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# *Baroque Routes*



**Newsletter**

The International Institute for Baroque Studies (IIBS) at the University of Malta was set up to promote the pursuit of interdisciplinary, academic studies on various aspects of baroque culture. It organizes symposiums, public lectures, exhibitions and other activities leading to a greater appreciation of baroque culture, with particular reference to Malta, and networks with similar centres for baroque studies overseas. It is currently engaged in research projects concerning baroque art and architecture of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The Institute organizes MA courses on baroque studies and short courses on the baroque heritage of Malta and its conservation, and is engaged in giving assistance to various bodies concerned with the restoration of baroque buildings and artefacts. It also organizes a pre-tertiary Certificate course and a Diploma course in baroque architecture.

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#### Baroque Routes Network Newsletter

Issue No.5 May 2004

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Front Cover: Detail from Melchiorre Cafà, *Ecstasy of St. Catherine of Siena*, at *Sta. Caterina a Magnanapoli* in Rome, ca.1663-66.

## Seminar on Melchiorre Cafà – Maltese genius of the Roman baroque

On 25 October 2003, a day seminar on the Maltese sculptor Melchiorre Cafà was held at the Aula Magna of the Old University in Valletta. Dr Ray Bondin, Executive Coordinator of the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, opened the event by proposing that the statue of St. Paul by Melchiorre Cafà and the procession of St. Paul should form part of a trans-boundary nomination to UNESCO for World Heritage status.

Dr Keith Sciberras (University of Malta) chaired the morning session, which began with a paper by Dr Jennifer Montagu (Warburg Institute, London) discussing Melchiorre Cafà's models for Ercole Ferrata, followed by Dott. Maria Giulia Barberini (*Museo di Palazzo Venezia*, Rome) and Dott. Angela Cipriani (*Accademia di San Luca*) who gave a joint paper entitled '*Fortuna Critica*'. Dott. Elena Di Gioia (*Museo Capitolini*) gave a paper titled '*Chi non esce talvolta dalla regola no la passa mai. Melchiorre Cafà e la scultura a Roma tra il 1657 e il 1667: alcuni problemi aperti*'. Professor Louise Rice (University of New York) spoke of 'Cafà's Conclusion', while Dott Alessandra Anselmi (University of Cosenza) examined Cafà and Santa Rosa.

The second session was chaired by art historian Professor Mario Buhagiar (University of Malta), and began with a paper by the art historian Dr Gerhard Bissell entitled '*Melchiorre Cafà at S. Caterina a Magnanapoli*', continuing with Dr Keith Sciberras who discussed Melchiorre Cafà and the Knights of Malta. Mgr John Azzopardi (Wignacourt

Museum, Rabat) spoke of Melchiorre Cafà and the Grotto of St. Paul, whereas conservator Dott. Sante Guido's paper was entitled '*La tecnica delle cere di Cafà*'.



*Melchiorre Cafà, St. Thomas of Villanova distributing alms, National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta, Malta.*

## Exhibition of works by Maltese sculptor Melchiorre Cafà

A specialized exhibition of works by Maltese sculptor Melchiorre Cafà, recognized internationally as one of the great masters of Roman baroque, was held at the National Museum of Fine Arts in Valletta in November, entitled *Melchiorre Cafà – Maltese Genius of the Roman Baroque*.

The highlight of the exhibition was an oil lamp designed by Cafà and made in Rome on commission by Donna Cosmana Navarra of Rabat in 1666. The exquisite silver and bronze lamp hangs in the side chapel dedicated to St. Anthony at the parish church of St. Paul in Rabat. The exhibits also included the terracotta model of *The Charity of St. Thomas of Villanova*, an excellent example of Cafà's inventiveness which made him one of the most respected artists of his time in Rome. The exhibition was set up by Heritage Malta and curated by baroque historian Dr Keith Sciberras (University of Malta).

"Cafà became so famous and his inventive capabilities were so great that he attracted commissions from the most important patrons. His legacy has been recaptured in the twentieth century", said Dr Sciberras. Cafà was born in Vittoriosa in 1636 and died at the young age of 31. Like many other artists of the time, Cafà was attracted to Rome as a centre of artistic activity. Aged 22, he left Malta for Rome where he spent the rest of his short working life.

Cafà may have died after a piece of a life-size model of St. John the Baptist fell on him, however the cause of his death is not firmly established.

The exhibition included models of marble statues located in Rome. The wax relief of *The Glory of St. Catherine of Siena* was made as a sketch model for the marble altar relief of St. Catherine in the church of *Sta Caterina in Magnanapoli*. The terracotta model of the *Charity of St. Thomas* was made for the marble group of the church of *S. Agostino*, and was commissioned by Prince Camillo Pamphilij in 1663. Cafà only managed to complete the statue of St. Thomas before his death. The rest of the group was eventually completed by Ercole Ferrata, Cafà's close collaborator and friend in Rome.

The exhibition also contained two wax figures of martyr saints. These models were pigmented, a process which resulted in the loss of a substantial amount of detail. The purpose of these models is not known, although they may have been made for the colonnade of St. Peter's in Rome. Cafà was one of the sculptors shortlisted for part of the project months before he died. Works securely attributed to Cafà included the statue of St. Paul at St. Paul Shipwrecked church in Valletta, and the *Virgin of the Rosary* at the Dominican Priory church in Rabat. The marble statue of St. Paul in St. Paul's Grotto in Rabat was completed by Ferrata after Cafà's death.

## Model of the Wignacourt Museum in Rabat

On 19 December 2003 a presentation was hosted at the Wignacourt Museum in Rabat, former residence belonging to the Order of St. John. Mgr John Azzopardi, curator of the Museum, opened the evening by highlighting the importance of this fine baroque building within the Pauline complex. Professor Denis De Lucca, Director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies, presented an architectural model of the complex to the Museum, constructed in connection with the preparation of a MA dissertation entitled *The Wignacourt Collegio – the Anatomy of Baroque Building in Malta*, recently completed by architect Monica Audrey Galea as a student of the Institute.

Ms Galea explained how the analysis of documented interventions in the building brought to light a number of interesting observations about the history and architectural development of the building. A copy of the work was donated to the Museum and may be



viewed in the new *Rabatensia*, a themed library that will soon be housed in the Wignacourt Museum.

## Baroque workshop in Sicily

In December 2003 Professor Denis De Lucca, Director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies, was invited to lecture on the teaching and research activities of the Institute at an international course on the baroque architecture of the *Val di Noto*, Sicily, held under the auspices of the *Centro Internazionale di Studi sul Barocco* and the recently established architecture faculty of the University of Catania, both based in Syracuse.

In his presentation, Professor De Lucca described the three courses run by the Institute, leading to a certificate, diploma or MA degree in baroque studies. He also outlined the results of recent and ongoing research projects carried out by research assistants and students of the Institute.

Professor De Lucca presented copies of various publications to the reference library of the Syracuse centre, including two books about the baroque military architects Vertova and Mondion published under the

auspices of the Institute, a copy of the annual newsletter published by the Institute in conjunction with the Baroque Routes Network of the Council of Europe, and copies of the first volume of the *Journal of Baroque Studies*. Important contacts were also established with leading academics in Italy concerned with architectural and artistic studies and focusing on the baroque period.

Professor De Lucca stated that at the workshop he held very fruitful discussions with Professor Marcello Fagiolo of La Sapienza University in Rome, one of Italy's leading academics in baroque architecture, with the aim of doing collaborative research work leading to joint publications.

He added that another important outcome of the Syracuse meeting will be the organization of a workshop for students of baroque studies and architecture, focusing on important baroque buildings and the restoration of sites in southeastern Sicily.

## HSBC supports studies on the baroque heritage

HSBC Bank Malta plc is helping the International Institute for Baroque Studies to set up a resource centre with a reference library for research purposes. A donation was presented to Professor Denis De Lucca, director of the Institute, by Mr Emanuel Sammut, Head of HSBC's Home Loans Division.

"HSBC's Home Loans Division inevitably has a great deal of contact with graduates. This strong relationship between the bank and professionals, particularly architects concerned with the study and conservation of the baroque heritage, gives HSBC a

very clear appreciation of the importance of providing students with the best possible resources during their studies", said Mr Sammut.

Around forty students are currently studying at the Institute, but the new facility will also be used by a further 250 students studying the history of architecture in the Department of Architecture and Urban Design. The funds donated by HSBC will help the Institute purchase reference works, particularly on the architecture, art and urbanism of sixteenth-, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Europe.



## Cultural links between Rhodes and Malta

A team of Maltese and Greek experts in the fields of art, architecture and conservation recently met in Rhodes to discuss the cultural links between Rhodes and Malta. This was the first time that a team of scholars from the two islands met to share information. The one-day meeting was held in the splendid Grand Master's palace in the medieval town of Rhodes.

The meeting was chaired by Dr Ray Bondin of the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, who introduced the talks by emphasising the close links that exist between Malta and Rhodes through the presence of the Knights of St. John on both islands. He argued that this should be the first step in establishing further cultural links. Lea Miniades, deputy mayor of Rhodes, stated that the municipality of Rhodes welcomed the proposals put forward by Dr Bondin, and that she intended to continue to collaborate not only on an academic and research level but also through other links.

Professor Anthony Luttrell gave the first presentation and took the occasion to launch his new publication, *The Town of Rhodes 1306-1356*. His keynote speech concentrated on the move of the Knights to Malta. He appealed for the preventive conservation of the documents from Rhodes currently preserved in the National Archives of Malta, and stressed the importance of joint research ventures between the two islands. He also spoke about the current inadequate system of manuscript retrieval in Maltese archives, making research an expensive and arduous exercise.

Professor Mario Buhagiar gave a paper entitled "The Rhodian Treasure of the Hospitaller Knights in Malta", providing important information on a sample of precious artefacts belonging to the Conventual Church of St. John in Valletta, the Cathedral Museum of Mdina, and the Collegiate Church of St. Lawrence at Birgu, that the Knights brought over from Rhodes. He stated that these bear testimony to the sophisticated patronage patterns that existed in the sixteenth century. He also highlighted the need for an orchestrated programme of cultural collaboration between the two islands.

Professor Denis De Lucca discussed the publication *A Description of Baroque Malta* by Albert Jouvin de Rochefort, which provides a large amount of detail about the architecture and other elements of baroque Malta. Dr Keith Sciberras presented a paper entitled "A Rhodian Relic in a Baroque Macchina", which highlighted the concept of continuity between Rhodes and Malta as perceived through the evolution of artistic expression. He discussed in some detail the important relic of the right hand of St. John the Baptist.

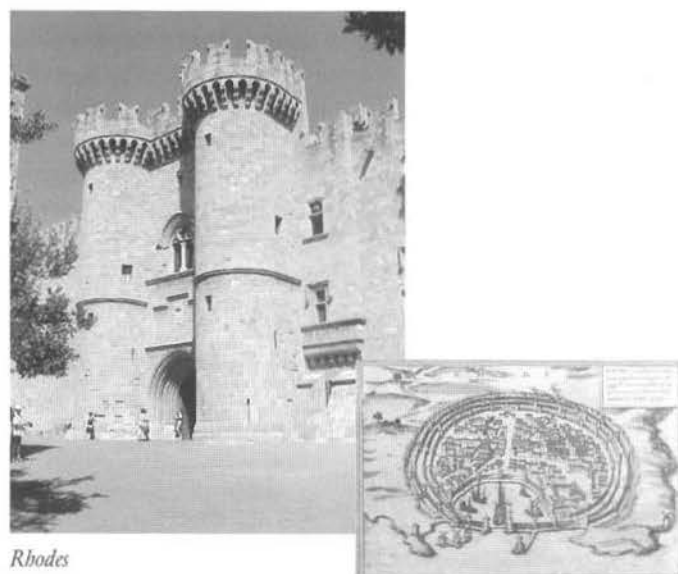
A section of the seminar concentrated on the development of fortifications between Rhodes and Malta through Italy. An expert from Rhodes and one from Naples described the development of the bastion system, while Stephen Spiteri discussed how Rhodian

military architecture reflected that of Malta. Mr Spiteri portrayed the Maltese fortifications as a reflection of a technical revolution brought about by gunpowder artillery.

Other Rhodian scholars highlighted the integrated conservation approach being adopted in Rhodes. Although the historic strata of the town of Rhodes are different from those of Valletta, all case studies refer to the common problems in the preservation of urban fabric – the economic, social and urban pressures caused by disintegration of social cohesion, overgrowth of tourism and leisure, low standards of living and the difficulties of architectural conservation. These points were also highlighted by Dr Ray Bondin, who spoke of the work done over the past fifteen years by the Valletta Rehabilitation Project, and emphasised the problems that still persist in Valletta. He showed appreciation for the work that had been done on the fortification system in Rhodes, and lamented the state of the fortifications in Valletta, particularly at Fort St. Elmo. He stated that while a lot has been carried out to save and conserve buildings and artefacts in Valletta, much work still remains to be done.

The day was concluded with the signing of a protocol of cooperation between the city of Rhodes, represented by its Mayor Dr George Giannopoulos, and Valletta, also represented by its Mayor Dr Paul Borg Olivier, which established further collaboration between the two cities. The Maltese delegation left Rhodes highly impressed by the regeneration and rehabilitation work being carried out. Most of the buildings are in a very good state of conservation and the streets are well paved. While the effects of tourism could not be missed, generally speaking the image the town portrayed was very positive.

The meeting was financed by the European Union, and was held on the initiative of Dr Ray Bondin and Lea Miniadis. It was well attended and received good coverage from the local media.



Rhodes

## Multimedia presentation on the military architecture of baroque Malta

In May 2004, the International Institute for Baroque Studies collaborated with the organising committee of Malta's EU accession celebrations to set up a twenty-minute multimedia presentation in the courtyard of the Manoel Theatre in Valletta. The show was prepared by two research associates of the Institute, Hermann Bonnici and Stephen Spiteri, and focused on the many military architects who were brought over by the Knights of St. John to consolidate their hold on Malta by offering advice on the building of the immensely powerful fortifications that were needed to prevent Malta from falling into the hands of the Turks, and to provide employment to the Maltese.

It was their close connections with all the major European states, particularly with the Italian states, with France and with Spain, that enabled the Grand Masters of the Order to bring these military architects over to Malta. It was through their activity in Malta that the final result – the superb fortified towns of the Grand Harbour area – represents the summation of the major European schools of teaching and practice about military architecture, spearheaded by that other eminently international organisation – the Jesuits,

founded by Ignatius of Loyola.

According to Professor Denis De Lucca, who spoke at the inauguration of the presentation by the Minister of Tourism and Culture, Dr Francis Zammit Dimech, it was the Jesuits who first applied their advanced knowledge of mathematics to diffuse teaching about military architecture to everybody that mattered in European baroque society, through their famous colleges. This explains the beautiful architectural geometry of all fortified towns in Europe in the baroque age which, like Valletta, Cottonera and Mdina, used a common language of European military design and execution that transcended contemporary frontiers.

Baroque Malta was the only place in the world where important citizens from all Europe of the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, lived together without the experience of frontiers, using a common language, practising a common creed and using a common currency. Baroque Malta represented a rare example in human history of a united Europe, used by the Pope in Rome not only to stop the advance of the Turks but also to project the image of a united Catholic Europe.

### Recent publications of interest



**Quentin Hughes & Conrad Thake. *Malta the Baroque Island*. Midsea Books, Malta: 2003, pp.228.**

An illustrated survey of Malta's baroque civil and military architecture that considers the work of both local and foreign architects in Malta, such as Francesco Buonamici and Lorenzo Gafa.

**Cynthia de Giorgio. *The Image of Triumph and the Knights of Malta*. Malta: 2004, pp.178.**

A study of the symbolic visual expression of triumph by the Knights of Malta during the baroque period, exploring the imagery used in various art forms including architecture, sculpture, painting and tapestry.

### Study tour to Versailles

The International Institute for Baroque Studies and the Department of Architecture and Urban Design at the University of Malta jointly organised a very successful study tour to Versailles in November 2003.

The objective of the trip was to familiarise students following the BE&A (Hons), the MA in Baroque Studies, and the Diploma in Architecture courses with the exterior and interior design of the foremost Baroque palace in Europe built by King Louis XIV of France. The students also viewed the beautifully landscaped gardens of the palace designed by Andre Le Note.

Another highlight of the trip to France was a visit to Paris, beginning with a coach tour visiting principal urban spaces of the city – the Champs Elysées, the Opera, the Louvre, the University of the Sorbonne, and the Pantheon. This was followed by a visit to the twelfth-century gothic cathedral of Notre Dame. The students were also shown the Georges-Pompidou centre designed by Renzo Piano and Richard Rogers, and the Louvre glass pyramid designed by J.M. Pei, two important landmarks in the history of modern architecture. The excursion ended with an evening boat trip on the river Seine, past the illuminated splendour of the principal medieval, baroque and nineteenth-century buildings of Paris.

The students were accompanied by Professor Denis De Lucca, Dr Joseph H. Spiteri, architect Carmel Cacopardo, architect Shirley Cefai, and the painter Alfred Chircop. The trip was sponsored by Vassallo Builders and the Corinthia Group of Companies.

**Denis De Lucca. *Mondion. The achievement of a French military engineer working in Malta in the early eighteenth century*. Malta: 2003, pp.viii+86.**

In February 1715, the 34-year-old French military engineer Charles François de Mondion arrived in Malta, as deputy head of French military mission headed by René Jacob de Tigné. Having been described to Grand Master Ramon Perellos as a brilliant young military engineer who had studied under the great Vauban, he was to give his opinion regarding the strengthening of the Floriana covered way and glacis and the Santa Margherita outworks.

Thus starts the connection with Malta of an architect and military engineer who was to leave his imprint in a number of landmark buildings mostly during the magistracy of Antonio Manoel de Vilhena. Mondion would spend most of his remaining years in Malta where he died in 1633.

Denis De Lucca's monograph about this important military engineer is the first full-length study about him. Even though it seems to be quite difficult to get plentiful biographical details, the author has still managed to offer an interesting assessment in what is a very beautifully produced book. Moreover, a couple of the appendices consist of contemporary descriptions of the island's actual and proposed fortifications that scholars of military architecture will deem invaluable.

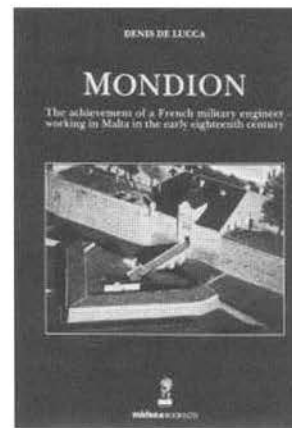
Tigné left soon afterwards but Mondion was granted leave of absence to enable him to stay on the island where he worked on the Floriana landfront turning it into what Tigné himself described as as "one of the most beautiful and feared in Europe". Tigné also lauded Mondion's "ability and intelligence".

Mondion identified the weak points in the Marsamxett harbour and proposed the fortification of *L'Izoletto* (Manoel Island) and Dragut Point (Tigné Point). In later years Mondion would link his name to the fortifications of Manoel Island.

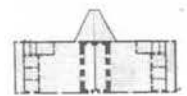
Mondion was also involved in other works until 1722 when a great admirer of his skills, Antonio Manoel, became Grand Master and his outstanding maecenas. In 1718 he submitted plans for an extension of Cospicua and improvements in the coastal fortifications in accordance with the changing strategic vision of the island's defence by the Order.

Like so many visitors to the island, Mondion seems to have fallen in love with the island and strove to be allowed to stay on indefinitely. Ambassador de Mesmes wrote to Manoel from Paris that Mondion preferred to be in Malta "to all the glory and rewards which he had good reason to expect in view of his ability and good service".

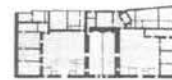
In the first years of Manoel's magistracy, Mondion was entrusted with at least seven major projects which included the preparation of site plans, design drawings and detail sheets and the actual execution of the new fort on *L'Izoletto*. The plans included a novel idea its raised parade ground and its symmetrically-located



*Pianta dell'Espedite del Gesù  
projetta dal Cav. Mondion  
nel 1726.*



*Le stanze l'Espedite come si trova  
nel 1719.*



*Spaccato di Ter. Maltese, come sta prima per il Cav. di S. Antonio.*



bomb-proof magazines. Another feature was the chapel dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua, the Grand Master's patron saint, and which would become the French engineer's final resting place. Ruined by bombs in the war, the church for many years was also the victim of super-efficient modern Vandals. The on-going restoration at the fort will, one hopes, bring back the fort's former glory and that the church will rise phoenix-like from the rubble to grace the harbour.

Another project was the building of the new suburb of Floriana, more or less on the lines set out by Count Valperga. Mondion's plans included a design for *Porte des Bombes*, a spacious parade ground and a fountain.

Beyond the harbour area, Mondion was employed in the baroque revival of Mdina following the disastrous earthquake of 1693. Mdina was effectively to become Mondion's city. Many of the noble buildings and structures bear testimony to his skills and vision. The main gate, the magisterial palace, the municipal palace and Greek's Gate are some of these works which any visitor to Mdina just cannot escape. De Lucca also suggests that Mondion "was actively involved in the design and building of the Bishop's seminary."

Even Gozo was to receive Mondion's attention. His works included the rebuilding of the Banca Guiratale which would be changed somewhat in following years and an abortive project for the building of an alternative city within Fort Chambray. Mondion was also lucky in having among his assistants Romano Fortunato Carapecchia who had been trained in the *Accademia di San Luca* and the able Maltese *capomastro* Francesco Zerafa. Yet there can be little doubt that he was instrumental in French concepts of baroque architecture, in spite of the fact that he does not seem to have had any formal training in architecture, but which he saw as an extension of his training as an engineer.

Mondion died of a heart attack at 4.30 am on Christmas Day 1733 and was buried in the crypt of the Fort Manoel church. The tombstone has since been destroyed but like most architects, Mondion does not really need one. One has only to look around to



see the results of his genius.

De Lucca's book is lavishly illustrated with many excellent photographs, contemporary plans, and diagrams by Malta's foremost military illustrator, Stephen Spiteri. All of those complement the text admirably while Spiteri's diagrams are invaluable since they give an excellent idea of the fortifications before we did our successful best to ruin most of them. Of great importance to the student of fortifications in Malta are the appendices in the book. One of them, written in 1717 by an anonymous Frenchman, gives a succinct history of the Order's fortifications in Malta which was possibly written to put the newly-arrived Tigné and Mondion in the picture. One of the manuscripts at our National Library, the document is presented in a free translation.

Another appendix consists of the report by Tigné

completed in 1715. Entitled *Discours general sur le fortifications de Malte et ce qui reste a faire pour le mettre en estat d'une bonne deffance*, it is also found in the National Library. It is a very exhaustive report which provided Mondion with a sort of blueprint of the works he was to undertake in the island. The third appendix is Mondion's own report written in 1715 which stresses the importance of the fort on *L'Izoletto*, which would make up for the weakness of the northern side of Valletta. It is also to be found in our National Library.

**Louis J. Scerri**

*This review first appeared in the Sunday Times of Malta (25 May 2003), p.31.*

## Launch of the first volume of the Journal of Baroque Studies

In November 2003, the International Institute for Baroque Studies launched the first volume of its *Journal of Baroque Studies* at St. James Cavalier Centre for Creativity. This first issue contained papers presented at a seminar entitled 'Triumph over Death – a Baroque Celebration', organised in conjunction with the Manoel Theatre Baroque Festival in which took place in May 2003. The journal is edited by Dr Petra Bianchi, and sponsored by the University of Malta, the Malta Tourism Authority, and Chev. Roger de Giorgio.

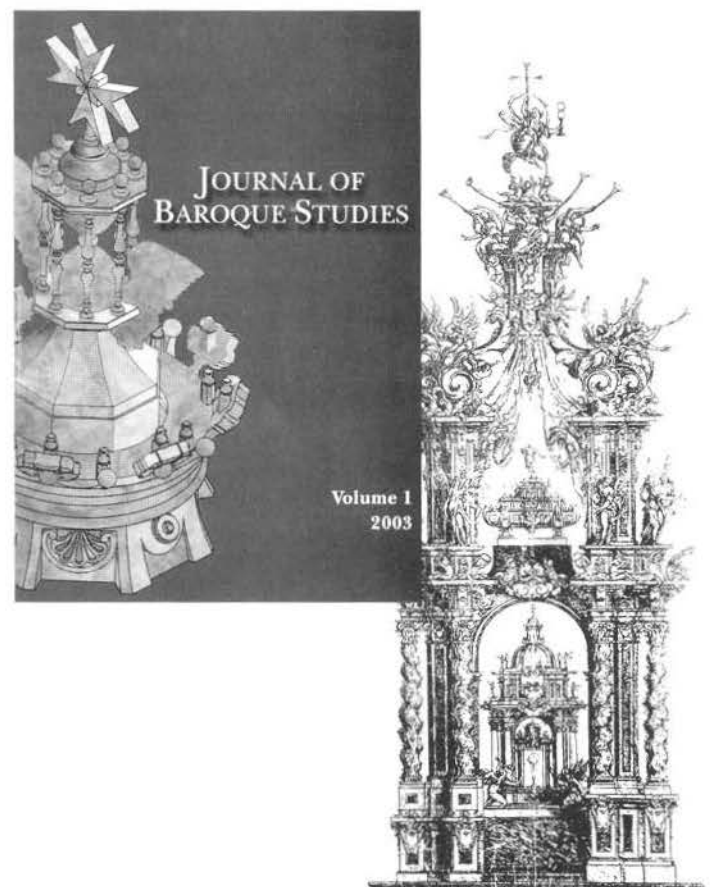
During the launch the volume was introduced by the authors of the collected papers. Professor Denis De Lucca introduced the proceedings with an overview of the teaching and research activities of the Institute, which has around fifty students following its MA, diploma and certificate courses. He also gave a brief summary of his paper entitled "The *Feste Funebre* of Baroque Europe", which focuses on the imaginative use of the *effimero* by baroque architects in contemporary death rituals.

The paper by Dr Keith Sciberras deals with the monumental tombstones in the Conventual Church of St. John's in Valletta, while in her article architect Shirley Cefai describes the studies carried out by Institute on the *Chapelle Ardente* designed in 1726 by Romano Carapecchia. Mgr. John Azzopardi's contribution is entitled "Funerary Liturgical Rites and Baroque Music in the Mdina-Rabat Area in the Sixteenth and Early Seventeenth Centuries".

The proceedings of the launch were concluded by Rev. Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, Chairman of the Board of the Institute, who discussed the theme of his contribution on "Philosophy and Death in the Baroque Age". He stressed the importance of publications like this new *Journal of Baroque Studies* for the Institute, which has been very active in the field of research since its foundation in 1996. He also mentioned the considerable contribution to the

founding and activities of the Institute made by the late Dr Giovanni Mangion, to whose memory the first volume of the journal is dedicated.

Professor De Lucca announced that other publications planned by the Institute include a second volume of the *Journal of Baroque Studies* and the next issue of the IBS newsletter, published in conjunction with the Baroque Routes Network of the Council of Europe. The journal is available from Midsea Books Ltd, tel: 21496911, and from leading bookstores.





**Keith Sciberras, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta*, with a preface by Jennifer Montagu. Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, Malta: 2004: pp. 234 + xx.**

The scholarly significance of this book is best appreciated if considered in the context of the research programme that the History of Art Programme at the University of Malta has on its academic agenda. The author is a senior lecturer and full-time member of staff on the Programme, who combines his research pursuits with a full teaching schedule.

*The Iconography of the Maltese Islands*, which I published in 1988, was a coherent first attempt at coming to terms with the history of the visual arts in Malta by providing a critical survey of painting in the 500 years between 1400 and 1900.

The Introduction emphasised that the book was intended as a point of departure, and cautioned that new research would inevitably necessitate modifications and revisions. The ultimate desideratum was that it would serve as a stimulus for specialisations in the several historical art disciplines, and that future studies would, in due course, crystallise in a comprehensive scholarly history of art in Malta. Fourteen years later, this goal has not yet been attained, but appreciable progress has been made.

The most significant step forward was the introduction of classes in the history and appreciation of art at the University of Malta, and the consequent fostering of a better concerted and more scholarly-oriented research programme. This bold initiative, that I was asked to co-ordinate, started in the same year as the publication of the book, and was to some extent the result of its success. Over the years, it has matured into a History of Art Programme responsible for an area of study within the Faculty of Arts.

The Programme offers courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels, and has been instrumental in the training of scientifically well-prepared art historians and critics who now occupy key positions in the country's fine arts (and other cultural) institutions. The idea of History of Art as a cultural pastime that can be pursued by any suitably motivated dilettante or art collector has finally started to be discredited, and there is a better informed attitude to the subject as a rigorous academic discipline.

The Programme has contacts of mutual academic collaboration with the History of Art departments of major universities and fine arts museums in Europe and North America, and has taken important initiatives in the protection and conservation of the Maltese artistic patrimony. Academic staff members sit on committees for international art exhibitions and colloquia and publish research papers in referred art historical journals and publications.

The richness of the new data collected since 1988 makes the time ripe for re-interpreting and rewriting the story of art in Malta in its wider Mediterranean and Western European contexts. *Roman Baroque*

*Sculpture for the Knights of Malta* is the first in a series of scholarly monographs that the Programme has on its agenda. It will be followed later on this year by an in-depth study on the art and architecture of late medieval Malta that I will be authoring and which will also be published by *Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti*.

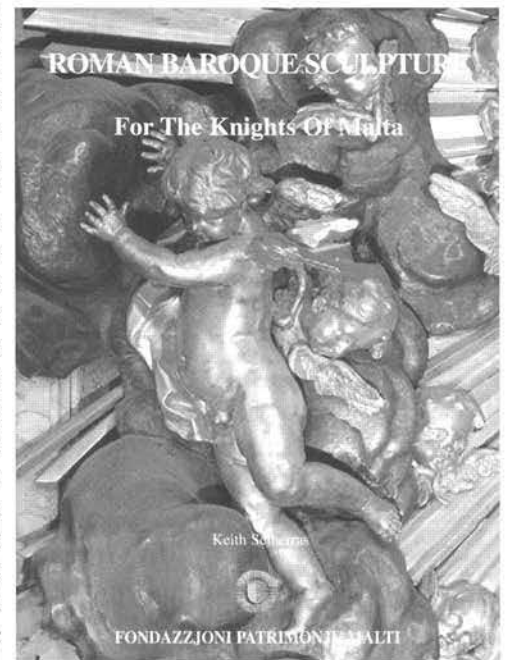
What Dr Sciberras has produced in the book is in many ways a unique academic achievement. As Dr Jennifer Montagu, one of the most respected and internationally celebrated contemporary historians of Roman baroque art, has stressed in her preface, Dr Sciberras has not only rewritten the history of Roman sculpture in Malta, but in so doing he has also broadened our knowledge of a significant aspect of the history of Roman baroque sculpture. He has done this by assiduously and intelligently taping the rich resources available in Maltese and foreign archives.

This, coupled with his trained eye, has enabled him in "not only identifying and analysing a number of extremely

important sculptures, but also examining the ways in which they were commissioned." The book is in this way a landmark in Maltese art historical studies and one of the few works produced in Malta that can stand comparison with the best art historical studies produced elsewhere in the academic world.

It is a credit to the author, to the institution that he represents, and to *Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti* that has been responsible for its publication.

Dr Sciberras is one of the first (and also outstanding) products of the History of Art courses that I pioneered at the University of Malta. The roots of the book are to be sought in the studies and research that he undertook, under my supervision, for his doctoral thesis in History of Art. He was the second PhD graduate of the Programme, the first being Dr Martina Caruana, currently head of Academic Studies at the Malta Restoration Institute, Bighi, whose studies, under my direction and that of Professor Anne Prache, were carried out jointly at the University of Malta and the University of Paris (Paris IV) Sorbonne. Her thesis on *The Codex Evangeliorum Melitensis and Related Late Medieval Illuminated Manuscripts Produced in Sicily* still awaits publication. I hope that Dr Caruana will see to it in the near future because it is a valuable contribution to Maltese late medieval studies,



particularly the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

Dr Sciberras' book is destined to remain a standard work of reference for many years to come. A cursory look at his bibliography provides an idea of his extensive reading in both primary and secondary sources. Particularly valuable, and richly rewarding, was the work carried out at the archives of the Sovereign Military Order at the Magistral Palace in *Via dei Condotti*, Rome, where he received the generous assistance of the then Librarian and Keeper of Archives, Fra John Critien, whose invaluable help he gratefully acknowledges.

Other important libraries outside Malta, the resources of which he perceptively tapped, included those of the *Bibliotheca Herziana* in Rome, the Warburg Institute in London, the *Accademia di San Luca* in Rome, the *Archivio Storico del Vicariato* in Rome, the *Archivio Doria Pamphili* in Rome, the *Archivio Storico della Banca di Napoli*, and several others. The list is truly impressive.

The book considers in remarkable depth and detail the most exciting and richly rewarding period in the modern art history of Malta, from around the middle of the seventeenth century to the end of the eighteenth century, when under the culturally enlightened government of the Knights Hospitallers of St. John of Jerusalem, the little central Mediterranean archipelago developed into a microcosm of the Baroque art of Roman Catholic Europe. The benevolent despotism of the Grand Masters was crystallised in a discerning programme of artistic patronage that generally reflected remarkable connoisseurship.

The city of Valletta in general, and the great church of St. John in particular, were transformed into a centre of artistic sophistication aptly described by Patrick Brydone who visited the islands on his Grand Tour in 1770, as "an epitome of all Europe". The acumen of the Knights' patronage is above all testified to by the choice of artists whom they enticed or sometimes coerced into their service, particularly in the decoration of the Conventual Church on which successive Grand Masters lavished their munificence.

Only the best was acceptable and through their agents, particularly in Rome and Naples, the Knights kept themselves informed of the artistic situation. It was to their credit that the Conventual Church became one of the great showpieces reflecting the unsurpassed *magnificenza* of baroque Rome. Dr Sciberras has demonstrated that, contrary to what has traditionally been maintained, the major influences that shaped the Baroque identity of Malta came from Rome rather than Naples.

The alleged Neapolitan bias, to which I myself had previously subscribed, resulted from the predominant influence of Mattia Preti whose sparkingly brilliant palette, tactile qualities, and warm lyrical appeal had a conditioning effect on Malta. This should not however blur our judgement of the other developments in local art.

Several artists who contributed to the glory of baroque Malta moved in the circles of Alessandro Algardi and Gian Lorenzo Bernini, the greatest

exponents of Roman high baroque sculpture who, although seemingly temperamentally and stylistically different from each other, shared a lot in common. The Knights tried to cajole both into their service.

They were not very successful with Bernini, although a bronze crucifix on the choir altar of the Conventual Church might possibly have been cast from a model for one of the several altar sets produced by him and his bottega, sometimes in collaboration with other sculptors, such as Ercole Ferrata. When in the early spring of 1655 they approached him through their ambassador in Rome for a sculptural altarpiece of the baptism of Christ for the grand niche of the Conventual Church, he diplomatically refused. The work was, as a result, entrusted to Melchiorre Cafà.

Cafà, on which Sciberras is currently preparing another major publication, is one of the great heroes of the book. Important new light is shed on the story of the commission, the untimely death of the great Maltese virtuoso, and the subsequent history of the project until its eventual realisation several years later by Giuseppe Mazzuoli. Of great interest to Maltese art history is the involvement of Melchiorre's brother, the architect Lorenzo, both in the final preparations of the setting for the baptismal group and of the chancel altar. His artistic credentials are in this way appreciably enhanced.

Many of the monuments discussed by Dr Sciberras have recently been restored by Dott. Sante Guido and his highly qualified equip of professional conservators and restorers. There has been all along a salubrious relationship between the two, with Dr Sciberras providing the correct historical context for conservation and restoration interventions, and Dott. Guido giving the scientific and technical advice that enhances the appreciation of the work of art.

This collaboration has resulted in the study and analysis of some of the great works discussed in the book, such as the *Christ the Saviour* by Alessandro Algardi, now in the Art Gallery of the Conventual Church, or the magnificent portrait bust of Pope Innocent XII, from the church of the Virgin of Victories, that Dr Sciberras has perceptively attributed to Giuseppe Mazzuoli. Both projects were made possible through the support and cooperation of the Valletta Rehabilitation Committee, and the enthusiasm of its coordinator Dr Ray Bondin.

Dr Sciberras' commitment to research and scholarship has attracted international attention and he is acquiring recognition as a leading authority on baroque studies.

Recently he has broadened his interests to include Caravaggio and he has been invited to sit on the organising committees of major exhibitions and scholarly fora on this great early sixteenth-century artist.

The book under review will further enhance his academic reputation. It also provides us with a foretaste of his future achievements.

**Mario Buhagiar**

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## Melchiorre Gafà's *Discorso* about the Designs and Models for the Main Altar of St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta<sup>1</sup>

**Moira Pisani**

Melchiorre Gafà (1635-67) rose from humble beginnings to become one of the most gifted baroque sculptors.<sup>2</sup> Both local<sup>3</sup> and international<sup>4</sup> scholars have highlighted his artistic contributions.

The earliest documented reference to Gafà as a sculptor records him as one of the four sculptors who accompanied Francesco Buonamici to Sicily to work on the chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in the Cathedral in Syracuse in 1651-52. He was particularly commended and was paid generously for having carved the twelve *putti* and six heads of seraphim figures placed on the columns and the four larger *putti* placed on the portals leading to the two sacristies.<sup>5</sup> In this document he is referred to as Marcello Caffà, aged sixteen.<sup>6</sup>

Gafà left Malta in 1658<sup>7</sup> and later became pupil and assistant of Ercole Ferrata<sup>8</sup>, a tutor who would have imparted technical knowledge but who was "infinitely less subtle" than he himself was.<sup>9</sup> Rather than espousing Ferrata or Algardi's reserved classicism, Gafà was inspired by Bernini's flamboyance and use of mixed media: coloured marbles and gilded bronze together with white marble used to create "quasi-pictorial, visionary effects".<sup>10</sup> Yet his works have a unique and distinctive sensitivity.

Gafà's *Ecstasy of St. Catherine of Siena* in *Santa Caterina da Siena à Magnapoli* in Rome, which was executed in 1667, was probably the only project that was finished entirely by him before his death.<sup>11</sup> It amply illustrates how he combined Bernini's aesthetic qualities with his own fresh ideas, thereby establishing a bridge between high and late baroque sculpture. Gafà's other major works include three of the most characteristic late baroque sculptures: *St. Rose of Lima* (1665-69), in Sao Domingo, Lima, and *St. Thomas of Villanova* (1661-68) in *Sant' Agostino*, Rome, which was completed by Ercole Ferrata.

Other notable works include the bronze bust of Pope Alexander VII, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York - of which another fine version exists in Siena Cathedral - and the marble relief of *St. Eustace in the lion's den* in *S. Agnese in Agone*, Rome.<sup>12</sup> Gafà also worked on the high altar in *Santa Maria in Campitelli*.<sup>13</sup> A particularly notable feature here is the bronze glory that clearly evokes the one in St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta. In Malta he is credited with two wooden processional statues - *St. Paul* in St. Paul Shipwrecked, Valletta, and *The Madonna of the Rosary*, in the Dominican church in Rabat.<sup>14</sup>

Gafà's productive years were all too few. His brilliant career was cut short by his untimely death in 1667,

while working on the model for the centrepiece in the main apse of St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta.<sup>15</sup>

Gafà had been working in Rome when the Order requested him, through its Ambassador Fra Francisque de Seytres-Caumons, to provide designs for the high altar niche of the conventual church. The Ambassador boasted that he had paid him fifty *doppe* for work which was worth a hundred.<sup>16</sup> Summoned by the Order, Gafà came to Malta and on 23 January the Grand Master ordered that consultation on the designs should be held between the Commissioners responsible for the embellishment of the church, Melchiorre Gafà, Mattia Preti (1613-99) who was in charge of the church decoration<sup>17</sup>, and Mederico Blondel<sup>18</sup> (1628-95), the Order's resident engineer. Their report was read out, discussed and accepted on 7 April 1666.<sup>19</sup> They provide an important insight into the project that Gafà was commissioned to produce. It was to be executed abroad and Gafà had to construct full-scale clay models, from which a mould could be created for the bronze figures together with a wooden full-scale niche. It was while Gafà was working on the clay models that he fell from a height, injured himself and died of fever a few days later.<sup>20</sup>

Following Gafà's death, the project was suspended and it was only on 24 November 1693 that the Grand Master and his Council approved the request made by the executors of Grand Master Carafa's will to devote his bequest of 7,000 *scudi* to the altar niche project. Following the deliberation of a number of plans, two of which had been drawn up in Rome by famous artists and one which had been presented by a Jesuit priest in Malta, the latter was chosen on 17 December 1695. This design included silver statues that were to be prepared in a local foundry and subsequently perfected by local artists. A large-scale model of this design was erected in St. John's but it failed to garner support and on 2 June 1696 the Grand Master and Council ordered that it should be removed.<sup>21</sup>

The choice then fell on Melchiorre's brother, Lorenzo. Lorenzo began his career as a stone carver, and in 1671 he was describing himself as a *scultore* but he forged a distinguished career as one of the most prolific architects on the island. He worked as a *scalpellino* in the choir, main altar and reredos of various churches and worked as a *capomastro*, executing the designs of Francesco Buonamici, resident engineer from 1635 to 1659<sup>22</sup>, and Mederico Blondel. He also designed several important churches and civil buildings among them the Palace of the General of the Gallies, Vittoriosa (before 1695);





Fig.1 - St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta - Nave

the church and convent of *Sta. Scolastica*, Vittoriosa (1679); the church of St. Lawrence, Vittoriosa (1681-97); St. Nicholas, Siggiewi (1676-93); St. Peter Martyr, M'Xlokk (1681); the dome of St. George, Qormi (1684); St. Mary, Qrendi (1685-1712); *Tal-Hlas*, Qormi (1690); St. Catherine, Zejtun (1692-1778), the Cathedral, Mdina (1697-1702); and the Cathedral, Gozo (1697).<sup>23</sup>

On 23 June 1696, he was requested to prepare two models for the refurbishment of the choir area, one with the titular painting of St. John the Baptist and another that included statues. On 4 January 1697, the model with the statuary group was approved. However, two more years were to pass before more action was taken. Finally on 16 May 1699 Lorenzo was sent to Rome with plans to oversee the project since it was decided that work should be carried out abroad and not locally.<sup>24</sup> This included the cladding for the marble niche and its ornaments, the bronze glory, which was executed by Giovanni Giardini<sup>25</sup>, the Vatican's chief metalworker, and the sculpture group that was executed by Giuseppe Mazzuoli (see fig.1).<sup>26</sup>

Giuseppe Mazzuoli (1644-1725) is said to have been Melchiorre Gafà's pupil, a fact that might have influenced his choice as sculptor.<sup>27</sup> Mazzuoli, like his patrons the Chigi family originated from Siena where many of his works can be found.<sup>28</sup> The details of both Gafà brothers' involvement in this project have been amply documented (AOM 264, 103r, 124v) but

Melchiorre remained a rather distant figure despite considerable interest in his work.<sup>29</sup>

A document has now come to light that reveals some of Melchiorre Gafà's dedication, attentiveness and thoroughness.<sup>30</sup> Here, in his own words, is none other than his discussion of the plans and models that he submitted for the project of St. John's altar niche. These models were sent from Rome together with this *Discorso* and a painting on September 1665 as transpires from correspondence between Ambassador Caumonts, the Order's Ambassador to the Holy See, and Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner (1663-80): "*Ieri feci imbarcare a questa ripa sopra una felucca per Messina i doi modelli fatti da questo Architetto e scultore Maltese per cotesta Altar maggiore, in due casse, e ne feci lettera al Ric. Barone di Messina acciò habbia cura di recuperarle e mandarle a Vostra Em. insieme con una scatola lunga dentrovi un quadro che manda detto Maltese; da cui essendomi dato un discorso sopra detti modelli e prezzi delle robbe con una lettera scritta da lui a V.E. ...*"<sup>31</sup>

This document is not Gafà's original letter, which has not been traced, but a transcription copied into a ledger in the archives of the Order.

#### *Translation of the Discorso*

In the opening paragraph Gafà pays homage to the Ambassador to the Holy See who had contacted him in Rome to prepare models for the high altar as well as to the Grand Master who he has the privilege of serving. He speaks of his eagerness to serve the Order as well as his country and says that he has created two models for this purpose and notes that the model with the marble statues has the advantage of being more durable than a painting and thus will preserve the Grand Master's memory for posterity.

The following paragraph discusses the space limitations posed not so much by the openings, the *porticelle*, created for the organs on either side of the choir, as by the fact that the apse painting - Mattia Preti's *St John, holding the Order's standard*, constrained the height available. He had in any case decided that the *porticelle* had to be advanced forward by a palm and a half. I believe this means that the bays that held the organs had to project further to provide more space for a deeper apse. This would allow him to raise the number of stairs in the choir to five because the present altar, with just three stairs, was deemed too low. However he had produced a modified design with four stairs in case the first proved to be inconvenient. These comments appear to refer to the design with the statues because he then goes on to talk about the model with the painting.

#### *Model with a painting as centrepiece*

Gafà states that this model differed completely, both in plan and ornament, from the other one: "*L'altro*

*modello l'ho fatto p[er] il quadro, il q[ua]le totalmente diverso di pianta e ornam[en]to dal primo*.<sup>32</sup> It was more spacious but not as magnificent. He had placed an ornament comprising a medallion supported by two small angels above and to one side of the organ openings. A bas-relief of the beheading of St. John or some other appropriate figure would be sculpted thereon.

He had also placed the arms of the Religion accompanied by two *putti* together with the Grand Master's coat-of-arms on the frontispiece above the arch in the central bay. This, he says, could be replaced by a painting if the medal motif did not meet approval. He terminates this description by saying that his models demonstrated his intentions far more clearly than his words ever could.

Gafà tells us that the plan and cross-section would make the execution of the work a simple matter because it included both proportions and measurements. In fact, he insists it could be carried out by any experienced *scarpellino*. In good time he would also send the models for the ogee mouldings and cornices and any other details that were required to finish off the work. (It was originally intended that the niche be built in Malta and that is why Gafà insists that his plans are detailed and will be very easy to follow).<sup>33</sup>

### Materials used

Gafà states that he has been careful to use materials that are easily obtainable and makes his recommendations. He suggests *bardiglio*<sup>34</sup> or *biscio di carrara* for the first plinth running above the steps and *Africano*<sup>35</sup>, an antique stone which could be obtained in Rome, to clad the first pedestal next to the altar. The second pedestal could be covered with antique alabaster.<sup>36</sup> This beautiful material could also be acquired in Rome. He recommends *breccia di Francia*<sup>37</sup> or *diaspro di Sicilia*<sup>38</sup> for the columns and black and white *Porto Vennere*<sup>39</sup> for the pilasters behind the columns in order to enhance their effect. *Porta Santa*<sup>40</sup> could be used for the pilasters alongside them. If the columns were to be made of *breccia di Francia* the pilasters could be made from *diaspro*. The frieze could be made from antique alabaster. The architrave, frieze and cornice were already made from ordinary white marble. He warns that since the architrave above the statue is exceptionally large it should be carried on an arch as a precaution. The black and white plinth above the cornice could also be made of striped *diaspro*, as could be seen in the other model. Here Gafà may be referring to the plinth above the cornice of the pedestal. He ends by saying that in any case colour and ornamentation could be adjusted according to his patrons' taste which would

certainly always be judged to be impeccable. The cross-section would indicate all the different types of marble he had recommended.

### Suppliers

Gafà then appends a list of the relevant stones and marble and prospective suppliers. Firstly the ordinary marble for the stairs and other cornices could be obtained from Filippo and Giacomo, merchants from Carrara, who would send the marble to Malta at their own risk<sup>41</sup> at the cost of twenty *scudi per carrata* of Messina which was worth one and two thirds of that of Rome and was equivalent to thirty cubic *palmi*.<sup>42</sup> The price would rise or fall according to the different dimensions of the marble slabs or blocks.<sup>43</sup> The *bardigli* could also be obtained from the same merchants, who would have to follow strict instructions. Gafà himself would be responsible for the quality of the marble chosen.

The black and white *Porto Vennere* marble could be obtained from the same source at thirty *scudi per carrata* and would also be transported to Malta. The green *Ponsevera di Genova*<sup>44</sup> could be obtained at forty *scudi per carrata*. The *breccia di Francia* columns could be had from the same merchants at the price of one hundred *scudi*. The *breccia di Francia* for the *porticelle* could also be obtained from the same source. If the columns were to be made of *diaspro Siciliano* they would be even more beautiful, and could be obtained from Sig. Franco Sculti or Sig. Stefano Frugone<sup>45</sup> but they would be costlier than if they were to be made from *breccia di Francia*. The *Porta Santa* for the pilasters could be obtained in Rome at four "*giuli*<sup>46</sup> per *palmi*<sup>47</sup>, *segato in tavola*". The yellow marble could be obtained at five "*giuli, segato in tavola*". The alabaster would cost fifteen *giuli* and the African marble could be obtained at the same price as the *Porta Santa*. The black marble for the fillets around the marble covering slabs could be obtained from Messina. The frame for the painting could be constructed from *giallo antico* -



Fig.2 - St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta. Section of the vault, painted by Mattia Preti



Fig.3 - S. Maria in Campitelli (1663-7), designed by Carlo Rainaldi. Here giant free standing columns are used to give prominence to the main apse and side chapels. These three churches illustrate some of the innovations of this period.

antique yellow marble<sup>48</sup> - or even black and white which would be even easier (to obtain?) and in which case a thin gold frame would also be used. This business-like tone rounds off this extraordinary testimony.

#### **Commentary on Melchiorre Gafà's *Discorso***

Gafà's *Discorso* is an important testimony, in the sculptor's own words, of his ideas regarding the ornamentation of the main altar and niche in St. John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta. However as already stressed it is not a description of the final plan for the altar that was approved by the Grand Master and his Council on 7 April 1666 and is partly described in the Commissioners' report, but his commentary on the models and plans that he sent from Rome. A comparison can be made between Gafà's *Discorso*, the Commissioners' report and the project that was finalised in 1703 and presently graces the main apse of the Co-Cathedral. While Gafà's report gives details of the materials to be used in the architectural background of the niche, the Commissioners' report is chiefly preoccupied with the sculpture group, including specifications of the materials to be used in its base, and mentions the bronze glory as well as details of how and where the project should be executed.

#### **Statue group - materials and models**

The report states that the design with the statues was chosen rather than the one with the painting because it was judged to be more conspicuous, decorative, rich and original. The statues should not be made of marble as recommended in the *Discorso* but of metal which would then be gilded: "...*facendosi di metallo dorato le statue del santo battesimo con la gloria d'Angeli, e splendor, materia per se stessa eterna, vien anco a conservarsi eternamente la generosa memoria di vostra Eminenza e della Sacra Religione*".<sup>49</sup> It should be noted that the statues in the Jesuit priest's plan were also to be made of metal, this time silver, and that when Gafà's brother Lorenzo was

charged with the project in 1697 the original plan was that it should include a silver group too. The decision to execute the statues in marble was only taken just before his departure for Rome.<sup>50</sup>

The Commissioners' report refers to three models rather than the two models and two plans that Gafà refers to in his *Discorso*. Sciberras notes that Gafà brought another model when he came to Malta to discuss his work.<sup>51</sup> The reference to the chosen model as the last model: "...*habbiamo giudicato doversi mettere in esecuzione l'ultimo modello*", in the Commissioners' report indicates that the model that was chosen was the one Gafà brought with him although we cannot even be certain that this is what the Commissioners were really referring to.

It appears that Gafà may have presented three models: one with a painting as centrepiece, one with a marble group and one with a bronze group. It must be noted however that the material in which the group was to be rendered may have been determined after the choice between alternative sculptural groups was made. It is impossible to tell, from the information provided, whether the background of the niche differed between models or whether the variations were simply linked to the central motif. There is no mention of the third model in his *Discorso* or in the correspondence between Ambassador Caumonts and Grand Master Cotoner and so it must have been an afterthought.

#### **Angels, putti and gilt 'glory'**

According to the Commissioners' report the sculpture was to include two angels that were to frame the Baptism group. The two roundels with *putti* that are now placed in the bays on either side of the marble sculpture are not mentioned in either description. The Commissioners' report refers to the statues and the bronze Glory, the gilt *gran splendore dello Spirito Santo*, which would be embellished with rays and groups of angels on clouds adoring the Redeemer. Gafà's *Discorso* makes no reference to this gilt glory or to the two angels that were to frame the baptism group mentioned in the Commissioners' report since, as already noted, he hardly discusses the group at all. This may indicate that the bronze glory was included in the third model but did not feature in the designs or models that accompanied the *Discorso*. On the other hand, it must be remembered that Gafà complained that the painting in the apse constrained the height available to him, a factor that would certainly have hindered the positioning of the bronze glory.

#### **Types of marble proposed and adopted**

Melchiorre Gafà had proposed a variety of different *marmi e pietre mischie*. The Commissioners



recommended the use of *bigio* for the niche background. This is another term for the *bardiglio* that Melchiorre Gafà had recommended for the first plinth running above the steps which was ultimately executed in black and white *nero Marquina*.<sup>52</sup> Gafà also refers to *bardiglio* as *biscio di carrara*. This marble was indeed eventually employed in the bays between the pilasters and as a background to the statues. It is edged with a wide *giallo di Siena* border. This is a different type of marble from the *giallo antico* referred to in the *Discorso*. The Commissioners' report recommends *pietre mischie*<sup>53</sup> as adornment for this area as well as for the *porticelle* but eventually this was omitted.

The Commissioners' report refers to two statues of St. Peter and St. Paul, which were originally destined to be placed in the choir. These statues were not executed since the choir area already had seating in it and lacked space. Gafà's *Discorso* does not mention these figures.

Following the approval of Gafà's plans on 12 July 1666, Grand Master Nicholas Cotoner had defrayed the expense of cladding the nave pilasters with marble.<sup>54</sup> The green *verde antico* used in the nave was later also used in the frieze in the choir despite Gafà's recommendation to use alabaster here. However Gafà did refer to the possible use of *Ponsevera di Genova*, a green marble, without specifying where it should be used. The cornice and architrave, are composed of *giallo di Siena*.

The Commissioners' report details the various marble types to be used beneath the group - the altar should be made of *Breccia di cottonella*<sup>55</sup> and adorned with a gilt medallion portraying either St. John preaching or the beheading of the same saint. The present main niche altar has a white marble top and jasper frontal which is framed with *cottanello* mouldings and a circular motif in front probably intended to hold a medallion such as the one referred to the Commissioners' report. The coats-of-arms proposed in the Commissioners report, to be placed "*nei lati dell'altare*" should have been Grand Master Cotoner's arms and the Religion's. When the project was concluded the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Perellos and Grand Master Carafa as well as two coats-of-arms of the Religion were placed on the pedestals of the choir pilasters. Carafa is commemorated here in memory of his bequest for the altar project.

The only mention in Gafà's *Discorso* of coats-of-arms is in the description of the model he created for the painting when he said that he had placed the arms of the Religion accompanied by two *putti* together with the Grand Masters coat-of-arms on the frontispiece. The motif of the coat-of-arms carried by *putti* was painted on the vault which was completed by 1666 by Preti. Apparently at least one sculpted coat-of-arms was to be placed high up in the niche in the chosen

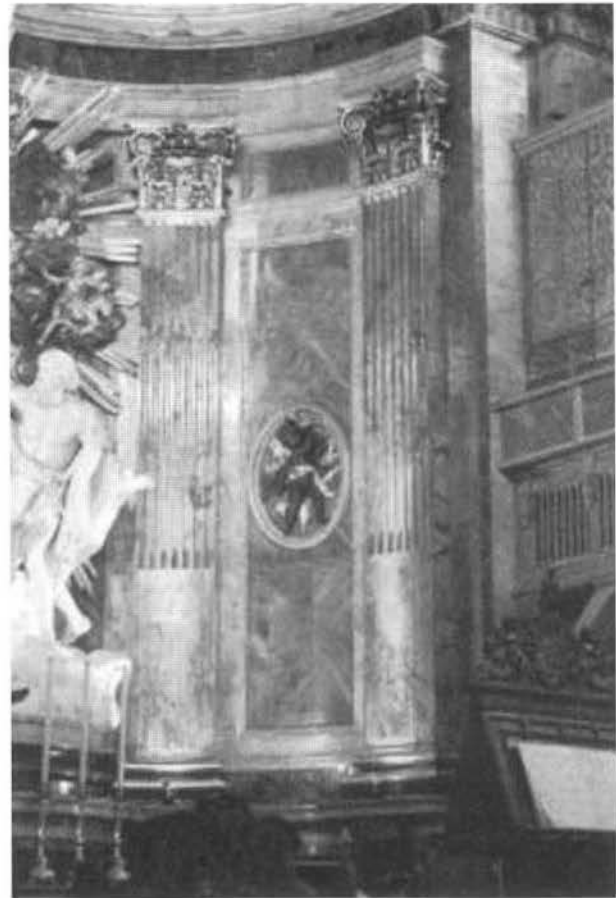


Fig.4 - View of main apse, showing roundel with putto, and side view of right-hand side organ.

model. It is reputed that it was while Gafà was working on it that it became detached and resulted in the fall that led to his death a few days later.

The commissioners recommended black and white marble for the plinth behind the niche altar on which the candlesticks should rest and above it a pedestal of Sicilian Jasper that would serve as a base for the statue group. This arrangement is similar to the present arrangement but differs in the use of the coloured marble both in the plinth serving as a base for the candlesticks - where we find the use of *verde antico* and red alabaster and in the pedestal beneath the statues where we find the re-introduction of the green *verde antico*. The pedestals beneath the pilasters are composed of a facing of *verde antico* (against which are set the coats-of-arms mentioned above), *porta santa* sides and *giallo di Siena*, base and cornice. In the *Discorso* Gafà recommends alabaster for the first pedestal next to the altar and makes no other reference to any other pedestal.

The columns superimposing pilasters mentioned in Melchiorre's description of his proposals are the most glaring difference since only flattened pilasters with cabled fluting articulate the present apse. Gafà's arrangement appears to have been that of a column superimposed on a pilaster with another pilaster (or pilasters) beside it. Eventually the pilasters were executed in pale red *Porta Santa* marble. They have composite capitals that are cast in bronze. Gafà's plan with its

greater use of varied marbles would have been more colourful than the present design. However there are also some similarities between the scheme that was eventually executed and the colours and types that were recommended.

### *Articulation of the niche*

The group that was approved by the Grand Master and his Council included two angels on either side of the baptism group and so would have been quite large. The articulation of the niche is not clearly described by Gafà. It may well be that the niche was composed of the statue group framed by a pilaster and a column superimposed on a pilaster on either side without an intervening bay between the orders. However we cannot exclude that Gafà may have included such a bay in his plan and in this case it might be worth considering an alternative such as the main niche of *S. Maria in Campitelli*, Rome (1663-67). Here Gafà executed the clay model of the main altar, possibly under the direction of Carlo Rainaldi, the architect who designed the church.

In *S. Maria* (see fig. 2) a pair of columns is placed at the ends of the niche and also at the ends of the side chapels to separate these areas from the rest of the church, and thereby emphasise them. In the main niche there is a column superimposed on a pilaster, with another pilaster beside it, a bay and another pilaster on either side of the main altar. If we remove the pilaster and superimposed column from the ends of this niche we are left with an elevation that is similar to the present articulation of the niche in St. John's: pilaster-bay-pilaster-statues-pilaster-bay-pilaster. The roundels with *putti* (see fig. 3) that presently adorn the area between the two pilasters on either side of the baptism group would probably have been obscured by columns placed at the apse ends. Only statues that would have projected further out from the columns would have been clearly visible from the front. The angels referred to earlier in the Commissioners' report, in fact, could have been inserted in the bay between the pilaster and its superimposed column and the neighbouring pilaster on either side of the sculpture group. However the Commissioners' report seems to indicate that the whole group of four statues was supported on the base above the pedestal behind the altar. The number of stairs leading to the altar should have been four according to the Commissioners' report but it was reduced to three finally, even though Gafà had been told that this was too low and had prepared two models with four and five stairs respectively.

### *Assessment of the various roles*

Ultimately, we have to return to a frequently asked question. How much of Gafà's original plan lives on in this one? Exactly how significant Lorenzo's



Fig.5 -Christ of the Baptism, National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta.

intervention may have been, how much depended on Giuseppe Mazzuoli who executed the marble group and how much may have depended on Gafà's original design is a matter of dispute since we do not possess Gafà's original plans, or the plans Lorenzo took with him to Rome. We know that Gafà had completed work on the full size terracotta models of Christ and the Baptist, and that in 1681 Baldinucci reported seeing them in the Vatican foundry where Gafà had been working.<sup>56</sup> Following Gafà's death the Grand Master had instructed the Ambassador and Receiver of the Order in Rome to take possession of the models, especially the full-scale models of Christ and St. John and to make proposals for their disposal but nothing is known about their fate after this point.<sup>57</sup>

In the Vatican there is a small terracotta model of the Baptism group bearing the date of Gafà's death. Originally it had been held in the *Bibliotheca Chigiana* and this association with the Chigi family as well as the date on the model was held as evidence that this model was Gafà's work<sup>58</sup> but it is now believed to be by, or after, Algardi. The terracotta of Christ presently held in the Museum of Fine arts in Valletta (see fig. 4) is now also being held to be a copy of Algardi's figures, probably executed in the late seventeenth century. A number of bronze casts similar to this terracotta model have also been noted but are similarly now not thought to be based on Gafà's work.<sup>59</sup>

This leads to the dilemma of deciding whether these models may have inspired first Gafà's designs and subsequently Mazzuoli's, or even simply Mazzuoli's final rendition alone. The model that is now attributed to Algardi seems to have influenced Mazzuoli's group but similarities with Antonio Raggi's group for *San Giovanni dei Fiorentini* in Rome executed in the late 1660s have also been noted.<sup>60</sup> It has been pointed out that Mazzuoli at the peak of his career might have found it difficult to follow the plans of another sculptor<sup>61</sup> but Gafà was no ordinary artist and as stated he had actually been Mazzuoli's tutor. On the other hand Algardi was a renowned master of his art and a model of his *Baptism* group was held in Ferrata's studio where both Gafà and Mazzuoli would have seen it.<sup>62</sup> The existence of full-size models would have made it even easier to create marble sculptures that followed Gafà's conception but we do not know whether they were still extant by the time Lorenzo went to Rome and consequently whether they influenced Mazzuoli at all. The Order would have been careless indeed if it had failed to preserve or to make some commercial use of these models. However it has been suggested that the difficulty in transporting these fragile models to Malta and the relatively low costs which had so been incurred up to the time of Gafà's death may very well have resulted in their abandonment.<sup>63</sup>

Significantly it does not appear that Mazzuoli had ever submitted any plans for approval to the Order. Could the reason for this have been that he was expected to closely follow Gafà's old models or the plans or models which his brother Lorenzo took with him to Rome (which may have been based on Gafà's original design)? Pascoli records that this work generated considerable interest while it was being executed and that Pope Clement XI, together with some Cardinals, Ambassador Sacchetti, the Order's ambassador to Rome and various other Knights and prelates visited Mazzuoli's workshop to view the sculpture. Apparently the Knights did not intend to return to Gafà's design when they took the project up again. Otherwise they would not have searched for alternative designs and chosen the Jesuit priest's plan at all.

One important point cannot be denied however. We know that Gafà had originally planned a bronze Glory and eventually this was indeed executed.<sup>64</sup> This alone is enough to indicate that his design for the altar niche had certainly not been entirely discarded. While the *Discorso* seems to highlight some differences, these are not related to the sculptural group that is hardly even mentioned in it. Although there is a possibility that alterations were made to Gafà's model before it was accepted, which might qualify Lorenzo's role, I do not believe that changes such as the removal of the columns would have escaped mention in the

Commissioners' report. The problem presented by the third model must now be addressed. If the third model which Gafà took with him from Rome was the one that was chosen then it might have differed substantially from the ones mentioned in the *Discorso*. In other words it is not possible to try and quantify Lorenzo's role by considering the differences between the recommendations in the *Discorso* and the final completed niche arch project.

On the other hand, it has been noted that Grand Master Carafa's will laid down that the bequest was being made to provide for the marble cladding for the niche, and also included provision for columns. The Jesuit priest's design also included columns.<sup>65</sup> It thus appears that the decision to use pilasters rather than columns was Lorenzo's. From the information we have it is difficult to assess whether he simply removed the columns and retained the articulation in his brother's plan or whether the two plans differed significantly in this respect.

Lorenzo's role has frequently been downplayed or even overlooked but an attentive perusal of the correspondence between Ambassador Caumonts and Grand Master Cotoner indicates that his role was pivotal.<sup>66</sup> He was not merely executing Gafà's old plans. He co-ordinated the project and may well have designed the present altar niche himself although he probably did not have a very significant role in the design of the statues and *Gloria*. His hard work in getting the project organised in Rome is recorded in a letter sent by the Order's Ambassador to the Holy See, Fra Marcello Sacchetti to the Grand Master on 21 September 1700: "... *rappresento solamente all'E.V. che il medesimo [Lorenzo Gafà] in simil commissione ha dato prove molto singolari della sua virtù e talento e che nel suo soggiorno si sia impiegato con propensione tale verso il buon servizio di V.E. che merita di essere aggraziato della di lui protezione come umilmente ne la supplico*".<sup>67</sup>

Ambassador Sacchetti continued: "... *l'Architetto Lorenzo Caffa ...inoprapreso il suo ritorno a codesta volta per via di Livorno dopo haver cooperato con indefessa applicatione e coll'efficacia della sua virtù bene singolare alla costruzione della nicchia dell'Altare di codesta Chiesa Conventuale ...*".<sup>68</sup> Lorenzo may have started his career as a sculptor but he built his reputation as an architect. For this reason it seems more likely that he might have amended his brother's earlier plans rather than present his own design, particularly with respect to the sculptural group. These amendments might have become necessary following the embellishments that had occurred since the earlier project and because of changing tastes. The *Discorso* throws some light on Melchiorre Gafà, architect and sculptor, but it does not answer all the questions about the niche project.



## Discorso di Melchiorre Gafà sopra li disegni e modelli per l'ornamento dell'Altare nell'choro di S. Giovanni

Il signor Ambasciatore per honorarmi s'è compiaciuto valersi del mio poco talento nell'occasione dell'ornamento di'Architettura da farsi nel Choro della Chiesa di San Gio[vanni] onde lo riconoscendo esser mia fortuna d'havere incontrato congiuntura di servire ad un Prencipe di cui mi glorò di vivere vassallo subito senz' lasciar passar momento incominciai a dar principio alle fatiche, e nel far riflessione e considerare il sito mi si rappresentarono avanti diverse inventioni, e io ansioso di mostrare il desiderio ch'ho di servire La Religio[n]e ed anche la mia patria, m'è parso bene fare due modelli acciò meglio possino sodisfare il loro genio, se qualche poca parte vi si conoscerà di buono non ho havuto però altro scopo, senon di far cosa che renda magnificenza, facendo in un modello le statue di marmo invece del quadro dell' batesimo di San Giovanni acciòche q[ue]tti marmi scolpiti ad onda dell' tempo conservino eternam[en]te a Posterì la memoria di sì generoso Prencipe.

Et ritrovandomi in angusto di sito, non tanto p[er] le porticelle che vanno a gl'organi quanto il non potermi alzare in riguardo della pittura fui necessitato stringermi nel sito accennatomi, onde non ho potuto in tutto sodisfare la mia inventione, fui forzato nondimeno ritirarmi in fuori con le porticelle un pal[m]o: e mezzo, come dalla mia pianta potranno vedere e p[er]ché m'è stato significato che l'altare, ch'oggi è in S. Gio[vanni] riesce basso, non havendo altro, che tre scalini, lo acciò habbia più decoro lo sollevai con cinque, ma dubito siano per impedire troppo sito nell'Choro e se ciò sarà giudicato debba portare qualche scommodità alla funzione si potrà levare un scalino per il piano che v'ò messo sopra li tre scalini che così ritirerà in dentro da 4 palmi, ma se non vi sarà necessità di moverli stimarei lasciarli nella conformità che l'ho posti; Ho anco fatto questo modello in due maniere, acciò possino far elezione di q[ue]llo che sarà giudicato meno imperfetto.

L'altro modello l'ho fatto p[er] il quadro, il q[ua]le totalmente diverso di pianta e ornam[en]to dal primo e credo non sia p[er] dispiacere riuscendo più spazioso, ma non ha però, tanto del grande, e del m[agnifi]co quanto l'altro; Sopra le porticelle in una parte v'ho posto p[er] ornam[en]to una medaglia portata da due angiolini, nella q[ua]le si potrà scolpire in basso rilievo una decolla[zio]ne del S[an]to ò pure q[ue]te sarà stimato più à proposito, v'ho anco messo sopra il frontespizio della Porta l'arme della Religione accompagnata con due Putti i, che fa ornam[en]to et all'incontro sarebbe l'arme di S[ua] Al[te]zza, dove v'ho fatto un sito da dipingere in caso che non piacesse il motivo della medaglia accennata. Ne mi stenderò in più lungo discorso, mentre possono dalli modellli chiaram[en]te vedere q[ue]sto, che non difficoltà lo potrei con la penna distintamente dimostrare.

Con la pianta, e profilo, ch'ho mandato riesce facilissima l'esegut[io]ne di quest' opera benchè consta di proportione e di misura, che difficil[ime]nte si può errare, e ogni pratico scarpellino e atto ad incamminarla, havendo tutta la proporzione de membri à suo tempo ancora manderò tutte le modellature delle basi cimase e cornici, e quello che bisognerà, p[er] conseguire il fine di quest' ornamento.

Circa le pietre e mischij ho avuto riguardo di mettere pietre, che facil[men]te si possono trovare e però lo mi usarei di queste, il p[ri]mo zoccolo s[op]ra le scalini, lo farei di bardiglio, o sia bisciò di carrara. Il commeso del p[ri]mo piedistallo che vi va annesso anco l'altare, si potrà commettere d'Africano, pietra antica che si ritrova in Roma. Il secondo piedistallo si potrà commettere d'Alabstri antichi, che sono pietre bellissime, e medesima[men]te s' haveranno in Roma. Le colonne si possono fare di due sorti di pietre, di breccia di Francia o vero diaspro di Sicilia, il Pilastro dietro le colonne lo farei di bianco e nero di Porto Vennere acciò le colonne vi possino campeggiare et l'altri Pilastrì a canto si possono fare di Porta Santa, pietra antica, e facendo le colonne di breccia di Francia, si potrebbe fare li d[et]ti Pilastrì di diaspro. Il Freggio si farà d'Alabastro antico, l'architrave e freggio e cornice già s'intende di Marmo bianco ordinario; Non manchino però nell'ordinare l'Architrave sopra le statue, essendo di misura straordinaria, farvi riflessione in riguardo del peso che porta, che stimarei bene poner su un arco acciò sostenghi il peso di sopra. Il zoccolo sopra la cornice di bianco e nero, si potrà anco fare di diaspro rigato, come nell'altro modello si vede, del resto si potranno sodisfare dall'uno, e l'altro, e levare et aggiungere con color di pietre, come anche d'ornamenti che sempre approverò il lor giudizio p[er] esquisito rimettendomi al parere dell'Intendenti: Dal Profilo haveranno tutte le pietre con loro ordine notate.

Nota di mischij, e marmi, che si possono adoperare e che bisognano p[er] la p[rese]nte cappella. Primeramente li scalini di marmo ordinario, e così anche p[er] l'altre cornici, che bisognano e questi marmi si potranno havere da Filippo e Giacomo Furgon Mercanti in Carrara, li q[ua]li daranno li marmi condotti in Malta a tutti suoi risichi, e spese à scudi 20; La Carrata di misura di Messina q[ua]le viene ad essere per una e due terzi della Corrente in Roma, e s'intende a pal: 30: di marmo riquadrato per ciasche d'una carrata e anco il prezzo crescerà e calerà secondo le misure de marmi e per li bardigli che v'anderanno corrono al prezzo, e misura delli marmi, e si potranno havere dalli medesimi, promettendo d'usare qualsivoglia: comesia, e quando gli saranno ordinati, che circa le qualità sarà peso mio far che restino serviti nella miglior forma che sia possibile.

Et anco li bianchi e neri di Porto Vennere s' haveranno dall'istesso a scudi 30: la Carrata misura come sopra condotti in Malta.

Il verde di Ponsevera di Genova si potrà havere dalli sudetti a scudi 40 la carrata. Le colonne se le vorranno di breccia di Francia, le faranno venire li medesimi mercanti de marmi a scudi 100; l'una il meno, e così anche l'altro breccia di Francia che bisogneranno p[er] le Porticelle.

E facendo di diaspro di Sicilia, riuscirebbe più belle assai, e si potrà fare ricapito à Palermo dal Sig. Franco Sculti o dal Sig. Stefano Frugone, che dall'uno e l'altro saranno provedute, ma però il prezzo sarà maggiore di q[ue]lle di breccia di Francia; la Porta S[an]ta p[er] Li Pilastrì, s' haverà in Roma a 4 giulij il palmo segato in tavola.

Il giallo a 5 giulij il palmo segato in tavola.

Gl'Alabastri a 15 giulij il palmo medesimamente segati

L'Africano al prezzo della Porta S[an]ta

Il Nero p[er] fare listelli attorno li comessi s'haverà in Messina;

La Cornice del quadro si può fare di Giallo antico, o vero di bianco, e nero che sarà assai più facile, e facendola di bianco, e nero vi si riporterà una cornicetta d'orata attorno al quadro.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> This document was first published by myself in 'Melchiorre Gafà's Discorso about the designs and models for St John's main altar' and in 'Commentary on Melchiorre Gafà's Discorso' in *The Sunday Times of Malta* (23 Feb and 2 Mar 2003) and discussed again in 'Some reflections on Melchiorre Gafà's Discorso' in *The Sunday Times of Malta*, (19 Oct 2003).

<sup>2</sup> L. Pascoli, *Vite de' pittori, scultori, ed architetti moderni* (Rome: 1730): 256, gives his date of birth as 1635 but Montagu (1989): 200 n.83 states that his date of birth is variously given as 1631 or 1635. Borg (1995): 95 suggests 1636 and Sammut (1978) suggests 1638.

<sup>3</sup> V. Borg, 'Christian Heritage and Malta's Stone' in *Cathedral and Diocesan Museums: Cross Roads of Faith and Culture Proceedings of the International Symposium held in Malta from the 27th to the 29th January 1994*, (Malta: 1995): 85-106; P. Buttigieg, 'Il-Faciata tal-Kor' in *Leben is-Setwata*, (9, 16, 20 Apr 1949); E. Sammut, *The Life and Works of Melchiorre Gafà (1638?-1667)* unpublished M.A. dissertation, University of Malta (1978); also E. Sammut, *Melchior Gafà – Maltese Sculptor of the Baroque – Further Biographical Notes*, *Scientia XXIII* (1957); K. Sciberras, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Order of Malta*, Ph.D thesis for the University of Malta, (2000); H. Scicluna, *The Church of St. John in Valletta*, (Rome: 1955): 181-83; W.L. Zammit, 'A Golden Age for the Conventual Church' in *The Church of St. John in Valletta 1578-1978*, (ed.) J. Azzopardi (Malta: 1978).

<sup>4</sup> A. Bacchi, *Scultura del '600 a Roma*, (Milan: 1996): 791-92; B. Boucher, *Italian Baroque Sculpture*, (London: 1998); A.N. Cellini, *Paragone VII*: 83 (1956); E. B. Di Gioia, 'Un Bozzetto di Melchiorre Caffà per il Bassorilievo di S. Eustachio in Santa Agnese in Agone', in *Bollettino dei Musei Comunal di Roma XXXVI* (1984): 48-67; E.B. Di Gioia, 'Bronzetto della S. Rosa da Lima di Melchiorre Caffà nel Museo di Roma', in *Bollettino dei Musei Comunal di Roma*, nss 1 (1987): 39-53; J. Fleming, *Burlington Magazine LXXXIX* (1947); J. Montagu, *Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art*, (Yale: 1989); J. Montagu, 'The Graphic Work of M. Caffà', in *Paragone Arte XXXV*: 413 (1984): 50-61; R. Preimesberger and M. Weil, 'The Pamphili Chapel in Sant' Agostino', in *Römische Jahrbuch f. Kunstgeschichte XV* (1975): 183-98; R. Preimesberger, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* (1973): 230-35; G. Schuster, *Das Hochaltartrelief der Kirche S. Caterina da Siena à Magnapoli von M. Caffà M.A. Thesis*, Friedrich-Alexander Universität, Erlangen and Nuremberg (1988); R. Wittkower, *Art and Architecture in Italy 1600-1750*, (1958; Yale: 1982); R. Wittkower, 'Melchiorre Gafà's Bust of Alexander VII', in *The Metropolitan Museum of Art Bulletin XVII*: 8 (1959): 197-204.

<sup>5</sup> *Atti not. Bartolomeo Galizia*, cited in Giuseppe Agnello, 'Architetti e scultori ignoti nella capella Torres a Siracusa' in *Archivi XVIII* (1951): 143-61 noted in D. De Lucca and C. Thake, *The Genesis of Maltese Baroque Architecture: Francesco Buonamici*, (Malta: 1994): 17-18.

<sup>6</sup> Borg (1995) notes the baptism dates of the Caffà children, two of which were named Marcello. The first died when he was only a few months old and the second one, baptized on 21 January 1636 was also named Marcello. Borg suggests that this Marcello later changed his name to Melchiorre.

<sup>7</sup> Sammut (1978): 12.

<sup>8</sup> F. Baldinucci, *Notizie de' professori del disegno da Cimabue in qua*, (Florence: 1681-1728), in his biography of Ercole Ferrata.

<sup>9</sup> Wittkower (1982): 307-8, 316; Montagu, (1989): 14-16.

<sup>10</sup> J. Gash, 'Painting and Sculpture in Early Modern Malta' in *Hospitaller Malta 1530-1798* (ed.) V. Mallia Milanes, (Malta: 1993): 576-78.

<sup>11</sup> Wittkower (1982): 307-308, 544 n. 13, 14, 15 and Boucher (1998): 160-62.

<sup>12</sup> Wittkower (1982): 197-204, 543, n. 13.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 281; A. Blunt, *Guide to Baroque Rome*, (1982): 83; Montagu (1989): 94-95.

<sup>14</sup> E. Sammut, *Handlist of Writings on Art in Malta*, 2nd rev. ed. (Malta: 1978): 35-36.

<sup>15</sup> Sammut (1957): 136, established the death as being before 19 September 1667.

<sup>16</sup> AOM 1284, f. 142r-143v.

<sup>17</sup> AOM 261, f. 38r; see J. Spike, 'Mattia Preti's Passage to Malta' in *Burlington Magazine CXX*: 905 (Aug 1978) and J. Spike, *Mattia Preti, Catalogo Ragionato dei dipinti* (Taverna: 1999).

<sup>18</sup> L. Mahoney, *5000 years of Architecture in Malta*, (Malta 1996): 308 and L. Mahoney, *A History of Maltese Architecture from Ancient Times up to 1800*, (Malta: 1988), *passim*, for details of civil works that are attributed to Blondel; D. De Lucca, 'French Military Engineers in Malta during the 17th and 18th centuries' in *Melita Historica VIII*: 1 (1981); A. Hoppen, *The Fortification of Malta by the Order of St John*, (Edinburgh: 1979); E. Micallef Valenzia, *The Military and Civil Architecture of Baroque Malta and the Chevalier de Malte Mederico De Blondel des Croisettes*, unpubl. M.A. dissertation, University of Malta (1999).

<sup>19</sup> AOM 261, f. 42r-v, Commissioner's report.

<sup>20</sup> Pascoli (1730): 256, noted in Sammut (1978).

<sup>21</sup> AOM 264, f. 21 r, 91r, 102r; Buttigieg (16 Apr 1949): 8; Scicluna (1955): 156-59

<sup>22</sup> See Mahoney (1996): 310 for a brief biography and Mahoney (1988) for details of Buonamici's works. Also V. Borg, 'Maltese Churches' in *Maltese Baroque* (ed.) G. Mangion (1989): 64-74; and De Lucca and Thake (1994).

<sup>23</sup> Mahoney (1988) for Gafà's main works.

<sup>24</sup> AOM 264, 103r, 124v; Buttigieg (1949); Scicluna (1955): 156-59.

<sup>25</sup> Sciberras, 2000: 116.

<sup>26</sup> Pascoli (1730) II: 481.

<sup>27</sup> Pascoli (1730): 256-58.

<sup>28</sup> Wittkower (1982): 319.

<sup>29</sup> Notes 3, and 66.

<sup>30</sup> AOM 6551, f. 104-6.

<sup>31</sup> AOM 1284, f. 146.

<sup>32</sup> Presumably the painting which had been sent with the models and plans was proposed for this project. It may have been the work of the artist friend who accompanied Gafà on his trip to Malta noted by Sciberras.

<sup>33</sup> It was common practice for sculptors to work on designs provided by painters or architects. Since the architect was usually in overall charge he would have a hand in the design of any sculptural work but often provided only a general idea of what was required. Gafà was described as an architect and a sculptor in AOM 1284, f. 146 and so it is not surprising that he designed both the niche and the sculptural group.

Montagu, (1984): 50-61 shows that Gafà was also adept at drawing and so could easily have created his own designs. Sammut (1978) contains an illustration of a portrait of Gafà from the National Museum of Arts in Stockholm. It carries an inscription describing him as *Melchior Caffà – Melitensis pictor – sculptor et Architectus*.

<sup>34</sup> This type of marble varies between different shades of grey and blue and is typically veined.

<sup>35</sup> African marble or 'Black of Chios' quarried on the island of Chios. It later came to be inaccurately called African marble. It is a very hard marble and is typically black with colourful spots.

<sup>36</sup> Alabaster which is composed of calcium sulphate is quarried mainly in Volterra and is referred to as *alabastro gessoso*. It has a banded structure and can be found in a variety of colours. The alabaster which was used in ancient Egypt and Rome is actually a much harder stone, sometimes known as onyx-marble because it resembles, (but differs from) onyx. It is composed of calcium carbonate and is referred to as *alabastro orientale*. Since Gafà stipulates antique alabaster it is probable that he is referring to this type of alabaster.

<sup>37</sup> *Breccia* is a conglomerate of fragments of rock held together with natural cement such as silica, calcite or iron oxide. Its colour naturally depends on its components. There are many types of *Breccia*. Montagu (1989): 38, mentions *Breccia di Francia*, in the correspondence she quotes concerning the commission of a tomb from a relative of Gianlorenzo Bernini. *Breccia di Francia* is referred to here as "an excellent speckled stone tending to red and white" that, in this case, was used for the columns framing the tomb aedicule.

<sup>38</sup> Sicilian Jasper. This is a type of marble that can vary between red, pink, brown and various shades of green.

<sup>39</sup> Portovenere is a sea-side town in Liguria. It is famous for the Portoro marble that is mined there. This marble is greyish black with yellow and white streaks.

<sup>40</sup> The name derives from its use around the doorways of the *Porta Santa* in important churches such as the Vatican, *S. Paolo*, *S. Giovanni in Laterano* and *S. Maria Maggiore*. It was excavated in Chios and for this reason was known in antique times as *marmor chium*. Its colour is generally muted red, yellow and orange with hints of grey and brown and whitish or reddish veins.

<sup>41</sup> Montagu (1989): 23-28 notes that the delivery of marble from the quarry to the sculptor's studio at the dealers' expense and risk was normal practice. These considerable risks would have included the possibility of breakage from the moment the marble block was quarried, loaded, transported and unloaded as well as the dangers posed by inclement weather or pirate attack.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28, states that the *carrata*, literally cartful, was the standard measurement for marble and was the weight that could be drawn in a cart by a pair of oxen. The value of the *carrata* rose between the fifteenth and seventeenth centuries but by the end of the sixteenth century it was a little over a ton or between twenty-eight and thirty cubic Genoese *palmi*.

<sup>43</sup> The larger pieces required more labour to quarry and transport and so the price would not rise proportionally to dimension but at a higher rate. Montagu (1989): 29 outlines the problems involved in this process.

<sup>44</sup> Actually *Polcevera di Genova*, a renowned green marble excavated at Petrelavezzare in the Polcevera valley, Genoa.

<sup>45</sup> Montagu (1989): 23 mentions Filippo Frugone, marble merchant, who together with Domenico Marcone, and his son Giovanni Battista were associated with the stone-mason Luca Berrettini, cousin of Pietro da Cortona.

<sup>46</sup> One *scudo* would have been worth ten and a half *giuli* in this period. *Piastre e scudi nella Roma del papa-re. Mostra e Catalogo a cura dell'Accademico Arturo Lusuardi*.

<sup>47</sup> Montagu (1989): 202, n. 78. The Roman *palmio* measured 22.34 centimetres. It differed from the Genoese *palmio* in that would probably have been used in the quarries in the region.

<sup>48</sup> Antique yellow, also known as numidic yellow, is a special type of marble, yellow in colour, which was quarried in North Africa.

<sup>49</sup> AOM 261, f. 42 r and v.

<sup>50</sup> AOM 264, f. 124 v.

<sup>51</sup> Sciberras: 129.

<sup>52</sup> A black marble with white veins.

<sup>53</sup> *Pietre mischie*, similarly to breccia, is composed of rock fragments and may be found in various colours. It derives from Tuscany, Carrara and Verona.

<sup>54</sup> AOM 261, f. 52 r.

<sup>55</sup> Sammut (1957): 65, cites Baldinucci, 'Vita del Cavaliere Bernino' (1681), who describes *Cottanella* thus: "pietra così detta per essere pure allora scoperta una casa nella Sabina nel Castello di Cottanello". This rosy pink marble was utilized in 44 columns in St. Peter's, Rome, in 1561.

<sup>56</sup> Baldinucci (1681-1728) in his biography on Ercole Ferrata.

<sup>57</sup> Lib. 261, f. 28v.

<sup>58</sup> R. Wittkower, 'Eine Bronzegruppe des Melchiorre Caffà' in *Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst* lxii (1928-30): 227-31 first made this widely-acclaimed proposal.

<sup>59</sup> J. Montagu, 'Le Baptême du Christ d'Alexandro Algardi', *Revue de l'Art XVI* (1972): 64-78. Also J. Montagu, 'Alessandro Algardi in Malta' in *Treasures of Malta*, (Malta: Summer 1999): 19-23.

<sup>60</sup> Sciberras: 114-15.

<sup>61</sup> V. Bonello, 'La Chiesa di San Giovanni (Qualche precisazione)' in *Annuario della Diocesi di Malta Anno II*, (Malta: 1934): 7-8.

<sup>62</sup> P. Cannata, in Montagu (1999): 164. V. Golzio, 'Lo "studio" di Ercole Ferrata' in *Archivi d'Italia e rassegna internazionale degli archivi, Ser. II, II* (1935): 64-74 for inventory.

<sup>63</sup> Sammut (1978): 121.

<sup>64</sup> AOM 261, f. 42v.

<sup>65</sup> AOM 925, f.1r-2v. The occurrence of columns in this document as well as in the Jesuit's plan was noted by Sciberras.

<sup>66</sup> M. Pisani, 'The Embellishment of the Sanctuary of St. John's Co-Cathedral' in *The Sunday Times*, (28 Jan 2001): 44-5, where Lorenzo Gafà's role was highlighted. Sciberras also discusses Lorenzo Gafà's involvement in this project.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*

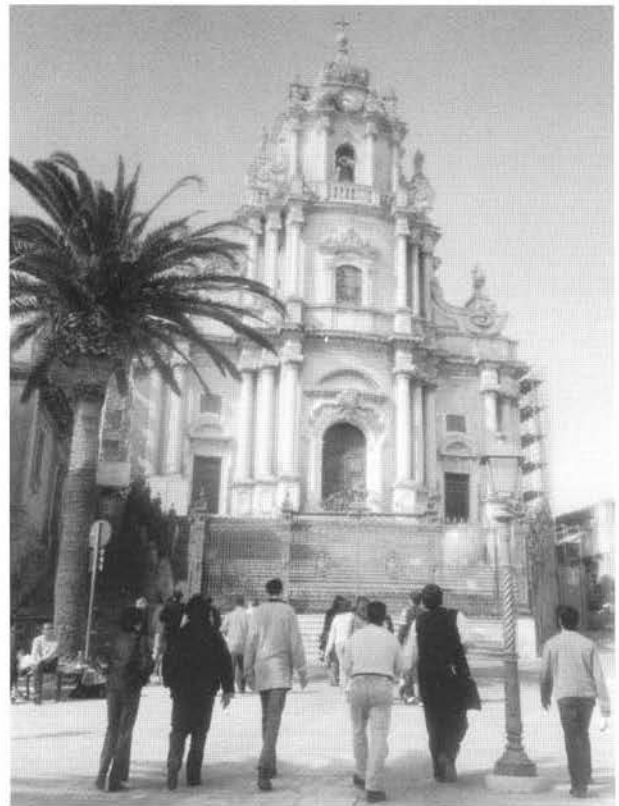
## Lectures on baroque architecture and trip to *Val di Noto*, Sicily

On 29-30 March 2004 the International Institute for Baroque Studies hosted Professor Lucia Trigilia, director of the *Centro Internazionale del Barocco* of the *Val di Noto* in Sicily. She is the author of several publications on the reconstruction of towns in south-eastern Sicily following the great earthquake of 1693, and lectures on the history and conservation of the baroque heritage in the faculty of architecture of the University of Catania based in Syracuse.

Professor Trigilia's visit to Malta followed a successful study tour to the *Val di Noto* recently organised by the International Institute for Baroque Studies for students following courses at the Institute and the Department of Architecture and Urban Design. The study tour visited the seven world heritage towns of Noto, Palazzolo Acreide, Ragusa, Modica, Scicli, Caltagirone and Militello. The participants were accompanied by Professor Denis De Lucca, director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies and head of the Department of Architecture, by Dr Ray Bondin, executive coordinator of rehabilitation projects in Malta who was responsible for the inclusion of the above-mentioned baroque towns in the World Heritage list of UNESCO, and by architect Hermann Bonnici, who lectures on conservation and coordinates the teaching programmes of the diploma and certificate courses run by the Institute.

In Sicily the students were given – through the assistance of the mayors of the towns visited – a unique opportunity to visit baroque monuments and restoration sites not normally open to the public, including a superbly designed museum of baroque

liturgical artefacts and paintings in Militello situated in the crypt of the church of *S. Nicolò*, which is presently being restored. Among the other important monuments visited were the baroque churches of *S. Giorgio* in Ragusa Ibla and Modica, the church of *S. Bartolomeo* in Scicli, the churches of *S. Paolo*, *S. Sebastiano* and *S. Nicolò* in Palazzolo Acreide, and the Villadorada Palace in Noto.



*Students visiting the church of S. Giorgio in Ragusa Ibla, Sicily.*

## Course on baroque architecture

In March 2004 Architect Ninu Zammit, Minister for Resources and Infrastructure, presented certificates to candidates who successfully attended the second pre-tertiary certificate course in baroque architecture at the International Institute for Baroque Studies.

The scope of the courses was primarily to create awareness for the built environment by helping participants develop skills in the field of baroque architecture. Course participants were expected to develop a clear understanding of how baroque buildings were constructed and how different materials within a building interact, with the aim of improving their manual skills.

To date, 29 students have successfully attended the course while another 18 students are currently attending the third course organised jointly by the Institute and the Ministry for Resources and Infrastructure. Another

19 students are in their final year of the first two-year diploma course in baroque architecture, also organised jointly by the Institute and the Ministry. It is expected that the first students in this course will graduate in November.

Mr Zammit said that the course was intended to provide a grounding in the baroque European heritage in all its major dimensions, as well as to provide insights into the conservation of baroque architecture.

This was achieved by providing information on various aspects of baroque art and guiding course participants to develop the skills to understand baroque architecture and distinguish between different architectural styles. He said that a new course primarily intended for the training of employees in the restoration of local baroque buildings will be launched shortly.