

# *St John's Conventual Church in Valletta, Malta: the dynamism of a church floor*

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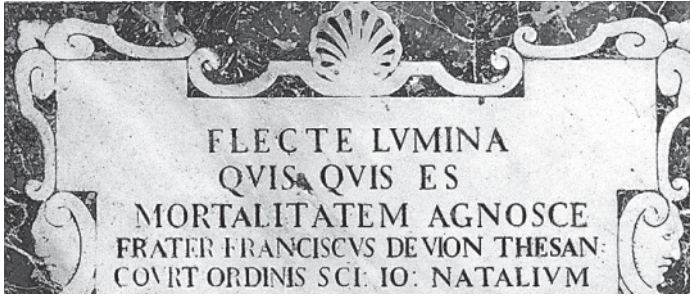
*The floor of St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, Malta, is in many ways exceptional. The quality and quantity of its polychrome marble intarsia sepulchral slabs deserve our attention as much as the remarkable story of the floor's survival and revival. Its culture of memory, initiated by the Order of St John during its stay on the island, has been preserved and nurtured. The floor and its commemorative character have thus become an integral part of Malta's heritage.*

## **Introduction**

The unknown author of a seventeenth-century Latin eulogy that is inscribed in one of the many marble floor slabs in St John's Co-Cathedral in Valletta, Malta, offered passers-by a powerful reminder of eternity as he entreated them: 'Flecte lumina, quisquis es, mortalitatem agnosce' (Bend down with your lighted candles, whoever you are, and acknowledge your mortality) (Fig. 1). Contemporary visitors would have crossed over a dimly lit floor on their way to visit the grave of a confrère, treading upon images of skulls, skeletons, angels, and other symbols of life and death, victory and eternity on the many sepulchral slabs covering the church floor. Lit by the visitors' candles, these images would have sprung forth from the darkness. Bending over, visitors would have looked for a particular name and, once they had found it, stood to read out the inscribed text, murmur prayers and remember their lost brother. Intercessory prayers were said in the hope that through these suffrages the souls of dead comrades would be released more quickly from purgatory. Visitors realised that where now their peers were lying beneath that 'ice-cold marble', they themselves might in time be laid to rest nearby to await their perfection and resurrection (Col. pl. 1).<sup>1</sup>

The 'Flecte lumina [...]' text is inscribed on the polychrome marble intarsia floor slab of Frà François de Vion Thesancourt, Grand Prior of the *tongue* (division) of France (d. 1649).<sup>2</sup> It is placed among the other floor slabs at St John's Co-Cathedral, the former conventual church of the Sovereign Military and Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem, Rhodes and Malta (Fig. 2).<sup>3</sup> Many regard this pavement as the floor of floors: some 407 inscribed texts in this church illustrate the importance of being commemorated as a member of the Order of St John (Col. pl. 2).<sup>4</sup>

This extraordinary collection of commemorative slabs owes its existence to the Order of St John and, like many other church floors, it has developed and changed over the centuries. Slabs were added and removed or repaired when worn, while many were subjected to a total make-over. Even the configuration of the floor itself was changed over time, sometimes drastically and on a large scale.<sup>5</sup> The Order's sense of collective identity and culture of memory



1. Detail of the inscribed text on the sepulchral slab of Frà François de Vion Thesancourt (d. 1649), St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta.

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has spared the pavement at St John's the fate suffered by so many other floors, *i.e.* when an old floor, considered out of date or irreparable, was replaced by what was considered a superior new floor. In this respect it compares favourably with other church floors, especially those with inlays of brass or other valuable materials, which have been pillaged for the value of the materials they contained. Nevertheless, the vast collection of marble-inlaid sepulchral slabs at St John's has suffered significantly, even though the iconoclasm during and after periods of Reformation or revolution never reached the shores of Malta.

St John's was the Order's conventual church and its *aula heroum* or hall of fame, a place which grew from humble beginnings into a showcase of the High Baroque in Malta. The church and its floor have undergone consecutive stages of artistic developments, of which Mannerism and the Baroque have had the greatest impact.<sup>6</sup> The Order's patronage of the arts, its conventual church and its artefacts are very well documented and have often been studied and published.<sup>7</sup> The church's polychrome marble intarsia floor has been studied less intensively, however, and much remains to be researched.<sup>8</sup>

### **Brief outline of the history of the conventual church of the Order**

There have been Christian refuges in Jerusalem since the sixth century. Spiritual continuity aside, however, the sources are silent about whether there is documented proof of a direct continuity from late Antiquity or even Carolingian times.<sup>9</sup> Two decades before the First Crusade marched to Jerusalem on the feast of the Ascension of the Holy Virgin on 15 August 1096, a man named Gerard had taken over the management of one of those refuges and turned it into a hospital for Christian pilgrims and the poor.<sup>10</sup> In 1113 Pope Paschal II granted the hospital many privileges, which formed the basis of the religious Hospitaller Order it would later become.<sup>11</sup> It was only around 1136, after the Knights Templar had arrived in Jerusalem in 1120, that the Hospitaller Order also established a military arm to protect pilgrims on their way to the Holy Land.<sup>12</sup> Gerard had set out to form a network of land and sea routes to Jerusalem with a large number of hospitals to cater for pilgrims and the sick. The institution of the Sovereign Military Order of St John still exists, albeit now only engaged in charity.<sup>13</sup>

After the Holy Land had been recaptured by the Muslims in 1291, the Order of St John found a base first in Cyprus and shortly thereafter in Rhodes. In this period the Order was transformed from a land army into a naval power to police the Mediterranean in the spirit of the crusades, to protect Christian pilgrims and to fight the infidel. However, the new Ottoman sultan Suleiman I the Magnificent (1494–1566) managed to expel the Order from Rhodes and on 1 January 1523 the Knights sailed back to Europe. After eight years of homelessness the

Order was given Malta as a fief by Emperor Charles V.<sup>14</sup> Malta's key location between Ottoman and Spanish spheres of influence and also the role of the Order of St John in policing the Mediterranean inevitably attracted Ottoman attention. The relentless corsairing activities of the Order and of the Maltese privateers were a continuous source of frustration for their Ottoman neighbours.<sup>15</sup> Bent on annihilating the Order, Suleiman decided to attack Malta and the Great Siege of 1565 ensued. After four months the engagement was decided in favour of Malta.<sup>16</sup>

### **Heroism and triumph**

The victory of the Order, or rather its survival, in the Great Siege had brought it immense popularity throughout Europe. Consequently, the Order's victory was interpreted as the triumph of the Catholic faith over Islam. It made the Order's treasury and ranks swell as many aristocratic families offered landed property and monetary gifts as well as, more importantly, their children as novices to the Order. Having their sons as potential heroes greatly enhanced the status of aristocratic families amongst their peers.

Little was known in Europe in those days about who had really been responsible for the heroic deeds of the Great Siege. The Order had about 550 knights in Malta at the time of the siege, while about 5,200 soldiers and 3,800 Maltese men – the latter inexperienced in modern combat – were left on the island to fight the enemy. The local Maltese gentry and all those unable to fight were regarded as unnecessary mouths to feed and thus shipped off to Sicily shortly before the siege. Only half the knights survived, while most of the soldiers and remaining Maltese died during the siege, but it was the prerogative of the ruling class to claim such heroic sacrifices as exclusively their own.<sup>17</sup> The heroic acts of the Great Siege of 1565 became the benchmark for measuring the virtues of later generations of Knights and the very example to be emulated. These virtues were also frequent themes in the triumphal artistic and architectural expressions of the Order. In contrast, the role of the Maltese people in the Great Siege never resulted in an organised culture of memory.

The importance of the Great Siege as a benchmark against which heroism and triumph could be measured cannot be underestimated. The Order emphasised its privileged role, both as the protector of the faith and as God's protégé. An inscription on the Couvre Port, a fortification in Vittoriosa, Malta, reads: DOMINE OBUMBRISTI SUPER CAPUT MEUM IN DIE BELLI (O Lord, you have covered my head in the day of war).<sup>18</sup> Such an inscription is a key to understanding the Order's perception of its place in this world. As the inscription suggests, in the opinion of the Order God had saved it from total annihilation by the Ottomans. That was certainly the understanding of Grand Master Jean de Valette (r. 1557–68), who had guided his Order through the ordeal of the Great Siege. He laid down a decree establishing an annual solemnity on 8 September, to commemorate the victory gained that day over the Ottomans.<sup>19</sup>

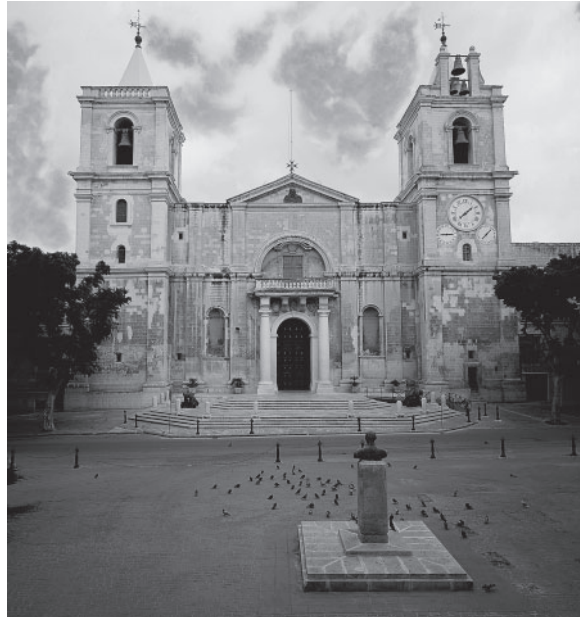
### **St John's Conventual Church**

After the siege the Order built its new, heavily fortified capital city of Valletta, one of the earliest designed cities of Europe. The Order's new conventual church was inaugurated there in 1578 and was dedicated to the patron saint of the Order, St John the Baptist (Fig. 2). Gerolamo Cassar (1520–c.1586), the Order's Maltese military engineer and architect, started work on the new conventual church in 1571, as commissioned by Grand Master Jean de la Cassière. He had previously been sent to Rome for further training. Cassar created a basilica with an austere and massive façade, with strong overtones of a fortification. The entrance is often judged to be in a Mannerist taste, with its balcony supported by Tuscan columns. The decorative treatment of the façade was sombre, and the interior was initially equally sober; possibly this austerity

## 2.

The façade of St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta, designed by the Maltese military engineer Gerolamo Cassar, c.1571.

Photo: Maurizio Urso in *Memento Mori*, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation



was a consequence of the cost and burden of rebuilding their society after the human loss and financial disaster caused by the Great Siege of 1565. St John's rectangular floor plan measures approx.  $36 \times 57$  m. The church's interior consists of a nave ( $15 \times 53$  m) with an aisle on each side, and the sanctuary with the high altar at the east end. The two side aisles break up into six interconnecting side chapels and passageways on either side of the nave (Col. pls 2–3). A longitudinal barrel vault of about 20 m high covers the nave and thrusts its weight onto two rows of buttresses on either side of the nave. The side chapels are accessible from the nave by means of one raised step, while the passageways are connected by means of a slight slope to the nave. From 1603, each side chapel was assigned to a *tongue* of the Order.<sup>20</sup>

### The origin of the floor and burial in the church

Although there is no known documentary evidence regarding the state of the floor in the initial period, at the time of the inauguration in 1578 the floor of the nave and side chapels was probably a common flagstone and dirt floor. In the early period of the church the floor certainly had not been envisaged as an *aula heroum*. In the later parts of the church the floors are covered with natural hard stone slabs. In the sacristy the floor was laid out in black, white and yellowish slabs in a grid pattern that is still visible today. The floor of the Oratory (dating to the early seventeenth century) has changed considerably over the centuries, but it probably initially had a floor of black and white tiles in a lozenge pattern (Col. pl. 4). In both annexes (mid to late seventeenth century), the floors are still covered with light-coloured slabs of natural stone.

As can be observed in the Oratory (Fig. 3), the original pavement was made of square slabs of natural stone, which were afterwards replaced by a floor of black and white marble tiles laid in a lozenge pattern. The iconography of some slabs may be referring to such floors (Col. pl. 7). At a later stage, marble intarsia sepulchral slabs were placed on this floor at intervals, with a perimeter of smaller black and white tiles surrounding them (Col. pl. 5). By analogy, it may be assumed that the nave had followed the same development. These are observations made on the basis of the watercolour drawings by the nineteenth-century Danish artist

Charles de Brocktorff, which are regarded as accurate depictions (Col. pls 3, 4).<sup>21</sup>

Grand Masters of the Order enjoyed exclusive rights to a specific burial site of their choice within St John's. Initially, they were buried in the Crypt of the Grand Masters, an underground area situated roughly beneath the high altar and choir, although little space remained after the burial of Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt (d. 1622). Knights of lower rank were buried in the Crypt of Bartolott, a number of underground chambers beneath the Oratory.<sup>22</sup>

The larger churches in the southern realm of Christianity were generally richly decorated. St John's conventual church was an exception to the rule. As previously mentioned, its austerity very likely mirrored the Order's frame of mind after the Great Siege. In the early seventeenth century, a new confidence seems to have grown. In the Chapter General of 13 March 1603, Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt decided that each of the individual *tongues* would be responsible for the maintenance and embellishment



3. The present-day configuration of the Oratory floor of St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta.

Photo: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation

of a side chapel at the conventual church of St John. Those side chapels were dedicated each to a particular patron saint. This decision included the placement of floor slabs, and the same manuscript shows the distribution of the chapels to each *tongue*. It also regulates the masses for the dead. From now on the *tongues* were able to commission works of art purposely made for, and dedicated to, their chapel's own patron saint.<sup>23</sup>

The earliest sepulchral slabs outside the crypts appear in the side chapels and passageways, where prominent members of each *tongue* were buried or commemorated. In the passageway leading to the Great Siege cemetery in the churchyard lie three of the earliest extant sepulchral slabs. The oldest is of the Italian Frà Bernardo Scaglia (d. 1600), which is closely followed in date by those of Frà Jacques de Virieu Pupetiers of the Auvergne (d. 1602) and Frà Laurens de Virieu Pupetiers (d. 1608).<sup>24</sup> All three slabs are polychrome marble intarsia slabs with elaborate designs in the Mannerist taste. Although the year of demise can be an unreliable date for establishing the manufacturing or placement of a slab,<sup>25</sup> sometimes the inscribed text mentions an event which undoubtedly occurred: Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt himself

laid the sepulchral slab of Frà Laurens de Virieu Pupetiers on 1 November in the year of his demise (Col. pl. 8).<sup>26</sup>

This public display to the memory of deceased heroes and defenders of the Catholic faith initiated competition between *tongues* to create the most beautiful chapel that their money and influence could buy.<sup>27</sup> Also, on a different scale, it is not unthinkable that the Order tried to vie with the churches of Rome. A trend thus ensued to obtain eye-catching slabs prompting intercessory prayers for their souls.<sup>28</sup> Everything had to adhere to the Order's ethos, and there were various 'approved' designs in inscribed texts and iconography to remind passers-by to emulate the exemplary lives of those commemorated.

The accretion of floor slabs resulted in a complex polychrome marble intarsia pavement. Before the 1640s, local Maltese artisans were not engaged in the manufacture of marble sepulchral slabs on a large scale. As it was generally south of Rome where the art of such marble flooring flourished, the first sepulchral slabs in the Mannerist taste mainly came from Sicily and Italy, specifically Naples. A 1620 letter from Frà Francesco Buonarroti mentions sepulchral slabs in the conventual church of the Order, especially in the Chapel of Italy, that were imported from Italy. He writes: '[...] tutte quelle lapide che ci sono per queste chiese di nostri grancroci morti, tutte sono fatte a Messina, Palermo, Genova o Firenze' (all those slabs at these churches made for our deceased Knights Grand Cross were all made in Messina, Palermo, Genoa or Florence).<sup>29</sup>

In the first half of the seventeenth century, the Order was still recovering financially from the Great Siege. Yet funds and confidence had become readily available again thanks to corsairing, slave trading, the steady development of commanderies, recruitment and the personal fortunes of prominent members. From the mid 1630s onwards the Order seems to have taken on seriously the task of decorating their conventual church as best they could under the circumstances. Both foreign and Maltese artisans were commissioned to design and carve the walls, and to embellish the church with gold leaf, marble and painting.<sup>30</sup> The Order's resident military engineer and architect, Francesco Buonamici, seems to have been instrumental in introducing the Baroque style to the Order during his years of service in Malta between 1635 and 1659.<sup>31</sup> Even though there are no documents to support the following observation, a number of Baroque features in the sepulchral slabs resemble Buonamici's creations, especially his typical style of rendering volutes.

The Provençal Antoine De Paule (d. 1636) was the first Grand Master to erect a monument in the church, since there was little space left in the Crypt of the Grand Masters.<sup>32</sup> De Paule's monument was placed in the Chapel of Auvergne, and again this public display was probably another factor which led to the Order's patronage of the visual arts. Henceforth, the place of a memorial – an excellent vehicle for messages of immortality and triumph – would be in the church. Curiously, there is no evidence for any sepulchral slabs in the nave in the early seventeenth century. Only in 1667 is there proof of slabs being present in this part of the church. In a decree dated 15 December Grand Master Nicolas Cotoner and the Order's Council unanimously agreed that they should look into the possibility of paving the floor of the nave with marble slabs and in what kind of manner it should be done, without disturbing those sepulchral slabs already present:

[...] unanimi voto hanno ordinato, che li Venerandi Commissarij deputati sopra l'ornamento della Chiesa con li Venerandi Prodomi di essa considerino se conserva Lastricare di marmo il pavimento a quanto ascenderebbe la spesa, che formadovebbe tenersi, equali arbitrij potrebbono trovarsi [...].<sup>33</sup>

*(by unanimous vote the Council ordered that the Venerable Deputy Commissioners of the Church should confer with the Venerable Pro-domi in order to estimate, in due consideration, had they to conserve the nave with a marble floor, how much it would cost, which form and configuration it should take and what difficulties they would foresee.)*

In any case, the result was that many more sepulchral slabs of the marble polychrome intarsia kind were placed in the nave after 1667, ranging from the main altar to the front door.

### The refurbishing of the church in the Maltese Baroque era

In the second half of the seventeenth century, the Order's renewed financial power also fuelled the cultural aspirations of the absolutist rulers of Malta, the 'Catholic Princes of the Sacred Republic' as they would call themselves.<sup>34</sup> The personal fortunes of two Grand Masters, Raphael Cotoner (r. 1660–63) and his brother, Nicolas (r. 1663–80), were of paramount importance in this respect. In 1660 Raphael had embarked on a lavish Baroque embellishment programme for the interior of St John's. After his death Nicolas continued his brother's work.

The Calabrian artist Mattia Preti, who lived and worked in Malta from 1660 until his death in 1699, was commissioned to start work in the conventual church in the early 1660s. His heavy-handed style particularly suited the festive and triumphal mood of Counter-Reformation Baroque. Although some Baroque sculpture had already been commissioned, Preti soon made up for the lack of overall decoration of St John's conventual church: between 1661 and 1699 he helped to turn the sober Mannerist environment into one of joy and celebration of life. Preti intended to provide a different dimension to the interior whereby the relationships between floor, walls and ceiling were closely related in topic, artistic style and chromatic value. His purpose was to make St John's as beautiful as the Order could afford. This included covering the barrel vault with oil painting and designing sculptures for those walls and triumphal arches which had not yet been treated by earlier artists.

A number of sepulchral slabs are attributed to Preti, but there is no firm evidence; one cannot confidently attribute the design of a tombstone just on the basis of its pictorial qualities. Preti's expansive decoration in oil on stone, depicting the life of St John the Baptist on the barrel vault of St John's and, to a lesser extent, his designs for the sculpture on the triumphal arches, offered ample inspiration to many other artists and *marmisti* (marble artisans), since copying Preti's art was then regarded as paying homage to a greater artist. Also, since it was approved by the Order, artists could expect fewer complaints from patrons when rendering a work of art in the manner of Preti.<sup>35</sup> Developments did not stop with Mattia Preti, however. The eighteenth century saw the arrival in Malta of the Italian architect Romano Carapecchia (1668–1738) who is known to have designed at least four tombstones at St John's Co-Cathedral.<sup>36</sup> One particular example (no. 22) shows an edifice that most probably contains elements also found in Carapecchia's masterful design of a giant wooden catafalque, his *chappelle ardente*.<sup>37</sup> This *chappelle ardente* was used for requiem masses for popes and other important people within the Order and the larger Catholic world.

### Developments in the funerary art of the Order

There is a great paradox in the funerary art of the Order of St John: not only the religious orders but European Christians in the conquered East in general executed their funerary art largely in the European medieval manner.<sup>38</sup> During their period in Cyprus and Rhodes the Order also adhered to their medieval style, even after they had settled in Malta and Tripoli in 1530.<sup>39</sup> Similarly, there was at this time little development in funerary art, which mostly retained its medieval quality and nature, although Renaissance influences are clearly recognisable. Sepulchral slabs were still of the traditional type, whereby a knight of the Order would be presented as a full-length effigy, reclining as if laid out in state, wearing armour and holding a sword, together with the coat of arms and possibly some text. The sepulchral slab of Giovan Antonio Piscatori, who died in Tunis on 20 January 1554 and was buried there, is made of a

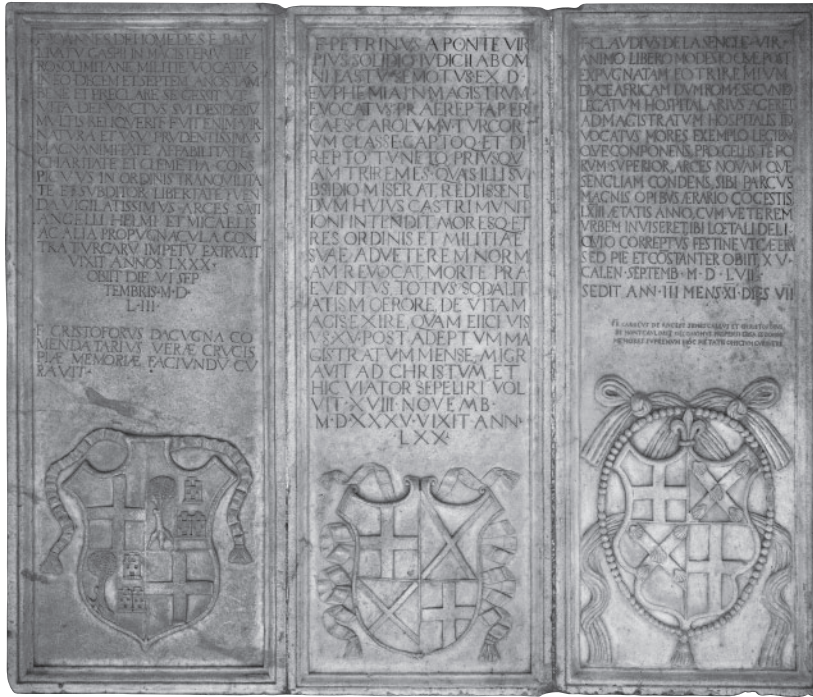
single slab of marble, carved in the familiar medieval iconographical style with an inscribed text and coat-of-arms only.<sup>40</sup> They are reminiscent of floor slabs across eleventh-century Europe, which were carved stone lids of coffins sunk into a cemetery's soil or church floor, marking the place of burial and identifying the interred. The Order's ledgers would normally be decorated with a full-length figure of a man, dressed in armour with sword, coat of arms and perhaps a few words for further identification.

It was only after the Great Siege of 1565 that the medieval style of architecture was abandoned by the Order and by the Maltese. Military and domestic building styles changed dramatically after the Great Siege when Italian engineers and architects began to make their mark. The first differences and developments in style and execution of the sepulchral slabs are noticeable in the Chapel of the Holy Crucifix, or the Crypt of the Grand Masters, beneath the presbytery at St John's; here the oldest monuments are found. The ledger-type slabs predating the Great Siege of 1565 – *i.e.* those of Grand Masters Pietro del Ponte (r. 1534–36), Juan de Homedes (r. 1536–53) and Claude de la Sengle (r. 1553–57) – consist of a single slab of marble containing an inscribed text and coat of arms (Fig. 4). These slabs are of particular interest in that they record their preoccupation with building fortifications, underlining the general apprehension about the inevitability of an Ottoman attack. The epitaph to Juan de Homedes (lines 13–16) informs us that '[...] ARCES / SANCTI ANGELLI, HELMI ET MICAELIS / AC ALIA PROPVGNACVLA CON / TRA TVRCARVM IMPERTVM EXTRVXIT [...]' (he raised the fortifications of Saint Angelo, Saint Elmo, Saint Michael and other bulwarks against an attack from the Turks).<sup>41</sup> The epitaph to his successor and hero of the Great Siege, Jean de Valette (d. 1568), hails him as the guardian of the people and the curse of the enemy, describing in detail how the heroic Grand Master chased the Ottomans from the islands and cleared each side of the sea of pirates, *i.e.* both the eastern and western basins of the Mediterranean.<sup>42</sup> The narrative continues with De Valette building a new fortified city, safe against the enemies of the faith, and how this bulwark was also an eternal monument for De Valette and the reputation of the French (Fig. 5).

The monument to Grand Master Hugo de Loubenx Verdala (d. 1595) presents a departure from the medieval style and tradition: for the first time cherubs appear on a sepulchral monument at St John's, although the deceased is still presented *gisant*, as in medieval times. It is only in the monument to Grand Master Martino Garzes (d. 1601) that a true break with past tradition occurs. Garzes' monument is executed in a very academic, austere Mannerist taste. Also, for the first time, some marble polychrome intarsia elements are added. It should be noted that it is hard to tell which was the first example of funerary art at St John's with polychrome intarsia elements: the monument of Grand Master Garzes or the sepulchral slab of Frà Bernardo Scaglia (d. 1600). However, sepulchral slabs in a Mannerist taste seem to have been imported from Sicily and Italy for some time before the technique of marble intarsia was deployed on monuments.

The appearance and the technique used for the slabs of the three Grand Masters and of the later marble intarsia slabs at St John's are fundamentally different (compare Fig. 4). The memorials to the three Grand Masters consist of one whole slab of marble each, but with three visual layers. First of all, a carved border surrounds a sunken surface. From this surface, the coat of arms protrudes, while the carved text sinks into the surface, forming the lowermost layer. Therefore, these ledgers are both monochrome and three-dimensional. In contrast, the Mannerist marble intarsia sepulchral slabs of Frà Bernardo Scaglia, Frà Jacques de Virieu Pupetiers and Frà Laurens de Virieu Pupetiers mentioned above are polychrome and have a flat surface. Sepulchral slabs made in the Mannerist taste have compartmentalised sections with very complicated decorative elements, in a colour scheme mostly restricted to black, white, yellow and red. Their design is symmetrical or near-symmetrical, and they generally





4. Sepulchral slabs of three pre-Great Siege Grand Masters, Crypt of the Grand Masters, beneath the main altar at St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta.

*Photo: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*



5. The sepulchral monument for Grand Master De Valette (d. 1568), Crypt of the Grand Masters, St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta.

*Photo: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*

consist of a carrier slab of white marble, which is softer and easier to carve than most other types of marble.<sup>43</sup> Part of the surface would be carved out to a depth of about 4–5 mm and smaller sections of coloured marble would then be inlaid into the sunken parts. Those areas which were designed to be shown as white surfaces – such as the border, the cartouche, the eight-pointed cross, the figures of Thanatos (Death), Hypnos and Chronos, and at times cherubs – remained at surface level. The lines of the faces, eyes and other small details would be carved out and filled with a mixture of resin and marble dust.

The choice of colour for the inlaid marble depended on artistic style; budget; personal, regional and artistic preferences; conventions; meaning; and mood (victorious, sober, mourning, etc.). The colour of the marble used for certain themes seems to have been subject to an unwritten convention. During the Baroque era, putti and other allegorical figures are mostly rendered in *giallo di siena*, a saturated yellow which was often treated with fire, since localised application of heat would leave a permanent dark red discolouring. When applied properly, the effect of discolouring gives a suggestion of depth and three-dimensionality. Many slabs became a stage for mini Italian baroque dramas and, although different and as individual as the commemorated Knights themselves, they conveyed a common identity (Col. pls 9, 10). In the cartouche, the text to be inscribed would often be carved out and the letters filled with a black resin. Other small details would also be carved out and filled with resin for a subtle effect.<sup>44</sup> Obviously, the resin would be the first material to be worn away by footsteps. In some slabs the letters are not black, but instead the colour of the carrier slab. These letters would be carved out and left in high relief. The *marmisti* would then cut out the same text from a slice of coloured marble and snugly fit it over the protruding letters. Each slice of coloured marble was formed with the help of templates. On finishing the whole slab, they ensured that the inlaid sections of marble would perfectly match the remaining parts of the carrier slab to form a very smooth surface.

Around 1644 one may observe a move from Mannerist to Baroque taste. In some slabs of Baroque taste elements occur within a late Mannerist border, but one slab incorporates both styles separately.<sup>45</sup> The upper register of the sepulchral slab of Frà Signorino Gattinara (d. 1644) is Mannerist, whereas the lower register reflects Baroque taste (Fig. 6a–b). On close observation it is noticeable that this memorial consists of two slabs, which have been carefully cut around the imagery and joined together.<sup>46</sup> According to Keith Sciberras, the sepulchral monument of Grand Master Raphael Cotoner (d. 1663) is the first example in the church itself to show recognisable and tangible signs of the Baroque, although with Mannerist overtones. This memorial may not have been designed and executed by a single artist, since the bronze bust is clearly by a different hand than its marble frame. According to John Debono, the artist for the marble framework of this sepulchral monument is the Florentine sculptor Vitale Covati, who was based in Messina.<sup>47</sup> The mood of the marble frame is still very sober and modest, far from the exuberance of later sepulchral monuments, and refers to an academic architectural approach. The use of bronze for the bust is a new development and also its iconography shows understanding of the dynamism of Baroque. In contrast to other busts within similar monuments which are made of marble, this bronze bust is a natural rather than an abstract rendering. Although the pose is still harshly frontal and the suit of armour adds a certain rigidity to it, the drapery folds run from shoulder to ribs in a horizontal manner. These folds partly cover and soften the unbending features of a suit of armour and thus solve also the abruptness where the lower register of the bust rests on its pedestal. Both the use of folds and the depth of the folds are considered Baroque devices, the former for softening a transition and the latter to create light and shade.<sup>48</sup> Baroque based iconography appeared much earlier on sepulchral slabs: examples completely designed in the Baroque taste occur as early as 1644–45 in the Chapels of Italy and Provence in the Co-Cathedral.<sup>49</sup>



6a. Floor slab of Frà Signorino Gattinara (d. 1644), St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta.

6b. Detail of the floor slab of Frà Signorino Gattinara, St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta: note the gap between the top and bottom registers, just around the cartouche.

Photos: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation

Many of the artists who created the sepulchral slabs remain unknown. The notarial archives have yielded only a few names of regular suppliers. Two names stand out, *viz.* that of the above-mentioned Vitale Covati and Bartholomeo Bambace. Between 1661 and 1669 Covati was commissioned to produce sepulchral slabs and transport them from his Messina workshop to Malta.<sup>50</sup> When Covati fell ill in 1669 he engaged Bartholomeo Bambace, a marble worker from Palermo working in Malta at that time, to finish a number of his projects.<sup>51</sup> Bambace had to complete the work on three sepulchral slabs, *viz.* those of Frà Tommaso Accarigi, Frà Ottaviano Bandinelli and Frà Giovanni Fiol, although the latter was not commemorated on the floor of St John's.<sup>52</sup> Bambace subsequently received commissions for sepulchral slabs to Frà Claude de Blot Vivier, Frà Cappone Capponi, Frà Henri d'Estampes Vallancay and Frà Giovanni Minutolo, which are all to be found at St John's.<sup>53</sup> Some of these sepulchral slabs by Bambace are purely Mannerist, some are transitional (*i.e.* containing elements of both Mannerist and Baroque taste) and others are clearly designed in a Baroque style.

The unexpectedly short life of some ledgers can be illustrated by one specific commemoration. In 1686 a sepulchral slab in a Mannerist style was laid down for Frà Giovanni Francesco Aijroli by his brother Giovanni Battista Aijroli in the Chapel of Italy, next to that of Grand Master Gregorio Carafa.<sup>54</sup> By the following year, the slab apparently no longer satisfied artistic or aesthetic demands, for it was lifted and its reverse side was refashioned in a Baroque instead of a Mannerist style with a dedication to the same Frà Giovanni Francesco Aijroli. However, that same year (1687) something must have happened to the slab as it was replaced by a brand-new identical sepulchral slab, now with a different text and this time commissioned by Frà Giuseppe Maria Marino, testamentary executor on behalf of the Common Treasury. The probable cause might be damage by rising damp, as the Baroque side shows signs related to such damage. The new slab was placed in the passageway to the Annexe, which at that time was considered as an overflow area for the Chapel of Italy. The earlier

double-sided slab disappeared from the church and was not seen again until 1974, when it was discovered standing in the garden of the Archaeological Museum in Valletta. It was subsequently moved to the house adjacent to the Fine Arts Museum in Valletta when the museum opened, but after some years it was returned to St John's where it was placed against a wall in the Oratory. Recently, the Foundation of St John's Co-Cathedral has allocated some funds to restore this 'redundant' sepulchral slab with its remarkable history.

Other slabs have also had a chequered history. After Frà Antonio Mastrillo died in 1619, a sepulchral slab was laid down in his honour in the passageway to the Annexe.<sup>55</sup> In 1741 a relative restored the coats of arms and the inscription on the slab because, as the inscribed text explains (in translation), 'it was worn away by age, into their original state, but more beautiful, in case the wear of time would obliterate so outstanding a man from memory'. These examples offer a clear indication that repairs and replacement were relatively common in the days when the church was still in the hands of the Order.

### Configuration and distribution

The configuration and distribution of the slabs on the floor of St John's is an intriguing process. Records present a fairly accurate idea of the situation before 1754, before 1838 and after that year. The manuscript of P.A. de Viguier of 1754 and the three-volume printed records of P.P. Caruana of 1838/40 show decisions in configuration and distribution made during the time of the Order of St John in Malta. The post-1838 records by H.P. Scicluna (1955) show the details of the great re-configuration of Giuseppe Hyzler made in the time of the British rule in Malta. Ever since the decision was taken in 1603 to allow each of the *tongues* to embellish their chapels, these where soon filled with slabs. The situation in the chapels has been fairly stable regarding numbers. Over the years the numbers have varied a little, although slabs were replaced.

The nave only became seriously populated with slabs after the decision of 1667. The process of filling up the nave was a relatively slow one compared to the individual chapels. The manuscript of De Viguier shows that in 1754 there were only eighty-two slabs in the nave. By the time Caruana records the floor pre-1838, this number had grown to 138. After the re-configuration of Hyzler this number had increased to 154, leaving no more space available. In the Oratory, De Viguier records three slabs behind the altar and three on the floor of the Oratory. From the watercolour of Brocktorff (see Col. pl. 4) and the records of Caruana, one can conclude that there were eleven slabs on the floor around 1821.<sup>56</sup> The watercolour gives us the added advantage of seeing their actual distribution on the floor. After the re-configuration of Hyzler the number was increased to forty-eight. The apparently least popular area to place slabs was the entrance to the sacristy, where De Viguier records only one slab, that of Mattia Preti, the artist who had contributed so much to the embellishment of St John's. Later on, Caruana counted twenty-five slabs in that area, leaving no more space for future additions.

Further internal changes to the floor occurred whereby sepulchral slabs were replaced by slabs of other knights, possibly more important or of a better artistic quality than those they replaced. Also, when a slab was replaced, its text was sometimes changed as well. This occurred to the slab of Gilbert d'Elbene when it was moved from the Chapel of France to the passageway of the Annexe.<sup>57</sup>

The German *tongue* will give an idea of the complexity of changes. Eighteen German Knights are commemorated at St John's at the present time, *i.e.* one in the Oratory, one in the Chapel of St Charles (passageway to the Oratory), three in the nave, and thirteen in the Chapel of the Three Kings (*Trium Regum*), *i.e.* the Chapel of the German *tongue*, which included Knights from Germany, Austria, Switzerland and Bohemia:

No.	Name	Date of demise	Placement of slab
276	Christian von Österhauzen	28 Jun 1664	Trium Regum
270	Franz Sebastian von Wratislau	1684	Trium Regum
275	Franz Xaver von Hassenstein	1688	Trium Regum
278	Ferdinand von Korff Schmisingh	28 Jun 1690	Trium Regum
273	Franz Sigismund von Thun	08 Sep 1707	Trium Regum
272	Heinrich Ludger von Galen	12 Jul 1717	Trium Regum
271	Johann Sigismund von Schaesberg	12 Sept 1718	Trium Regum
233	Innozenz von Dietrichstein	07 Feb 1727	Passageway to Oratory
274	Wolfgang Philipp von Guttenberg	04 Dec 1733	Trium Regum
277	Hermann Beveren	27 Jan 1736	Trium Regum
279	Leopold Ignatz von Sauer Ankestein	06 Feb 1736	Trium Regum
19	Franz Christoph Sebastian von Remchingen	18 Feb 1743	Nave
269	Ferdinand Stadel	29 Dec 1743	Trium Regum
268	Franz Anton von Schönau	11 Jan 1748	Trium Regum
43	Nicolaus von Enzberg,	12 Feb 1752	Nave
280	Philipp Wilhelm von Nesselrode	16 Jan 1754	Trium Regum
397	Casper Fidel von Schönau	11 Nov 1774	Oratory
114	Johann Baptist von Schauenberg	06 Mar 1775	Nave

There is at present room for thirteen floor slabs in the German Chapel and it seems that since 1754 the number of slabs has been established and fixed. The last German Knight to receive a slab was Philipp Wilhelm von Nesselrode (d. 16 January 1754).<sup>58</sup> According to the *Index Defunctorum*, the death registers of the Order, there were also other Knights of the German *tongue* buried at the German Chapel.<sup>59</sup> The manuscripts reveal the names of Karl Philipp Fridac (d. 26 November 1698), Bernhard Ernst Reede (d. 20 October 1720; first buried in the nave near the German Chapel and later in the German Chapel itself), Joachim Wiesnich (d. 17 October 1745), Johann Karl de Breschin (d. 15 December 1747) and Leopold Gloyach (d. 5 February 1767).<sup>60</sup> Two German Knights were buried close to the German Chapel in the passageway to the Sacristy, *viz.* Alexander de Stein (d. 11 December 1770) and Nicholas de Enzberg (d. 12 February 1752).<sup>61</sup> Of these two, Enzberg's remains were later transferred to the nave and commemorated there with a sepulchral slab.<sup>62</sup> Two German Knights – Maria Johann Gerard de Falkesteins and Frederik d'Eltz – were lost during a sea battle on 16 February 1700 and not commemorated at all at St John's.<sup>63</sup> It seems that, at a relatively early stage, the Germans had established some benchmarks for commemoration with a slab. None of the other knights recorded in the *Index Defunctorum* was apparently deemed worthy, with the exception of Enzberg. Some researchers have suggested that each chapel may have a burial place in the form of a *fossa*, a deeper grave where the bones of many knights can be kept, but such a hypothesis has not been verified yet.

Not only were sepulchral slabs to recently deceased members of the Order added to the floor, but sometimes the slabs of long-dead members were restored and relocated in the floor of St John's. The inscribed text of the sepulchral slab of Frà Francisco de Torres Pacheco y Cardenas (d. 1711) reveals that he had restored a number of sepulchral slabs and rearranged them in chronological order:

QUO TEMPORE VETUSTA EQUITUM MONUMENTA  
 E TENEBRIS ERUTA LUCI RESTITUIT  
 AC CHRONOLOGICO INDICE EXORNAVIT <sup>64</sup>

(in which time, he restored to light the ancient monumental inscriptions of Knights, and arranged [them], released from darkness, in a chronological order).

It is not quite clear to which sepulchral slabs De Torres Pacheco y Cardenas' slab refers, but he may have relocated from the Crypt of Bartolott some slabs of Knights whom he thought worthy. In the manuscript of De Viguier, seven such slabs can be traced.<sup>65</sup> Their provenance was the 'grand caveau sous l'Oratoire', *i.e.* the Crypt of Bartolott, and the reason why they were 'released from darkness' seems to be that they all died young in battle for their religion, making them the right material for commemoration.<sup>66</sup>

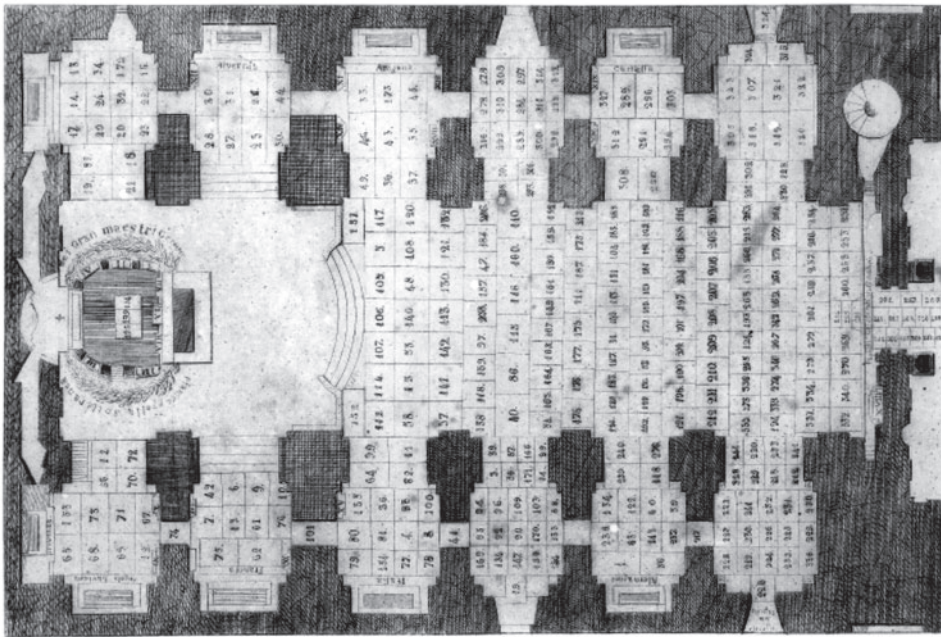
### Hyzler and the Office of Public Works

The greatest change to the floor was its total reconfiguration by a Maltese artist named Giuseppe Hyzler (1787–1858). After the Order had been forced to leave Malta in 1798 by Napoleon Bonaparte, the sepulchral slabs and monuments no longer enjoyed their sacred status. It was in this period that Giuseppe Hyzler was educated and he became a follower of the Neo-Classical trend, in Malta embodied in the so-called 'Nazarener' movement, driven by puritan and extremist opinions. The island's artistic development came to a near-standstill, and returned to provincialism, isolated once more from mainland Europe. Taste in art changed and the trend became notably anti-Baroque; all art lacking a religious sentiment was deemed useless and irrelevant by the Nazarener movement.<sup>67</sup> Baroque was condemned for its exuberance, its pagan elements, and for its use of sensual and frivolous figures representing very grave and serious allegorical figures and personifications. The Angel of Fame, used in the sepulchral monuments of Grand Masters Nicholas Cotoner and Emanuel Pinto de Fonseca, offers a good example as both its sensuality (sensual naked shoulders and an exposed breast) and exaggeration of costume were no longer acceptable in certain artistic circles.<sup>68</sup>

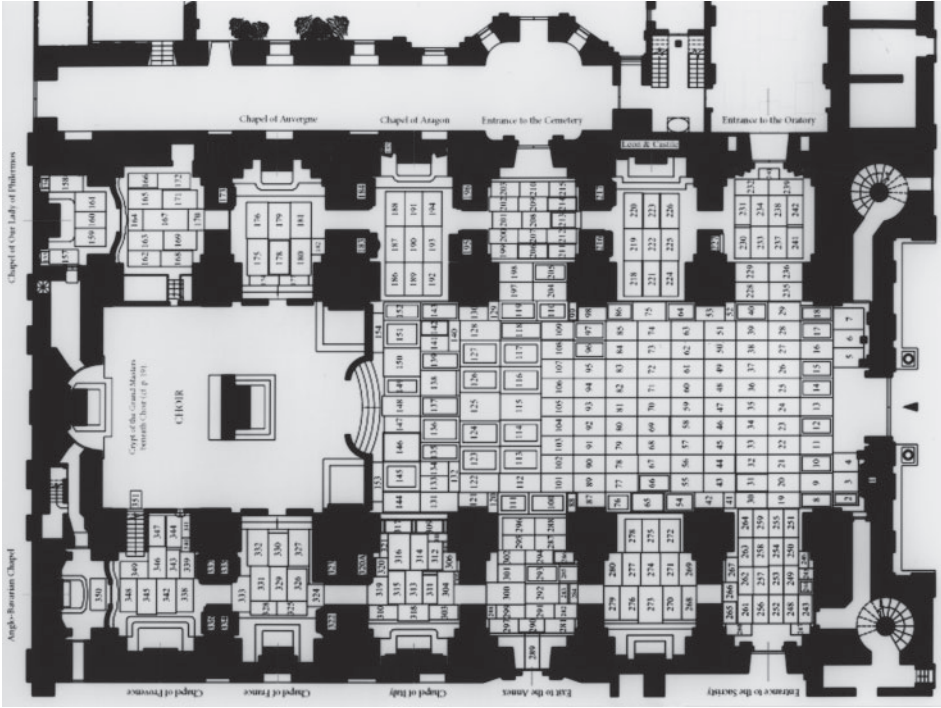
During the time of British rule in Malta (1800–1964) some care was given to the state of the floor of St John's. A plan was designed to give the interior of St John's a fresh look, guided by 'modern' artistic principles. Hyzler accepted the commission to rearrange the sepulchral slabs on the floor at St John's, a job which was completed in 1833. He rearranged most of the slabs by placing them symmetrically and giving importance to rank, design and colour. He also filled up awkward spaces in his symmetrical design with small sepulchral slabs, made to measure to fit the required space (Figs 7–8).

As a result of his work, Hyzler undid all previous efforts by people eager to obtain the best possible resting place for their remains, whereas others now enjoyed a more prominent location than before. Although Hyzler was praised for his work, he nevertheless added false impressions to the culture of memory which the Order had so carefully maintained. The insensitivity towards the Order and its dead Knights can be explained by the hostile perception of the Order by contemporaries. It was popularly believed that the Order had represented only a totalitarian regime which, once ousted, was best forgotten. Burials were halted in 1798 with the arrival of the French. Those Knights who stayed in Malta because of family ties were buried elsewhere, although some received a sepulchral slab at St John's after the British ended the French occupation in 1800. On 3 May 1869 burials were finally prohibited in Valletta and other inner harbour areas.

One example of continuous care for the soul of a member of the Order of St John is worth mentioning: when the Maltese knight of the Italian *tongue*, Frà Paule de Bertis Portughes, Commendator of Pisa, died on 18 July 1835 his Maltese family managed to have his sepulchral



7. Plan of the floor 'pre-Hyzler', as published in P.P. Caruana's *Collezione di monumenti e lapidi sepolcrali dei Militti Gerosolimitani nella chiesa di San Giovanni in Malta*, vol. 1, part IV (1838), as previously published in D. Munro, *Memento Mori*; ironically, when Caruana published his three volumes, Giuseppe Hyzler had already finalised his reconfiguration of the floor in 1833.



8. Plan of the 'post-Hyzler' configuration of the floor of St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta, previously published in D. Munro, *Memento Mori*.

slab placed at St John's.<sup>69</sup> The family still come to pay their respects and to pray over his sepulchral slab. Another unique example concerns the burial of an individual in St John's who not only was not a member of the Order but instead a holder of a Protestant order of chivalry. Giuseppe Nicola Zamitt was a Maltese who was made a Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St George by King George III on the foundation of that Order on 16 December 1818; he was buried in the Chapel of Auvergne at St John's, but it was not until 1875 that his family laid a floor slab over his remains.<sup>70</sup> Zamitt's sepulchral slab has suffered a great deal: much of its opaque blue material within the representation of the Order of St Michael and St George has been hacked away, possibly on the assumption that it was lapis lazuli.<sup>71</sup>

The impact of Hyzler's re-configuration of the church floor is shown below. The new additions to the floor may also have come from the Crypt of Bartolott or elsewhere. Hyzler made sure that all sepulchral slabs face the nearest altar. The following table only concerns the reconfiguration of the sepulchral slabs and not of the sepulchral monuments and additional plaques (although they are included in the numbering).

Place numbers	Re-configuration
Nave, 1–154:	Originally 138 sepulchral slabs in the pre-Hyzler setting of the nave. There were forty-eight mutations whereby floor slabs were taken from other parts and placed in the nave while some were removed from the nave to other parts. Nearly every slab originally in the nave has been shifted from its original place, at least marginally, to fit into the new configuration.
Lady of Philermos, 155–172:	Almost all of the sixteen original sepulchral slabs in this chapel have been shifted internally; one replacement; two new placements.
Auvergne, 173–182:	Two internal changes of place, one new placement.
Aragon, 183–196:	No mutations.
Passage Cemetery, 197–215:	From nineteen slabs in a horizontal five-row configuration to nineteen slabs in a vertical seven-row configuration. They all now face the altar at the Chapel of Our Lady of Philermos. No new floor slabs introduced.
Castile, 216–226:	Eight out of nine remained and were internally repositioned. One replacement.
Passage Oratory, 227–242:	The original configuration of fifteen floor slabs was rearranged and only five remained in their former position.
Passage Sacristy, 243–267:	Of the twenty-four original floor slabs thirteen remained. Twelve new replacements. The whole configuration has changed.
Chapel of Germany, 268–280:	Fifteen slabs in the original setting. Thirteen remained while the internal configuration changed. Five replacements.
Passage Annexe, 281–302:	Original setting of twenty-four sepulchral slabs was reduced to twenty-two, while seven replacements took place. The internal configuration changed so that all but one face the altar in the Anglo-Bavarian Chapel.
Chapel of Italy, 303–321:	The seventeen slabs in their original setting changed to twenty in a new configuration. There were three new introductions and two replacements.
Chapel of France, 322–335:	Thirteen sepulchral slabs in the original setting, fourteen in the new setting, <i>viz.</i> the monument to the brother of the French king. Two new introductions and three changes. All have been shifted internally.
Chapel of Provence 336–349:	Fourteen in the original setting, fourteen in the new setting, with two changes. The re-configuration has shifted all sepulchral slabs.
Anglo-Bavarian Chapel, 350: [351] <sup>72</sup>	No mutations.
Crypt Grand Masters, 352–363:	No mutations.
Oratory, 364–405:	From the original fourteen the number grew to forty-two. Five were removed and placed elsewhere. The whole setting has been changed, except for the three behind the altar.



During the period 1899–1913 the Office of Public Works at Valletta ordered an extensive programme of replacement and repair affecting eighty-five of the sepulchral slabs.<sup>73</sup> Thirty-four were totally replaced by reproductions, which we cannot judge on their faithfulness since the original slabs were presumably cannibalised, while fifty-three were repaired during this period. This fits in very well with the tradition of renewal and repair during the period of the Order. The question always remains: how much have the sepulchral slabs changed? Colour changes have occurred due to the unavailability of some kinds of marble required, and from a few examples available one can detect changes in the iconography too (Fig. 6a–b). This Public Works archive has not yielded any more information and it is therefore not clear whether the Office of Public Works did more work on the floor of St John's. It might be possible that the above-mentioned works were carried out to make up for the damages caused by an infantry regiment called the Royal Malta Fencible Regiment, in service until 1861. T. McGill wrote in his *Handbook or guide for strangers visiting Malta* (1959) that 'the Malta 'Fencibles' in the nineteenth century were for some years permitted to assemble for mass in this fine temple [...] until with their arm and iron heels they had punched into irreparable ruin the beautiful mosaic pavement'.<sup>74</sup> After Malta's independence in 1964 the floor slabs continued to be replaced and repaired, up to the 1980s and 1990s. Although no records were kept, such work is often clearly recognisable.

### Conclusion

The floor of St John's Co-Cathedral was dear to the Order and, as a result, it was both developed and preserved. This has been crucial for its survival into the twenty-first century. Yet even when the Order was evicted from Malta by Bonaparte in 1798, the beauty of the floor was recognised as something worth keeping. During the modern period the floor continued to develop, both in a negative and positive way. The fashion for steel stiletto heels in the 1950s and 1960s endangered the sepulchral slabs, and modern mass tourism is not helping the situation, although the income generated through tourism helps to fund restoration. Like other historic floors, the delicate fabric of St John's is inevitably damaged by the influx of thousands of visitors daily, shuffling and polishing the floor with the soles of their shoes.

However, it is not only the visitors who harm the floor. The church congregation is also contributing to the wear and tear. The poor quality of the rubber of the chair legs has led to further fragmentation as the exposed screws formerly attaching the rubber washers to the bases of the chair-legs have caused further damage. Furthermore, the liturgical routes have created distinct wear patterns on the floor. The result is that many parts of the sepulchral slabs are fragmented, worn away, missing, illegible, or otherwise damaged through previous interventions by artists and restorers.

The St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation has recently introduced some measures to combat further deterioration of the floor. A new carpeted route for tourists has been laid out, which leaves much of the nave visible to the visitor. Two full-time conservators are employed to repair any damaged floor slabs without disturbing their patina. As a result, the floor now has a more 'cared for' appearance and the conservation methods employed have negated the need for any wholesale replacement. In contrast to former 'restoration' exercises, a methodology statement has been compiled and meticulous records are kept of the work done. The present conservation regime includes work on the replacement floor slabs laid in 1899–1913. As a result of work done in the past it is not inconceivable that a number of floor slabs have been 'reinterpreted' on at least two occasions and thus no longer closely resemble the original state.

To some extent, the floor slabs at St John's have lost their original meaning. Apart from the exceptional case of Frà Paule de Bertis Portughes' memorial mentioned earlier, the floor

slabs are no longer the object of intercessory prayers, collective identity, corporate image or elements of memory in relation to the Order of St John (Figs 17–18).<sup>75</sup> That they remain objects of study is a direct result of the new cultural, historical and academic value they have acquired. Many no longer mark the actual burial place of the deceased, but their redistribution has created a pattern of immense visual attractiveness. St John's is a 'living' church as well as a museum; fortunately, the current programme of conservation guarantees that the Co-Cathedral can maintain its round of daily services while 'the most beautiful floor in the world' remains exactly that.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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#### NOTES

1 The reference to 'ice-cold' marble appears a number of times on the memorial slabs at St John's Co-Cathedral. The slab of Joseph Béon du Casaus reads (line 3) 'ossa sub hoc gelide marmore clausa jacent' (the bones of Brother Joseph are lying confined beneath this ice-cold marble). The slab of Juan Garzes y Pueyo contains the same line, 'ossa sub hoc gelide marmore clausa' (line 3). The reference to ice-cold marble is here used metaphorically. The slab is regarded as a cold and thin sheet (like ice) dividing the dark world of the dead from the warm-blooded living above. This poetical notion of ice-cold marble emphasises the change a once warm, living person has undergone, now waiting in the dark and the cold for his perfection and resurrection. See D. Munro, *Memento mori, a companion to the most beautiful floor in the world* (Valletta, 2005), vol. 1, p. 53, no. 15, and p. 116, no. 171. The reference to 'perfection and resurrection' relates to a frequent text on the slabs, namely 'perfectionem expectans', (waiting for his perfection), viz. line 18 of the slab of Didaco Maria Gargallo (see Munro, *Memento mori*, p. 49, no. 6). In the Catholic religion, this is the moment in which the soul is fit to be judged by God in heaven, after all sins are confessed and time is spent in purgatory to cleanse the soul. Only after reaching perfection is one ready for resurrection at the occurring moment.

2 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 178, no. 329. The term *intarsia* is specifically applied to a type of inlaying probably developed in Siena (Italy) in the thirteenth century and originally derived from Middle-Eastern marquetry, i.e. inlays of ivory upon wood. See C. Dauphin, *Carpets of stone: the Graeco-Roman legacy in the Levant* (Paris, 1999); B. Adembri, 'I marmi colorati nella decorazione di Villa Adriana', in M. de Nuccio and L. Ungaro (eds), *I marmi colorati della Roma imperiale* (Venice, 2002), pp. 471–80. At pp. 479–80 Adembri states that *tarsia in opus sectile* was already in existence in the first century AD; she describes and illustrates fragments of the polychrome *intarsia* pavement at Hadrian's Villa at Tivoli (near Rome).

3 The convent in this context means the place where the Order had its headquarters, i.e. its financial centre, fleet, conventual church, treasury, hospital and all it needed to maintain itself.

4 Although all members of the Order were entitled to burial in the church, only a small number were actually buried in the nave or side chapels; most were interred in the Crypt of Bartolott, beneath the church's Oratory. Obtaining a prime position on the church floor did not only require high birth and a splendid career path, but presumably also a considerable amount of lobbying. Certainly, all those buried in public view were persons worthy of emulation in the eyes of the Order and the individual *tongues*; their life and death had to match the collective identity of the Order and its notion of *memoria*. A sepulchral slab or monument had at least four main functions: to commemorate the deceased; to elicit prayers for the deliverance of the deceased's soul from purgatory; to present the deceased as an inspiration to future generations of knights; and to celebrate the heroic and victorious past of the Order.

5 During the reconfiguration of the floor by Giuseppe Hyzler, completed in 1833, the movement of bones was not recorded. Therefore, if there are remains beneath a sepulchral slab, they do not necessarily belong to the person commemorated on the slab. Moreover, a large number of slabs are cenotaphs, the remains of the deceased having been buried elsewhere. Again, there is no exact record.

6 Mannerism, the transitional artistic period between Renaissance and Baroque, flourished between 1525 and 1600 in the main artistic centres, but in provincial areas and isolated places like Malta it could linger much beyond that period, up to the first half of the seventeenth century. Therefore, it is preferable to speak about a Mannerist taste instead. See D. Hay, *Europe in the sixteenth century* (New York, 1992), p. 393. The last sepulchral slab at St John's with Mannerist influence dates from 1680: see Munro, *Memento mori*, no. 404, Ramon Soler (d. 20 March 1680). The Mannerist taste in sepulchral slabs at St John's can be defined as a Mannerist decorative typology which expresses an idealised architectural composition, and its main colour scheme contains mostly white, black, yellow and red. The decorations in the

compartmentalised sections are often very complicated. The iconography is symmetrical or nearly symmetrical. Objects are mostly rendered as just an outline (see Col. pl. 8). The Baroque taste in sepulchral slabs at St John's can be defined as a category in which there is typically the presence of a pedestal and some architectural features that often represent those qualities of a sculptured monument. The majority is rendered symmetrically or nearly symmetrically, with a few exceptions. Other Baroque artistic expressions to be found in the sepulchral slabs at St John's are outside the scope of this article. One sepulchral slab rendered in the Baroque taste at St John's shows a date of demise as early as 1595, but this is presumably a case of retrospective commemoration: see Munro, *Memento mori*, pp. 113–14, no. 164. The year that (imported) Baroque-taste slabs appear at St John's is presumably 1630, which is closer to the start of the Baroque age at St John's. Baroque was fashionable on the continent from approximately 1600 until the 1750s. At St John's Co-Cathedral the application of Baroque sculpture and architecture started around 1635 with the arrival of Francesco Buonamici, who is regarded as a pioneer in introducing and developing Baroque in Malta. See D. De Lucca and C. Thake, *The genesis of Maltese Baroque architecture: Francesco Buonamici (1596–1677)* (Msida, 1994), p. 1. The Baroque taste, in various stages of development, would remain the preferred artistic expression at St John's to the very end of the existence of the Order of St John in Malta in 1798.

7 A major study on the art patronage of the Order and a discussion of High Baroque art in Malta is K. Sciberras, *Roman Baroque sculpture for the Knights of Malta* (Valletta, 2004). For a study of art, artisans and patronage, see J. Debono, *Art and artisans in St John's and other churches in the Maltese islands, ca. 1650–1800: stone carving, marble, bells, clocks and organs* (Valletta, 2005).

8 There are a number of works which have gone into detailed description of St John's. The manuscript of P.A. de Viguier, a Commandator of the Order, was published in Paris, July 1754, ms. Lib. 135 at the National Library at Valletta, Malta. This manuscript gives a transcription of all the inscribed texts of the slabs and monuments present in St John's up to 1754 and it also records in which area of the church they are situated. It has full colour drawings of each of the coats of arms, and is the first contemporary document describing the funerary art at St John's. A full transcription of the inscribed texts and a drawing of each sepulchral slab and monument appeared in P.P. Caruana, *Collezione di monumenti e lapidi sepolcrali dei Militi Gerosolimitani nella chiesa di San Giovanni in Malta* (Valletta, 1838–40), 3 vols. The work was made pre-1833, but the illustrations (etchings) took a long time to complete. When it was published, Hyzler had already finished the re-configuration of the floor. The value of this work lies in its strict diplomatic transcription of the texts (the word 'diplomatic' is used in the auxiliary science of editing of texts to show that the orthography, morphology, syntax and grammar of the original text are respected and conserved and are not edited to, for example, suite uniformity of spelling). See D. Munro, 'The importance of conserving originality', *Baroque Routes Network Newsletter*, 7 (2007), pp. 6–10. H.P. Scicluna, *The church of St John in Valletta* (Rome, 1955), gives a comprehensive history of the church and its usage by the Order of St John. It also has b/w photographs of each slab and monument and presents a transcription of the inscribed texts. Unfortunately, the transcriptions have suffered heavily through editing and hyper-correction. N. de Piro, *The temple of the Knights of Malta* (Sliema, 1999), provides micro-histories of St John's Co-Cathedral. The work has very valuable overview photography of the floor. D. Munro, *Memento mori*, contains a strict diplomatic transcription of the inscribed texts and the first published English translation of all Latin inscriptions, as well as colour photographs of every slab and monument. Many other works describe single aspects of St John's.

9 R. Hiestand, 'Die Anfänge der Johanniter', in F. Fleckenstein and M. Hellmann (eds), *Die geistlichen Ritterorden Europas* (Sigmaringen, 1980), pp. 31–80, at p. 32. The first mention of a hospital in Jerusalem for Latins, i.e. western Christians, is found in a letter of Pope Gregory the Great in the year 603, ordering Abbot Probus to travel to Jerusalem in order to set up a hospital for pilgrims from the West. A similar hospital was founded around the same time in the Sinai.

10 H.J.A. Sire, *The Knights of Malta* (London, 1996), p. 3.

11 Hiestand, 'Die Anfänge', p. 39. Already in 1112 Pope Paschal II had bestowed a number of privileges on the hospital and its *institutor* Gerard. By 1154 Gerard's Hospitaller organisation had acquired the status of a religious order, a *Christianae fidei religio*, by decree of Pope Eugenius III: see Hiestand, 'Die Anfänge', pp. 62–64.

12 Hiestand, 'Die Anfänge', p. 66; Sire, *The Knights*, pp. 6–7.

13 For information regarding the modern day activities of the Order of St John, see <http://www.orderofmalta-malta.org/> and <http://www.orderofmalta.org/>.

14 For a detailed account of this period, see H. Nicholson, *The Knights Hospitaller* (Woodbridge, 2007).

15 S. Bono, 'Naval exploits and privateering', in V. Mallia-Milanes (ed.), *Hospitaller Malta 1530–1798. Studies of early modern Malta and the Order of St John of Jerusalem* (Msida, 1993), pp. 351–98, at pp. 351–54. Also J. Muscat, *Slaves on Maltese galleys* (Pieta, 2004), p. 1.

16 For a detailed account on the Great Siege of Malta, see F. Balbi di Correggio, *The siege of Malta 1565* (1568, trans. E. Bradford, London, 2003), and S.C. Spiteri, *The Great Siege, Knights vs Turks, MDLXV* (Malta, 2005).

17 Spiteri, *The Great Siege*, p. 554.

18 From the Vulgate Bible, inspired by Psalm 139:8 ('Domine Deus fortitudo salutis meae protexisti caput meum in die belli'): 'Domine Domine virtus salutis meae obumbrasti super caput meum in die belli' (O Lord, my Lord, you are the strength of my salvation, you have covered my head in the day of war).

19 R. de Vertot, *The history of the Knights of Malta* (London, 1728; facsimile edn Malta, 1989, 2 vols), 2, Old and New Statutes, title III under 11, pp. 20–21:

We are particularly obliged to celebrate with great reverence and devotion the feast of the Nativity of the Holy Virgin Mother of God, as well for the singular benefits which we and our Order have always received from her, as for the victory which God was pleased to give us on this day over the Barbarians. The Turkish monarch,

the bitter enemy of the Christian name, and particularly of our Order, sent a mighty and well provided navy against us in 1565, to attack our island [...] we were reduced to the utmost distress, and yet, by the assistance of almighty God, the bravery and the resolution of our Brothers, we held out against all the efforts of the enemy [...] we therefore are acknowledging that we owe this victory to almighty God, to the Holy Virgin Mary his mother, and to St John the Baptist, our protector [...].

20 When the Order occupied Rhodes in the early fourteenth century it had grouped its members in sections of the same culture or language, named *tongues*, viz. Germany, France, Provence, Auvergne, Castile (with Leon and Portugal), Aragon, Italy and England. Later the Anglo-Bavarian *tongue* was created after Henry VIII had confiscated all properties of the English *tongue*.

21 B. Scicluna, *Charles Frederick de Brocktorff, watercolours of Malta at the National Library, Valletta* (Valletta, 2007), vol. 1.

22 Scicluna, *The church of St John*, pp. 173–74. The Crypt of Bartolott is an underground cemetery at St John's: it consists of at least four chambers, of which three were opened in 1948 but closed again soon afterwards. At present, it is not even clear where exactly the entrance is located.

23 National Library of Malta, Valletta, Archivum Ordinis Melitae, hereafter (AOM) 305, fols 87r–88v.

24 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 130, no. 202, p. 129, no. 200, and p. 132, no. 207, respectively. A record of the exact date of Frà Laurens de Virieu Pupetiers' death has not yet been found.

25 When the date of death is not given, the date of manufacture or placement may be discovered through notarial deeds. There are cases in which the slab was placed a few years before death and in some cases up to fifty or a hundred years after death.

26 Parts of the translated Latin text are from nos 200 and 207 mentioned above.

27 Sciberras, *Roman Baroque Malta*, p. 1, explains that the Order and the individual *tongues* developed a patronage of the arts based on their admiration of Italian art. Especially in a later stage, in the latter half of the seventeenth century, the Order of St John had a high regard for Roman Baroque painting and sculpture and it wanted the best it could possibly buy. The Order expected nothing less than outstanding works to match their own position in the world.

28 A sepulchral slab is also a door to a metaphysical passageway and one cannot possibly get closer to the netherworld without going there oneself. Since the marble representation was regarded as a bridge between the two worlds, it needed to be both suitable for the deceased and attractive to the living. Apart from borrowing elements from myth, literature, religion and history, a powerful message is achieved through the use of symbols, perspective, the colour of the marble, and the skilful manipulation of polychrome marble intarsia, which all result in a successful application of visual effects. The inscribed text had its own gripping effect on the beholder. Each sepulchral slab at St John's seems to be a statement of a Knight's personal eschatology.

29 Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana, Florence (BLF), Archivio Buonarroti, ser. 106, fol. 323, with thanks to Dr Keith Scibberas for providing this quote.

30 Debono, *Art and artisans*, p. 30.

31 De Lucca and Thake, *The genesis*, p. 1.

32 Grand Master De Paule was not the first person to be commemorated with a sepulchral monument, however. Grand Master Alof de Wignacourt placed a monument to his brother Joachim de Wignacourt in the Chapel of France after the latter's death on 11 August 1615. The Grand Master himself chose to be buried in the Crypt of the Grand Masters in 1622, occupying the last available space there.

33 AOM 261, fol. 87r.

34 The inscribed texts of the sepulchral slabs often refer to the Grand Masters as 'Princes' and their society as the 'Sacred Republic', 'Christian Republic' or 'Jerusalemite Republic'.

35 In the first half of the eighteenth century, the transformation of Valletta into the High Baroque festive style is attributed to the Italian architect Romano Carapacchia. The Order commissioned monumental sculptures for their deceased Grand Masters from workshops in Rome and Florence and had them brought over to Malta on board their galleys. Art was commissioned from even as far as Flanders.

36 D. De Lucca, *Carapacchia, Master of Baroque architecture in early eighteenth century Malta* (Msida, 1999), pp. 215–17; see also Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, nos. 22, 36, 37 and 69.

37 This sepulchral slab of Frà Gaspare Gori Mancini, bishop of Malta and Gozo (d. July 1727), was designed by Romano Carapacchia and shows a pedestal, bearing a cartouche with the inscribed text in front: see Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 56, no. 22. The pedestal supports a contraption which can be identified as a *chappelle ardente*. Carapacchia had completed a giant *chappelle ardente* in October 1726 after his own design. A contraption of this size, also called a catafalque (which, when fully mounted, could reach the height of approx. 12 m, thereby just fitting in under the roof of the nave) was intended for requiem masses for popes and other Catholic dignitaries, such as Grand Masters. When used on such occasions, the *chappelle ardente*, was lit up with 230 candles, using the elements of light and fire to inspire reverence. The design of this slab shows certain elements that Carapacchia had used in his giant *chappelle ardente*, or at least elements of previous studies leading to his final design, such as the corner pilasters of the mid-section. The floral elements and the volutes present on the sepulchral slab are almost identical to those present on the catafalque. The skull and cross-bones are also present, although in a slightly higher position. On the sepulchral slab of Frà Gaspare the blank spaces – which on the catafalque are normally reserved for the escutcheons and cartouches of the deceased – are filled with his coat of arms, placed over the eight-pointed cross of the Order, and a bishop's mitre. See S. Cefai, 'Romano Carapacchia's chapel ardente', *Journal of Baroque Studies*, 1 (2003), pp. 79–95, at p. 80.

- 38 A case in point is the large fragment of the sepulchral slab of Princess Anne of Jerusalem (Agnès de Villehardouin), who died on 4 January 1286.
- 39 Reference is made to the sepulchral slabs present in the Museum for Archaeology in Rhodes.
- 40 Now in the museum of St John's Co-Cathedral. According to its inscribed Latin text, this sepulchral slab was returned to Malta by the efforts of Governor Thomas F. Reade in the nineteenth century.
- 41 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, pp. 187–88, no. 354.
- 42 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 190, no. 359.
- 43 A slab is between 6 and 8 cm thick. The length and width vary, although most sepulchral slabs are a standard 125 × 222 cm. The largest ones, especially those in the upper section of the nave, can measure up to 194 × 281 cm; the smallest ones have an average size of approx. 80 × 125 cm.
- 44 There is only one sepulchral slab at St John's which has the carved-out spaces for the lettering filled up with what seems to be a metal alloy. See Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 267, photograph of no. 147, Frà Nicolao di la Marra. In general, the lettering size of the sepulchral slabs at St John's varies between 15 and 45 mm in height, but an average would be 22 mm in height. Both serif and sans serif lettering appear.
- 45 Often the main slab and the border slabs were made of different pieces of stone. The artistic style of border slabs is often not coherent with the artistic style employed in the main slab. One of the reasons was that the borders were used to fill up empty spaces in between slabs in order to create some balance in the floor's configuration. Later on it seems that border slabs started to get a life of their own. The design of white skulls and cross-bones on black slabs was a very popular one, as there are eighteen of these. As previous designs were no longer deemed satisfactory, sepulchral slabs of a Baroque taste were apparently framed within border slabs belonging to a previous period or style.
- 46 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, pp. 169, 340, no. 304.
- 47 Vitale Covati was commissioned to carry out works of art in marble in Malta at least since 1645. He probably was no longer able to work after 1669. See Debono, *Art and artisans*, p. 32. On pp. 39–40 he maintains that Covati was the artist commissioned to create the sepulchral monuments for Grand Master Raphael Cotoner (r. 1660–63) discussed here and for two previous Grand Masters, Jean Paul de Lascaris Castellar (r. 1636–57) and Martin de Redin (r. 1657–60).
- 48 Sciberras, *Roman Baroque sculpture*, p. 100. In comparison, the monument of Lascaris Castellar is an austere work in the Mannerist taste and its bust, from marble, is as rigorous. Grand Master Redin's monument is slightly less rigid and has a few more Baroque elements, such as two chubby *putti*, adding some softness to an otherwise immovable bust. The bust, of marble, has draperies going straight down from shoulders to pedestal, adding a very cardboard cut-out quality to it. As Sciberras rightly observes, the bronze bust of Raphael Cotoner is of a totally different quality, going outside the general definitions of the Mannerist genre and probably also beyond the artistic qualities of Covati. The notarial archives are silent on the provenance of the bust.
- 49 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1. Frà Guillaume de Vincens Savoillan (d. 12 February 1644), p. 184, no. 345; Frà Christophe de Seitres Caumons (d. 15 April 1644), p. 183, no. 342, in the Chapel of Provence; Frà Giovan Battista Macdonio (d. 1645), p. 167, no. 299, in the exit to the Annexe (belonging to the Chapel of Italy).
- 50 Debono, *Art and artisans*, pp. 41–2. Mentioned are the sepulchral slabs to Frà Pompeo Rospigliosi, Frà Christophe de Seitres Caumons, Frà Antonio Tancredi, Frà Pierre de Veure, Frà Enrico de Rocafull, and Frà Vincenzo Martelli: see Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 293, no. 158; p. 351, no. 342; p. 343, no. 303; p. 359, no. 398; p. 357, no. 383; and p. 294, no. 172, respectively.
- 51 Debono, *Art and artisans*, p. 56. Bambace took over the works of Covati when he fell ill in 1669. He continued to receive commissions in Malta until his death in 1680. Bambace settled in Malta and married a local woman.
- 52 Debono, *Art and artisans*, pp. 41–56. Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 212, no. 002, and p. 343, no. 310, respectively.
- 53 Debono, *Art and artisans*, pp. 44–45. Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 295, no. 170; p. 344, no. 170; p. 348, no. 327; and p. 359, no. 367, respectively.
- 54 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 166, no. 295; and p. 193, no. 364, respectively.
- 55 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, pp. 168–69, no. 302.
- 56 From comparison with that watercolour of Brocktorff and the records of Caruana, it can be deduced that on top of no. 384 the coat of arms of Lomellini is visible. In front, from top left to right, the slabs of Ballestros (no. 399 in Munro, *Memento mori*), Chinzio (no. 402), Basurto (no. 387); bottom left to right, Caamano (no. 379), the coat of arms of Giovanni (no. 371), and Cabre Roquevaire (no. 349) can be identified.
- 57 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 167, no. 298. When his slab was in its original place in the chapel of France, the text, and possibly the iconography, was different from that on his slab which can now be found in the passageway to the Annexe. See also P.A. de Viguier, fol. 32r.
- 58 Munro, *Memento mori*, p. 160, no. 280. De Viguier had recorded the same thirteen slabs in the German Chapel in 1754.
- 59 AOM 1948 and 1949. AOM 1948, fol. 1r, reveals that the first entry in this separate death register, the *Index Defunctorum*, related to deaths appearing both within the convent and the galleys, was made on 18 August 1694 (the death of Franciso March, a chaplain on board of the galley Ss<sup>ma</sup> Annunciata). Previously, deaths were not recorded in a common register but might be found scattered in the records of the *Registris Spoliarum* at the Treasury. In this *Registris Spoliarum* were recorded all the possessions of a Knight of the Order, both those reverting to the Order and the *quinta*, that part which could be freely bestowed. A Knight entering the Order lived under the vow of personal poverty, which meant that most things he acquired during his life in the Order in the form of 'spoils', *i.e.* booty, gifts etc., he would keep until his death, after which they reverted to the Order.

60 AOM 1948, fols 11r, 55r, 100r, 106r and 170r, respectively; fol. 55r states regarding Bernhard Ernst Reede that 'in navi eiusdem tumulatum fuit et postea in cappellam Trium Magorum translatum' (he was buried in the nave of the same [church] and afterwards [his remains] were transferred to the chapel of the Three Magi).

61 AOM 1948, fols. 106r, 183r and 116r, respectively.

62 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 64, no. 43. Also recorded by De Viguier.

63 AOM 1948, fol. 16r.

64 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 136, no. 219 (lines 13–15). This slab is in the Chapel of Castile.

65 Ms. Lib.135, fols. 170–76.

66 Those thus commemorated are first of all Tommaso Accariggi (d. 1668 in battle aged 26), whose polychrome intarsia slab is in the nave (row 1). Giovanni Caccialupi (d. 1623) received a simple white slab at the end of row 5 in the nave. Giovanni Otto Bosio (d. 1622) also received a simple white slab at the end of row 10 in the main nave, at the opposite end from where the slab of Pietro Varavalle lies (d. 1623). As the brother of two Grand Masters, Miguel Juan Cotoner (d. 1630 in battle aged twenty) received a polychrome intarsia slab, now in the nave (row 13) in front of the main altar. Vincenzo dal Pozzo (d. 1688 aged thirty-six at sea during the siege of Negroponte) received a simple white slab, but with the coat of arms made of polychrome intarsia, which is placed in the passageway to the Annexe. Francesco Maffei (d. 1630 in battle aged twenty-one) received a polychrome intarsia slab in the Oratory. See Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 48, no. 2; p. 68, no. 52; p. 87, no. 99; p. 82, no. 88; p. 104, no. 141; p. 162, no. 286; and p. 195, no. 370.

67 D. Cutajar, 'Artistic crisis and new ideals', in V. Malia-Milanes (ed.), *The British colonial experience, 1800–1964: the impact on Maltese society* (Msida, 1988), pp. 231–62.

68 The Angel of Fame, or *Fama*, heralds the deceased's reputation to the four winds by means of her trumpet. Antiquity had fused with Christianity in the earlier artistic styles, especially the Baroque, as people were mindful of the message of Francesco Petrarca (1304–74) that all art made before Christianity was nevertheless already Christian but only started to be called Christian after the birth of Christ. In Malta's Baroque era it was quite acceptable that a sensuous young female with a bare breast and sensual naked shoulders could be rendered as *Fama* on a sepulchral monument dedicated to a Grand Master, whose life was lived in celibacy. In the puritan period following the expulsion of the Order, some influential artists fiercely opposed such art.

69 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, p. 147, no. 247.

70 Munro, *Memento mori*, vol. 1, pp. 121–22, no. 182.

71 J. Debono, 'A note on the St John Co-Cathedral marble tombstones: the artisans, foreign and Maltese', *Melita Historica*, 12:4 (1999), pp 387–401, at p. 396. 'In 1872 Baron Calcedonio Azzopardi petitioned the civil and ecclesiastical authorities for permission to place a tombstone in St John's in memory of his late grandfather, Sir Giuseppe Nicola Zamitt'. Zamitt's services as Secretary to the Government at the beginning of the nineteenth century were recognised on the foundation of the Order of St Michael and St George, of which he was made a Knight Commander on 16 December 1818 by George III. He died at the age of fifty-two on 7 September 1823 and was buried in the Chapel of Auvergne (dedicated to St Sebastian) in St John's Co-Cathedral. The Most Distinguished Order of St Michael & St George was instituted to reward important service in the British Dominions and Protectorates and loyal service in relation to foreign affairs. The *marmisti* at St John's Co-Cathedral restored this slab in Spring 2008.

72 No. 351 is not a sepulchral slab but a papal brief chiselled in a slab of white marble, placed over the staircase leading to the Crypt of the Grand Masters. It is not mentioned in any of the other records and presumably never moved location.

73 Archive of Public Works Department, Floriana, Malta, ser. 15, fol. 14b, dated 7 January 1914.

74 Cutajar, 'Artistic crisis', p. 283, n. 30.

75 Some family members still come and pay their respects to their ancient family members, such as the family of Frà Paule de Bertis Portughes mentioned above. The Order of St John is still very active in Malta. The Sovereign Military Order of Malta, its headquarters based in the Vatican, has more than one hundred embassies around the world, and its embassy in Valletta is housed in one of the fortifications, the St John's cavalier. Besides, the Order leases Fort St Angelo at Vittoriosa from the Maltese Government. The local association of the Order, MASMOM, which has its offices in Valletta, celebrates its investitures for new members in the Oratory of St John's Co-Cathedral, in front of Caravaggio's famous painting *The Beheading of St John*. The members of the Order also attend a large number of special occasions and masses in their uniforms and robes. Every year on 8 September, the Great Siege is commemorated and prayers are said over the slab of one the biggest heroes of the Siege, Frà Melchior de Robles, located in the Chapel of Auvergne: see Munro, *Memento mori*, p. 120, no. 179.



**Col. pl. 1.** Sepulchral slab of Frà Giovanni Francesco de Ricasoli (d. 1664),  
St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta.

*Photo: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*



**Col. pl. 2.** View of the nave of St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta, with its present configuration of 154 sepulchral slabs.

*Photo: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*





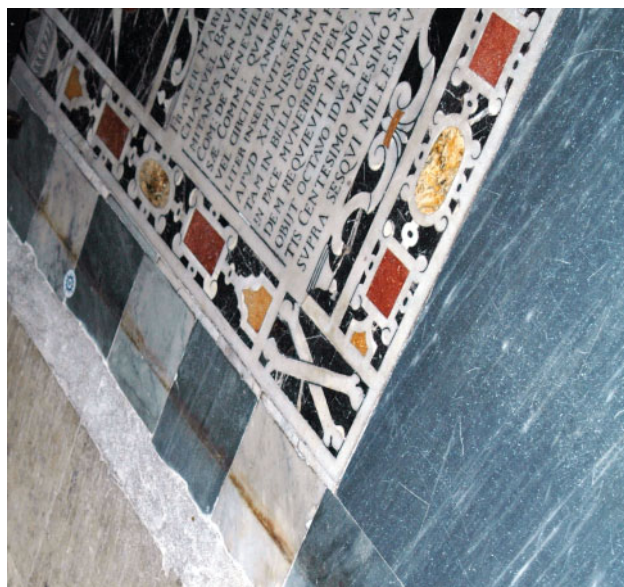
**Col. pl. 3.** The nave of St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta, as depicted in a watercolour of c.1820 by Charles Frederick de Brocktorff (National Library, Valletta, Malta).

*Photo: author, reproduced with kind permission of the National Library, Valletta, Malta*



**Col.pl. 4.** The Oratory around 1820, as depicted in an early-nineteenth-century watercolour by Charles Frederick de Brocktorff (National Library, Valletta, Malta): at this time the lozenge-shaped floor of black and white tiles was still largely intact, but the configuration of the Oratory floor was to be modified a few years later by Giuseppe Hyzler.

*Photo: author, reproduced with kind permission of the National Library, Valletta, Malta*



*left*  
**Col.pl. 5.** Detail of the outer border of the Oratory floor of St John's Co-Cathedral, still consisting of natural flagstone; a newer border of black and white tiles marks the part where the sepulchral slabs start.

*Photo: author, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*



**Col.pl. 6a.** Detail of floor slab no. 137 to Frà Lucas Bueno (d. 1668) in the nave, St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta, here in a ruinous state.

**Col.pl. 6b.** Detail of the replacement of floor slab no. 137 to Frà Lucas Bueno (d. 1668), made in the 1980s–90s.

*Photos: author, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*



*right*  
**Col. pl. 7.**  
 Sepulchral slab of Frà Garsia Xarava Castro (d. 1794), St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta: the slab shows in the lower register a black and white lozenge-shaped floor, possibly a reference to the floors at St John's Co-Cathedral.

*Photo: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*

*far right*

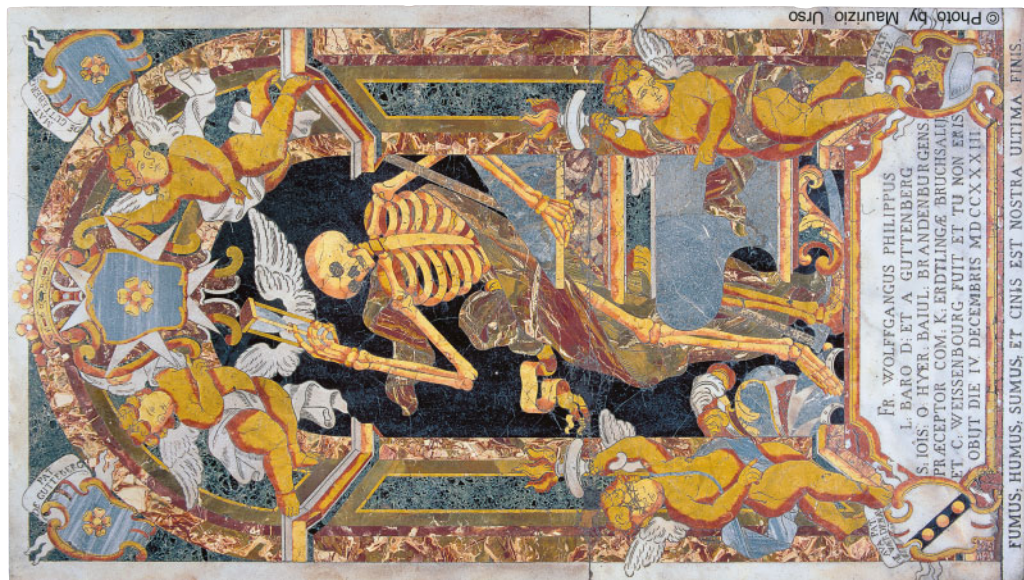
**Col. pl. 8.**  
 Sepulchral slab of Frà Laurens Virieu Pupetiers (d. 1608), St John's Co-Cathedral, Valletta, Malta.

*Photo: Maurizio Urso, reproduced with kind permission of St John's Co-Cathedral Foundation*

*right*  
**Col. pl. 9.**  
 Death chops down a  
 branch of the family tree  
 on the slab of Frà Didaco  
 Maria Gargallo (d. 1744),  
 St John's Co-Cathedral,  
 Valletta, Malta.  
*Photo: Maurizio Urso,  
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 Foundation*

*far right*  
**Col. pl. 10.**  
 Death with winged  
 hourglass and scythe  
 on the slab of  
 Wolfgang Guttenberg  
 (d. 1733), St John's  
 Co-Cathedral, Valletta,  
 Malta.

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*Photo by Maurizio Urso*