



Figure 1. Attr. to Giovan Battista Mazzolo, *St. Mary Magdalene pedestal*, first half of the sixteenth century, marble, Church of Santa Maria di Gesù, Rabat, 24 x 49 x 33 cm. Photo credit: PrevArti

A Sicilian Renaissance Mary Magdalene pedestal in Rabat, Malta: a recent discovery

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Introduction

On 19 January 2021, the Maltese conservator and restorer Pierre Bugeja from PrevArti Ltd was assessing potential art works for conservation at a private collector's residence on Malta. He was shown a marble pedestal [Fig. 1] with abraded reliefs on three of its sides that he recognised as being executed in the Italian Renaissance tradition. With the permission of the private collector, he brought the pedestal to the attention of Dr Charlene Vella who was at the time working on the diagnostic testing and conservation and restoration of Antonello Gagini's (1478–1536) 1504 *Madonna and Child* sculpture from the Franciscan Minor Church of Santa Maria di Gesù (Ta' Ġiezu) in Rabat, Malta, which was the main focus of Jamie Farrugia's undergraduate thesis in art history.¹

The style of the pedestal as well as the iconography, were key indicators in identifying the pedestal's original location. Dr Vella identified the pedestal as, in fact, belonging to the gagesque tradition of Sicilian sculptures executed in the first half of the sixteenth century, and that it portrays the *Noli me tangere* on the front, the Magdalene washing Christ's feet on the left, and the assumption of Mary Magdalene on the right. She further associated it with an Italian Renaissance sculpture of *Mary Magdalene* [Fig. 2] in the Ta' Ġiezu Church that she had published in 2013 as being by the workshop of Antonello Gagini.²

This marble *Mary Magdalene* on Malta currently stands in a niche on the left of a side altar dedicated to St Anthony, without its pedestal, in the rebuilt Ta' Ġiezu Rabat church that was constructed in 1752. However, the sculpture would likely have been commissioned soon after the first church was built by the Observant Franciscans in the very late 1490s, since there is mention of a privately owned altar dedicated to the Magdalene a few decades later.³ The Magdalene altar was the closest to the main altar, to its left. Through his archival research, Fr George Aquilina stated that the *Magdalene* statue was moved from its altar to a lateral niche within the same space after the rebuilding of the church, when the altar was then rededicated to St. Anthony.⁴ Despite the lack of direct



Figure 2. Attr. to Giovan Battista Mazzolo, *St. Mary Magdalene*, first half of the sixteenth century, marble, Church of Santa Maria di Gesù, Rabat, 136 x 45 cm. Photo credit: Joe P. Borg

mentions to the sculpture or its pedestal, the pedestal's dimensions (24 x 49 x 33 cm), shape and iconography, perfectly match the *Mary Magdalene* sculpture (c. 136 x 45 cm).

Without any documentation relating to the sculpture's commission, the identification and re-discovery of its pedestal in a private collection came as a welcome surprise for the Friars Minor. Bought at auction, the private collector, Dr John Bugeja Caruana, decided to donate the pedestal to the Church of Ta' Ġiežu

in order for the sculpture and its pedestal to be reunited, after he had it cleaned and conserved by PrevArti Ltd.⁵ The pedestal is now exhibited in the Rabat church in front of the Magdalene sculpture since the sculpture is cemented in place, and the sculpture together with the pedestal would not fit into the present niche. This suggests that the Magdalene sculpture was always intended to be placed in its new niche on the altar of St Anthony without its pedestal, suggesting that the pedestal was removed from the sculpture when the church was rebuilt in 1752. It is here worth pointing out that Antonello Gagini's marble *Madonna and Child* in the same church, that will be mentioned in the next section, also had its pedestal removed at an unknown period, which would very well have also occurred in 1752, since the sculpture presently stands in a niche on an altar as was intended in the new church, on a new pedestal that was created for it.

The composition of the pedestal and the Scenes portrayed

The multi-faced marble pedestal has three main facets with relief sculptures on each, each measuring 12.5 x 19 cm, 12.5 x 24.5 cm, and 12.5 x 19 cm. It also carries two classical mouldings that run around the pedestal, one at the top and another at the bottom. There is a simplicity in the construction and the composition of the scenes, which is heightened through the attention to detail dedicated to the figures which are infused with Renaissance qualities. The style and format are reminiscent of another pedestal that survives on Malta in the National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta, MUŻA [Fig. 3], and which belonged to the Gagini *Madonna and Child* [Fig. 4] in the same Rabat church that was commissioned by the Franciscans from Messina on 23 February 1504.⁶ Despite the damaged and mutilated state in which the figures executed in high relief survive – largely having seemingly been intentionally defaced,⁷ as well as weathering likely due to it having been placed outdoors



Figure 3. Antonello Gagini, Pedestal with the *Stigmatization of St Francis with Sts Paul and Francis of Assisi*, 1504, marble, MUZA, Valletta, 28 x 46.5 x 57 cm. Image credit: courtesy of Heritage Malta

for part of its history – it is still possible to identify the three scenes portrayed on the pedestal's principal facets.

The scene on the left [Fig. 5] is the most crowded of the three. It contains five full-length figures, four of whom wear a halo. In the foreground, a kneeling woman anoints the feet of a seated Christ on the far right as he raises his hand in blessing. Standing behind the crouched figure, are three apostles who witness the scene. The composition's vanishing point has been worked out according to the Renaissance's use of mathematical perspective with the perspectival lines leading the eye to the centre of the composition, just to the left of the woman's head. Despite their state of preservation, these three figures' gestures are still visibly expressing shock as well as dismay towards the woman's action of breaking open an expensive perfume jar⁸ with which she anoints Christ's feet. This woman has been referred to as the sinful woman, or Mary of Bethany in the gospels of Luke and John respectively.⁹ During the pontificate of Pope Gregory I or Gregory the Great, the identity of this woman was combined with the figure of Mary Magdalene, promoting the cult of the penitent Magdalene.

The scene is devoid of any background details. The figures are sculpted in high relief where a play of light and shade adds more



Figure 4. Antonello Gagini, *Madonna and Child*, 1504, marble, Church of Santa Maria di Gesù, Rabat, Malta, c. 150 cm high. Image credit: Prevarti

weight and roundness of form to the figures. This is especially noticeable in the central figures of the scene: Christ and the kneeling figure, identifiable as the Magdalene, making them more prominent and creating a visual separation between them and the group of apostles who are executed in a slightly shallower relief. The dynamism of the hand gestures and the drapery folds leads the viewers' eyes to the central point of the scene, and therefore, to the Magdalene who is in the act of anointing Christ's feet, an act of glorification and penitence, after she had washed them with her tears and dried them with her hair.



Figure 5. Attr. to Giovan Battista Mazzolo, The Washing of Christ's feet; Figure 6. id., Noli me Tangere; Figure 7. id., Assumption of St Mary Magdalene, *St. Mary Magdalene pedestal*, first half of the early sixteenth century, marble, Church of Santa Maria di Gesù, Rabat. Photo credit: PrevArti

The Magdalene's raised head also directs the viewer's eye diagonally to the blessing Christ, with which gesture he is also announcing to the apostles present the importance of this symbolic act, a ritual that foreshadows his eventual death and burial, and which is connected to the central scene portrayed on the pedestal [Fig. 6], the *Noli me tangere*.

This central scene had already had an established iconography by the Renaissance period and had been portrayed by numerous artists, even Italian, as is exemplified by Fra Angelico in the convent of San Marco in Florence and by Titian's version today in The National Gallery, London.¹⁰ The iconography does not vary much, with the scene typically unfolding in a garden next to Christ's empty tomb. The moment portrayed is that when Christ has just risen from the dead and appears to the Magdalene who was mourning his death. Mary Magdalene had returned to Christ's tomb only to find that it was empty, which is where she meets a man, who she mistakes him for a gardener. Having realised that the man before her is in fact Christ, Mary Magdalene falls to her knees and reaches out her hand in Christ's direction. At that moment, Christ tells her in Latin "*noli me tangere*" ("do not touch me"). The focus is on the intense interaction of gesture and gaze between Christ and Mary Magdalene, that is the exact moment that Mary Magdalene realised that the figure before her was Christ. Therefore Christ gestures for her not to touch him, as he steps away from her to the right of the scene and holds what appears to be a gardening spade, symbolising why Mary Magdalene mistook him for a gardener. The sculptor has represented the garden by a single tree that features in the background to the left of the scene.

The importance in this scene lies in the fact that Mary Magdalene was the first witness of Christ's resurrection and triumph, a central tenet of the Christian faith. The sculptor also makes use of mathematical perspective, with the focal point being the centre of the scene where the Magdalene's hand almost touches the body of Christ. The two figures are animated and fit into a pyramidal composition that is typical of Renaissance art.

The scene on the right side of the pedestal portrays the assumption of Mary Magdalene [Fig. 7]. The Saint features at the centre of the composition wearing a halo and seemingly clasping her hands in prayer, as she is being carried upwards into heaven by four angels,

two holding her feet, and two at each of her arms. The scene therefore follows that recounted by Jacobus de Voragine (c. 1230-1298) in his *Legenda Aurea* or *Golden Legend* (c. 1260) whereby angels would carry the Magdalene to Heaven seven times a day, at each canonical hour, which provided sufficient spiritual nourishment which compensated for the lack of physical nourishment due to the life of penitence she led in the desert. Mary Magdalene as a subject matter is also connected to the passion of Christ, a doctrine that is also very much at the centre of Franciscanism.

Attribution and date

Due to the lack of a document relating to the sculpture's commission, the question of attribution has insofar centred around the figurative sculpture of the *Mary Magdalene*, due to the pedestal and the sculpture being separated at some point during their history, but which likely took place when the church was rebuilt in 1752. A 1561 document refers to the altar of Mary Magdalene mentioning liturgical proceedings being held at the altar, indicating that it accommodated the sculpture and was already well-established and served its devotional purpose by this time.¹¹ Furthermore, a donation to the altar of Mary Magdalene was documented in the 1554 will of Ysabella de Saroya, setting a *terminus post quem* for the commission of the sculpture.¹² The *terminus ante quem* would be the erection of the Ta' Ġiežu Church in the late 1490s.

This altar dedicated to Mary Magdalene was first paid for by the nobleman and Castellan Pietro de Nava who had a connection with the Franciscans.¹³ Pietro de Nava was a nobleman of Malta and Castellan of the Castrum Maris, that castle that overlooked the harbour, in what is now Fort St Angelo in Birgu. He inherited substantial land in Marsa from his father in 1488,¹⁴ in which the Observant Franciscans had invested money left to them from the will of Jakobus Hakim alias Malf in 1492 for a friary to be built, this investment, there-

fore, was made until the actual construction of the original church commenced.¹⁵ The same Castellan de Nava demanded that he be buried in the Franciscan habit in his will of 1487,¹⁶ indicating a significant connection with the Mendicant Order during a period of political rivalry between the power of the Castellany and the Mdina Università or Town Council.¹⁷

The *Mary Magdalene* sculpture was originally attributed by Mario Buhagiar to the hand of a sculptor who hailed "from a related close quarter" of Antonello Gagini, which, in his view, the inferior quality distinctly eliminated the possibility of it being a workshop piece.¹⁸ Ivana Mancino and, later, Charlene Vella, both described the work as emerging from a "*scuola gaginiana*", indicating that there are elements of considerable artistic quality which should not be overlooked.¹⁹ The sculpture was more recently attributed by Nuccio Lo Castro and Alessandra Migliorato to the sculptor Giovan Battista or Giovambattista Mazzolo who was active in Messina between 1512 and 1550, the latter describing the Rabat sculpture as one of his most beautiful works.²⁰ Mazzolo's active years as a sculptor, therefore, conform to the most likely timeframe of when the sculpture was most likely commissioned,²¹ that is, between the late 1490s and 1554.

Giovan Battista Mazzolo was born in the Tuscan town of Carrara renowned for the marble that is quarried there, but he was active as a sculptor in Messina, Sicily.²² His son, Giovan Domenico Mazzolo, was also a sculptor. Giovan Battista created, among others, the sculpture for the main portal of Messina's Cathedral and two noteworthy funerary monuments. The first was that of Pietro Bellorodo in 1513 for the town's Cathedral that today survives in part in the Cathedral of Messina and in the Museo Regionale di Messina, and which was produced in collaboration with the Messinese sculptor Antonello Freri (1478-1536). The other is that of Eleonora Branciforte in 1525 today in the Galleria Regionale di Palazzo Bellomo in Syracuse, but which was originally in the church of Santa Maria di Gesù in Lentini (province of Syracuse, Sicily). Being active in Messina, it is understandable that he



Figure 8. Attr. to Giovan Battista Mazzolo, *Annunciation*, 1531, marble, Duomo of Novara di Sicilia, Messina

could not escape the influence of the sculpture produced by Domenico (1425/30–1492) and Antonello Gagini. In fact, Antonello may very well have been Mazzolo's master in the decade when Antonello Gagini was active in Messina instead of Palermo (1498–1508).²³ When Antonello Gagini left Messina, Mazzolo may very well have been one of the more important sculptors active in Messina.²⁴

The Observant Franciscans had already established an artistic connection with Messina through the significant 1504 commission of the marble sculpture of the *Madonna and Child* [Fig. 4] by Antonello Gagini for the church of Ta' Giezu,²⁵ and then again in 1510–15 through the commission of Antonio de Saliba's titular altarpiece for their church.²⁶ These two commissions affirm that the Observant Franciscans of Malta were not only under the administrative structure of the Fran-

ciscans of Messina, but also working with their Messinese mother house when it came to their artistic commissions. It is therefore not surprising that the friars would once again choose an artist who was active in Messina for this commission.

The Rabat *Mary Magdalene* sculpture is crisply carved with broad and ample drapery folds falling over the saint's feet. She holds the ointment jar in her right hand close to her bosom and a book in her left hand that she supports on her hip. Her hair flows in curly waves down to her shoulders, with part of the hair being tied in a neat bun on the back of her head. The Magdalene's dress realistically folds over a belt worn high on the waist in a way that is reminiscent, for instance, of a *Madonna* that forms part of an *Annunciation* group commissioned in 1530 that is attributed to Mazzolo in the Parish Church of Brognaturo (Province of Vibo Valentia, Calabria), as well as those in the Duomo of Novara di Sicilia (Province of Messina) [Fig. 8] of 1531²⁷ and in the church of the Annunciation in Tropea, Calabria, in which there are also similarities in the way the Virgin holds the book in her right hand, the elongated fingers and the loose ringlets falling to the shoulders.

With the pedestal and sculpture being reunited, there is now the possibility for a fresh interpretation of it as a complete work of art. The pedestal strengthens the idea that the sculptor was well-acquainted with the work of Antonello Gagini, as well as the humanist Renaissance ideals which had developed on mainland Italy and which reached Sicily through Francesco Laurana (c.1430–1502) and Domenico Gagini, Antonello's father. Undoubtedly the sculptor was attempting to transmit these qualities and techniques onto the pedestal, by using mathematical perspective, controlling space and volume, and creating harmonious scenes within the limited dimensions.

Conversely, the sculpture of *St Mary Magdalene* betrays a link with Antonello Gagini in the composition of the figure who stands in contrapposto, but there is also a visible attempt to move away from Gagini, especially in

the drapery folds and the meticulously rendered treatment of the hair, which are more dynamic and articulate than in Antonello's work. This therefore, points to the sculptor in question being indeed Giovan Battista Mazzolo. The pedestal and the statue together may very much portray this transition in Giovan Battista Mazzolo's artistic evolution, a sculptor who was well-versed in the *maniera* of Antonello Gagini, but who was attempting to break away from Gagini's style. Mazzolo's sculptures may also betray an awareness of the paintings of the Lombard Cesare da Sesto (1477–1523) who was in Messina in 1514 and who introduced leonardesque traits in Sicilian art.²⁸

The style of the Mary Magdalene pedestal also continues to emphasise Mazzolo's strong affinity to the Gagini workshop. Comparing it to other pedestals attributed to Mazzolo such as that of Santa Caterina in the Museo Regionale Maria Accascina in Messina, or of the Madonna col Bambino in the Church of the Assumption of the Virgin in Melicuccà (Reggio Calabria) [Fig. 9], resulted in some interesting observations. The Magdalene pedestal differs in the weight of the scenes, offering simpler and more direct depictions of these key moments from the life of St Mary Magdalene, whereas in the above examples the scenes are executed in deeper relief and what appears to be a lot more detail. Such an observation could provoke the question of a bottega hand assisting in the manufacture of the Magdalene pedestal, however, a key element to factor in is the unfortunate physical state that the Magdalene pedestal is currently in. Perhaps it could also be an indication of a different period in the sculptor's career. The left scene containing five figures shows more of Mazzolo's abilities to include detailing such as Christ's throne, and the play on the depth and volume in the figures. The general style of the pedestal containing six facets, three of which portray a sculpted scene framed by the classical moulding, conforms to his typical style of pedestals. The pedestal lacks any observable inscriptions on the areas of moulding which are still intact.

An unfortunate similarity among the two pedestals that survive on Malta by Gagini and



Figure 9. Attr. to Giovan Battista Mazzolo, *Madonna and Child*, sixteenth century, marble, Church of the Assumption of the Virgin, Melicuccà, Reggio Calabria

Mazzolo is their badly mutilated state. All the figures on the Magdalene pedestal have been defaced, in a similar way that can be noticed on the Gagini pedestal [Fig. 3]. This raises the possibility that some raid had occurred in Church of Ta' Giezu in which both pedestals were intentionally vandalised. Mendicant Orders such as the Dominicans were targeted by the Ottomans in their attempt to access Mdina in 1551, however there is no documentation related to the Franciscan convent suffering from any Turkish invasion.²⁹ Mario Buhagiar hypothesised that the damaged pedestal of the *Madonna and Child* could be the result of French iconoclastic vandalism during their occupation of the convent in 1798.³⁰ Since the damage to the figures on both pedestals is quite similar, it is highly probable that they were mutilated in the same attack. The mouldings of the Magdalene pedestal are also chipped in several areas.

Conclusion

The donation of this pedestal and its return to the Church of Ta' Giezu in Rabat is a key moment in the story of Renaissance studies on Malta in general and this Renaissance



Figure 10. Attr. Giovan Battista Mazzolo, *St. Mary Magdalene*, early sixteenth century, marble, Church of Santa Maria di Gesù, Rabat, reconstruction of the statue and the pedestal as one whole image. Image credit: Joe P. Borg

sculpture and Mazzolo as a sculptor in particular. The return of the pedestal to the church for it to be viewed with the Magdalene statue now allows a fresh reinterpretation of the work as a holistic piece, and through digital reconstructions [Fig. 10], it is possible to view it in a condition which is as close to the original as possible.³¹ This, despite the fact that it is known that Renaissance sculptures like this would certainly have been originally viewed



Figure 11. Attr. to Giovan Battista Mazzolo, *St. Mary Magdalene*, early sixteenth century, marble, Church of Santa Maria di Gesù, Rabat, detail illustrating the blue pigment

with the addition of colour that was added to the marble once it was sculpted. A reconstruction of the whole as intended by the sculptor would therefore only be complete with more information on the original pigments that the *Mary Magdalene* sculpture had.

The *Mary Magdalene* sculpture, in fact, exhibits significant traces of pigment [Fig. 11], such as a blue hue on the dress, strongly suggesting that the sculpture would have been fully polychromed.³² Looking closely at the sculpture also reveals a floral motif on the hemline of Mary Magdalene's mantle [Fig. 11]. These pigments and visible motifs will be researched further in an upcoming study on the sculpture. There appear to be no such physical traces on the pedestal itself, hence, further study is required in order to assess how likely it is that this particular pedestal was similarly polychromed in part and perhaps even gilded.

Notes

¹ The Gagini *Madonna and Child* sculpture was studied and restored by PrevArti Ltd between September 2020 and May 2021 which was made possible thanks to funds obtained from the LEADER Programme distributed by the GAL Majjistral Foundation. The authors would like to thank Pierre Bugeja, the Franciscan Minors for entrusting them with the project, Fr Gino Gauci, Mario Buhagiar and Joe P. Borg.

² Charlene Vella, *The Mediterranean Artistic Context of Medieval Malta: 1091-1530*, Valletta 2013, pp. 178-179.

³ Notarial Archives Valletta (NAV): Acts of Antonio Cassar, R160/8, 5.ix.1561, ff. 12v-13v; Franciscan Provincial Archives OFM (FPA), Giuliana Rabat, II, cited in George Aquilina, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin: mill-1482c sal-Konċilju Vatikan II – 1965c*, Valletta 2011, p. 293.

Most of the references relate to either the masses and liturgical ceremonies carried out or to the altar dedication itself.

⁴ NAV: Acts of Felice Camenzuli, R128/3, 20.xi.1752, ff. 60-61; NAV: Acts of Ignazio Debono, R 210/30, 8.vii.1713, ff. 832v-836v; APF, Giuliana Rabat, II, 246, all cited in Aquilina, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin*, cit., p. 293.

⁵ It so happens that the donor's mother is buried within the Church of Ta' Ġiežu. The pedestal was installed in the church in September 2022.

⁶ This pedestal was certainly already separated from the sculpture between 1906 and 1911, a time during which Sir Temi Zammit was in contact with the Franciscans and requesting artefacts to improve the collection of the Museum in Valletta at the time. The Franciscans willingly contributed to the clause and loaned a number of their artefacts, including the Gaginian marble pedestal. Decades later, mainly through the efforts of Fr. George Aquilina in the 1990s, the Franciscans sought to retrieve their pedestal back, only to find unwavering opposition from the Museum's end, claiming it was a donation and not a loan. Despite decades of attempts at reuniting the works at the church of Ta' Ġiežu in Rabat, these unfortunately remain separated. More detailed report outlining the history of the separated pedestal can be found in: Jamie Farrugia, 'Antonello Gagini's Observant Franciscan Ta' Ġiežu *Madonna and Child*', unpublished B.A. (Hons.) dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta 2021, pp. 116-120.

⁷ The intentional defacing of the figures on the pedestal is similar to what occurred on the Antonello Gagini MUZA pedestal.

⁸ This is mentioned in Mark 14:3 (The New Oxford annotated Bible with Apocrypha) which refers to the perfume as the "costly ointment of nard", an essential oil used as a perfume and traditional medicine sourced from Nepal, China and India.

⁹ Gospels of Luke referring to the figure as a sinful woman: Luke 7:39, Gospels of John mentioning the Mary of Bethany: John 12:1-8. The other two gospels do not mention a name, but merely refer to her as a woman from Bethany: Matthew 26:6 and Mark 14:3.

¹⁰ Fra Angelico, *Noli Me Tangere*, 1440-42, fresco, 166

x 125 cm, Convento di San Marco, Florence; Titian, *Noli Me Tangere*, c. 1514, oil on canvas, 110.5 x 91.9 cm, The National Gallery, London.

¹¹ NAV: Acts of Antonio Cassar, R160/8, 5.ix.1561, ff. 12v-13v and APF, Giuliana Rabat, II cited in Aquilina, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin*, cit., p. 292.

¹² Acts of Angelo Bartolo, 562/1, 6.ix.1554, mp., cited in Aquilina, 2011, p. 292. At some point before 1568, new patrons took over the financing of the altar. NAV: Acts of Giuliano Muscat, R376/52, 29.xi.1568, ff.75-79v; APF, Giuliana Rabat, II, ff. 29r-v cited in Aquilina, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin*, cit., p. 292.

¹³ *Ibidem*.

¹⁴ Giovanfrancesco Abela, *Della Descrizione Di Malta*, Valletta, 1984, p. 514.

¹⁵ See George Aquilina and Stanley Fiorini, *The origin of Franciscanism in late medieval Malta*, Valletta, 1995, p. 15; Charles Dalli, *Iz-Zmien Nofsani Malti*, Valletta, 2002, p. 139.

¹⁶ Acts of Graciano Vassallo, an eighteenth-century abstract in the National Library of Malta, Libr. MS. 635, ff. 63v-67, cited in Aquilina and Fiorini, *The origin of Franciscanism*, cit., p. 16. Despite Pietro de Nava having a will in 1487, his year of death falls in 1533, as noted in Abela, *Della Descrizione Di Malta*, cit., p. 515.

¹⁷ Aquilina and Fiorini, *The origin of Franciscanism*, cit., pp. 10-11. On Pietro de Nava, see also Stanley Fiorini ed, *Documentary Sources of Maltese History: Part II Documents in the State Archives, Palermo, No. 7, Miscellanea 1156-1511*, Msida, Malta University Press, 2022, pp. 339-341 and 343-345.

¹⁸ Mario Buhagiar, *The Late Medieval Art and Architecture of the Maltese Islands*, Valletta 2005, p. 237.

¹⁹ Ivana Mancino, *Antonello Gagini fra Sicilia e Malta. Il restauro delle statue della Cattedrale di Palermo*, Racalmuto 2007, pp. 41-42; Vella, *The Mediterranean Artistic Context*, cit., p. 179.

²⁰ Nuccio Lo Castro, 'Opere di Giovambattista Mazzolo fra Sicilia e Malta', in *Paleokastro*, Anno V, N. 6, December 2015/February 2016, p. 12; Alessandra Migliorato, 'Riflessioni su Antonello Gagini tra conferme, smentite e nuove acquisizioni', in *Palazzo Ciampoli tra arte e storia. Testimonianze della cultura figurative messinese dal XV al XVI secolo* (exhibition catalogue, Palazzo Ciampoli, Taormina, 29 December 2015 – 1 May 2016), ed. Grazia Musolino, Soveria Mannelli 2016, p. 572.

²¹ Alessandra Migliorato points to references in Giacchino di Marzo's texts which mention Giovan Battista Mazzolo as being active in Messina between 1512 and 1550. See Gioacchino Di Marzo, *I Gagini e la scultura in Sicilia nei secoli XV e XVI: memorie storiche e documenti*, vol. 1, Tipografia del Giornale di Sicilia 1880, pp. 746-761; and Gioacchino Di Marzo, *I Gagini e la scultura in Sicilia nei secoli XV e XVI: memorie storiche e documenti*, vol. II, Tipografia del Giornale di Sicilia 1883, pp. 425-435. See also Alessandra Migliorato, *Una Maniera Molto Graziosa. Ricerche*

sulla scultura del Cinquecento nella Sicilia orientale e in Calabria, Magika 2010, p. 78.

²² For more information on Mazzolo, see Di Marzo, *I Gagini E La Scultura in Sicilia Nei Secoli XV E XVI*, cit., pp. 743-776; Alessandra Migliorato, *Tra Messina e Napoli: la scultura del Cinquecento in Calabria: da Giovan Battista Mazzolo a Pietro Bernini*, Messina 2000, pp. 29-31; Laura Orbicciani, 'MAZZOLO, Giovan Battista', in *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 72, 2008; Migliorato, *Una Maniera Molto Graziosa*, cit., pp. 78-109; Giampaolo Chillè, 'Arte, Documenti e toponimi: un'aggiunta al catalogo dello scultore Carrarese Giovan Battista Mazzolo', in *Archivio Storico Messinese 94/95*, Messina 2013-2014, pp. 247-260.

²³ This is also hypothesised by Alessandra Migliorato, see: Migliorato, *Tra Messina e Napoli*, cit., p. 40.

²⁴ Ivi, p. 85.

²⁵ The contract has been documented in Di Marzo, *I Gagini e la Scultura in Sicilia nei Secoli XV e XVI*, cit., 1883, pp. 60-61; Documentation of the donation of 25 *uncie* by Giovanni Frendo to the Franciscan Observants in 1510 for the Antonio de Saliba altarpiece in: FPA, *Acta Originalia I*, fol. 92r, 1510. This same altarpiece was described in Giovanni Antonio Mercieca's description in FPA, *Ms. Cronica 15*, fol. 15r., 1730.

²⁶ For more information on Antonio de Saliba's altarpiece for Rabat, see Charlene Vella, *In the Footsteps of Antonello da Messina: the antonelliani between Sicily and Venice*, Valletta, 2022, pp. 140-150, 160-161.

²⁷ This sculptural group was originally in the church dedicated to the Annunciation of Novara di Sicilia and it survives with blue and gold colours.

²⁸ Migliorato, *Tra Messina e Napoli*, cit., p. 47; Migliorato, *Una Maniera Molto Graziosa*, cit., p. 80.

²⁹ Mikiel Fsadni, *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u l-Birgu sal-1620*, Malta 1974, p. 45.

³⁰ Mario Buhagiar's hypothesis dated to November 2002 is cited in Stavroula Golfomitsou, *Conservation Report: MCR Project No: 0048/02/01*, Ceramics, Glass, Metals and Stone Conservation Department, Malta Centre for Restoration, Bighi, Malta, October 2002 - February 2003, p. 3.

³¹ The authors would like to thank Joe P. Borg for these images and digital reconstruction.

³² A detailed study on the pigments present on Antonello Gagini's *Madonna and Child* sculpture in Rabat as well as other polychromized Renaissance sculptures in Farrugia, 'Antonello Gagini's Observant Franciscan Ta' Giezu *Madonna and Child*', cit., pp. 51-79.