture*, Malta, 1988, 234-235, as quoted in Conrad Thake, *Baroque Churches in Malta*, Arcadia, Malta, 1995, 70-71. For more information on Qrendi and the construction of its parish church, see George Cassar, *Qrendi: its people and their heritage*, Qrendi Local Council, 2014.

Fig. 4.69 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption, Qrendi. Detail.

Fig. 4.70 Andrea Pozzo, Altar of St Ignatius, Church of Il Gesù, Rome. Detail.

Fig. 4.71 Print of the altar of St Ignatius, Il Gesù, Rome. Detail.

It is apparent that the *scalpellino* carrying out the design had the print fully available to him. Pozzo's composition is replicated in the Qrendi altar with the two figures of the Eternal Father and Christ with the Cross placed beside each other atop the altar painting. There is also a very apparent attempt to replicate the figures' hand gestures and facial expressions. The drapery folds of the figure of Christ are also very similar, especially in their position around the body, while there is a noticeable difference in the manner which the drapery folds swirl to rise above the Eternal Father's head. This is particularly similar to other depictions of the Eternal Father in Pietro Paolo Zahra's documented oeuvre and could have been inspired by Cafa's Eternal Father or depictions of the typology in paintings (Fig. 4.72 – Fig. 4.74). The *gloria* is similarly placed in between the two figures with the dove of the Holy Spirit at its centre. The Maltese *gloria* is more diffused than the one portrayed by Pozzo as well as the one included in the print, resulting in a diminished dramatic portrayal of the emanating light achieved in the original altar. The greatest difference in composition is the positioning and prominence of the globe. In both the altar in Il Gesù and the print, the globe is placed between the two figures while the Maltese *scalpellino* relegated it to the right of the Eternal Father. In spite of this difference, the putto holding it up is copied from the original composition, as are the double sets of cherub heads among the sculpted clouds.

The rest of the altar reredos acknowledges the Berninesque tradition in the inclusion of two *angeli adoranti* flanking the altar paining. They are executed in the style of Pietro Paolo Zahra; the angel on the left, with his hand placed on the edge of the sculpted frame decorated with an acanthus leaf festoon, gazes upwards at the Virgin in the centre of the painting's composition while the angel on the right makes direct contact with the spectator situated beneath the altar. Their physiognomy and facial expression, the manner in which the hair is sculpted in waves, the feathers in their wings, their bended knees and solid anatomy, and the angled drapery folds point towards the attribution to Pietro Paolo Zahra or his workshop.

The same typology of *angeli adoranti* can be found in two other altar reredoses in the same church. The altar dedicated to the Virgin of Carmel display two flanking angels in a very similar posture, with one reaching out to the spectator while the other gazes in absorbed adoration at the Virgin in the painting. Two full-

Fig. 4.72 Melchiorre Cafà, Altar of St Thomas of Villanova, Church of S. Agostino, Rome. Detail. (top left)

Fig. 4.73 Lucas Garnier, *Holy Souls with Trinity in Purgatory*, Parish Church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Fig. 4.74 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption, Qrendi. Detail. (top)

fledged angels, a number of *putti*, and several cherub heads peeking from behind flatly-rendered and partly gilded clouds, are perched on top of the altar painting. From a stylistic analysis of the drapery folds, physiognomy, and general idiosyncrasies, it is evident that the altar of the Holy Spirit and the altar of the Virgin of Carmel were executed by the same hand, probably by Pietro Paolo Zahra. The same conclusion can be applied to the altar of the Virgin with the Girdle and the altar of St John the Baptist with St Paul, St Catherine, St Nicholas of Bari, and St Lucy. The latter's altar painting was executed in 1741 by Francesco Zahra,[115] Pietro Paolo's painter son, and this strengthens the possibility of the four altars being the work of Pietro Paolo Zahra. Nevertheless, the sculptural work on the altar of the Virgin with the Girdle and the altar of St John the Baptist with St Paul, St Catherine, St Nicholas of Bari, and St Lucy, as compared with the other two altars in the same church analysed here, seems to be somewhat diminished in technical quality and execution of design and composition, which points to the probability that a workshop hand might have been at work.

---

[115] For more on Francesco Zahra and this altarpiece, see Sciberras (2010), 150-151.

4.4 Catalogue of Works: Small Churches

XII. Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra,
Altar of the Virgin of Mercy,
Church of the Virgin of Mercy,
Qrendi, c. 1723

Plate 6

The significance of the titular altar reredos in the church of the Virgin of Mercy in Qrendi is the fact that it represents the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in countryside churches.[116] Qrendi is a village which remains to this day small and rural with small churches dotting its countryside. The Berninesque imprint, which can also be seen in the altars in Qrendi's parish church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin,[117] was carried into the church of the Virgin of Mercy very successfully.

The commission documents for this church have not yet been discovered, if they are still in existence, but on the basis of stylistic and contextual analysis, this altar reredos is attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra.[118] Its date of execution is placed in the early twenties of the eighteenth century due to a mention in the pastoral visitation, in which Bishop Gori Mancini describes it as 'newly and elegantly enlarged'.[119] Apart from the standard typology used by Zahra, there are also a number of similarities in the manner in which the facial features, the hair, the drapery, and the wings of the angels are sculpted in other works by Zahra, including

---

[116] For more on the history of this church, see Alexandra Scicluna, 'The Church of the Virgin of Mercy (Tal-Ħniena) Qrendi: Its History Architecture and Works of Art', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2002.

[117] The altars in the parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Qrendi are discussed *supra* in Catalogue Entry XI.

[118] This is discussed in Meli (2017), 215- 217.

[119] AAM, VP XXXI, Gori Mancini, 1722-1723, f. 328. See Meli (2017), 215.

Fig. 4.75 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Church of the Virgin of Mercy, Qrendi. Detail. (top left)

Fig. 4.76 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption, Qrendi. Detail. (top right)

Fig. 4.77 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Church of the Virgin of Mercy, Qrendi. Detail. (centre left)

Fig. 4.78 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Pentecost, Parish church of the Assumption, Qrendi. Detail. (bottom left)

311

Fig. 4.79 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Church of the Virgin of Mercy, Qrendi. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.80 Ercole Ferrata, Altar of the Visitiation, Santa Maria del Popolo. Rome. Detail. (right)

the examples in the Qrendi parish church (Fig. 4.75 and Fig. 4.76). There are also stylistic similarities with a number of the *scalpellino*'s altar reredoses in the decoration of the apsidal cap, with two *putti* holding a crown awaiting to put it on top of the Virgin's head (Fig. 4.77 and Fig. 4.78). These kind of compositional links, especially coupled with the *angeli adoranti* conversing between the spectator and the narrative in the altar painting, are typical of Zahra's Berninesque-imprinted style.

The angels hovering on clouds on either side of the altar painting are executed in the Berninesque tradition of *angeli adoranti* and are most comparable to the angels in the transept altars of the church of S. Maria del Popolo in Rome, executed by Berniniani and other sculptors in Rome (Fig. 4.79 and Fig 4.80). It is clear from these comparisons that the sculptor-designer of this altar reredos was familiar with Roman Baroque works of art, either from first-hand experience, printed sources, or association with other persons – artists or patrons – who possessed knowledge of Bernini's designs. The regional quality of the stuccoed

limestone is apparent in the sculpture of the altar reredos; furthermore, restoration has revealed that the sculpture was originally painted and gilded – a regional quality of Maltese Late Baroque sculpture which is obviously missing in Rome.

The church of the Virgin of Mercy has been abandoned for a considerable number of years and was not in a good state of preservation. Restoration had started a number of years back but was interrupted due to lack of funds before it was continued last year. The preservation of this church is essential as an important example of the Berninesque tradition which in Malta was powerful enough to permeate through to rural churches and manifest itself in a vernacular setting.

XIII. Pietro Paolo Zahra,

Altar of the Annunciation,
Altar of the Virgin of Light with St
James,

Church of St James,
Żurrieq, 1728-1731

Plates 7 and 8

The church of St James in Żurrieq is the perfect example of a space which is completely immersed in the Berninesque imprint.[120] The fact that Pietro Paolo Zahra is documented as the architect of the church and the designer of the three altar reredoses inside is further stylistic and contextual proof that this *scalpellino* was not only responsible for the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in Malta, but he was also absorbed in the Berninesque spirit as an artist in his own right as it is evident in all of his designs.

The building of the church fabric was commissioned in 1728, and the notarial contract makes specific reference to Pietro Paolo Zahra as the '*Architetto*'.[121] The early eighteenth century in Malta witnessed a boom in building new churches and enlarging older ones, thus creating a prosperous period for all *scalpellini* and craftsmen working in Malta due to the increased demand for designing and furnishing altar reredoses. The church of St James belongs firmly within this period and general context. Pietro Paolo Zahra was also commissioned the design and sculpting of the altar reredoses inside the church, since the

---

[120] This church is also analysed in Meli (2017).
[121] NAV, Notary Marc'Antonio Brancati, R87, Volume 38, f. 25v-27v. See also Meli (2017), 222. The building of the church was entrusted to the master mason Giacomo Bianco who had to follow the plan of '*Maestro Paolo Architetto*'. NAV, Notary Marc'Antonio Brancati, R87, Volume 38, f. 26.
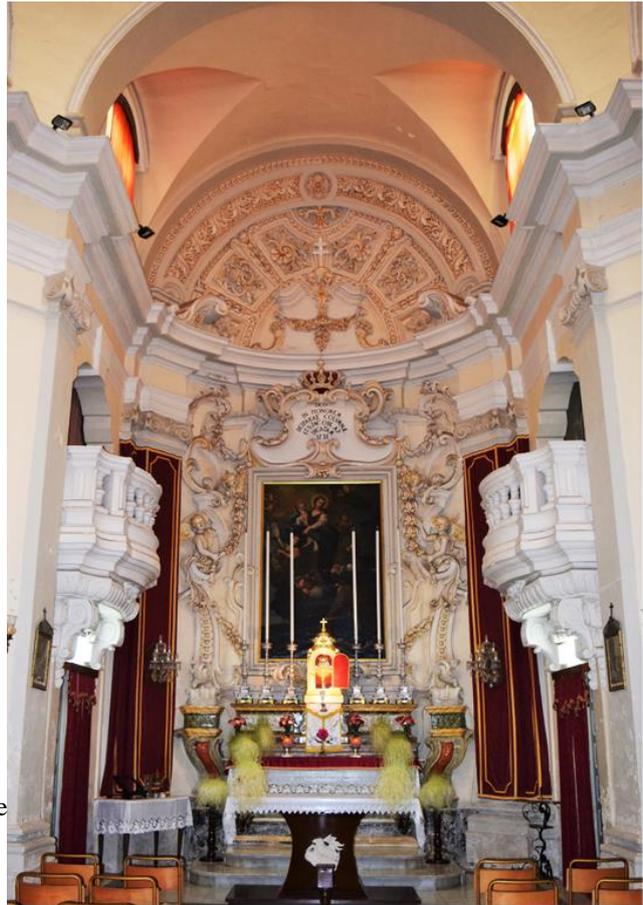
Fig. 4.81 Fabri family, Altar of the Virgin of Light with St James, Church of St James, Żurrieq.

commission contract for its building obliges the master mason, Giacomo Bianco, to leave all bosses and projections of all façades ready for subsequent sculpting.[122] The church and its interior decoration were completed within three short years, when it was consecrated in 1731.

Although documentation reveals that Zahra was the designer of the entire church, including the altar reredoses, stylistically it is very clear that two hands were at work in the church. While Zahra's hand is immediately recognisable in the two lateral altar reredoses, the main altar was executed by another *scalpellino* (Fig. 4.81). This is apparent from the stiffer treatment of the stone medium and the lesser quality which points to either an execution by a workshop hand or another *scalpellino* altogether. Indeed, it has been previously attributed to the Fabri family.[123] This attribution could suffice especially in view of the motifs and decorative sculpture utilised in the main altar reredos, which are a salient feature used by the Fabri family. However, this work falls below the Fabri's usual standard,

---

[122] See Meli (2017), 222.
[123] Sciberras (2010), 41. See also Meli (2017), 223.

especially in the execution of the figures (Fig. 4.82 and Fig. 4.83). This suggests that, while the design was executed by Zahra, a workshop hand from either the Zahra or Fabri workshop was at work. The reason behind Zahra's decision to entrust the most important altar in the church to another *scalpellino* is unclear, but it might have been strategically wise to continue to enforce the relations between the two leading *scalpellini* family active on the Island.

The two lateral altars, on the other hand, belong firmly within Pietro Paolo Zahra's oeuvre. This is confirmed by their typical composition displaying two *angeli adoranti* flanking the altar painting with sculptural decoration consisting of the Eternal Father in the altar of the Annunciation or frolicking *putti* upholding a crown in the altar of the Virgin of Light with St James. The sculpture of both altars complements the narrative in the painting, exemplifying the close relationship and successful collaboration between the sculptor and the painter, Francesco Zahra, who was Pietro Paolo's son. While in the altar of the Annunciation, the Eternal Father watches over the announcement of the Archangel Gabriel to the Virgin, the *putti* in the altar of the Virgin of Light await the Virgin with a crown for her head. There are also clear echoes between the painting and the sculpture, especially in the left angel of the altar of the Annunciation and the *putti* atop the altar of the Virgin of Light, both of which are reproduced in three-dimensional sculpture from their two-dimensional counterparts in the painting. This collaboration between the artists and the different components making up the altar decoration is very much in tune with the spirit of the Roman Baroque *gesamtkunstwerk* and the Berninesque *bel composto* as discussed by Filippo Baldinucci in his *Life of Bernini*:[124]

DEL CAVALIER BERNINO.   67

di, come bene spesso accadeua per lo gusto, che aueuano tali Per-
sonaggi di sollazzarsi con lui in sì fatto trattenimento, anche in-
torno a i propri volti, dando poi a vedere i disegni ad altri di non
minore affare. E' concetto molto vniuersale, ch'egli sia stato il
primo, che abbia tentato di vnire l'Architettura con la Scultura, e
Pittura in tal modo, che di tutte si facesse vn bel composto; il che
fece egli con togliere alcune vniformità odiose di attitudini, rō-
pendole talora senza violar le buone regole, ma senza obbligarsi
a regola; ed era suo detto ordinario in tal proposito, che chi non
esce taluolta della Regola, non la passa mai; voleua però, che chi

---

[124] Filippo Baldinucci, *Vita del cav. Gio. Lorenzo Bernino,* Firenze, 1682, 67.

Fig. 4.82 Fabri family, Altar of the Virgin of Light with St James, Church of St James, Żurrieq. Detail.

Fig. 4.83 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Annunciation, Church of St James, Żurrieq. Detail.

The technical ability of Zahra, especially in the carving of the figures and facial features of the angels, contrasts highly with the more provincial aptitude and the *horror vacui* seen in the main altar. The influence is clearly Berninesque, from the motifs used by the sculptor to the spirit the altar reredoses impart on the spectator. Compared to the main altar reredos, there is less stress on the decorative features, bar the large volutes and scrolls which connect the side with the top of the altar, in favour of large masses of sculpted figures. More attention is paid to the aura that the design imparts to the small church. The compositional links between the angels and the spectator continue to enforce the Berninesque spirit embodied in these altars. The designs naturally find their origin in Baroque Rome, and their counterparts in the south of Italy.

The Berninesque visible spirit in the small church of St James is an excellent example of the forceful impact of Bernini's influence which permeated the visual culture in Malta to reach not only the cosmopolitan towns of Valletta, Mdina, Rabat, and the Three Cities, but also more remote villages like Żurrieq. It also exemplifies the awareness which patrons and artists in Malta's villages had of Bernini's works in Rome and their desire to recreate their stylistic essence and spiritual ethos closer to home.

**XIV. Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra,
Altar of the Virgin of Light,
Church of the Virgin of Light,
Żebbuġ, c. 1736-1745**

Plate 54

Another important example of the Berninesque tradition as manifested regionally in the production of eighteenth-century Maltese *scalpellini* is the church of the Virgin of Light in Żebbuġ. The cult of the Virgin of Light was immensely popular in Sicily and this devotion travelled also to Malta in the eighteenth century, especially through the backing of Bishop Alpheran de Bussan who encouraged the building of the church of the Virgin of Light in Żebbuġ in 1736.[125] The finished church is mentioned in the pastoral visit of Bishop Alpheran de Bussan in 1745,[126] meaning that the altar reredos inside dates between 1736 and 1745. Stylistically, it falls neatly into Pietro Paolo Zahra's oeuvre.

The altar painting is encased in a robust partly-gilded stone frame which is held up by two *angeli adoranti* on either upper side. A cartouche with a later Maltese inscription tops the frame amongst three cherub heads. A *sopra quadro* topped with a shell motif and surrounded by two *putti* complete the simple composition of the altar reredos. The nave of the small church is decorated with more paintings, all of which have stone frames with shell motifs at the top. This kind of altar reredos typology, the shell motif for the side paintings, and the facial and figurative typologies of the *angeli adoranti* and the *putti* are akin to Pietro Paolo Zahra's style pertaining to the first half of the eighteenth century. Considering his close connection to the Żebbuġ clergy through his execution of the

---

[125] His coat of arms can be seen on the façade of the church.
[126] AAM, VP XXXIV, Alpheran de Bussan, 1744-1751. See Anthony M. Brincat, 'Il-kappella tal-Madonna tad-Dawl, Żebbuġ' at <https://www.kappellimaltin.com/Il-Kappelli/Sett04/ZBG_Mad_tad-Dawl/zbg_mad_tad-dawl.html> accessed 12 September 2020.

large transept altars in the Żebbuġ parish church dedicated to St Philip of Agira, it is probable that Zahra is the author of this work.

The church of the Virgin of Light in Żebbuġ is not open for the public and the condition of the altar reredos is stable. It stands in Żebbuġ as another of Pietro Paolo Zahra's examples of a small-scale altar reredos imprinted with the theatrical style of Bernini and the Roman Baroque of the Eternal City.

**XV. Francesco Fabri,
Altar of the Virgin of Damascus,
Church of the Virgin of Damascus,
Birgu, 1740s**

Plate 11

It is stylistically evident that the surviving Berninesque altar reredos surrounding the icon of the Virgin of Damascus in the tiny church of the Virgin of Damascus in Birgu was commissioned and executed in the eighteenth century.

The church has a complicated architectural and political history. Also known as the church of *Il-Madonna tal-Griegi*, which is part of the Oratory of St Joseph in Birgu (Vittoriosa), it was originally dedicated to St Catherine, but in the early sixteenth century it was given to the Rhodians who came with the Order of St John to Malta to serve as a church for the Greek rite.[127] When the church of the Virgin of Damascus built in Valletta was finished,[128] the Icon of the Virgin was solemnly transferred to the new church in the city while a replica made by Greek tradesmen replaced it on the altar in the church at Birgu.[129] The church of St Catherine, which became the church of the Virgin of Damascus in 1530 when it was given to the Greek community of Birgu,[130] stood next to another small church dedicated to the Visitation of St Elizabeth to the Virgin Mary, which was under the privilege of *jus patronatus*. These two churches shared a common door and essentially formed one church on the inside with the altar of the Virgin of Damascus recognised as the main altar of the two churches. At some point, the church of the Visitation was demolished and another one was built instead of it but the church of the Virgin of Damascus remained untouched. On 24 February 1832,

---

[127] Gregory Gauci, *Churches, Chapels and Oratories in Birgu*, published by author, Malta, 2001, 2.
[128] The church of the Virgin of Damascus in Valletta was destroyed in WWII and later rebuilt.
[129] Gauci (2010), 2.
[130] Achille Ferris, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta, 1866, 279.

the church of the Visitation was entrusted to the Confraternity of St Joseph founded in the parish church of Birgu dedicated to St Lawrence.[131] The church of the Virgin of Damascus eventually became a chapel incorporated within the Oratory of St Joseph.[132]

The small chapel is thought to have been a remnant of the old church,[133] but stylistically, the sculpture belongs firmly in the eighteenth century. This is confirmed by the commission of the altar of the Virgin of Damascus given to Francesco Fabri on 17 Febraury 1743 by Marchese Gio Pio de Piro.[134] Fabri was obliged to dismantle the existing altar and instead build a new one which included marble details and inscriptions on the altar's pedestal. While it is not entirely clear from the contract whether Fabri was commissioned to execute the altar reredos or the altar table, the fact that marble is mentioned as the medium points towards the probability that Fabri was executing the altar table. However, stylistically, the stone carved altar reredos also belongs to the family's style. It is impacted by the Roman Baroque style in its use of the flanking *angeli adoranti* and *gloria* with the dove of the Holy Spirit at the apex of the reredos. From the composition and the repeated typology of the work, it is also clear that Fabri was influenced by the higher quality work of Pietro Paolo Zahra, with whom he had previously worked. Giacomo Fabri, Francesco's brother, is also a possible candidate for the commission of the stone carved altar reredos. Giacomo Fabri was commissioned by the same patron, Marchese Gio Pio de Piro, to paint the chapel of the Greek rite in Vittoriosa, including the *scanello* of the altar with the '*cartella coll'iscrizione Madre di Dio*'.[135] Fabri had to paint the entire chapel with different mediums, including the '*puttini*', the '*cornice*', the '*scanelli*', and '*la cartella coll'iscrizione Madre di*

---

[131] This information on the history of the church was obtained from Giuseppe Porsella Flores, *Knejjes li ma Għadhomx Jidhru Ġewwa l-Birgu*, published by author, Malta, 2002, 113-121.

[132] Leonard Mahoney, 'Ecclesiastical Architecture' in Lino Bugeja, Mario Buhagiar, Stanley Fiorini (eds), *Birgu: A Maltese Maritime City*, Central Bank of Malta, 1993, 393-420: 418.

[133] Mahoney (1993), 418.

[134] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco d'Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1743, ff. 283-284.

[135] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco d'Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1743, f. 483v-484v.

Fig. 4.84 Fabri family, Altar of the Virgin of Light with St James, Church of St James, Żurrieq. Detail. (top left)

Fig. 4.85 Fabri family, Altar of the Virgin of Damascus, Oratory of St Joseph, Birgu. Detail. (top right)

Fig. 4.86 Church of the Virgin of Providence, Siggiewi. Detail. (left)

Dio'.[136] The latter, in the lower part of the reredos atop the *scanello*, has been repainted and replaced with the IHS symbol.[137]

The icon of the silver-clad Virgin of Damascus is flanked by two angels hovering on flatly rendered stone sculpted clouds. The angels, although not *putti*, do not seem to be entirely fully-fledged angels – they appear to be somewhere in between, since their smaller size contradicts their adult facial features. This typology of a short stocky angel is seen elsewhere in Maltese countryside churches, particularly in the small eighteenth-century church of the Virgin of the Providence in Siggiewi and the altar of the Virgin with St James in the church of St James in Żurrieq, also attributed to the Fabri family (Fig. 4.84 – Fig. 4.86). Both angels make eye contact with the spectator in the direct manner of the Roman Baroque style but one of the angels points away from the altar. The IHS symbol, previously the inscription of the Virgin Mary, was probably installed when the church was given to the Confraternity of St Joseph and was repurposed into an oratory. It is encased in a rather bulkily sculpted stone frame, especially when proportionally compared with the rather small altar painting, and topped with a crown; the latter is also similar in execution to the crown on the altar of the Virgin with St James in the church of St James in Żurrieq.[138]

The top part of the altar reredos is executed in the style of Pietro Paolo Zahra's altar typology, especially in the inclusion of the *gloria* with the dove of the Holy Spirit and the cartouche with the motif of the shell atop the altar painting with two leafy festoons dropping on each side. The drapery folds and the rendition of the feathers of the angels' wings are also in the style of Pietro Paolo Zahra. However, the quality at this point in Pietro Paolo Zahra's career was much better than what is presented by the scalpellino of this altar reredos. Thus, the attribution to a member of the Fabri family, who were influenced by the style disseminated by Zahra, is more plausible.

---

[136] NAV, R15, Notary Francesco d'Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1743, f. 484.
[137] The same church was then repainted by Giuseppe Gatt later on in the eighteenth century, commissioned by Papaso Constantino Bruni on 6 October 1758. NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 21, 1758-1759, ff. 38v-39v.
[138] See Catalogue Entry XIII.

**XVI. Attributed to the Fabri family,
Altar of the Assumption of Mary,
Church of the Assumption of Mary,
Safi, c. 1761-1764**

Plate 55

The church of the Assumption of the Virgin is a small church in the tiny village of Safi in the south-west of Malta. Its main altar reredos, which is only a few steps away from the front portal, is an excellent example of the dissemination of the Berninesque style from the imposing city of Rome to tiny churches in Maltese villages where it enhanced the eighteenth-century visual culture of altar reredoses sculpted primarily of local limestone. This is very apparent in the church of the Assumption of the Virgin since the sculpture is not polychromised or gilded. The date of execution of the altar reredos is also proof of the intensity of the Berninesque impact on Maltese *scalpellini* – an influence which effortlessly lingered on into the second half of the eighteenth century.

Little is known of the documentary evidence pertaining to this church. The church's origins date back to the late sixteenth century as it is mentioned to have been in a disastrous state in the Dusina 1575 pastoral visit. In 1758, the church was still abandoned but a request to rebuild the church was made to Bishop Bartholomeo Rull. The request was granted in 1759 and works started two years later in May 1761 and lasted until October 1764. The church of the Assumption of the Virgin was consecrated in 1765.[139]

The typology used by the undocumented *scalpellino* in this altar reredos is virtually the same as the formula adopted by Pietro Paolo Zahra and his workshop.

---

[139] Martin Gravina, 'Knejjes b'kult Marjan fil-ġurisdizzjoni ta' Bir Miftuħ', *Festa titulari Santa Marija il-Gudja 2011*, Parish Church of the Assumption, Gudja, 2011, 13-15.

Fig. 4.87 Fabri family, Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Safi. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.88 Fabri family, Church of St Bartholomew, Żurrieq. Detail. (right)
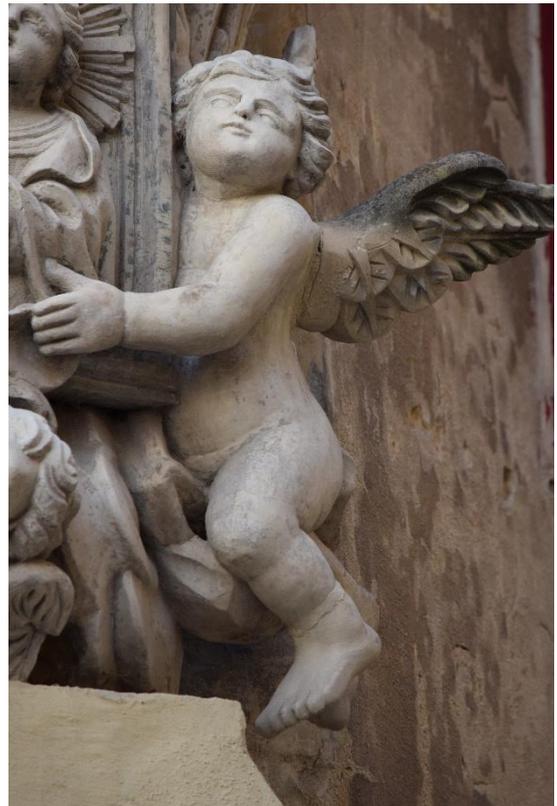
Fig. 4.89 Fabri family, Museum of Sculpture. Xewkija, Gozo. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.90 Fabri family, Niche, Rabat. Detail. (right)

Two *angeli adoranti* flank the altar painting, one making a connection with the spectator and one gazing at the Eternal Father, who surmounts the entire composition atop the altar painting. He is held up by multiple cherub heads amidst the rays of the *gloria* bursting from behind him in the apsidal cap. The main difference from Pietro Paolo Zahra's altar reredoses is the type of sculptural decoration which is used. Although festoons, scrolls, volutes, and shells are still used, and therefore, the elements are constant, the manner in which they are sculpted is more frivolous, playful, and less serious when compare to Zahra's more sombre, more solid, and more robust handling of the stone.

Zahra's son, Felice, is documented to have formed part of his father's workshop and could have easily adapted his father's style to produce altar reredoses of this type. However, it is more likely, especially due to their popularity, that the Fabri family executed this altar reredos. There are also stylistic affinities, particularly in the facial typologies of the *angeli adoranti* (Fig 4.87), as well as the profuse use of decorative sculptural elements, with other works attributed to or documented to have been executed by the Fabri. Examples of these include the titular altar of the Church of St Bartholomew in Żurrieq (Fig 4.88), the eighteenth-century altars in old parish church of St John the Baptist in Xewkija, Gozo (Fig 4.89), and even a niche of the Virgin and Child in Triq Santu Wistin, Rabat (Fig 4.90).

There are also some striking similarities with the altar reredos of the church of Santa Chiara in Noto. It has been documented that Maltese *scalpellini* worked in Sicily and Sicilian artists also worked in Malta,[140] and this shared Berninesque influence continued to reinforce the connection between the two islands. Both versions of the Eternal Father, in both posture and facial typology, are close in their execution (Fig. 4.93 and Fig. 4.94). On the other hand, there is a disparity in quality in the execution and dexterity observed in the execution of the *angeli adoranti* in the Safi and Noto churches. The Maltese version exhibits angels which are more robust, with graceful facial features, and with a feel for the anatomy of the body underneath the billowing drapery. In the church of Santa Chiara, the *scalpellino* did not adopt such a dramatic style of drapery and indeed, the drapery folds are more

---

[140] This is discussed *supra* in Chapter I and II.

Fig. 4.91 Fabri family, Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Safi. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.92 Church of Santa Chiara, Noto. Detail. (right)

Fig. 4.93 Fabri family, Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Safi. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.94 Church of Santa Chiara, Noto. Detail. (right)

subdued and less animated (Fig. 4.91 and Fig. 4.92). The same could be said about the angels' faces which can be described as more blank of expression when compared to the more dynamic Maltese versions, which also adopt more pronounced *affetti*.

This altar reredos is particularly important to the subject of the Berninesque impact in Malta due to its small size and rural location, as well as its apparent similarities with other regional centres, such as Noto. The altar reredos is in a good state of preservation and further conservation treatments are being carried out. The entire church is also in a good state.

XVII. Attributed to the Fabri family,
Altar of St Bartholomew,
Church of St Bartholomew,
Żurrieq, c. 1775-1784

Plate 12

The small church of St Bartholomew, attributed to the Fabri family, is another example of the Maltese Late Baroque embracing the Berninesque tradition in the late eighteenth century. The present church dedicated to St Bartholomew situated in the village of Żurrieq started to be constructed in 1775. Before this, another church dedicated to the same saint had been standing on the site since 1482.[141] The new church was consecrated in 1784 and therefore, the highly ornate altar reredos is dated to have been executed between 1775 and 1784.

The altar painting is adorned with a highly-ornate stone frame made up of delicately-carved scrolls, volutes, and festoons of acanthus leaves. The *sotto quadro* is particularly lavish in its execution. Two large *angeli adoranti* are placed on clouds on either side of the frame and act as intercessors between the spectator and the divine through their use of *affetti*. The drapery folds of their garments are dynamic, reflecting their animated state of mind. The altar painting is surmounted with a cartouche encompassing the Chi-Rho symbol with cherub heads atop. Further up, on the pediment upon the entablature, three *putti* exhibit the symbols of St Bartholomew's martyrdom to the faithful: the trunk of a tree; the palm frond and the skin of St Bartholomew; and the knife – all references to the flaying of the saint. The *gloria* of the Holy Spirit in the central partition of the ribbed apsidal cap completes the altar reredos's iconography.

---

[141] The church is mentioned in the pastoral visitation report of Bishop Dusina in 1575 to have been in a very good state but it was later abandoned and deconsecrated by Bishop Balaguer in 1658. See Anthony M. Brincat, 'Il-kappella ta' San Bartilmew, Żurrieq' at <https://www.kappellimaltin.com/Il-Kappelli/Sett02/ZRQ_S__Bartilmew/zrq_s__bartilmew.html> accessed 12 September 2020.

Fig. 4.95 Fabri family, Side wall, Church of St Bartholomew, Żurrieq. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.96 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Side wall, Oratory of Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail. (right)

The stylistic progression from Pietro Paolo Troisi's and Pietro Paolo Zahra's more robust designs to the Fabri's later more decorative and elaborate adopt the same Berninesque typology. Although the formula of the altar reredos remains the same – flanking *angeli adoranti* surrounded by *putti*, cherub head, the *gloria*, floral and decorative motifs – the treatment of the stone is more delicate resulting in a more frivolous, Rococo-like style which makes Pietro Paolo Zahra's theatrical piety look sober in comparison. The same treatment is given to the stone frames of the paintings on the side walls of the church (Fig. 4.95 and Fig. 4.96).

The similarities with other works attributed to the Fabri family are strikingly apparent, especially in the facial typology adopted by this family of *scalpellini*. The angels' faces have chubby cheeks, pronounced brows and lips, with a small nose and eyes which are somewhat sideways elongated. The facial proportions are also particular with a disproportionate width to the height of the face, giving the angels a more child-like appearance (Fig. 4.97 and Fig. 4.98). The same drapery folds and treatment of the feathers of the angels' wings can be seen in other works by the

Fig. 4.97 Fabri family, Church of St Bartholomew, Żurrieq. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.98 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Oratory of Holy Crucifix, Senglea. Detail. (right)

Fig. 4.99 Fabri family, Church of St Bartholomew, Żurrieq. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.100 Fabri family, Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Safi. Detail. (right)

Fabri, especially the altar reredos in the nearby church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Safi (Fig. 4.99 and Fig. 4.100).[142]

The church of St Bartholomew is an example of a very ornate church in the Fabri's oeuvre which remains to this day an excellent illustration of the persistence of the Berninesque tradition in Maltese Late Baroque altar reredoses.

---

[142] The church of the Virgin of the Assumption in Safi is discussed *supra* in Catalogue Entry XVI.

4.5 Catalogue of Works: Statues and Architectural Decoration

XVIII. Melchiorre Cafà,
St Paul,
Parish Church of St Paul Shipwrecked, Valletta,
c.1659

Melchiorre Cafà,
Virgin of the Rosary,
Parish Church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin, Rabat,
1660-1661

Two immensely significant statues for the development of regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta are Melchiorre Cafà's *St Paul* and the *Virgin of the Rosary*. Although the Berninesque tradition in Malta is imprinted in the majority of altar reredoses executed by regional *scalpellini* in the eighteenth century, the commissioning of free-standing statues, particularly of St Paul and the Virgin Mary under her various titles, took another route.

With Melchiorre Cafà present in Rome and very little previous work in Malta, the first two works by him to be sent to Malta were commissioned by two important parish churches – the *St Paul* for the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta and the *Virgin of the Rosary* for the parish church of St Dominic and the Blessed Virgin in Rabat. In these two works, Cafà shows his allegiance to Alessandro Algardi, through his association with Ercole Ferrata's workshop, before he merged this style with influence from Bernini.[143] Since they were originally conceived as processional statues, the medium used by Cafà was wood. It is documented that the Virgin of the Rosary arrived in Malta in May 1661 but there is no documentation on the St Paul, although it has been established that it

---

[143] Sciberras (2012), 37-39.

Fig. 4.101 Pietro Paolo Zahra, St Paul, Senglea. (left)
Fig. 4.102 Pietro Paolo Zahra, St Paul, Sacristy façade, Parish church of St Paul, Valletta. (right)

must have been donated to the church by the patrons, the Testaferrata family, before 1694.[144]

The impact which these two processional statues had on the development of free-standing statuary in eighteenth-century Malta was immense, affecting even the production of sculpture in stone. The two statues are often found mentioned in commission contracts, used as a reference for the sculptor who is commissioned a statue which was to follow the style of Cafà's examples.[145] Indeed, no archival documentation is required to observe the great similarities between Cafà's St Paul and, for example, a statue of St Paul in Senglea or another statue of the saint above

---

[144] Keith Sciberras (ed.), Melchiorre Cafà: Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2006, 4.
[145] NAV, Notary Gio Antonio Abela, R2, Volume 28, ff. 367-368v. Published in Sandro Debono, 'Mariano Girada (1770-1823): Maltese Art and Spain 1750-1830', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, 2007, 33.

Fig. 4.103 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Virgin of the Rosary, Parish church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Mosta. (left)
Fig. 4.104 Pietro Felice, Virgin of the Rosary, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. (right)
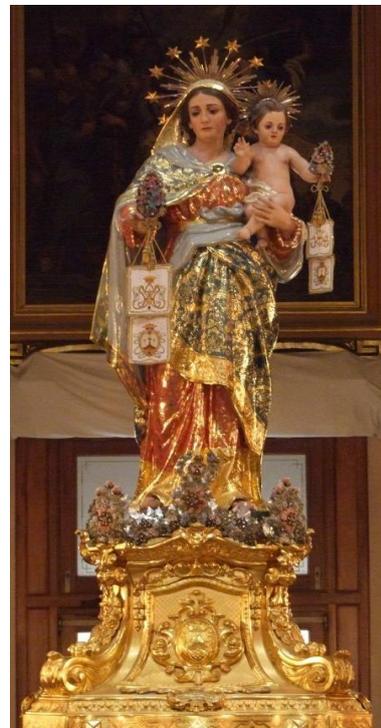
Fig. 4.105 Antonio Fabri, Virgin of the Rosary, Capuchin friary, Kalkara . (left)
Fig. 4.106 Salvatore Psaila, Virgin of Carmel, Parish church of St Catherine, Żurrieq. (right)

the sacristy door of the parish church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta, both attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra (Fig. 4.101 and Fig. 4.102).[146] The same applies to Cafà's Virgin of the Rosary. The typical Algardesque *contrapposto* pose is replicated by Pietro Paolo Zahra in the Virgin of the Rosary in Mosta,[147] another statue under the same title in Żebbuġ by Pietro Felice,[148] and another in the Capuchin Convent in Kalkara executed by Antonio Fabri (Fig. 4.103 – Fig. 1.05).[149] A number of processional statues pertaining to parish church titular altars, such as Salvatore Psaila's Virgin of Carmel in Żurrieq, are also executed in this manner (Fig. 1.06).

The fact that Cafà's two statues had been commissioned by the Diocese coupled with the fact that the statues were meant for public ceremonial processions meant that they were extremely accessible to artists in Malta, and this partly explains the dominance which they enjoyed for centuries. Naturally, Cafà's skill and technical ability, or Algardi's classic Baroque expression, is not reflected as well in the regional productions of the same typology; regional characteristics, such as polychromy, gilding, and further embellishment of the statues – even of Cafà's *St Paul* and the *Virgin of the Rosary* which were probably never intended to be polychromised – remind the spectator that they are indeed in Malta and not in Rome.

---

[146] Meli (2017), 79-80.
[147] Meli (2017), 138-139.
[148] Clint Camilleri, 'The Influence of Melchiorre Cafà's St Paul and the Virgin of the Rosary on Maltese Baroque Sculpture', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Institute of Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2011, 86.
[149] Camilleri (2011), 91.

**XIX. Romano Carapecchia,
Side elevations,
Church of St James,
Valletta, c. 1710**

Plate 56 and 57

The church of St James in Valletta was designed by Romano Carapecchia in the first half of the eighteenth century. Carapecchia, a Roman artist present in Malta in the eighteenth century, was one of the main promoters of the Roman Baroque style in Malta. His various commissions and subsequent works in the Maltese Islands further disseminated the ideas and elements of the 'new' style and *scalpellini* who worked under him on these several projects benefited from his knowledge of the seventeenth-century art of the Eternal City. The side elevations, and to a certain extent the main altar, of the church of St James are a testament to this dissemination of the Berninesque manner.

The architecture and articulation of the interior of the church of St James exhibits Carapecchia's familiarity with the Roman works of architects, such as Francesco Borromini, especially in the adoption of the elliptically-shaped church in light of the theological and Tridentine directions for the main altar holding the Eucharist to be the focal point of the church.[150] However, Carapecchia also borrows from Bernini's colourful marble palette in his use of the dark marble for the altar reredos which contrasts sharply with the rest of the white church which is adorned with gilded sculpture and architectural motifs. The heavenly white and gold combination is akin to Bernini's designs for the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale in Rome.[151]

---

[150] Denis De Lucca, *Carapecchia: Master of Baroque Architecture in Early Eighteenth Century Malta*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 1999, 120. See also Meli (2017), 76.
[151] Meli (2017), 76.

Fig. 4.107 and Fig. 4.108 Romano Carapecchia, Side walls, Church of St James, Valletta. Details. (left column)
Fig. 4.109 and Fig. 4.110 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Transept altars, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Details. (right)

The side elevations are particularly interesting to the discussion of regional Late Baroque sculpture in Malta since they are most probably designs by a foreign architect, Carapecchia, executed by a local *scalpellino*. It has already been remarked that Pietro Paolo Zahra worked under Carapecchia on projects commissioned by the Maltese Diocese.[152] In 1718, Carapecchia designed the new sacristy for the church of St Paul Shipwrecked in Valletta as well as the furniture and the sculptural programmes.[153] The same church later commissioned Pietro Paolo Zahra to execute sculptural and wood-carved works in the same sacristy;[154] such contextual documentation therefore suggests the possibility that Zahra was executing Carapecchia's designs. It has already been sustained that the sculptural

---

[152] Meli (2017), 76.
[153] De Lucca (1999), 147-148.
[154] Sciberras (2010), 52-55. The *scalpellino* decorated the *preparatorio* in stone, marble, and wood. He also executed a marble *lavabo* for the church. Felice Zahra, Pietro Paolo's son, and Gerolamo and Carlo Fabri assisted Pietro Paolo. See also Meli (2017), 77.

337

decorations of this sacristy are akin to Zahra's style.[155] It is possible that the sculptural decoration of the side elevations of the church of St James belong to a similar scenario. In addition to this contextual evidence, the architectural motifs used such as the festoons, the shells, the palm fronds, and the cherub heads are very reminiscent of Zahra's style, on top of the similar gestures and postures of the *putti* (Fig. 4.107 – Fig. 4.110).

The effect of Carapecchia's design can be seen in the side elevations employed in the church dedicated to the Virgin of Porto Salvo in Ħamrun. The same architectural solution is employed for the side doors, with a moulding surrounding the portal surmounted by a cherub head. The upper part of the side elevations is also quite similar in the use of a central element which is flanked by gesturing *putti* holding acanthus-leaf festoons or palm fronds. Although the *putti*, both in terms of their broad anatomical portrayal and the typology of the hair and facial features, seem to recall Pietro Paolo Zahra's style, it is possible that he was not the sculptor due to the fact that the church's construction was commissioned in 1745 and consecrated in 1750, while Zahra died in 1747. However, although it could still have been Zahra who executed the figures, it is also possible that he was commissioned the work which would have been completed by his son, Felice, if still unfinished by the *scalpellino*'s death.

The church of St James is in a good state of preservation and stands to this day as an excellent example of the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition from Rome to Malta directly through the employment of foreign artists and architects. Its completion in the early eighteenth century ensured that the impact it had on Maltese *scalpellini* was effectively employed in their later designs.

---

[155] Meli (2017), 77.

XX. Unknown sculptor,
Side elevations,
Church of the Virgin of Providence,
Siġġiewi, mid-eighteenth century

Plate 30

The church of the Virgin of Providence is situated in the countryside pertaining to the village of Siġġiewi. The importance of this church lies in its side elevation decoration which is executed in the Berninesque tradition and is a satisfactory example of the regional interpretation of the style.

The present church was built between 1750 and 1753, in place of the sixteenth-century church which had been abandoned.[156] Its main altar is simply decorated with festoons and a cartouche on top of the frame surmounted by two *putti* holding up a crown. Further up in the ribbed apsidal cap, the *gloria* of the Holy Spirit shines down on the altar painting. Although this style of decoration owes its origin to Roman Baroque sculpture, the side elevations of the church are Berninesque in conception. The large lateral paintings are all decorated with festoons, shells, and cartouches to complement the main altar reredos, but they also have an added element which gives them a Berninesque feel – instead of the standard typology of the *angeli adoranti*, the designer of the church incorporated larger-than-life-size *putti* into the composition. Opposite to their usual function of adding on figures, filling in spaces, supporting larger figures, or carrying attributions which add on to the iconography of the design, in this case the *putti* are acting in place of *angeli adoranti* in the style of the transept altars of S. Maria del Popolo in Rome, including the use of *affetti*.

---

[156] The old church was mentioned by Bishop Dusina in his 1575 pastoral visitation report with a different dedication. In the 1747 pastoral visitation report by Bishop Alpheran de Bussan, the church was deconsecrated due to its abandoned state. See Roderick Busuttil, 'Il-Kappella tal-Providenza, Siġġiewi' at <https://www.kappellimaltin.com/Il-Kappelli/Sett01/SGW_Tal-Providenza/sgw_tal-providenza.html> accessed 12 September 2020.

Fig. 4.111 and Fig. 4.112 Church of the Virgin of Providence, Siggiewi. Details.

The author of the sculpture of this church is unknown. Additionally, although the style of the church's interior is in line with the decoration adopted by the Fabri and Zahra families of *scalpellini* in the Maltese eighteenth-century sculpture, the facial features of the *putti* do not match the standard typology of the most prominent members of the two. Since the church started to be built before Pietro Paolo Zahra's death, this could have meant that Felice, his son, took over his pending work. It could have also been entrusted to a less active member of the Fabri family or, on the other hand, a less popular or unknown *scalpellino*. If the latter is the case, it would support the forceful dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in Malta further since even less major *scalpellini* were aware of the widespread style. The church of the Virgin of Providence is in a good state of preservation, although its exterior is in need of restoration.

XXI. Attributed to Zahra workshop, Side elevation, Church of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Hamrun, 1745-1750

Plate 25

This chapel knows its origin to the early seventeenth century, but it was rebuilt and rededicated to the Virgin of Porto Salvo (it was originally dedicated to St Joseph) in the mid-eighteenth century.[157] Due to its very small scale, it represents the power that the Berninesque imprint had in the Maltese Islands, infiltrating to some degree or other almost any ecclesiastical sculpture commissioned in the eighteenth century.[158]

The church was commissioned in 1745 by Margerita Grech and it was finished by 1750 when Bishop Fra Paolo Alferan de Bussan consecrated it. Stylistically, especially based on the facial typologies of the *putti* and the figurative approach to the side walls, it can be attributed to the Zahra family workshop; since Pietro Paolo died in 1747, it is highly likely that it was continued by his workshop. Although the altar reredos of the sole altar which is situated in the church is not overly decorated, the side walls of the church are typical of regional Maltese Late Baroque sculpture.

Larger-than-life-size *putti* are perched on scrolls and hold palm fronds in their chubby hands. The facial typology of chubby cheeks, pointy chin, and protruding forehead is very typical of Zahra's oeuvre and the manner in which the hair is sculpturally stylised is also reminiscent of countless other *putti* in his works. The palm fronds rest on the oval stone painting frame which is surmounted by a cartouche flanked with two other scrolls embellished with acanthus leaves. All of the motifs adhere to the typical Maltese Late Baroque style as inspired by Roman

---

[157] NAV, Notary Francesco Alfano, R15, 4 February 1745.
[158] This church is also analysed in Meli (2017).

Fig. 4.113 Romano Carapecchia, Side walls, Church of St James, Valletta. (left)

Fig. 4.114 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Side walls, Church of the Virgin of Porto Salvo, Hamrun. (right)

Baroque sculpture. The medium, limestone, is painted white and polished, resulting in a shiny finish which tries to mimic marble.

The position of the figures is also comparable to other works by Zahra. The *putti* in this particular case take on the role of their larger counterparts – *angeli adoranti* – and fulfil their role in directing the vision of the spectator to the subject of the painting, by pointing towards the focus of the composition. The entire composition of the side wall is also reminiscent of the side walls in the church of St James in Valletta which was designed by Romano Carapecchia,[159] especially in the manner in which the side wall is organised with the portal framed in stone, a round or oval central focal point which is then flanked by *putti* holding or playing with decorative vegetation (Fig. 4.113 and Fig. 4.114). Documents have also uncovered that Pietro Paolo Zahra worked under the Roman architect.[160]

The Berninesque imprint on this church is evident in the desire by the patron and scalpellino to emulate the style of the Eternal City and in the use of Berninesque motifs, particularly the *putti* taking the place of larger figures as exemplified in several churches in Rome, amongst them the nave decoration of the church of Santa Maria del Popolo. The decoration in this church stands as evidence of the Berninesque tradition in Malta stretching into the second half of the eighteenth century, which was then carried on successfully by the Fabri family.

---

[159] On Romano Carapecchia, see Denis De Lucca, *Carapecchia: Master of Baroque Architecture in Early Eighteenth Century Malta*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 1999.
[160] This is discussed *supra* in Chapter I.

XXII. Attributed to Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra, Convent interior façade, Convent of the Franciscans, Valletta, 1730s

Plate 58

This interior façade at the entrance of the convent of the Franciscans in Republic Street, Valletta is testament to the imprint of the Berninesque tradition and the effect the collaboration between Pietro Paolo Troisi and Pietro Paolo Zahra had on its dissemination in the Maltese Islands.

The convent of the Franciscans was demolished and rebuilt on the design of Giuseppe Bonavia at the expense of Grand Master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena in the third decade of the eighteenth century.[161] In the absence of documented proof, the roundel relief of the portrait of Grand Master Vilhena has been attributed on stylistic grounds to Pietro Paolo Troisi.[162] It has been confirmed that, although the portrait is painted black to mimic bronze, it is actually sculpted out of stone, showcasing Troisi's ability in more than one medium. It is indeed a copy of the bronze portrait roundel which is placed on top of the main portal of Palazzo Vilhena in Mdina.[163]

The similarity with the Palazzo Vilhena portal does not end there; both portrait roundels are flanked by sculpture in Maltese limestone. Although Troisi would have been more than capable of executing the stone sculpture, it is more probable that he designed them in tandem with the *scalpellini* who actually produced them. This is certainly the case with the Mdina roundel, which is discussed in another catalogue entry *infra*, where the figures flanking the portrait

---

[161] Briffa (2009), 53-54.
[162] Briffa (2009), 54.
[163] Briffa (2009), 54.

Fig. 4.115 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Convent Entrance, Convent of St Francis, Valletta. Detail.. (left)
Fig. 4.116 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. (right)

are documented to have been executed by the Fabri family.[164] In this interior convent façade, the stone roundel is flanked by two *putti* holding the two crowns, attributes to the Grand Master. The fringed drapery is another nod to a Berninesque motif, which acts as if the spectator is being given an exclusive glimpse of the Grand Master's portrait.

The *putti* betray the hand of the Zahra workshop;[165] this is especially noticeable in their typical facial features, their placing in a sitting position, and their characteristic chubbiness (Fig. 1.115 and Fig. 1.116). Considering that Pietro Paolo Zahra had previously worked with Pietro Paolo Troisi on other sculptural commissions, including the notable altar of the Immaculate Conception in the church of St Francis in Rabat, this could be considered another probable collaboration between the two important artistic personalities of eighteenth-century Malta. The interior façade is in a good state of preservation.

---

[164] Conrad Thake, 'Architectural Scenography in 18th century Mdina', S. Fiorini (ed.) *Proceedings of History Week*, The Malta Historical Society, 1996, 63-76. See also Briffa (2009), 54.
[165] This is further analysed in Meli (2017).

XXIII. Attributed to the Fabri family, Portal decoration, Magisterial Palace (Palazzo Vilhena), Mdina, 1725-1730

Plate 59

The portal decoration of the Magisterial Palace, also known as Palazzo Vilhena, at the entrance of Mdina is a prime example of the Berninesque tradition and the Roman Baroque sculpture impact in the sculpture of regional Malta in the eighteenth century. It is also an important example of how regional *scalpellini*, sometimes regarded as lesser than when compared to foreign artists and architects present in Malta, were also engaged by the Order of St John to carry out significant works.

The internal main portal of the Palazzo Vilhena, designed by François de Mondion,[166] exhibits a bronze portrait medallion of Grand Master Fra Antonio Manoel de Vilhena which has been attributed to Pietro Paolo Troisi.[167] In true triumphant form, the Magisterial Palace was designed 'to create a monumental and ceremonial stage-set for the Grand Master'.[168] This is not unlike Bernini's *concetto* of a space or a work of art – be it an altar reredos, a fountain, a piazza, a church – acting as a theatre, or a scenographic element, for ceremonials.[169] These architectural works in the entrance of Mdina, in this case the Magisterial Palace and the adjacent Mdina gate, were part of the regeneration of Mdina carried out in the

---

[166] For more on the eighteenth-century architectural edifices in Mdina, see Thake (1996).

[167] Briffa (2009), 53.

[168] Conrad Thake, 'Architectural Scenography in 18th century Mdina', in Stanley Fiorini (ed.), *Proceedings of History Week*, The Malta Historical Society, 1996, 63-76: 74.

[169] Thake refers to this idea of the 'scenographic element' throughout the article on Mdina. Thake (1996). On the idea of the ceremonial, Thake also refers to Canon John Azzopardi, *Mdina and the Earthquake of 1693*, Malta, 1993, and Denis De Lucca, 'The Contribution of François de Mondion in the Architectural Development of 18th century Malta', in *Proceedings of History Week 1981*, Malta, 1981, 76-81. See also Conrad Thake, 'The genesis of baroque Mdina', *Treasures of Malta*, i, 2 (Easter 1995), 28-32.

Fig. 4.117 Giuseppe Mazzuoli, Monument to Grand Master Perellos, Conventual Church of St John, Valletta. Detail. (left)

Fig. 4.118 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Castelletti Monument, Gozo Matrice, Rabat. Detail. (right)

first half of the eighteenth century under the magistracy of Grand Master Vilhena, with the intention of 'project[ing] to the local population the munificence and power of the Order'.[170] The image of Vilhena was part of this Baroque rhetoric and propaganda.

The oval bronze relief portrait is flanked by two allegorical figures supporting the *tondo* of the portrait. These are executed in the manner of the Zahra and Fabri family workshops, constantly looking towards the Roman Baroque style for inspiration. It may indeed be tentatively attributed to the Fabri family, since they are documented to have worked under Mondion in the regeneration project, both in the Main Gate and the Greek's Gate to Mdina.[171] Indeed, the sculpture of the Mdina gate is comparable to the sculpture found on the interior façade of the Magisterial Palace. The same posture of one of the figures has been used by Pietro Paolo Zahra ten years before the start of this Mdina regeneration in the *Mausoleum of Ferdinand Castelletti* situated in the Gozo Matrice in the Cittadella (Fig. 4.118). Zahra himself probably emulated this pose from the *Charity* on Giuseppe Mazzuoli's *Monument*

---

[170] Thake (1996), 74.

[171] NLM, Manuscript 96, *Università: Spese per le fortificazioni 1723-1728*. An attached note to f. 195 reveals the payments made to Gerolamo Fabri and his sons for this work. This is published in Thake (1996), 74.

Fig. 4.119 Fabri family, Architectural decoration, Valletta.

to Grand Master Perellos in the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta (Fig. 4.117, which is in itself inspired from Bernini's *Charity* on the *Tomb of Pope Urban VIII* in the Basilica of St Peter's. The Fabri could have been inspired from any of these works of art since the first two were present in Malta and easily accessible while Bernini's monument was known in Malta through the disseminations of prints.

The Fabri's involvement in the sculpture of the Mdina regeneration project is also a noteworthy indication of the fact that regional *scalpellini* were also engaged to work in secular edifices, rather than only on ecclesiastical works. This fact is also documented in a number of contracts which commission the Fabri and the Zahra *scalpellini* to work on a number of *palazzi* and domestic edifices, especially in the Cottonera and Valletta areas. The flamboyant and theatrical decorative sculpture on one of the upper corners of the Franciscan Convent in Valletta is another example of such commissions (Fig. 4.119). This has been attributed to the Fabri family and was probably executed in the 1730s.[172] The use of the drapery, the angel, and the scrolls, coupled with its more dynamic positioning, is reminiscent of the decoration of the organ lofts, designed by Bernini and executed with the assistance of Antonio Raggi, in the church of Santa Maria del Popolo in Rome. Photos of the Fabri's stone sculpture on the interior façade in the courtyard of Palazzo Vilhena reveal that the work of art is in need of conservation in order to prevent further deterioration of the limestone.

---

[172] For more on this architectural decoration, see Quentin Hughes & Conrad Thake, *Malta: the Baroque Island*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2003, 161.

XV. Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra,
Church façade,
Parish Church of St Bartholomew,
Għargħur,
c. 1743

Plate 60

The façade of the parish church of St Bartholomew in Għargħur is significant for its Berninesque imprint in the stone sculpture which embellishes it, particularly in the figure of St Bartholomew above the main portal of the church and the surrounding decoration.

Replacing an older church, the new parish church of Għargħur probably designed by Tommaso Dingli,[173] started to be built around the year 1612, but the façade was taken down again and rebuilt in the mid-eighteenth century.[174] This change in the façade's aesthetic reflected the changing tastes of patrons, artists, and the general population in eighteenth-century Malta, wherein the desire to emulate the art of the Eternal City saw the introduction of the Roman Baroque style of sculpture to older edifices built in the seventeenth century. Parish records reveal that in 1743, one year later from when Don Gio Maria Gafà was appointed procurator of the parish church, the façade started to be taken down after the necessary permission from the Bishop Alpheran de Bussan was obtained.[175] The reasons given were that firstly, a *campanile* was needed to accommodate a new bell and secondly, the façade would be refabricated '*nel modo più acconero all'uso*

---

[173] Denis De Lucca, 'Il-Knisja Parrokjali ta' Ħal Għargħur', in *Programm tal-festi f'ġieħ San Bartilmew Appostlu, f'Ħal-Għargħur*, Malta, 1994, 15.

[174] Francis Pace, *Il-Gargur. In-nies u l-knejjes tiegħu*, Malta, 2000, 34.

[175] Għargħur Parish Archives, *Ricorso del Proc. Della Ven. Lamp. Per essere abilitato a spendere e pigliare da alcune procure certe somme di denaro per fare nuova facciata nella chiesa e li campanile*, 6 February 1743, unpaginated. This was published in Pace (2000), 120.

348

Fig. 4.120 Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra, Façade decoration, Parish church of St Bartholomew, Għargħur. (left) Fig. 4.121 Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of St Mary Magdalene, Church of St Mary Magdalene, Valletta. Detail. (right)

moderno'.[176] Petruzzo Debono, a master mason active in eighteenth-century Malta, has been mentioned as a possible participant in the building of the new façade.[177] Stylistically, the sculptural elements of the church façade can be attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra. The style is akin to his mature period in the production of altar reredoses in Maltese churches. Supporting this attribution is the fact that this would not have been the first instance in which Pietro Paolo Zahra collaborated with Petruzzo Debono.[178]

---

[176] Għargħur Parish Archives, *Ricorso del Proc. Della Ven. Lamp. Per essere abilitato a spendere e pigliare da alcune procure certe somme di denaro per fare nuova facciata nella chiesa e li campanile*, 6 February 1743, unpaginated.

[177] Pace (2000), 104.

[178] Amongst other instances where the two artistic personalities collaborated, there is the construction of the choir wall of the parish church of Senglea, which was carried out under the direction of master mason Petruzzo Debono. SPA, CF 2.13, *Esiti and Introiti 1741-1804*, f. 29-32. The decoration of the reredos and the choir was then commissioned by Don Francesco Saverio Politano from Pietro Paolo Zahra. NAV, Notary Francesco Pisano, R395, Volume 6, ff. 464v-467v. See Meli (2017), 246.

Fig. 4.122 Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra, Façade decoration, Parish church of St Bartholomew, Għargħur. Detail. (left)
Fig. 4.123 Gianlorenzo Bernini and Antonio Raggi, St Andrew, Church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale, Rome. Detail. (right)

More convincing to support this attribution are the comparisons with Pietro Paolo Zahra's other works of art and the distinct parallels with Roman Baroque sculpture, particularly of the Berninesque tradition. The church façade is sectioned into three bays by the use of Composite pilasters and half-pilasters. The upper central section is adorned with a sculpture of St Bartholomew ascending to the heavens supported by three *putti*. The sculpture is encased in an ornate frame which is embellished with drooping festoons of acanthus leaves at its sides and an undulating scroll at its upper edges. The ubiquitously present flatly-rendered clouds belonging to Pietro Paolo Zahra's oeuvre support the saint in his ascent. The facial typologies of the *putti*, their positioning, and their gestures are typical of Zahra's other works, including the *putti* supporting one of the saints in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta (Fig. 4.120 and Fig. 4.121). The saint is also typical of Zahra's other renditions of saints and angels, including the St Francis in the church of St Mary Magdalene in Valletta. Also akin to Zahra's other sculptural works in stone are the drapery folds which characterise his figures and the spirit with which he imbues them.

This node of regional Late Baroque sculpture in Għargħur is completely immersed in the Berninesque tradition. The religious fervour of the saint looking

350

upwards and clutching his chest in piety is striking and evocative of Bernini's spirit in the *Santa Bibiana*. The drapery folds used by Zahra are an attempt to emulate the spirit of the state of mind of the saint, a *concetto* conceived by Bernini in his *St Longinus*. The S-curve of the figure of the saint is also reminiscent of Melchiorre Cafà's *Ecstasy of St Catherine* in Santa Caterina a Magnanapoli in Rome. However, it is clear that in this circumstance Pietro Paolo Zahra must have used Bernini's *St Andrew* in Sant'Andrea al Quirinale as the ultimate example to emulate for the decoration of this church façade. The *concetto* of the saint ascending to the heavens and the idea of the theatrical stage set which the façade provides for this narrative are clearly borrowed from one of Bernini's most evocative spaces in Rome (Fig. 4.122 and Fig. 4.123). In true artistic biographical form, Domenico Bernini states that the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale was one of the few instances where Gianlorenzo allowed himself to admire his work;[179] an anecdote which Pietro Paolo Zahra might have been familiar with:

mandasse, *Che facesse così solo, e cheto?* e che gli rispondesse il Cavaliere, *Figlio, di questa sola Opera di Architettura io sento qualche particolar compiacenza nel*
nel fondo del mio cuore, e spesso per sollievo delle mie fatiche io quì mi porto a consolarmi col mio lavoro. Sentimento nuovo nel Cavaliere, che non mai seppe compiacersi in alcuna delle tante Opere, che faceva, stimandole tutte molto inferiori a quel bello, che conosceva, e concepiva nella mente. Onde maraviglia non

This church façade stands to this day as evidence of the Berninesque spirit which triumphed in Malta in the eighteenth century, not only in altar reredoses but also in other stone sculpture. For Pietro Paolo Zahra to have the ability and the knowledge to execute such a work of art for the new façade of the Għargħur parish church, it is unquestionable that he must have had a certain degree of understanding of Bernini and his works through printed sources. Ultimately, it is almost unconceivable that Pietro Paolo Zahra was not aware of the Bernini's essence and Baroque concepts in order for him to produce such an evocative regional work of art.

---

[179] Domenico Bernini, *Vita del cavalier Gio. Lorenzo Bernino*, Rome, 1713, 108-109.

CONCLUSION

Attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Virgin of Mercy, Church of the Virgin of Mercy, Qrendi.

T his research has concluded that the Berninesque style was the most dominant expression in eighteenth-century Maltese visual culture. In this regard, this study has provided not only qualitative hypotheses and conclusions,[1] but also quantifiable results for altars in a considerably large number of churches in Malta.[2] The analysis of the links which fuelled the dissemination of the Berninesque tradition in Malta has now made it abundantly clear that the connection with Rome was a direct unwavering one-way channel of influence which emanated from the Eternal City straight to Malta.

It has also been clearly demonstrated that the spread of the Berninesque tradition in Malta was of an undoubtedly impactful nature. It has exposed the forcefulness in which the Berninesque tradition manifested itself at the very grassroots level of the popular visual culture, enabled by regional *scalpellini* who entirely submitted their designs to this style. This is especially true in comparison to some of the other regional locations included in this study, namely Naples and Lecce, where the Berninesque tradition is present but not as strong and dominating as in Malta.[3]

Several channels between Malta and Rome have been identified, analysed, and established through this research: the channel of influence provided by the Order of St John and its importation of Roman Baroque works of art to Malta; the movement of artists and patrons, including the travel of Maltese artists to Rome for studious purposes and the presence of foreign artists and architects in Malta; and the dissemination of working material, including the availability of prints and architectural treatises in Malta.[4] The study of these channels of stylistic influence is rooted in international academia on the subject of the dissemination of the Roman Baroque style from Rome.[5] This research has provided conclusions that the same

---

[1] Chapter III contains a comparative analysis of the links between Rome and Malta and the ensuing stylistic similarities of regional Maltese Late Baroque sculpture to Roman and Berninesque typologies. Furthermore, Chapter IV delved deeper in the analysis of a number of altar reredoses in Catalogue Entries.

[2] The quantification of the Berninesque style in Malta is analysed in Chapter III. Refer also to Appendix A: Quantification of Berninesque Impact in Malta Database.

[3] This is analysed in Chapter II which analyses the regional sculpture of eighteenth-century Malta in light of its comparative qualities with Naples, Lecce, and Sicily.

[4] These channels of influence are identified and analysed in Chapter I.

[5] This similarity in the manner in which the Berninesque style travelled from Rome to other regional locations is discussed in the Introduction, with various references to literature on the subject pertaining to other regional locations.

links which conditioned the stylistic progression of other regional locations' sculpture were also present in eighteenth-century Malta.

The comparative analysis between the regional Late Baroque sculpture of Malta, Naples, Lecce, and Sicily has resulted not only in a valuable new comparative stylistic analysis but it has served to demonstrate and confirm that Malta's direct link with Rome belonged to a greater international context,[6] wherein this link was yet another connection between Rome and a regional location on which the Eternal City exerted stylistic influence.[7] In this equation of stylistic influence, Rome continuously remains the non-variable component. This state of affairs can be likened to a tree, where the trunk represents Rome and the branches represent the different expressions of the Roman Baroque and Berninesque regional styles – they are all connected to the same tree and therefore have the same roots, but all are only dependent on the tree and not each other. In spite of this independent existence, the branches are inevitably siblings and are therefore comparable as they cross each other in their development and growth. Through this comparative analysis, a greater degree of similarity has emerged between the eighteenth-century regional sculpture of Malta and Sicily.[8] Although there are parallels between Malta's eighteenth-century sculpture to that in Naples and Lecce, such as Naples' fervent use of the Berninesque style and Lecce's use of the medium of stone, the resemblances between Malta and Sicily remain the strongest. This conclusion is perhaps due, among other contextual factors, to the closer geographical location and the mutual easy accessibility of the two regions.[9] Indeed, the contextual artistic analysis of both Malta and Sicily result in more similarities than with Naples or Lecce, and the commercial and artistic links between the two islands continued to enhance this link.[10] This artistic link also saw the travelling and

---

[6] This international context of the spread of the Berninesque imprint is analysed and discussed through the available literature in the Introduction. This served to ground this research in existing literature and impart onto it an international significance.

[7] Chapter II analyses the links between the regional locations identified in this research and explores the parallels and disparities between their resulting expression of the Berninesque tradition.

[8] See Chapter II for the comparative analysis between the regional Late Baroque sculpture of Malta and Sicily and the corresponding Appendices C-F for its visual accompaniment.

[9] Refer to Chapter II for the comparative analysis of the socio-political artistic context of Sicily and Malta.

[10] The parallels in the socio-political artistic scene of Malta and Sicily are analysed in Chapter II.

working of regional *scalpellini* in the two regions.[11] This would have made similarities between the regional sculpture of Malta and Sicily more possible and plausible.

It has also been made clear that Malta's socio-political artistic context of the eighteenth century was undoubtedly influential in the reception of this 'new' style. This research has identified the protagonists of eighteenth-century Maltese Berninesque sculpture as being Pietro Paolo Troisi, Pietro Paolo Zahra and his workshop, and the Fabri family.[12] The extensive archival research undertaken in this study was instrumental in enabling the analysis of these *scalpellini*'s context. In addition to this, new documents have been uncovered which are not only valuable for the attribution of new works to the oeuvres of these *scalpellini* families, but also contribute towards the unearthing of new archival documentation which confirms the participation of previously unknown artists and craftsmen.[13] This contributes to the furthering of the understanding of the eighteenth-century context, which also saw intimate links between these *scalpellini* families, also confirmed through the existence of documentation in the archives.[14] New archival documentation also contributed to the analysis of the industrial aspect of the *bottega* and the mechanisms of the *scalepllino*'s workshop.[15]

The core of the research statement is not only answered quantifiably,[16] but this research was also significant for its contribution on the discussion of Berninesque typologies employed by Maltese *scalpellini*. Through the analysis of the inclusion of these Berninesque typologies in *scalpellini*'s designs, this research has identified the typology of altar reredos which is most recognisably Maltese – a Maltese-adapted Berninesque formula.[17] This naturally led to answer the question of what makes this formula Maltese and, in this regard, this dissertation contributes also an analysis of the regional characteristics which make Maltese Late Baroque

---

[11] This is analysed in Chapter I of this dissertation where the involvement of Maltese scalpellini in Sicily and the presence of Sicilian artists in Malta are analysed.

[12] Pietro Paolo Troisi, Pietro Paolo Zahra and his workshop, and the Fabri family are discussed throughout this dissertation but most particularly in Chapter I and Chapter IV.

[13] This is discussed in Chapter I of this dissertation. For a list of names of artists and craftsmen uncovered from research at the Notarial Archives, refer to the methodology section in the Introduction, Table 3.

[14] See Chapter I for this archival documentation.

[15] This is analysed in Chapter I of this dissertation.

[16] This can be found in the first section of Chapter III of this dissertation.

[17] Refer to Chapter III's first section for details about this typology.

sculpture what it essentially is. These regional characteristics have been largely identified by this research as being: the medium of limestone; the polychromy of sculpture; and the habit of Maltese *scalpellini* to sometimes go above and beyond what is recognisable as triumphant Berninesque style to a pastiche of motifs appropriated from different Roman Baroque works.[18] The availability of treatises and prints, particularly de' Rossi's publications, in Malta aided this inclusion of Berninesque typologies in Maltese designs. A deep comparative analysis also with prints from treatises,[19] which have been confirmed to have been present in Malta through their inclusion in inventories,[20] has contributed to our specific understanding of the similarities and disparities which are apparent in Roman Baroque and Maltese sculpture.

On contemplating this research statement, it has also been concluded that the majority of the inspiration which led Maltese *scalpellini* to include Berninesque works of art in their designs came firstly, from the ecclesiastical works of Bernini and secondly, from the works pertaining to his mature style. The reason for this has been made abundantly clear throughout this research – the Maltese scenario was heavily influenced by Catholicism and the main working ground of the scalpellino was the church or other religious grounds, such as oratories. It was thus natural for *scalpellini* to be more interested in typologies such as *angeli adoranti*, the Eternal Father, and saints, rather than the mythological themes of Bernini's earlier works. It can be thus concluded that Bernini's most effective works of art in regional Maltese sculpture were the *angeli adoranti* in the church of S. Agostino, the standing angels in the transepts of the church of Santa Maria del Popolo, the angels carrying the instruments of the Passion on the Ponte S. Angelo, the *Cathedra Petri*, the *Cappella del Sacramento*, and the church of Sant'Andrea al Quirinale.[21] This does not mean that other works would not have been quoted by Maltese *scalpellini* but from this research, these have transpired to be the main works of influence.

---

[18] Regional characteristics are referred to throughout Chapter III and Chapter IV of this dissertation.
[19] See Appendix G for the visuals of this comparative analysis and Chapter III for its corresponding in text analysis.
[20] See Chapter III for the analysis of inventories which contain material that aided in the dissemination of the Roman Baroque in Malta.
[21] Continuous reference to these works of art are made throughout this dissertation, with a concentration of references in Chapter III and IV.

In answering the research statement with reference to both quantification and qualification, twenty-five works of which the majority are altar reredoses, have been identified as being the most representative of the Berninesque tradition as it flourished in Malta. They are analysed in separate Catalogue Entries which formally analyses the work, places it in its proper context, provides archival documentation when this is available, and comparatively analyses it with Roman Baroque works of art and prints. The contribution of this catalogue also enhances the oeuvre of *scalpellini* families as well as consolidates the expression of the Berninesque in Maltese regional sculpture by providing detail on important Berninesque spaces, such as the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix in Senglea and the altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory in the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ.[22] In spite of the many similarities between Roman Baroque and Maltese eighteenth-century sculpture, the Maltese *scalpellini*' understanding of Berninesque *concetti* is here brought into question: were they aware of Bernini's iconographical and ideological ideas which informed his designs and works of art? Unfortunately, documented proof of this is scarce, although there are some mentions of executing works in the '*alla Romana*' manner[23] but still, this could have been only referring to a stylistic element rather than a theoretical issue. In the absence of archival documentation, we are faced only with the altar reredoses to answer this question. From the theatrical and deeply spiritual feeling which these works in Maltese churches exude, it is tempting to answer in the positive and state that Maltese *scalpellini* were aware of Bernini's more theoretically-inclined Baroque *concetti*. However, the pastiche which some Maltese altar reredoses present us with is completely to the contrary of Bernini's triumphant, dramatic, theatrical yet balanced designs. In reaction to this analysis, it is most probable that Maltese *scalpellini* did not fully comprehend Bernini's concepts but they recognised his authority and responded to his designs in the manner in which Bernini would have intended them to in the first place: by increasing their devotion and Catholic fervour, which eventually translated into their dramatic and pious designs for Maltese churches.

One of the limitations of this research is two-fold: firstly, the vastness of the altar reredoses available in Malta for stylistic and comparative analysis; secondly,

---

[22] For the Catalogue Entries of these two Berninesque spaces, see Catalogue Entry IV and Catalogue Entry V respectively.

[23] For these documented instances, refer to Chapter I of this dissertation.

the enormous amount of data available in the archives which remains unearthed to this day. This is one of the possibilities which this dissertation presents for further research. Another limitation focuses on the medium and typology chosen for this research, that is, the stone-carved altar reredos. The archival research conducted has clearly shown that Maltese *scalpellini* were not only involved in designing and executing altar reredoses, but also decorative works of art in a range of different mediums, such as gilded altar furnishings and wooden statues. It would be fascinating to see a study on the Berninesque imprint on these works of art being undertaken as a result of this research. Another limitation of this research, which could easily be translated into a new research opportunity, is the work of *scalpellini* on secular buildings. Once again, the archives have shown that even through preliminary research, new documentation could be produced on the production of these *scalpellini* on several houses and palaces in Malta's capital city and surrounding towns. Further research on the ecclesiastical works of Maltese *scalpellini* will also surely uncover more commissions and secure existent attributions made on stylistic grounds and connoisseurship skills.

In essence, the most significant contribution of this research has been the anchoring in academic literature of the Berninesque imprint on the popular visual culture of the Maltese Islands. This has been achieved by providing a wide-ranging study on stone altar reredoses in Maltese churches, and analysing them especially within the larger international context of the spread of Bernini's style, with particular reference to Naples, Lecce, and Sicily. Above all, it has been confirmed that the link between Rome and Malta was unwaveringly direct and that, in spite of apparent lesser quality, Maltese *scalpellini* managed to capture the spirit of Gian Lorenzo Bernini's most important works for the Eternal City in their designs and executions of Berninesque stone altar reredoses for Maltese churches. The successful anchoring of the Berninesque tradition in the vernacular visual culture of Malta is evidence of how at grassroots level the Maltese were comfortable embracing a style that clearly belonged to Papal Rome.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Pietro Paolo Zahra, Altar of the Holy Souls in Purgatory, Parish Church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. Detail.

Primary sources

Archivium Archiepiscopale Melitense

AAM, VP XXXI, Gori Mancini, 1722-1723.

AAM, VP XXXIII, Alpheran de Bussan, 1736-1740.

AAM, VP XXXIV, Alpheran de Bussan, 1744-1751.

AAM, VP XXXIV, Alpheran de Bussan, 1744-1751.

Archivum Cathedrale Melitensis

ACM, Misc., Volume 191, Alpheran de Bussan.

National Archives of Malta

NAM, Magna Curia Castellania, Mdina, Reg. Bon. Volume 1 (1700-1715).

National Library of Malta

AOM, Arch. 1456.

NLM, Library Manuscript 264.

NLM, Ms. 96. *Università: Spese per le fortificazioni* 1723-1728.

Senglea Parish Archives

SPA, CF 2.13, *Esiti and Introiti 1741-1804.*

SPA, *Descrizione della Chiesa Parrocchiale dell'Invittà Città Senglea 1805.*

SPA, *Liber Matrimonium*, Volume I, 1587-1715.

Notarial Archives Valletta

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 1, 1727-1728.

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 4, 1730-1731.

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 11, 1735-1736.

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 15, 1742-1743.

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 20, 1747-1748.

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 21, 1748-1749.

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 28, 1765-1766.

NAV, R2, Notary Gio Andrea Abela, Volume 32, 1772-1773.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 3, 1728-1730.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 4, 1727-1728.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 5, 1732-1733.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 7, 1730-1731.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 8, 1731-1732.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 10, 1733-1734.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 11, 1734-1735.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 16, 1739-1740.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 17, 1740-1741.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 18, 1741-1742.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 21, 1743-1744.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 25, 1748-1749.

NAV, R14, Notary Francesco Alessi, Volume 35, 1758-1759.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 2, 1726-1727.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 3, 1728-1730.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 6, 1733-1734.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 8, 1735-1736.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 9, 1736-1737.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 10, 1737-1738.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 11, 1738-1739.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 11, 1738-1739.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 12, 1739-1740.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 14, 1741-1742.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 15, 1742-1744.

NAV, R15, Notary Francesco Alfano, Volume 16, 1744-1746.

NAV, R62, Notary Giuseppe Bonavita, Volume 3.

NAV, R87, Notary Marc'Antonio Brancati, Volume 39, 1728-1729.

NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 27, 1713-1714.

NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 35, 1725-1726.

NAV, R126, Notary Giuseppe Callus, Volume 36, 1726-1728.

NAV, R182, Notary Gasparre Domenico Chircop, Volume 28, 1725-1726.

NAV, R210, Notary Ignazio Debono, Volume 40, 1718-1719.

NAV, R210, Notary Iganzio Debono, Volume 79, 1742-1743.

NAV, R303, Notary Giovanni Grech, Volume 2, 1709-1710.

NAV, R303, Notary Giovanni Grech, Volume 16, 1727-1728.

NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 17, 1734-1735.

NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 20, 1737-1738.

NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 29, 1746-1747.

NAV, R322, Notary Pietro Antonio Madiona, Volume 33, 1750-1751.

NAV, R343, Notary Vincenzo Marchese, Volume 36, 1737-1738.

NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 4, 1720-1721.

NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 14, 1730-1731.

NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 18, 1734-1735.

NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 21, 1737-1738.

NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 22, 1738-1739.

NAV, R386, Notary Antonio Pace, Volume 24, 1740-1741.

NAV, R388, Notary Gio Domenico Pace, Volume 24, 1705-1706.

NAV, R395, Notary Francesco Pisano, Volume 6, 1745-1746.

NAV, R408, Notary Archangelo Pullicino, Volume 21, 1736-1737.

NAV, R408, Notary Archangelo Pullicino, Volume 26, 1741-1742.

NAV, R424, Notary Pietro Paolo Saliba, Volume 22, 1735-1736.

NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 39, 1715-1716.

NAV, R428, Notary Gio Francesco Sant, Volume 41, 1724-1725.

NAV, R487, Notary Alessandro Vivieri, Volume 7, 1721-1723.

Secondary sources

Agius (2014)
Agius, Gabrielle, 'Pietro Paolo Zahra and the Roman baroque manner at the Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea', unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2014.

Angelini (2005)
Angelini, Alessandro, *La scultura del Seicento a Roma*, Siena, Banca Monte dei Paschi di Siena, 2005.

Amico (1726-1750)
Amico, Giacomo, *L'Architetto Prattico*, Palermo, 1726-1750.

Antinori (2012)
Antinori, Aloisio, 'Premessa', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 7-8.

Antista (2014)
Antista, Armando, L'Architetto e il capomastro: una disputa nel cantiere della chiesa di Santa Caterina d'Italia a Valletta, *Lexicon. Storie e Architettura in Sicilia e nel Mediterrraneo*, Edizioni Caracol, 18 (2014), 92-96.

Antista (2007)
Antista, Giuseppe, 'Libri di Architettura nelle Bibliothece Private del XVIII secolo', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 219-223.

Attard (2006)
Attard, Noel, 'An Art Historical Gazetteer of the Figural Baroque Reredos of the Maltese Islands', unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2006.

Avery (2002)
Avery, Charles, 'Sculpture gone wild: Bernini and the English' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 159-178.

Azzopardi (2018)
Azzopardi, Andrei, 'Alessio Erardi's Ceiling Decoration for the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, Dominican Priory, Valletta', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, 2018.

Azzopardi (1986)
Azzopardi, John (ed.), *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773*, Malta, Friends of the Cathedral Museum, 1986.

Azzopardi (1993)
Azzopardi, Canon John, *Mdina and the Earthquake of 1693*, Malta, 1993.

Bacchi (2008)
Bacchi, Andrea (ed.), *Bernini and the birth of Baroque portrait sculpture*, Los Angeles, J. Paul Getty Museum, 2008.

Bacchi & Delmas (2017)
Bacchi, Andrea and Delmas, Anne-Lise, 'The Fortunes of Bernini in 18th Century Sculpture' in Andrea Bacchi and Anna Coliva (eds), *Bernini*, Milano, Officina Libraria, 2017, 332-348.

Bailey & Guzmán (2011)
Bailey, Gauvin Alexander and Guzmán, Fernando, 'The 'St Sebastian' of Los Andes: a Chilean cultural treasure re-examined', *The Burlington Magazine*, cliii, 1304 Sculpture (November 2011), 721-726.

Bailey & Guzmán (2013)
Bailey, Gauvin Alexander and Guzmán, Fernando, 'The Rococo altarpiece of St Ignatius: Chile's grandest colonial retable rediscovered', *The Burlington Magazine*, clv, 1329 (December 2013), 815-820.

Baldinucci (1682)
Baldinucci, Filippo, *Vita del cav. Gio. Lorenzo Bernino,* Firenze, 1682.

Bauer and Bauer (1980)
Bauer, George and Bauer, Linda, 'Bernini's Organ-Case for S. Maria del Popolo', *The Art Bulletin*, lxii, 1 (1980), 115-123.

Beldon Scott (1995.a)
Beldon Scott, John, 'Guarino Guarini's Invention of the Passion Capitals in the Chapel of the Holy Shroud, Turin', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, liv, 4 (1995), 418-445.

Beldon Scott (1995.b)
Beldon Scott, John, 'Seeing the Shroud: Guarini's Reliquary Chapel in Turin and the Ostension of a Dynastic Relic', *The Art Bulletin*, LXXVII, 4 (1995), 609-637.

Bernini (1713)
Bernini, Domenico, *Vita del cavalier Gio. Lorenzo Bernino*, Rome, 1713.

Bershad (1970)
Bershad, David L., 'A Series of Papal Busts by Domenico Guidi', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxii, 813 (1970), 805-809+811.

Bershad (1971)
Bershad, David, 'Domenico Guidi: A 17th Century Roman Sculptor', PhD Dissertation, University of California, 1971.

Blunt (1968)
Blunt, Anthony, *Sicilian Baroque*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, 35.

Boehman (2009)
Boehman, Jessica Marie, 'Maestro Ercole Ferrata', PhD Dissertation, University of Pennsylvania, 2009.

Bonanni (1699)
Bonanni, Filippo, *Numismata pontificum Romanorum quae a tempore Martini V. usque ad annum M.DC.XCIX: vel authoritate publica, vel privato genio in lucem prodiere, explicata, ac multiplici eruditione sacra, & prophana illustrata*, Rome, 1699.

Bonet Correa (2002)
Bonet Correa, Antonio, 'Bernini y el arte barroco en España ' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 241-254.

Bonello (1993)
Bonello, Giovanni, 'Pietro Paolo Troisi: the quest for a gifted sculptor', *The Sunday Times*, 29 July 1993, 32-33.

Bonnici (1986)
Bonnici, Alexander, *L-Isla Fi Ġrajjiet il-Bażilika-Santwarju ta' Marija Bambina Volume II*, Senglea, Parroċċa tal-Isla, 1986.

Borg (2010)
Borg, Jessica, 'An artistic analysis of the Augustinian church and convent, Rabat', unpublished MA dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, University of Malta, 2010.

Borg (1983)
Borg, Vincent, *Marian Devotions in the Islands of St Paul 1600-1800*, Malta Historical Society, Malta, 1983.

Boscarini (1996)
Boscarini, Salvatore, 'Rosario Gagliardi e Giovan Battista Vaccarini: temi architettonici a confronto', in *Corso internazionale di storia dell'architettura (1st, 1994, Siracusa); Rosario Gagliardi e l'architettura barocca in Italia e in Europa*, Annali del barocco in Sicilia, 1996.

Boucher (1998)
Boucher, Bruce, *Italian Baroque Sculpture*, London, Thames & Hudson, 1998, 185.

Boudon-Machuel (2005)
Boudon-Machuel, Marion, *François du Quesnoy*, 1597-1643, Paris, Arthena, 2005.

Bury (1985)
Bury, Michael, 'The Taste for Prints in Italy to c. 1600', *Print Quarterly*, ii 1 (March 1985), 12-26.

Briffa (2009)
Briffa, Joseph A., *Pietro Paolo Troisi (1686-1750): A Maltese Baroque Artist*, Msida, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2009.

Bryan (1816)
Bryan, Michael, *A Biographical and Critical Dictionary of Painters and Engravers Volume II*, Carpenter and Son; J. Booker; and Whittingham and Arliss, 1816.

Burns (1980)
Burns, Roger C., 'Camillo Mariani: Catalyst of the Rome Baroque', PhD Dissertation, Johns Hopkins University, 1980.

Calvesi and Manieri-Elia (1966)
Calvesi, Maurizio and Manieri-Elia, Mario, *Personalità e strutture caratterizzanti il "barocco" leccese*, Comunita Europea dell'Arte e della Cultura, Italy, 1966.

Camilleri (2002)
Camilleri, Donald, 'The Stone-Carved Altar Reredos in 17th Century Malta', unpublished MA dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2002.

Cantone (1992)
Cantone, Gaetano (ed.), *Barocco Napoletano*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992.

Caraffa (2002)
Caraffa, Costanza, 'La piazza S. Pietro di Bernini e la chiesa cattolica di Dresda di Gaetano Chiaveri' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 207-224.

Cassar (2014)
Cassar, George, *Qrendi: its people and their heritage*, Qrendi Local Council, 2014.

Cassar (2013)
Cassar, Kenneth (ed), *The Inquisitor's Palace: an architectural gem spanning centuries and styles*, Heritage Malta, Malta, 2013.

Cassar (2013)
Cassar, Kenneth (ed), *The Inquisitor's Palace: an architectural gem spanning centuries and styles*, Heritage Malta, Malta, 2013.

Cassar (2014)
Cassar, Paul, 'The Oratories of the Onorati and the Immaculate Conception at the Jesuit church, Valletta', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2014.

Camilleri (2011)
Camilleri, Clint, 'The Influence of Melchiorre Cafà's St Paul and the Virgin of the Rosary on Maltese Baroque Sculpture', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Institute of Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2011.

Canale (1976)
Canale, Cleofe Giovanni, *Noto – La Struttura Continua Della Città Tardo-Barocca*, Palermo, S.F. Flaccovio, 1976.

Casciaro (2017)
Casciaro, Raffaele, 'Su Francesco Antonio Zimbalo', in Vincenzo Cazzato, Regina Poso, and Giancarlo Vallone (eds), *Per le Arti e per la Storia. Omaggio a Tonino Cassiano*, Mario Congedo Editore, 2017, 86-97.

Cazzato (1992)
Cazzato, Vincenzo, 'Lecce: Assi e linguaggio di una città barocca', in Maria Luisa Madonna and Lucia Trigilia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 369-405.

Cazzato (2017)
Cazzato, Mario, '*Il libro e la squadra: la circolazione dei trattati di architettura nel Barocco salentino*' in Vincenzo Cazzato, Regina Poso, and Giancarlo Vallone (eds), *per la Arti e per la Storia. Omaggio a Tonino Cassiano*, Architettura e Città Collana diretta da Vincenzo Cazzato, No. 10, Mario Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2017, 98-103.

Cazzato and Fagiolo (2013)
Cazzato, Vincenzo and Fagiolo, Marcello, *Lecce. Architettura e Storia Urbana*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2013.

Chiurazzi (1984)
Chiurazzi, Fiammetta, *Civiltà del Seicento a Napoli*, II, Naples, 1984.

Ciappara (2008)
Ciappara, Frans, 'The Parish Community in Eighteenth-Century Malta', *Catholic Historical Review*, xciv, 4 (2008), 671-694.

Ciappara (2014)
Ciappara, Frans, *The Social and Religious History of a Maltese Parish: St Mary's Qrendi in the Eighteenth Century*, Malta University Press, Msida, 2014.

Ciappara (1882)
Ciappara, Salv, *Storia del Zebbug e sua Parrocchia*, Malta, s.n., 1882.

Conelli (1992)
Conelli, Maria Ann, 'The Gesù Nuovo in Naples: Politics, Property and Religion', PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1992.

Connors (1982)
Connors, Joseph, 'Bernini's S. Andrea al Quirinale: Payments and Planning', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, xli, 1 (1982), 15-37.

Czyżewski & Walczak (2015)
Czyżewski, Krzysztof J. and Walczak, Marek, 'The Monuments with Portrait Busts of the Bishop of Cracow: On the History of the Reception of Roman Baroque Models of Sepulchral Art in Poland', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxxvi, 71 (2015), 181-223.

D'Onorofio (1966)
D'Onorofio, Cesare, 'Note berniniane, 1, Un dialogo-recita di Gian Lorenzo Bernini e Lelio Guidiccioni', *Palatino*, 10 (1966), 127-134. Cesare D'Onorofio, 'Note berniniane, 2, Priorità della biografia di Domenico Bernini su quella del Baldinucci', Palatino, 10 (1966), 201-208.

de Cavi (2012)
de Cavi, Sabina, 'Applied Arts in Naples: Materials and Artistic Techniques from Micro- to Macrocosmos', *West 86th: A Journal of Decorative Arts, Design History, and Material Culture*, xix, 2 (Fall-Winter 2012), 196-230.

De Lotto (2006)
De Lotto, Maria Teresa, 'Camillo Mariani (1567-1611): Catalogo ragionato delle opere', PhD Dissertation, University of Udine, 2006.

De Lucca (1981)
De Lucca, Denis, 'The Contribution of François de Mondion in the Architectural Development of 18th century Malta', in *Proceedings of History Week 1981*, Malta, 1981, 76-81.

De Lucca (1994)
De Lucca, Denis, 'Il-Knisja Parrokjali ta' Ħal Għargħur', in *Programm tal-festi f'ġieħ San Bartilmew Appostlu, f'Ħal-Għargħur*, Malta, 1994.

De Lucca (1999)
Denis De Lucca, *Carapecchia: Master of Baroque Architecture in Early Eighteenth Century Malta*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 1999.

De Lucca (2006)
De Lucca, Denis, *Francesco Buonamici: Painter, Architect and Military Engineer in Seventeenth Century Malta and Italy*, Msida, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2006.

De Lucca (2003)
De Lucca, Denis, *Mondion: The Achievements of a French Military Engineer working in Malta in the Early Eighteenth Century*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2003.

De Lucca and Thake (1994)
De Lucca, Denis and Thake, Conrad, *The Genesis of Maltese Baroque Architecture: Francesco Buonamici (1596-1677)*, Msida, University of Malta, 1994.

de' Rossi (1702)
de' Rossi, Domenico, *Studio d'architettura civile sopra gli ornamenti di porte e finestre tatti da alcune fabbriche insigni di Roma con le misure piante modini, e profili. Opera de piu celebri architetti de nostri tempi*, Rome, 1702.

de' Rossi (1711)
de' Rossi, Domenico, *Studio d'architettura civile sopra varj ornamenti di cappelle, e diversi sepolcri tratti da più chiese di Roma colle loro facciate, fianchi, piante, e misure. Opera de' più celebri architetti de' nostri tempi*, Rome, 1711.

de' Rossi (1721)
de' Rossi, Domenico, *Studio d'architettura civili sopra varie chiese, cappelle di Roma, e palazzo di Caprarola, et altre fabriche con le loro facciate, spaccati, piante, e misure. Opera de' piu celebri architetti de' nostri tempi*, Rome, 1721.

de' Rossi (1684)
de' Rossi, Giovanni Giacomo, *Insignium Romæ templorum prospectus exteriores interioresque: a celebrioribus architectis inventi: nunc tandem suis cum plantis ac mensuris*, Rome, 1684.

de' Rossi (1713)
de' Rossi, Giovanni Giacomo, *Disegni di vari altari e cappelle nelle chiese di Roma con le loro facciate fianchi piante e misure de piu celebri architetti*, Rome, 1713.

del Pesco (2002)
del Pesco, Daniel, 'La genèse du Journal de voyage de Cavalier Bernin en France, écrit biographique et portrait critique de l'artiste ' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 25-42.

Debono (1989)
Debono, John, *An Inventory of Alessio Erardi's Paintings and Books*, Malta, Peresso Publishing, 1989.

Debono (1999)
Debono, John, 'A Note on the St John Co-Cathedral marble tombstones: the Artisans, foreign and Maltese', *Melita Historica*, xii, 4 (1999), 387-401.

Debono (2010)
Debono, John (ed.), *Documentary Sources on Maltese Artists: Pietro Paolo Zahra (1685-1747) and his son Francesco Vincenzo (1710-1773)*, Malta, published by author, 2010.

Debono (2007)
Debono, Sandro, 'Mariano Gerada (1771-1823). Maltese Art and Spain 1750-1830', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, University of Malta, 2007.

Delbeke (2006)
Delbeke, Maarten, Levy, Evonne, and Ostrow, Steven F., *Bernini's Biographies: Critical Essays*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2006.

Delbeke (2012)
Delbeke, Maarten, 'The pope, the bust, the sculptor and the fly: an ethical perspective on the work of Gianlorenzo Bernini in the writings of Sforza Pallavicino', *Bulletin de l'Institut historique belge de Rome*, 70 (2000), 179-223; Maarten Delbeke, *The Art of Religion: Sforza Pallavicino and Art Theory in Bernini's Rome*, London, Routledge, 2012.

Delogu (1932)
Delogu, Giuseppe, *La scultura italiana del Seicento e del Settecento*, Florence, Nemi, 1932.

Di Fede and Scaduto (2007)
Di Fede, Maria Sofia & Scaduto, Fulvia (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007.

Dickerson III et al. (2013)
Dickerson III, C. D., Anthony Sigel, & Ian Wardropper (eds.), *Bernini: Sculpting in Clay*, New York, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013.

Dictionary.com (2019)
Dictionary.com, '-esque', https://www.dictionary.com/browse/-esque accessed 6 May 2019.

Dombrowski (2009)
Dombrowski, Damian, *Giuliano Finelli: Bildhauer zwischen Neapel und Rom*, Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2009.

Donati (1945)
Donati, Agnese, *Stefano Maderno scultore: 1576-1636*, Bellinzona, A. Salvioni & Co., 1945.

Fagiolo dell'Arco & Bernardini (1999)
Fagiolo dell'Arco, Maurizio and Bernardini, Maria Grazia, *Bernini Regista del Barocco*, Milan, Skira Editore, 1999.

Fagiolo dell'Arco (1967)
Fagiolo dell'Arco, Maurizio and Marcello, *Bernini. Una introduzione al gran teatro del barocco*, Rome, Mario Bulzoni Editore, 1967.

Fagiolo & Madonna (1992)
Fagiolo, Marcello and Madonna, Maria Luisa (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992.

Faldi (1958)
Faldi, Italo, *La scultura barocca in Italia*, Milan, Garzanti, 1958.

Favero (2008)
Favero, Marcella, *Francesco Mochi: Una carrier di scultore*, Rome, UNI Service, 2008.

Ferris (1866)
Ferris, Achille, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta, 1866.

Fichera (1934)
Fichera, Giuseppe, *Giovanni Battista Vaccarini e l'architettura del Settecento in Sicilia*, Reale accademia d'Italia, Rome, 1934.

Finger (2015)
Finger, Marie Claire, 'The Knight Artist Lucas Garnier: His Role in Mid-Seventeenth Century Painting in Malta', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2015.

Fraschetti (1900)
Fraschetti, Stanislao, *Il Bernini. La sua vita, la sua opera, il suo tempo*, Milan, Hoepli, 1900.

Frommel (2002)
Frommel, Sabine, 'Le projet du Bernin pour le Louvre, traditione italienne conre tradition française' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe.*

Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 43-76.

Galea (2016)
Galea, Lisa, *The Architect's Library: Architectural Texts and Treatises from the Archives of the Order of St John*, published by author, Malta, 2016.

Galea (2005)
Galea, Vince, 'L-Arċkonfraternità tas-SSmu. Sagrament', *Missierna San Duminku*, Valletta, 2005, 67-72.

Gangi(1968)
Gangi, Gaetano, *Il Barocco nella Sicilia Occidentale*, De Luca Editore, Rome, 1968, 28-36.

Garstang (1988)
Garstang, Donald, 'The Oratorio della Madonna della Consolazione e S. Mercurio in Palermo and the Early Activity of Giacomo Serpotta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxx, 1023 (1988), 430-432.

Garstang (2005)
Garstang, Donald, 'When Serpotta is Not Serpotta: The Stuccos in the Church of S. Spirito in Agrigento', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxlvii, 1227 (June 2005) Furniture, Decorative Arts, Sculpture, 368-375.

Gauci (2001)
Gauci, Gregory, *Churches, Chapels and Oratories in Birgu*, published by author, Malta, 2001.

Giardini (1714)
Giardini, Giovanni, *Disegni diversi inventati e delineati da Giovanni Giardini da Forlí, argentiere del Palazzo Apostolico, e fonditore della Reu-Camera: intagliati in Roma*, Rome, 1714.

Giometti (2010)
Giometti, Cristiano, *Domenico Guidi 1625-1701: Uno scultore barocco di fama europea*, Rome, L'Erma di Bretschneider, 2010.

Giuffrè (2007)
Giuffrè, Maria, *Baroque Architecture of Sicily*, London, Thames & Hudson, 2007.

Goetting (2012)
Goetting, Carol Ann, 'Guarino Guarini: His Architecture and the Sublime', MA dissertation, University of California, 2012.

Gravina (2011)
Gravina, Martin, 'Knejjes b'kult Marjan fil-ġurisdizzjoni ta' Bir Miftuħ', *Festa titulari Santa Marija il-Gudja 2011*, Parish Church of the Assumption, Gudja, 2011, 13-15.

Grell & Stanic (2002)
Grell, Chantal and Stanic, Milovan (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002.

Grimaud (2010)
Grimaud, James Micallef, 'Eighteenth Century Marble Altar Typologies of the Maltese Islands', unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2010.

Hage (2002)
Hage, Hellmut, 'Impronte Berniniane nell'architecttura e nella decorazione architettonica in Italia e in Europa' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 353-374.

Hager (2005)
Hager, Hellmut, Balthasar Neumann's Schönborn Chapel at Würzburg Cathedral and Its Berninesque Prototype, *Architectural History*, xxvi (1983), 73-81+151-156.

Harwood (1979)
Harwood, Barry, 'Nicolo Cordieri: His Activity in Rome, 1592-1612', PhD Dissertation, Princeton University, 1979.

Hawley (1964)
Hawley, Henry H., 'Eighteenth-Century Sculpture from Germany and Austria', *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art*, li, 1 (January 1964), 2-13.

Hildburgh (1942)
Hildburgh, W. L., 'A Signed Marble Cupid Perhaps by Paolo Valentino Bernini', *The Burlington Magazine for Connoisseurs*, lxxxi, 476 (1942), 280+282-284.

Hill (2012)
Hill, Helen, 'Beyond Mere Containment: The Neapolitan Treasury Chapel of San Gennaro and the Matter of Materials', California Italian Studies, 3(1), 2012, 1-21.

Hughes and Thake (2003)
Hughes, Quentin and Thake, Conrad, *Malta: the Baroque Island*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2003.

Johnson Deupi (2006)
Johnson Deupi, Jill, 'Cultural Politics in Bourbon Naples, 1734-1799: Antiquities, Academies and Rivalries with Rome', PhD dissertation, University of Virginia, 2006.

Kappelli Maltin (2012-2020)
Kappelli Maltin, various articles, <https://www.kappellimaltin.com> accessed 12 September 2020.

Kessler (2005)
Kessler, Hans-Ulrich, *Pietro Benini (1562-1629)*, Vienna, Hirmer Verlag, 2005.

Krautheimer (1987)
Richard Krautheimer, *The Rome of Alexander VII, 1655-1667*, New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1987.

Kremeier (2002)
Kremeier, Jarl, 'Unexecuted Results of Unexecuted Ideas: Gianlorenzo Bernini's Louvre-Chapel and its Reception in France and Germany' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 107-128.

Kruft (1981)
Kruft, Hanno-Walter, 'Another Sculpture by Ciro Ferri in Malta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxxiii, 934 Sepcial Issue Devoted to Sculpture (January 1981), 26-29.

Lattuada (1992)
Lattuada, Riccardo, 'Napoli e Bernini: Spie di un rapport ancora inedito' in Gaetana Cantome (ed.), *Centri e periferie del Barocco. Barocco Napoletano*, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca dello Stato, Rome, 1992, 645-670.

Lavin (2009.a)
Lavin, Irving, 'Bernini-Bozzetti: One More, One Less: A Berninesque Sculptor in Mid-Eighteenth Century France' in *Visible Spirit: The Art of Gianlorenzo Bernini Vol. II*, The Pindar Press, London, 2009, 1018-1045.

Lavin (2009.b)
Lavin, Irving, 'Bernini-*Bozzetti*: One More, One Less: A Berninesque Sculptor in Mid-Eighteenth Century France', in Hannah Baader (ed.), *Ars et Scriptura: Festschrift für Rudolf Preimesberger zum 65*, Berlin, Geburtstag, 2001, 143-56. Revised and reprinted in Irving Lavin, *Visible Spirit: The Art of Gianlorenzo Bernini*, Vol. II, London, Pindar, 2009, 1018-45.

Lavin (1980)
Lavin, Irving, *Bernini and the Unity of the Arts*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1980.

Lavin (1978)
Lavin, Irving, 'Calculated Spontaneity: Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch', *Apollo*, cvii, 195 (1978), 398-405.

Lavin (1992)
Lavin, Irving, 'L'immagine berninana del Re Sole' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 3-58.

Lavin (1968)
Lavin, Irving, *Bernini and the Crossing of St. Peter's*, New York, New York University Press, 1968.

Lázaro (2015)
Lázaro, Sara Fuentes, 'The Contribution of Perspectiva Pictorum Architectorum to Retable-Façades in Eighteenth-Century Spanish Cathedrals', paper presented during

the international convention *Architettura e città. Problemi di tutela e valorizzazione nei centri storici e nelle periferie*, La Spezia, 27-28 November 2015.

Leuschner (1998)
Leuschner, Eckhard, 'The Papal Printing Privilege', *Print Quarterly*, xv, 4 (December 1998), 359-370.

Levy (2017)
Levy, Evonne, 'Wittkower's Old Oak Branches: Thirty Years of Bernini Studies (1980s-today)' in Andrea Bacchi and Anna Coliva (eds), *Bernini*, Milano, Officina Libraria, 2017.

Leone (2017)
Leone, Stephanie C., 'Luca Berrettini (1609 –1680): The Scalpellino-Merchant in Pietro da Cortona's Architectural Production and Baroque Rome', in Susanne Kubersky-Piredda (ed), *Römisches Jahrbuch der Bibliotheca Hertziana*, Bibliotheca Hertziana, Munich, 2017, 437-472.

Lingo (2007)
Lingo, Estelle, *François Duquesnoy and the Greek Ideal*, New Haven, Yale University Press, 2007.

Macandrew (1972)
Macandrew, Hugh, 'Baciccio's Early Drawings: A Group from the Artist's First Decade in Rome', *Master Drawings*, x, 2 (1972), 111-125+171-181.

Madonna & Trigilia (1992)
Madonna, Maria Luisa and Trigilia, Lucia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992.

Mahoney (1988)
Mahoney, Leonard, *A History of Maltese Architecture*, Malta, 1988.

Mahoney (1993)
Mahoney, Leonard, 'Ecclesiastical Architecture' in Lino Bugeja, Mario Buhagiar, Stanley Fiorini (eds), *Birgu: A Maltese Maritime City*, Central Bank of Malta, 1993, 393-420.

Mallia (1975)
Filipp Mallia, *Il-Fratellanza tas-SS.mu Sagrament ta' S.M. tal-Portu, il-Belt, 1575-1975*, Malta, s.n., 1975.

Mallory (1970)
Mallory, Nina A., 'Narciso Tomé's "Transparente" in the Cathedral of Toledo (1721-1732)', *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, xxix, 1 (1970), 9-23.

Marder (1998)
Tod. A. Marder, *Bernini and the Art of Architecture*, New York, Abbeville Press, 1998.

Martone Dragani (2012)
Martone Dragani, Concetta, 'Between Heaven and Earth: Negotiating Sacred Space at the Church of the Certosa di San Martino in Early-Seventeenth-Century Naples', PhD dissertation, Temple University, 2012.

Mazzamuto (1992)
Mazzamuto, Antonella, 'Noto: Storia e Progetto della Città Barocca', in Maria Luisa Madonna and Lucia Trigilia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 121-146.

Micallef Grimaud (2010)
James Micallef Grimaud, 'Eighteenth Century Marble Altar Typologies of the Maltese Islands', unpublished BA (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2010.

Martin (2000)
Martin, Frank, 'Two Angels by Bernardino Cametti in Madrid', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxlii, 1163 (February 2000), 104-107.

Martinelli (1996)
Martinelli, Valentino, *L'ultimo Bernini (1665-1680): nuovi argomenti, documenti e immagini*, Rome, Quasar, 1996.

Martinelli (1968)
Martinelli, Valentino, *Scultura italiana dal manierismo al rococo*, Milan, Electa, 1968.

Meli (2015)
Meli, Christina, 'The Church of Our Lady of Porto Salvo and the Congregation of the Oratory of St Philip Neri in Senglea: An Architectural Appraisal', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2015.

Meli (2017)
Meli, Christina, 'From the Eternal City to Malta: The Roman Baroque Imprint on the Regional Late Baroque Sculpture of Pietro Paolo Zahra', unpublished M.A. dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2017.

Meli (2018)
Meli, Christina, 'Pietro Paolo Zahra's Late Baroque Sculpture in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea: Art-historical Considerations and Insights from the Notarial Archives', in Alex Attard, Joan Abela, Emanuel Buttigieg (eds), *Parallel Existences. The Notarial Archives. A Photographer's Inspiration*, Birkirkara, Kite Group, 2018, 223-235.

Metzger Habel (1997)
Metzger Habel, Dorothy, 'Bernini's d'Aste Family Tombs in S. Maria in Via Lata, Rome: A Reconstruction', The Art Bulletin, lxxix, 2 (1997), 291-300.

Michaud (2003)
Michaud, Claude, 'Chantal Grell et Milovan Stanic (éd.): Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique., 2002', *L'épicurisme des Lumières, Dix-huitième Siècle*, 35 (2003), 656-657.

Montagu (1985)
Montagu, Jennifer, *Alessandro Algardi*, Yale, Yale University Press, 1985.

Montagu (1992)
Montagu, Jennifer, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art*, London, Yale University Press, First published 1989 (2nd edition, 1992).

Montanaro (1986)
Montanaro, Eugene F., 'Materials for the Life of Francesco Vincenzo Zahra (1710-1773)' in John Azzopardi (ed.), *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773*, Malta, Friends of the Cathedral Museum, 1986, 1-38.

Montanaro (1992)
Montanaro, Eugene F., 'The building of a new church dedicated to Saint Julian in 1682', *Melita Historica*, xi, 1 (1992), 35-58.

Mormando (2011)
Mormando, Franco, *Bernini: His Life and His Rome*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 2011.

Montanari (1998)
Montanari, Tomaso, 'Bernini e Cristina di Svezia: alle origini della storiografia berniniana' in Alessandro Angelini, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini e i Chigi tra Roma e Siena*, Pizzi, 1998, 328-477.

Montanari (1982)
Montonari, Tomaso, *La libertà di Bernini: La sovranità dell'artista e le regole del potere*, Turin, Einaudi, 2016.

Muscat (2013)
Muscat, Christine, *Magdalene Nuns and Penitent Prostitutes, Valletta*, San Ġwann, BDL Publications, 2013.

Napoli (2003)
Napoli, John Nicholas, 'Fashioning the Certosa di San Martino: Ornament, Illusion, and Artistic Collaboration in Early-Modern Naples', PhD dissertation, Princeton University, 2003.

Nava (1982)
Nava Cellini, Antonia, *La scultura del Seicento*, Turin, UTET, 1982.

Neil (2007)
Neil, Erik H., 'Architects as Writers, Architects as Readers in Early Modern Sicily', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri*

e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 14-23.

Nobile (1990)
Nobile, Marco Rosario, 'Disegni del Settecento negli archivi parrocchiali della provincia di Ragusa', in *Il Disegno di architettura*, May 1990.

Nobile (2007)
Nobile, Marco Rosario, 'Ragioni e Genesi delle Bibliotheche dell'Architetto in Sicilia', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 11-13.

Nobile (2017)
Nobile, Marco Rosario, 'Giacomo Serpotta e Giacomo Amata: una problematica collaborazione', in Vincenzo Abbate, *Serpotta e il suo tempo*, Silvana Editoriale, Palermo, 2017, 56-63.

Nobile and Bares (2015)
Nobile, Marco Rosario and Bares, Maria Mercedes, 'The use of 'false vaults' in 18th century buildings of Sicily', *Construction History*, xxx, 1 (2015), 53-70.

Nobile and Bares (2020)
Nobile, Marco Rosario and Bares, Maria Mercedes (eds), *Rosario Gagliardi (1690 ca. – 1762)*, Caracol, Palermo, 2020.

Olin (2012)
Olin, Martin, 'Nicodemus Tessin the Younger and the De Rossi books: a vision of Roman architecture in eighteenth-century Sweden', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 185-211.

Opdycke (1938)
Opdycke, Leonard, 'A Group of Models for Berninesque Sculpture', *Bulletin of the Fogg Art Museum*, vii, 2 (1938), 26-30.

Ostrow & Colantuono (2014)
Ostrow, Steven F. and Colantuono, Anthony (eds), *Critical Perspectives on Roman Baroque Sculpture*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania University Press, 2014.

Ostrow (1991)
Ostrow, Steven F., 'Gianlorenzo Bernini, Girolamo Lucenti, and the Statue of Philip IV in S. Maria Maggiore: Patronage and Politics in Seicento Rome', *The Art Bulletin*, lxxiii, 1 (1991), 89-118.

Ostrowski (2000)
Ostrowski, Jan K., 'A Great Baroque Master on the Outskirts of Latin Europe. Johann Georg Pinsel and the High Altar of the Church at Hodowica', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxi, 42 (2000), 197-216.

Ostrowski (1989)
Ostrowski, Jan K., 'Die polnische Barockskulptur im 18. Jahrhundert Probleme und Forschungsaufgaben', *Zeitschrift für Kunstgeschichte*, lii, 1 (1989), 89-113.

Oxford Dictionaries (2019)
Oxford Dictionaries, '-esque', https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/-esque accessed 6 May 2019.

Ožanić (2018)
Ožanić, Martina, 'Altaristika u opusu Franza Antona Strauba na području sjeverne Hrvatske – geneza motiva, utjecaji, odjeci', *Peristil* 61 (2018), Ministry of Culture of the Republic of Croatia, Directorate for the Protection of Cultural Heritage, Conservation Department in Zagreb, 65-87.

Pace (2000)
Pace, Francis, *Il-Gargur. In-nies u l-knejjes tiegħu*, Malta, 2000.

Palazzotto (2015)
Palazzotto, Pierfrancesco, 'Tradizione e rinnovamento nei primi apparati decorativi barocchi in stucco di Giacomo Serpotta a Palermo (1678-1700)' in *Arredare il Sacro: Artisti, opere e committenti in Sicilia dal Medioevo al Contemporaneo*, Milano, Skira Editore, 2015, 81-108.

Palazzotto (2016)
Palazzotto, Pierfrancesco, 'Technique and Inspiration in the Work of Giacomo Serpotta, Master of Ornament', in Pierre Caye and Francesco Solinas, *Les Cahiers de l'Ornament*, De Luca Editori d'Arte, Rome, 2016, 175-196.

Palazzatto (2016)
Palazzatto, Pierfrancesco, *Giacomo Serpotta. Gli Oratori di Palermo*, Kalos, Palermo, 2016.

Palazzotto (2017)
Palazzotto, Pierfrancesco, 'Note sulla maniera di Giacomo Serpotta a Palermo: relazioni, infl uenze, cantieri', in Vincenzo Abbate, *Serpotta e il suo tempo*, Silvana Editoriale, Palermo, 2017, 64-72.

Palazzotto (2019)
Palazzotto, Pierfrancesco, 'La committenza confraternale. Giacomo Serpotta e il fasto degli oratori palermitani tra XVII e XVIII secolo', in Valerio Viola, Rino La Delfa, and Cosimo Scordato (eds), *La "sovrabbondanza" nel Barocco*, Euno Edizioni, Palermo, 2019, 231-247.

Paone (1974)
Paone, Michele, *Lecce Città Chiesa*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 1974.

Pestilli (2011)
Pestilli, Livio, 'On Bernini's Reputed Unpopularity in Late Baroque Rome', *Artibus et Historiae*, xxxii, 63 (2011), 119-142.

Piazza (2010)
Piazza, Stefano, 'Le fonti editoriali della decorazione architettonica in marmi policromi nella sicilia del seicento: Alcune riflessioni', in Giovanna Curcio, Marco Rosario Nobile, Aurora Scotti Tosini (eds), *I Libri e L'ingegno. Studi sulla Biblioteca sell'Architetto (XV-XX Secolo)*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2010, 71-76.

Piazza (2014)
Piazza, Stefano, 'L'influenza delle incisioni romane nell'architettura siciliana del Settecento', in Stefano Piazza (ed.), *La circolazione dei modelli a stampa nell'architettura di età moderna*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2014, 147-156.

Piazza & Vicinelli (1999)
Piazza, Stefano and Vicinelli, Susan, 'Marble Architectural Decoration in Sicily: Fifteenth to Eighteenth Century', *Bulletin of the Detroit Institute of Arts*, lxxiii, 1/2 European Sculpture and Decorative Arts (1999), 42-54.

Pierguidi (2017)
Stefano Pierguidi, '*Putti*: The Birth of a Genre', in Andrea Bacchi and Anna Coliva (eds), *Bernini*, Milano, Officina Libraria, 2017, 54-73.

Pirotta (1962)
Pirotta, Luigi, 'Contributo alla storia della Accademia Nazionale di S. Luca. Alunni delle scuole accademiche premiati nei vari corpi', *Urbe*, 2 (1962), 14-20.

Pope-Hennessy (1963)
Pope-Hennessy, John, *Italian High Renaissance and Baroque Sculpture*, London, Phaidon, 1963.

Porsella Flores (2002)
Porsella Flores, Giuseppe, *Knejjes li ma Għadhomx Jidhru Ġewwa l-Birgu*, published by author, Malta, 2002.

Portanier (2017)
Portanier, Hannah, 'The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament at St. Dominic's Priory, Valletta. A Total Work of Art', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of Art and Art History, Faculty of Arts, University of Malta, 2017.

Portoghesi (1970)
Paolo Portoghesi, *Roma Barocca*, Massachusetts, MIT, 1970.

Pozzo (1693)
Pozzo, Andrea, *Perspectiva pictorum et architectorum*, Rome, 1693.

Preimesberger (1985)
Preimesberger, Rudolf, 'Themes from Art Theory in the Early Works' in Lavin, Irving (ed.), *Gianlorenzo Bernini: New Aspects of his Art and Thought: A Commemorative Volume*, Pennsylvania, Pennsylvania State, 1985.

Pressouyre (1984)
Pressouyre, Sylvia, *Nicolas Cordier: Recherches sur la sculpture à Rome autour de 1600*, L'École Française de Rome, 1984.

Ray (1992)
Ray, Stefano, 'Da Roma all'Europa. Architettura barocca e architettura dell'età del barocco tra ambiguità e chiarezza di disegno' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 83-150.

Riccoboni (1942)
Riccoboni, Alberto, *Roma nell'arte: La scultura nell'evo modern dal Quattrocento ad oggi*, Roma, Casa Editrice Medierranea, 1942.

Roberto (1992)
Roberto, Sebastiano, 'Gian Lorenzo Bernini e la committenza artistica dei Rospigliosi a Pistoia nel '600' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 357-404.

Robinich (2008)
Robinich, Ivor, 'The Fraternity of the Crucifix and its Oratory in Senglea', unpublished diploma dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, 2008.

Rosenthal (1942)
Rosenthal, Gertrude, 'An Italian Rococo Relief in Bernini's Tradition', *The Journal of the Walters Art Gallery*, 5 (1942), 56-67.

Ruiz (2012)
Ruiz, Delfín Rodríguez, 'Lo *Studio d'Architettura Civile* di Domenico de Rossi e la sua influenza in Spagna', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 115-141.

Salge (2012)
Salge, Christine, 'The reception of the De Rossi books in eighteenth-century Germany and Austria', in Aloisio Antinori, *Studio d'Architettura Civile. Gli atlanti di architettura moderna e la diffusione dei modelli romani nell'Europa del Settecento*, Edizioni Quasar, Rome, 2012, 165-183.

Salvini (1948)
Salvini, Roberto, 'A Marble Bust by Duquesnoy', *The Burlington Magazine*, xc, 541 (1948), 92-97.

Sanfilippo (1992)
Sanfilippo, Ernesto Dario, 'L'influenza barocca nelle ricostruzioni della città della Sicilia orientale dopo il terremoto del 1693', in Maria Luisa Madonna and Lucia Trigilia (eds), *Barocco Mediterraneo*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 103-120.

Scaduto (2007)
Scaduto, Fulvia, 'Le Avventure della Decorazione', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 115-135.

Sciberras (2006)
Sciberras, Keith (ed.), *Melchiorre Cafà: Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2006.

Sciberras (1999)
Sciberras, Keith, 'Ciro Ferri's Reliquary for the Oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato in Malta', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxli, 1156 (July 1999), 392-400.

Sciberras (2009)
Sciberras, Keith, *Baroque Painting in Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2009.

Sciberras (2010)
Sciberras, Keith, *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His life and art in mid-18th century Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2010.

Sciberras (2012a)
Sciberras, Keith, *Mattia Preti: The Triumphant Manner*, Valletta, Midsea Books, 2012.

Sciberras (2012)
Sciberras, Keith, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta*, Santa Venera, Midsea Books, 2012.

Sciberras Mifsud (2007)
Sciberras Mifsud, Yvette, 'Rosario Gagliardi and Ecclesiastical Buildings in Sicilian Towns: A personal portrait', unpublished MA dissertation, International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta, 2007.

Scicluna (2002)
Scicluna, Alexandra, 'The Church of the Virgin of Mercy (Tal-Ħniena) Qrendi: Its History Architecture and Works of Art', unpublished B.A. (Hons) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2002.

Seimer (1981)
Seimer, Meinolf, 'Francesco Mochi (1580-1654): Beitrage zu einer Monographie', PhD Dissertation, University of Würzburg, 1981.

Sobotka (1927)
Sobotka, Georg, *Die Bildhauerei der Barockzeit*, Vienna, Schroll, 1927.

Soussloff (1987)
Soussloff, Catherine, 'Old Age and Old-Age Style in the "Lives" of Artists: Gianlorenzo Bernini', *Art Journal*, 46 (1987), 115-121.

Sow (2002)
Sow, Jean-Cyrille, 'Aspects religiuex de la réception du Bernin en France' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 241-256.

Sozzo (2005)
Sozzo, Maria Alessandra, *Tabernacoli barocchi nella diocese di Licce tra arte e simbologia*, Congedo Editore, Galatina, 2005.

Spreti (1981)
Spreti, Vittorio, *Enciclopedia storico-nobiliare italiana*, Volume 6, Bologna, Forni, 1981.

Sutera (2007)
Sutera, Domenica, 'Teoria e Architettura nell'Italia d'Età Barocca', in Maria Sofia Di Fede & Fulvia Scaduto (eds), *La Biblioteca dell'Architetto. Libri e incisioni (XVI-XVIII secolo) cusoditit nella Bibliotheca Centrale della Regione Siciliana*, Edizioni Caracol, Palermo, 2007, 89-135.

Sutera (2014)
Sutera, Domemca, '"A Miracle of Architecture": The Billiemi limestone columns of the Church of San Giuseppe dei Teatini in Palermo and Domenico Fontana's method for lifting monoliths', *Construction History*, xxix, 1 (2014), 25-50.

Szambien (2002)
Szambien, Werner, 'Bernin et l'architecture néoclassique francaise (1750-1830)' in Chantal Grell & Milovan Stanic (eds), *Le Bernin et l'Europe. Du baroque triomphant à l'âge romantique*, Paris, Presses de l'Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 2002, 147-158.

Tonkovich (1998)
Tonkovich, Jennifer, 'Two Studies for the Gesù and a 'Quarantore' Design by Bernini', *The Burlington Magazine*, cxl, 1138 (1998), 34-37.

Thake (1994)
Thake, Conrad, 'Architectural Scenography in 18th century Mdina', S. Fiorini (ed.) *Proceedings of History Week*, The Malta Historical Society, 1994, 63-76.

Thake (1995a)
Thake, Conrad, *Baroque Churches in Malta*, Arcadia, Malta, 1995.

Thake (1995b)
Thake, Conrad, 'The genesis of baroque Mdina', *Treasures of Malta*, i, 2 (Easter 1995), 28-32.

Thake (1995c)
Thake, Conrad, 'The Dominican church and priory in Rabat', *Treasures of Malta*, ii, 1 (Christmas 1995), 16-21.

Thake (1995d)
Thake, Conrad, 'Francesco Buonamici (1596-1677) A Pioneer of Baroque Architecture in Malta and Syracuse', in *Annali del Barocco in Sicilia. Studi sul Seicento e Settecento in Sicilia e a Malta*, Siracusa, Gangemi Editore, 2/1995, 19-29.

Thake (2002)
Thake, Conrad, 'Francesco Buonamici, 1596-1677: a pioneer of Baroque architecture in Malta', *Treasures of Malta*, viii, 2 (23) (Easter 2002), 17-22.

Tobriner (1982)
Tobriner, Stephen, *The Genesis of Noto: An Eighteenth-Century Sicilian City*, California, A. Zwemmer, 1982.

Trigilia (2016)
Trigilia, Lucia, 'L'altare Barocco Opera D'arte Totale, echi di Juan Andrea Ricci, Gian Lorenzo Bernini e Andrea Pozzo nella Sicilia del Settecento', in María del Pilar López and Fernando Quiles (eds), *Visiones renovadas del Barroco iberoamericano*, Universo Barroco Iberoamericano, 2016, 146-155.

van Gastel (2013)
van Gastel, Joris, *Il Marmo Spirante: Sculpture and Experience in Seventeenth-Century Rome*, Leiden, Leiden University Press, 2013.

Weil (1971)
Weil, Mark S., 'The Angels of the Ponte Sant' Angelo: A Comparison of Bernini's Sculpture to the Work of Two Collaborators', *Art Journal*, xxx, 3 (1971), 252-259.

Weil (1974)
Weil, Mark S., *The History and Decoration of the Ponte S. Angelo*, Pennsylvania, The Pennsylvania State University, 1974.

Weil (1992)
Weil, Mark S., 'L'orazione delle Quarant'ore come guida allo sviluppo del linguaggio barocco' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 675-694.

Weil (1999)
Weil, Mark S., 'Bernini Drawings and Bozzetti for the Ponte Sant'Angelo: A New Look' in Ivan Gaskell & Henry Lie (eds.) 'Sketches in Clay for Projects by Gian Lorenzo Bernini: Theoretical, Technical, and Case Studies', *Harvard University Art Museums Bulletin*, vi, 3 (1999), 144-150.

Westin (1974)
Westin, Robert H., 'Antonio Raggi's Death of St Cecilia', *The Art Bulletin*, lvi, 3 (1974), 422-429.

Westin (1978)
Westin, Robert H., 'Antonio Raggi: A Documentary and Stylistic Investigation of His Life, Work, and Significance in Seventeenth-Century Roman Baroque Sculpture', PhD Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1978.

Winckelmann (1961)
Winckelmann, J. J., *Lettere italiane*, vol. 1, Milan, 1961.

Wittkower (1937)
Wittkower, Rudolf, 'Carlo Rainaldi and the Roman Architecture of the Full Baroque', *The Art Bulletin*, xix, 2 (1937), 242-313.

Wittkower (1999)
Wittkower, Rudolf, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750 Volumes I-III*, Revised by Jennifer Montagu and Joseph Connors, Yale, Yale University Press, First published 1958 (1999).

Wittkower (1997)
Wittkower, Rudolf, *Bernini The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque*, London, Phaidon Press, 4th revised ed. 1997, first published 1955.

Zangheri (1992)
Zangheri, Luigi, 'Giovanni Pieroni e Baccio del Bianco a Praga e nell'Impero' in Marcello Fagiolo and Maria Luisa Madonna (eds), *Il Barocco Romano e l'Europa*, Rome, Istituto Poligrafico e Zecca Dello Stato Libreria Dello Stato, 1992, 503-526.