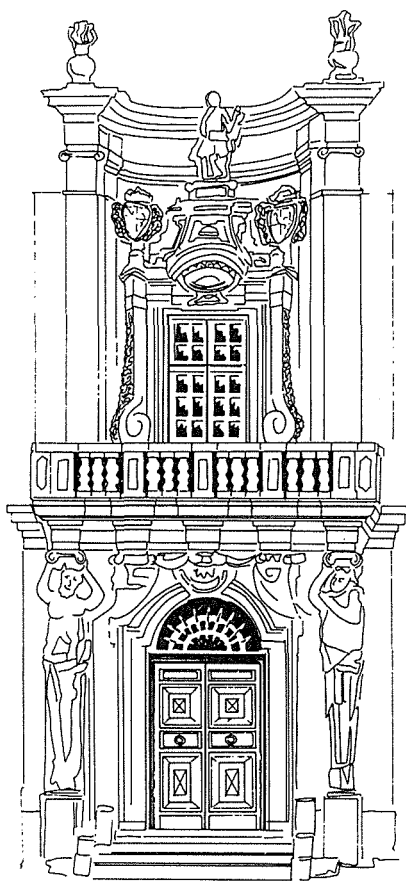


# THE CATHEDRAL MUSEUM MDINA - MALTA

by

Canon John Azzopardi  
Curator of the Museum





## THE CATHEDRAL CITY

Unlike Valletta, Malta's new capital city, whose origin starts in 1565 (just after the great Siege), Mdina's origin is lost in mystery - we only know that it was inhabited from the earliest times and certainly from the Phoenician period. Its very name - Mdina - is not distinctive but only designative - Mdina, in Arabic, simply means a town.

Not that Mdina owes its origin to the Arabs. The city existed many centuries before and was at least three times larger in size.

Built on a plateau almost in the centre of the island, at a level of 185 metres above sea level and protected by steep cliffs on its north, east and north east sides, Mdina was enhanced by the Romans who built upon it a fortified city, which they called by the same name of the island, *Melita*. Classical writers as Ptolemy, Cicero, Livy and Diodorus Siculus extol its rich architecture and sumptuous palaces whereas as late as 1643 the Maltese historian Abela recalls its many marble columns and statues, remnants of sumptuous palaces and temples.

With the advent of Christianity this Roman city must have had one of the earliest churches of Christendom.

The Arabs or Byzantines, presumably for reasons of defence, restricted its area to about one third of the original size.

In 1091 *Anno Domini* Roger of Normandy, according to the narrative of his own scribe Malaterra, advanced on the town of Mdina, to whom the Qaid or Arab governor submitted and surrendered mules, horses arms and money. He was allowed to rule under certain conditions until the Arabs were really conquered by Roger II in 1127 and finally expelled in 1224.

In the so called Spanish period (Aragonese and Castilian), Mdina's town council - the *Università* administered by the *Giurati* under the *Capitano della verga* - assumed increased importance and was given powers to administer justice, represent the people's claims with the king, levy taxes, control weights, etc.

This town council was apprehensive of the new rule of the Order of St John of Jerusalem and before giving to each newly elected Grand Master the keys of the city, used to make him swear he would not curb but only protect the privileges, customs and usages of the council and the people.

Seeing that the city was depopulated by frequent corsairs' raids and that its bastions were in desperate need of repair, Mdina's town council pressed for special measures to promote extensive repairs and

encourage parishioners not to abandon the area. As a result its inhabitants were even granted exemption from military service. These measures, however, had only limited effect.

In 1693 a great earthquake shook Sicily and Malta with considerable damage to Mdina, especially the Cathedral area. The Cathedral was immediately rebuilt and later Grand Master Vilhena inaugurated an extensive rebuilding programme including fortifications, a new entrance and a magisterial Palace on the seat of the old Town Council - thus symbolically curbing its power.

Just as in 1530 the aristocracy handed the keys of the city to L'Isle Adam with considerable reluctance, so also - and to a greater extent - in 1798 the city fathers, gathered near the bishop's palace, handed the keys of the city to general Vaubois following a message for immediate reply.

But just as in 1565 after the fall of St Elmo one Turkish prisoner was hanged upon the walls of Mdina every morning, and during Lascaris' reign the women in Mdina attacked the Grand Master's people for replacing brass cannons by iron pieces, so also during the short-lived rule of the French Forces, the city played its part again. No sooner had the French started auctioning articles belonging to the Carmelite Priory of Mdina that Church bells were rung, messages despatched and the city occupied by the insurgents. The French garrison was forced to retreat.

In 1818 Sir Thomas Maitland abolished the *Università* and Mdina lost the little that had remained of its commercial and social importance. But the city with its quiet narrow roads and majestic Siculo Norman, Baroque and Renaissance palaces retained its aristocratic atmosphere.

Fortunately Mdina's palaces, churches, convents, Seminary and other buildings emerged unscathed from World War II and, today, Mdina still retains its splendour as a small, compact, fortified city, the seat of the Cathedral, the bishopric and the nobility.

There are three Museums at Mdina - the Cathedral Museum at the Old Seminary, the Natural History Museum at Vilhena Palace and the Gollcher Trust at the "Norman" House. The various Palaces of the old aristocracy and the Churches (Convents, Monasteries) of the old city, however, are certainly adorned with many museum quality pieces.

One fine treasure house is the Cathedral Museum.



## THE CATHEDRAL MUSEUM: A TREASURE HOUSE

Thousands of visitors walk round the spacious halls, the glazed-in corridors and the central courtyard of the Cathedral Museum at Mdina, Malta and admire the varied exhibits; many of these visitors, however, believe that the treasures of the museum are limited to its collections and fail to realize that equally important is the palace itself, with its restrained baroque architecture and the centuries old archives with the wealth of material contained therein.

This compendium does not offer a guide, however brief, to the museum nor a catalogue of its exhibits. It simply selects a limited number of important items and offers some comments on their artistic or historical importance along with some information on their provenance and their connection with the political, social and cultural history of the Maltese islands.

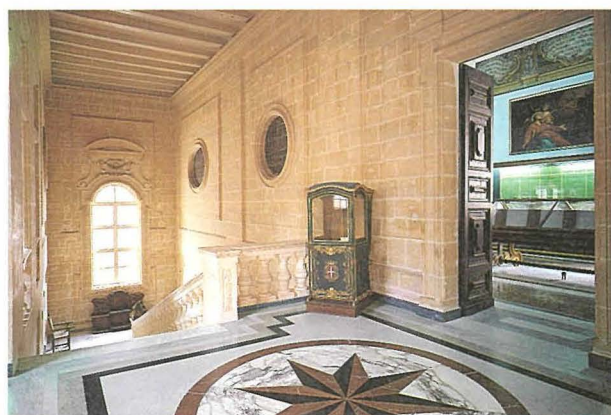


## A BAROQUE PALACE: THE OLD SEMINARY

On 11 January 1693 a strong earthquake destroyed a part of Mdina, that included the Cathedral, several other localities in Malta as well as parts of Sicily, especially Messina. The only part of the Cathedral that was spared was the sacristy and the apse; the latter had just been newly constructed by the Maltese architect Lorenzo Gafà (1682) and newly adorned with seven paintings by Mattia Preti (donated by Canon Testaferatta on 22 March 1688).

The site on which the museum building now stands must also have sustained considerable damage; the area contained houses belonging to the Gurgion, de Fiott and Bonnici families.

The rebuilding of the Cathedral, in the newly introduced baroque style and according to plans already prepared by Gafà before the earthquake, was immediately undertaken and completed by 1702. The Bishop's Palace was next to be reconstructed.



Whereas Grand Master Antonio de Vilhena (1722-1736), taking advantage of the devastation caused by the earthquake embellished the entrance by a new gate and a Magisterial Palace, a French bishop of refined taste and a keen promoter of the arts, Mgr Paul Alpheran de Bussan, embellished the other end of the old city by constructing a baroque palace, destined to house a new Seminary, and thereby added a new square on the west side of the newly formed Cathedral Square.

The first stone was laid in 1733 and the whole building was completed in 1744. Detailed administrative accounts preserved in the Cathedral Archives provide abundant information on the purchase of private houses subsequently demolished to provide space for the new edifice, as well as minute details of payments to workmen, including the names of stone masons, carpenters, sculptors, marble workers, painters etc. The only unfortunate omission is the name of the architect: the popular attribution to Giovanni Barbara is questionable.

The architect's plan included a groundfloor and a mainfloor as well as two large cellars. A central charming courtyard gives light and air to the whole building and is surrounded by arched corridors leading to three spacious halls on the main floor and a refectory as well as a number of spacious rooms at ground level.

The central part of the facade is flanked by two huge Atlantes supporting a corbelled balcony with a window in a concave recess surmounted by a stone statue of St Paul. The other windows on the facade and on the sides are gracefully designed and ear-shaped.

To finance the enterprise Bishop Alpheran ordered a levy on all ecclesiastical benefices but also solicited contributions. The greatest contribution came from the bishop's own purse and amounted to 11,117 scudi (the scudo amounted to 8 cents and 3 mills); Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena followed the good example: the coat-of-arms of both benefactors are affixed in marble on the majestic facade of the edifice, flanking the stone statue of St Paul beneath the inscription SEMINARIUM MAGNI SANCTI PAULI.

The building functioned as a seminary up to the beginning of the present century. During World War I the old Seminary was used by the British army forces who added a second floor whereas during World War II it accommodated St Edward's College. Other uses by the diocese included temporary quarters for the Sisters of St Joseph of the Apparition and the Malta Catholic Action for spiritual retreats.

Archbishop Michael Gonzi willingly offered the premises to the Cathedral Chapter for use as a museum: various precious objects were till then inadequately housed in a few rooms in the Cathedral Sacristies. A commission was set up; Mgr Prof Edoardo Coleiro was the moving force behind the project and successfully brought it to completion. He coordinated a team of experts including Prof. Raffaello Causa of Capodimonte, Naples and Dr John A. Cauchi, then Curator of Fine Arts at the National Museum of Malta, as well as Chev. Vincenzo Bonello, Mr (now Chev.) Joseph Sammut and the late Francis Mallia.

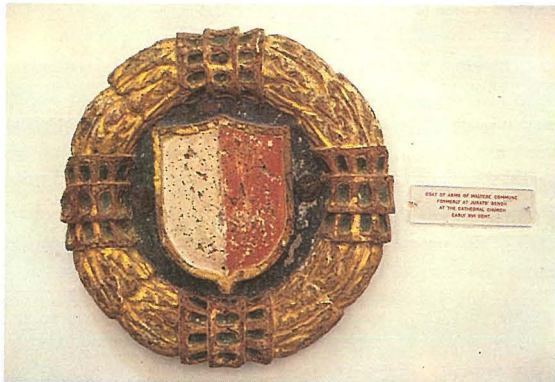
The Cathedral Chapter generously contributed huge sums of money to refurbish and restore the palace and the exhibits. It has also been maintaining and developing the museum since its formal opening on 4 January 1969, supported at times by private donors as well as by two cultural associations: the Friends of the Cathedral Museum (founded 1971) and the Cathedral Museum Resources Council (founded 1989)

Reference: Archives of the Cathedral of Malta, *Miscellanea 172: Miscellanea di affari che concernono il Vescovo, la Cattedrale ed il Seminario*, Tomo 2 (1419 - 1774)



## THREE COAT-OF-ARMS

Three coat-of-arms exhibited in the ground floor corridor of the Cathedral Museum are representative of three cultures during three distinct periods of Malta's history. These are the coat-of-arms of the Malta commune; the coat-of-arms of Emperor Charles V of Spain (1530) and the arms of the French Republic (1798).



*Arms of Malta (XV Cent.)*

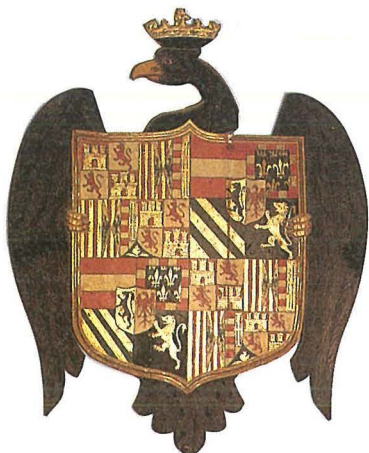
The Maltese islands formed part of the kingdom of the two Sicilies from Norman times and followed the fate of Sicily up to 1530. They had their own flag and their own arms, with the traditional white and red colours.

The arms on exhibition at the Museum are painted on wood on a beautifully hand-carved motif with wreaths in the form of a circle. They date from the XV century.

Originally these arms were on the Jurats' bench in the Cathedral. The Jurats, headed by the *Capitano della Verga* or *Il-Hakem* enjoyed a very privileged position in the cathedral from times immemorial.

When Malta was given to the Order in 1530 the Maltese feared that they would lose their rights and privileges but Grand Master l'Isle Adam on behalf of the Order swore he would never curb but only protect these privileges. The *Università* (or the so called local government) retained its lawcourts (the relative archives are now located at the *Banca Giuratale* at Mdina, very near to the Cathedral Museum). The Jurats retained their distinct seat during the liturgical ceremonies at the Cathedral on a bench marked with these arms, here illustrated.

These arms, which incidentally are very similar to the present coat-of-arms of the Republic of Malta, recall two contemporary exemplars in the Cathedral, one sculptured on wood on the old sacristy door and another sculptured in marble on the base of the baptismal font near the main entrance.



*Arms of Charles V (1530)*

The sovereign of Malta in 1530 was Charles V, Head of the Holy Roman Empire, and ruler of the dynasties of Burgandy, Spain, Sicily and the greater part of Italy as well as the Spanish conquests in North Africa. Malta had come to him from King Ferdinand of Aragon, his maternal grandfather.

It was from this empire that the Order of St John of Jerusalem, after losing Rhodes and wandering for seven years, acquired what proved to be their most lasting home, together with the onerous gift of Tripoli.

Theoretically Malta was given to the Order on fief and Emperor Charles V remained sovereign; among the symbols of this sovereignty were the right to intervene in the choice of a new bishop of Malta and the presence of his coat-of-arms in a prominent place on Malta's Cathedral.

The coat-of-arms now on exhibition at the Museum was recovered from the apse of the old Cathedral. After the earthquake of 1693 it was preserved in the Cathedral sacristies (which survived the earthquake).

In the rebuilt Cathedral it was replaced by a more elaborate stone structure, beautifully painted and gilt, showing the arms no longer of Charles V but of the then reigning monarch Ferdinand II.

The arms on exhibition, slightly restored in 1969, are very well preserved. Their varied details reflect the vastness of the emperor's kingdom.



*Arms of the French Republic (1798)*



One of the few surviving relics of French rule in Malta is the elliptical panel onto which are painted in oil the arms of the French Republic.

At the beginning of their shortlived stay in Malta, French officials defaced the armorial bearings on the houses of the aristocracy. William Thakeray points out that “when the French reached Malta, they effaced armorial bearings with their usual hot-headed eagerness.”

The coat-of-arms of the French Republic substituted that of the Order of St John.

The arms on exhibition at the Cathedral Museum were preserved in the Cathedral sacristies and have never been restored. Their presence in the Cathedral points out to their former location, either on the Cathedral Church itself, or on the Archbishop’s Palace, or at least on the city walls of Mdina.

This relic featured prominently in two exhibitions organized in 1989: one organized by the French embassy in Malta, commemorating the French revolution anniversary and the other, organized by the Department of Culture, commemorating the silver jubilee of Malta’s Independence.

References: W. M. Thakeray, *A Journal from Cornhill to Cairo* quoted by Sir Harry Luke in *Malta. An Account and an Appreciation*, 1954, p.96.

## CHOIR STALL WITH SCENE OF THE NATIVITY

*Inlaid panel, 113.3 cm × 63 cm*

The friendly relations between Church and State in late Medieval Malta are reflected in the patronage of many works of art that adorned the old Cathedral and other churches in Malta.

Among the works of art that survived the earthquake are a series of choir panels that were originally commissioned for the Priory of Santa Maria tal-Ghar at Rabat in 1481 and ceded to the Cathedral Church to settle a dispute that had arisen with the *Università* (that is local government). The inlaid panels now on exhibition at the Museum are among the few relics of 15th cent. art that adorned Malta’s Siculo-Norman Cathedral. They point to a high artistic standard.

On 2 January 1482 a contract was signed in Syracuse, in the acts of notary Giovanni Candacha (?), between Fr Pietro Zurchi of the Rabat Dominican Priory and the mastermasons Parisio and Pietro Antonion Calachura of Catania, to complete within two years at the price of 40 *once* a choir with twenty stalls, similar to that of the Church of S. Domenico in Syracuse. The work was apparently delayed by several years. In January 1487 the *Università* decided to commission a similar choir for the Mdina Cathedral but the Bishop felt it fell within his competence to order the choir. It was on that occasion that the Dominicans, who had previously received help and support from the *Università*, offered to present to the Cathedral their new choir and accept instead the old choir of the Cathedral.

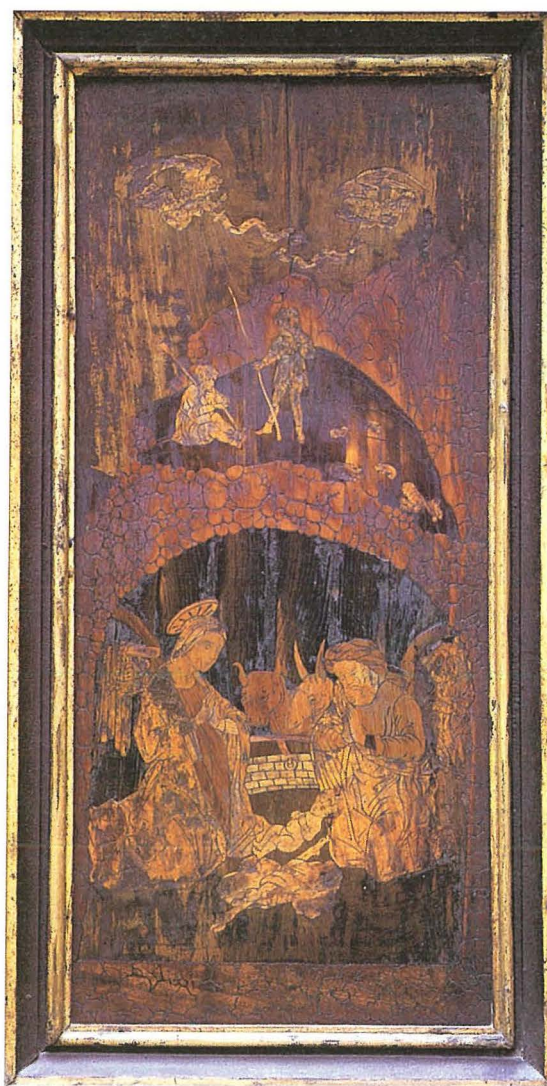
Modifications and additions in the choir are documented to have been made in 1681 and in 1712. In July 1876 the choir was replaced by the present one.

An inscription on one of the choir’s inlaid panels records the date of the commission (1481) and the year of restoration and gilding (1712). The panel representing Adam and Eve is preserved in the original state and with the original border prior to the gilding of 1712.

In 1848 the panels were examined by Mrs Jameson, who extolled their art and reproduced two of the panels in her book *Sacred and Legendary Art*.

The panel here reproduced represents a pleasant scene of the Nativity, with shepherds, animals and other figures verging on the naive.

References: P. Pullicino, *Il Novo Coro della Chiesa Cattedrale di Malta*, Malta 1877; Mrs Jameson, *Sacred and Legendary Art*, London 1848; M. Fsadni, O.P., *Il-Miġja u l-Hidma ta’ l-ewwel Dumnikani f’Malta* (1450 - 1512), Malta 1965.





A LITERARY SHRINE: SALA DUN KARM

Museums generally exhibit centuries old items of artistic value, but exceptions are welcome if justified. The Cathedral Museum is an ecclesiastical institution of the highest cultural standard. It is located in the old Seminary, where hundreds of ecclesiastics received their education. These in turn offered a formidable contribution to our cultural heritage, both artistic and literary.

Our national poet, Dun Karm, alias Mons. Carmelo Psaila (1871 - 1961) through whose efforts the Maltese language attained its highest literary standards, is deservedly remembered in Malta's Cathedral museum, run by a Chapter of which Dun Karm was an honorary member. In that same building the poet had been educated and he in turn educated successive generations of students. A small room in the building has been beautifully transformed into a literary shrine not only with the poet's vestments and personal belongings, (his diplomas, his piano, his chalice etc.) but especially with his manuscripts and publications as well as a small library on the poet.

Decorating the room is a marble slab with the text of Malta's national anthem, which he wrote, as set for music by Mro Robert Samut.

The benefactress of this room was Miss Karmen Mikalleg Buhaġar. Various admirers of Dun Karm, including members of his family, have donated exhibits.



Malta's National Anthem

CERAMIC DISH WITH BIBLICAL SCENE OF JOSHUA STOPPING THE SUN

Urbino, c.1550, diameter 46 cm.

The Marchese legacy in favour of the Cathedral of Malta consisted of paintings (except the family portraits), drawings and prints, which were at the Counts' house in Valletta. But a fine ceramic dish of Urbino on exhibition in the Museum also formed part of Marchese's collections.

Coming from the workshop of Orazio Fontana (flourished c.1550) and executing a painting or drawing by Raphael (the Urbino tradition preferred to work on designs of old masters) the plate represents in gorgeous colours the Biblical scene of Joshua praying with hands uplifted and stopping the sun. Orazio Fontana (died 1571) was the grandson of Nicola Pelippario, of Castel Durante. The Fontana family was celebrated for its maiolica pottery and artistry.

The donor's (unidentified) arma are depicted on the border.

A stanza with four endecasyllabic lines in Italian is reproduced in turquoise on the plate's verso: it gives a poetic rendering of the biblical scene as narrated in the seventeenth chapter of the book of Exodus. The text reads as follows:

ESOD. XVII

Muoue Amalech esercito gagliardo,  
Contr'a' 'l popol di Dio, dett' Israele:  
Giosue' spiega con lo stendardo  
Con huommin' attj del popol fedele.

In translation: (King) Amalech leads an outstanding army against God's people, known as Israel: Joshua by his banner deploys the valiant troops of his people full of faith.



Count Saverio Marchese has this comment to make on the plate, one of two he possessed: "although the name of Orazio Fontana is not inscribed on either of the two plates which I possess - one is the Battle in which Joshua stops the sun, with verses in turquoise on the back, and the other is a battle of inferior quality; both however on designs by Raphael - the first of the two must undoubtedly be the work of the said Master because it is executed so excellently."

The plate was restored in 1969 by Prof. Raffaello Causa in Naples.

References: Count Saverio Marchese's manuscript miscellany, f.40 recto; M. Macdonal-Taylor (ed.), *A Dictionary of Marks; Ceramics*, 1963.



## NUMISMATIC COLLECTION

Malta's geographical position in the centre of the Mediterranean and at the crossroad of various civilisations has brought the island and its people in contact with the great empires and nations; moreover as Malta was a colony up to its independence in 1962, the coins of the rulers were legal tender on the Maltese islands. There were some exceptions: under the Romans, the Maltese as well as the Gozitans were the socii or allies of the Romans and their limited measure of self-government included the privilege of minting their own coinage which circulated besides the official coinage of the Roman Republic. When the Knights of St John settled in Malta in 1530, in spite of strong opposition from Messina, the Order obtained the privilege of striking coins in Malta. In May 1972 the Central Bank of Malta started minting Malta's coins, which today are the only legal tender on the two islands.

The coin collection at the Cathedral Museum includes coins (in their own times legal tender in Malta) of the Carthagians, Romans, Byzantines, Arabs, Normans, the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, the Order of St John of Jerusalem and the British Empire, as well as the issues of the Central Bank of Malta. They are displayed in chronological sequence leading the visitor to a path through Malta's history and displayed on glass shelving beneath a mirror to make possible a view of both obverse and reverse. The collections includes several rare specimens and also medals. There are, besides, a collection of old English coinage and a section of Papal coinage.

The Cathedral Museum collection is a valuable historical record of Maltese history. It mirrors the political and economic history of Malta through the ages. It reflects not only the artistry and skill of the engravers but also various aspects of Malta's social and religious history. Even a chemical analysis of the metal forming the coin reflects the economic strength of the issuing country at the particular time of issue.

## COMPLETE COLLECTION OF MALTESE AND GOZITAN COINS OF THE ROMAN PERIOD

The complete collection of coins of local mint during the Roman rule (218 B.C. to the sixth cent A.D.) reflects the triple culture prevailing in Malta during these centuries.

There are clear indications that the Punic influence was very slow to fade away: in fact the Roman coins of the period still bear the three Punic letters indicating the pre-Punic name of Malta (*aleph, nun, nun*).

The increasing Hellenization of Malta round 150 A.D. is reflected in the Greek legend then inscribed on the coins, MELITAION as well as GAULITON on two coin types minted in Gozo. The Greco-Roman culture is also evidenced by the fact that some coins of the period bear a Greek legend on one side and a Latin one on the other.

The subsequent complete Romanization of our islands is reflected in the fact that the legend on the later coins is only in Latin - reproducing the island's name MELITAS.



Sextans c. 211 B.C.



Semis c. 175 B.C.



Semis c. 175 B.C.



Semis c. 160 B.C.



Semis c. 125 B.C.



Quadrans c. 89 B.C.



Triens c. 89 B.C.



Semis c. 35 B.C.



Semis c. 15 B.C.



Quincunx c. 40 B.C.





## A PAPAL MEDAL OF 1294

The oldest items on display, in a section of Papal coins and medals, is a medal of Pope Celestine V, issued in 1294. The obverse bears an image of the Pontiff whereas the reverse bears the Pontiff's coat-of-arms. The medal is very well preserved. It weighs 27.93 grams.

The Mdina collection of Papal coins, apart from a few recent donations of twentieth century Pontiffs, was purchased by the Cathedral for a small sum of money in March 1902.

Pope Celestine V, whose real name was Pietro di Murrone, was a Benedictine monk who in about 1254 founded the Order of the Celestines, a reform of that of the Benedictines. He was elected Pope in 1294 after an interregnum of six years. A few months after, he resigned his office and was succeeded by Boniface VIII, who confined him in the castle of Fumone where he died. Nineteen years after, in 1313, he was canonized by Pope Clement V.

The presence of such a medal, issued seven centuries ago during a pontificate lasting only a few months, makes the exhibit one of the most valuable items of the entire collection.

References: Cathedral Archives, Chapter meetings of March 1902; *Currency in Malta*, Central Bank of Malta, XX anniversary commemorative exhibition, 1988; E. Coleiro, "Maltese Coins of the Roman Period" in *Numismatic Chronicle*, Vol. XI (1971).



## BAROQUE CHAPEL, XVIII Cent.

The tiny octagonal chapel on the first floor of the old Seminary, with its baroque architecture, marbles, paintings, decorative sculptures, furniture and precious exhibits is a museum in miniature.

No sooner was the material building completed in 1744 than its main benefactor started to embellish the chapel. Bishop Paul Alpheran de Bussan, gifted with refined artistic taste, soon signed a contract with Mastro Claudio Durante first for the construction of a marble altar with its cornices and predella (which cost 195 scudi) and later for an elegant marble pavement with no less than seven hundred and four *quadrelli* as well as for a small *lavabo* and holy water font.

He next provided a painted soffit and beautiful decorative sculptures for both front and side walls to enframe the canvases he was about to commission. The elaborately carved stone frames, and the palm fronds, festoons and scallop-shells resemble those of the Manresa chapel in Floriana and betray close similarity both in design and in execution. Sculptor Felice Zahra, son of Pietro Paolo (1685-1747) and brother of the painter Francesco is mentioned in the detailed administrative records.

Four of the five paintings were entrusted to the Bishop's connational Antoine Favray who had settled in Malta a few years previously and who had by then completed or almost completed the canvases of the Manresa chapel. One lateral altarpiece at Floriana bears a close similarity to the elliptical canvas showing St Paul in the Mdina chapel. The other picture, the oval beneath the altarpiece was entrusted to a most significant artist of eighteenth century Malta, Francesco Zahra (1710-1773).

Favray's altarpiece depicting *The Annunciation* is signed and dated A. Favray 1748. It admirably fits in the extremely decorative sculptured frame. The artist took care to ensure that the painting gets its light from the side of the nearby window. The commission included four other pictures of the Saints Paul, Peter, Carlo Borromeo and Francois de Sales. The five canvases cost 250 scudi.

Zahra's oval with St Vincent de Paule formed part of a later commission with two other canvases, a portrait of benefactor Grand Master Vilhena (no longer conserved in the building) and an elliptical *St Paul appearing over the walled city* with a lovely vignette of Mdina. The three paintings cost the bishop 44 scudi. The total expense for the embellishment of the Chapel amounted to 4220 scudi, all defrayed from the personal purse of the Bishop.

The furniture of the chapel is equally attractive. The entrance door has a pleasing design, a beautifully carved sculpture of St Paul and two brass knockers with the arms of the bishop. An inlaid wall cabinet with four drawers, an open space and top cupboard is placed on the right hand side of the entrance. The name of the maker is not recorded. Two inlaid pre-dieu are now placed in the chapel, though they do not form part of the original set up: one, a gift by the late Mgr Ignazio Panzavecchia, is made of ebony and inlaid with ivory and the other, a recent donation by Mgr Paul Pace, is a fitting companion to the original cabinet near the entrance (Maltese, mid XVIII Cent.). The latter was donated as a memento of Pope John Paul II's Pastoral Visit: in fact it was used by His Holiness at St John's Co-Cathedral on 25 May 1990.

Two finely sculptured marble slabs with inscriptions decorate the chapel. That on the right holds interred within it in an urn the heart of the benefactor, Mgr Paul Alpheran, as a gesture of his love for the students of the Seminary.

Finally three precious exhibits are contained in the inlaid cabinet: a romanesque chalice of metal, a Paduan-Venetian altar-stone with enamels and an old asperges with an ivory handle of Oriental make.

References: Archives of the Cathedral of Malta, *Miscellanea*, 172; Antoine Favray (1706-1798): an exhibition of paintings and drawings, Malta 1982; J. Galea Naudi - D. Micallef, *Ancient Maltese Furniture*, Malta 1989, fig. 142.





Baroque Chapel



## PICTURE GALLERY

The picture-gallery of the Cathedral Museum consists of about 150 paintings which may be classified as follows:

a) paintings transferred from the Cathedral or other filial churches. These include the Polyptich of St Paul, the Annunciation, both formerly altarpieces at the Cathedral, St Margaret from the filial Church of Ghajn Rihana and a few bozzetti and other paintings that adorned the Cathedral sacristies. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, on the initiative of Mgr. Paolo Pullicino, various altarpieces in the Cathedral were being replaced by others executed by the contemporary Italian artists Pietro Gagliardi (1809-1890), Francesco Grandi (1831-1891) and Domenico Bruschi (1840-1910).

b) the Marchese legacy, which constitutes the main part of the Museum's collections including both religious and secular themes, as landscapes, still life paintings, mythological and historical subjects, etc. Marchese not only purchased paintings from various dealers in Malta and abroad but also commissioned works to artists active in Malta as Anton Schranz and Antoine Favray. The Marchese legacy was stipulated in the acts of Notary Cristofano Frendo in favour of the Cathedral long before the opening of the Cathedral Museum.

c) works donated after the opening of the museum (1969) by generous individuals whose names deserve to be recorded: Mr G. Bonanno of Senglea, Mr Walter Bellizzi of Balzan, Prof. Roger Vella Bonavita, now residing in Australia, and others.

d) works by contemporary artists, donated following exhibitions held at the Museum by these same artists. The latest among these is a fine *St Francis* by Anton Inglott donated by the artist's heirs after the exhibition and publication on Inglott organized by the Friends of the Museum in 1988.

Most of the above paintings are on permanent exhibition; those in the reserve collection, however, are all properly catalogued and available for study and research. Works by contemporary artists are exhibited in the modern art section by rotation.



Count Saverio Marchese (1757-1833)  
Relief in fibreglass by Toni Pace

## SPANISH SCHOOL, XV CENT,

### Polyptich of St Paul

Panel, 419 cm x 361 cm.

The main attraction to most visitors of the Cathedral Museum's picture gallery is the extra-large polyptich of St Paul with various episodes of his life.

The Mdina Cathedral was enlarged by the addition of a transept round the year 1419. It must have been round that time that either the need of a larger retable, or altar-piece, was felt or else the Polyptich of St Paul which had been completed within the previous few decades was moved backwards as an iconostasis.

The Cathedral Museum now possesses this impressive polyptich showing St Paul enthroned with various moments of his life, including various episodes of St Paul's stay in Malta. Such an important commission must have been confirmed by a notarial deed enacted in Spain, Sicily or in Malta and it is a pity that so far this contract has not been traced. A search in the acts of Catalan notaries may one day prove rewarding just as the reference, published by Bresc, to the 1299 pious foundation in favour of Malta's episcopal church of St Paul, has provided the oldest documentary evidence to the Pauline dedication of Malta's cathedral.

In 1871 Can Paolo Pullicino ascribed the Polyptich to the Sienese school; whereas in 1960 Chev. Vincenzo Bonello ascribed it to the Siculo-Catalan school. The present attribution, by Dr John A. Cauchi, is that of the Spanish School of the early 15th Cent. Within that school Genevieve Bautier Bresc suggested the entourage of Luis Borrassa, c. 1410.

The polyptich was restored towards the end of the last century and the beginning of the present century by Giuseppe Hyzler (central panel) and Giuseppe Calleja (the remaining panels). Round 1960 it was again restored by Samuel Bugeja.

St Paul enthroned, with the book and the sword, dominates the painting. On either side are panels vividly depicting his life and miracles. Three panels with pointed tops crown the polyptich. On the predella three enthroned saints, Peter, Catherine and Agatha, hold consultation together whereas on the crowning central panel musician angels entertain the Virgin and Child. The importance given to the Malta Shipwreck episode in several panels (arrival and departure of St Paul, miracle of the viper and healing of the father of Publius) is out of proportion to the rest of the Apostle's life: this confirms that the painting was commissioned for Malta.

The other panels describe St Paul's conversion, his baptism, Paul in front of Agrippa and Festus, his raising of Eutychus from the dead, and finally the Apostle's martyrdom and burial.

The picture is the largest and possibly the oldest painting in the whole collection; it is considered by many as the masterpiece of the Cathedral Museum's picture - gallery.

References: H. Bresc, "Malta dopo il Vespro Siciliano" in *Melita Historica*, 1964, 318; A. Luttrell (ed.), *Hal Millieri, A Maltese Casale, Its Churches and Paintings*, Malta 1976, contribution by G.B. Bresc; P. Pullicino, *Antiche Tavole - altre volte componenti il principale gran quadro della chiesa Cattedrale di Malta*, Malta 1871; E.V. Borg, *The St Paul Polyptich at the Cathedral Museum, Mdina, Malta*, Malta 1987; Mario Buhagiar, *The Iconography of the Maltese Islands 1400-1900: Painting*, 1987.





*Polyptych of St. Paul (Spanish School, XV Cent.)*



## MATTIA PRETI: Mocking of Christ

*Oil on canvas, 133.8 cm x 104 cm*

Mattia Preti (1613-1699), one of the greatest artists of Southern 17th century Italy, settled in Malta in 1661 and remained on the island till his death. He joined the Order of the Knights of St John, for whom he painted and decorated the Conventual Church. Malta was indeed fortunate in having this adopted son for almost four decades, the influence he left on subsequent art is immense; moreover Malta possesses today perhaps the largest collection of paintings by the artist in one place, the National Museum of Fine Arts as well as his monumental work at St John's Co-Cathedral, besides so many paintings in other churches and in private collections.

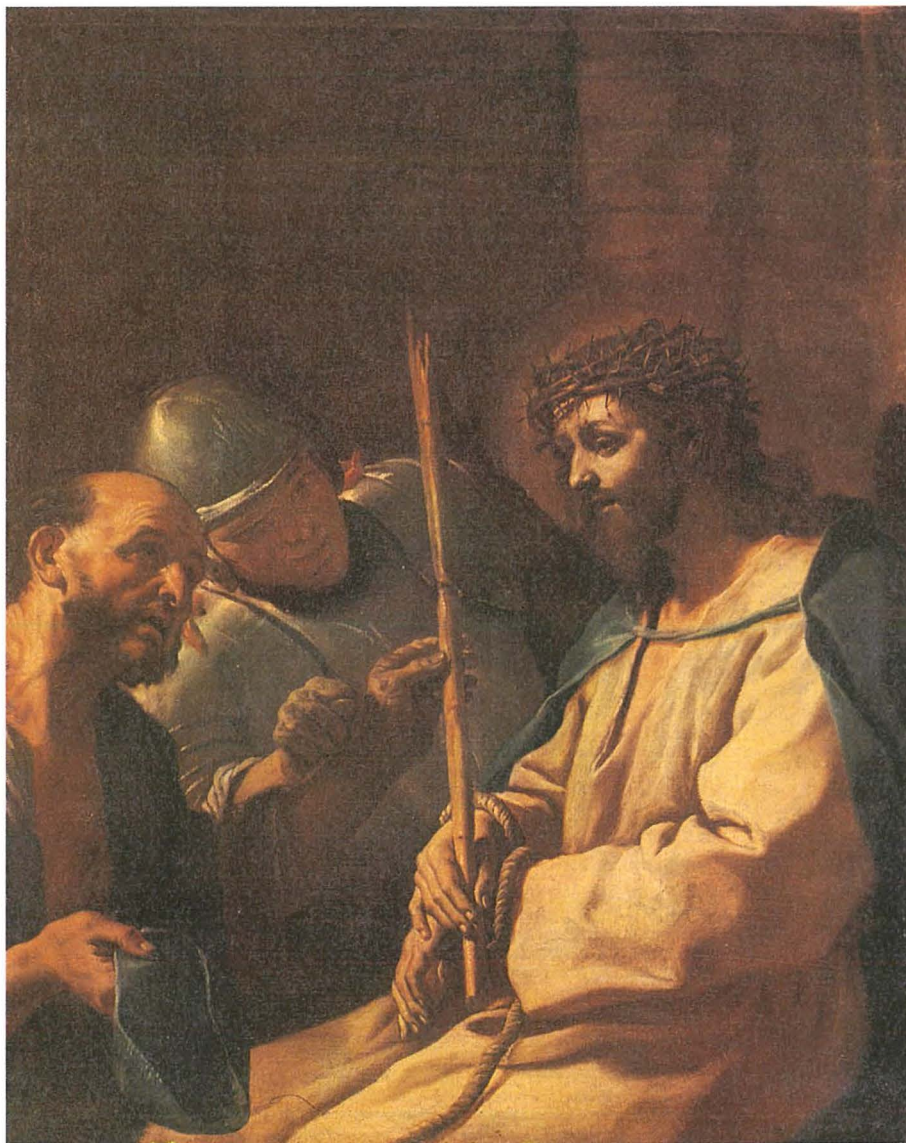
The Cathedral Church at Mdina possesses several paintings by Preti, including the main altar-piece showing St Paul's Conversion and the large apse, painted in oils on stone, vividly interpreting the saint's Malta Shipwreck. A small but fine painting depicting the mocking of Christ was up to 1969 in the private oratory of the Cathedral Sacristies; it was then transferred to the museum where it can be enjoyed by many visitors.

The various moments of Christ's Holy Passion inspired Preti with many paintings; in this particular one he reaches a rare degree of "poignancy and spirituality."

The painting, now on permanent exhibition at the Museum, was loaned for the 1960 Pauline Exhibition and was described by Chev. V. Bonello as follows: "Christ, crowned with thorns and wearing the purple mantle, is seated on the left; in front of him are two figures, one wearing a helmet; the other, cap in hand, salutes ironically and is offering him the cane. The balance of qualities described in the picture, combined with the spacing, the soft, cool tones and the straightforward completeness, point out to a powerful personality and a consummate master in Preti."

Its former location was the private oratory in the Cathedral Sacristy. The oratory was constructed in the second decade of the eighteenth century, long after Preti's death. The painting was donated by a private owner at a time when members of the Chapter were offering paintings, reliquaries and silver objects to decorate and enrich the newly constructed church.

References: V. Mariani, *Mattia Preti a Malta*, Rome 1929; V. Bonello - J.A. Cauchi, *Sacred Art in Malta - Pauline Centenary Exhibition*, p.68, item 97. Mario Buhagiar, *The Iconography of the Maltese Islands 1400 - 1900, Painting*, 1987, p. 102





## FRANCESCO ZAHRA: Jesuit Saints.

Oil on canvas: 49 cm x 38 cm

A group of Jesuit Saints, each with his particular emblem, crowd round their founder, St Ignatius of Loyola, who holds the open book of the rules with the motto *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*. He is pointing to Christ who, seated above a cloud and surrounded by four angels, blesses from heaven.

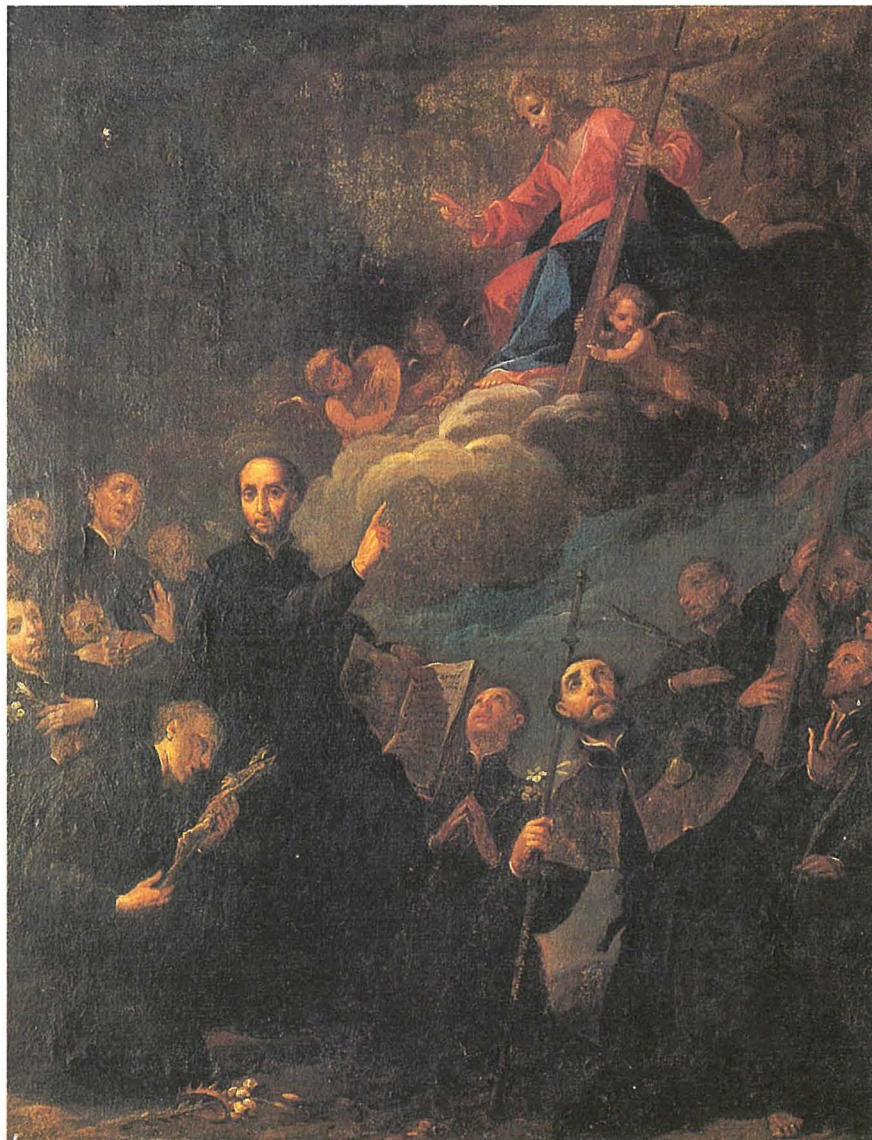
On the other page of the book are the artist's initials F V Z (Francesco Vincenzo Zahra and the date 1769); a part of the inscription is not clearly legible.

The painting was included in the Pauline centenary exhibition, held in 1960. In the relative catalogue entry, Chev. Vincenzo Bonello expressed the opinion that this sketch or bozzetto, which was never executed, was made in competition with Antoine Favray who was assigned *The Saints of the Order* (also at the Cathedral Museum). He points out that the Maltese artist here has shown a more masterly decision and a more powerful personality than his younger French colleague.

The canvas was also included in the Francesco Zahra exhibition held by the Friends of the Cathedral Museum in 1986. The artistic comment by Antonio Espinosa Rodriquez is here reproduced: "Executed by means of sure and free brushstrokes bringing the highlights up to a certain finish but gradually becoming more sketchy towards the periphery so that it possesses the immediacy and freshness characteristic of preliminary works or bozzetti."

FRANCESCO ZAHRA was born in Senglea on 15 December 1710. He is believed to have studied under Gio. Nicola Buhagiar (1698-1752); art historians link his art with the Neapolitan school of painting. His earliest commission was for the Dominican Priory at Rabat. He was very prolific and his work is scattered in many churches and also in private collections: these latter also include portraits. He is probably Malta's greatest eighteenth century painter. In 1743 he married Teresa Fenech at Valletta and took up residence there until his death on 19 August 1773. One of his most prestigious works is a *Glory of St Paul* for the ceiling of the Chapter Hall of Mdina Cathedral.

References: V. Bonello - A. Cauchi, *Sacred Art in Malta - Pauline Centenary Exhibition*, Malta 1960, p.84, no 120; J. Azzopardi (ed.), *Francesco Zahra (1710-1773)*, Friends of the Cathedral Museum; Malta 1986, p.131, no 11.





## ANTON SCHRANZ

The painter Anton Schranz (1769-1839) from Ochsenhausen in the rural district of Biberach in Germany arrived and settled in Malta from Port Mahon in June 1817. His wife and their nine children arrived a year later on 17 July, 1818.

The artist soon established friendly relations with Count Saverio Marchese (1757-1833), a collector and patron of the arts who commissioned to him the two companion pictures here illustrated, besides buying from him several prints and commissioning to his son Giovanni the restoration of several paintings.

These two oils on canvas are probably the earliest recorded works by the artist in Malta. Signed and dated *A. Schranz P. 1818* both were completed in 1818 at a cost of 60 scudi for each canvas.



*Grand Harbour View  
with the vessel Albion  
Oil on canvas, 62 cm × 99 cm*

Count Marchese in his register of purchases provides interesting details on the exact locality from which the views were taken and records the name of the vessel and its captain:

*21 marzo 1818. Pagati al Pittore Tedesco Mons. Schranz per una veduta a olio fattami in un quadro della veduta del Porto di Malta presa dalla punta Ricasoli col fondo della marsa, e col vascello l'Albion dell'ammiraglio Penrose in atto di dar fondo per .....sc.60*

*21 settembre 1818. Pagati al Sig. Schranz Tedesco suddetto per quadro compagno al precedente rappresentante l'opposto dell'Ingresso del Porto, ed il fondo del medesimo preso dal fondo della marsa detto La Ceppuna d'onde si vede la maggior parte del molo della Valletta, col suo nome ed anno in ambe due scritto... sc. 60. (fol.55v)*

These two pictures occupied a prominent place in the exhibition of the Schranz artists organized by the Friends of the Cathedral Museum in 1987. Antonio Espinosa Rodriguez gives the followings descriptions and comments in the exhibition catalogue (*The Schranz Artists*, 1987, p.52)

“These two paintings possess all those compositional elements that characterize the Schranz style; namely the disposition of fore, middle and distant planes, the inclusion of a focal point covering the composition, the frequent use of repoussoirs leading from plane to plane, the linearity and draughtsmanlike quality of the execution, the almost fastidious rendering of topographical details and ancillaries, finally the recurrent inclusion of local characters, figures, and animals, particularly dogs, to render the impression of actuality.”

He also gives the following descriptions:

“H.M.S. Albion, flying the flag of Admiral Penrose, casts anchor inside Valletta's Grand Harbour. At Ricasoli point fishermen are about their chores as one of their number, jesticulating and pointing at the ship, is engaged in conversation with a gentleman wearing a top hat. Bighi, Fort St Angelo and Senglea highlight the scene while other sea-crafts, including a Spanish ship, punctuate the composition.

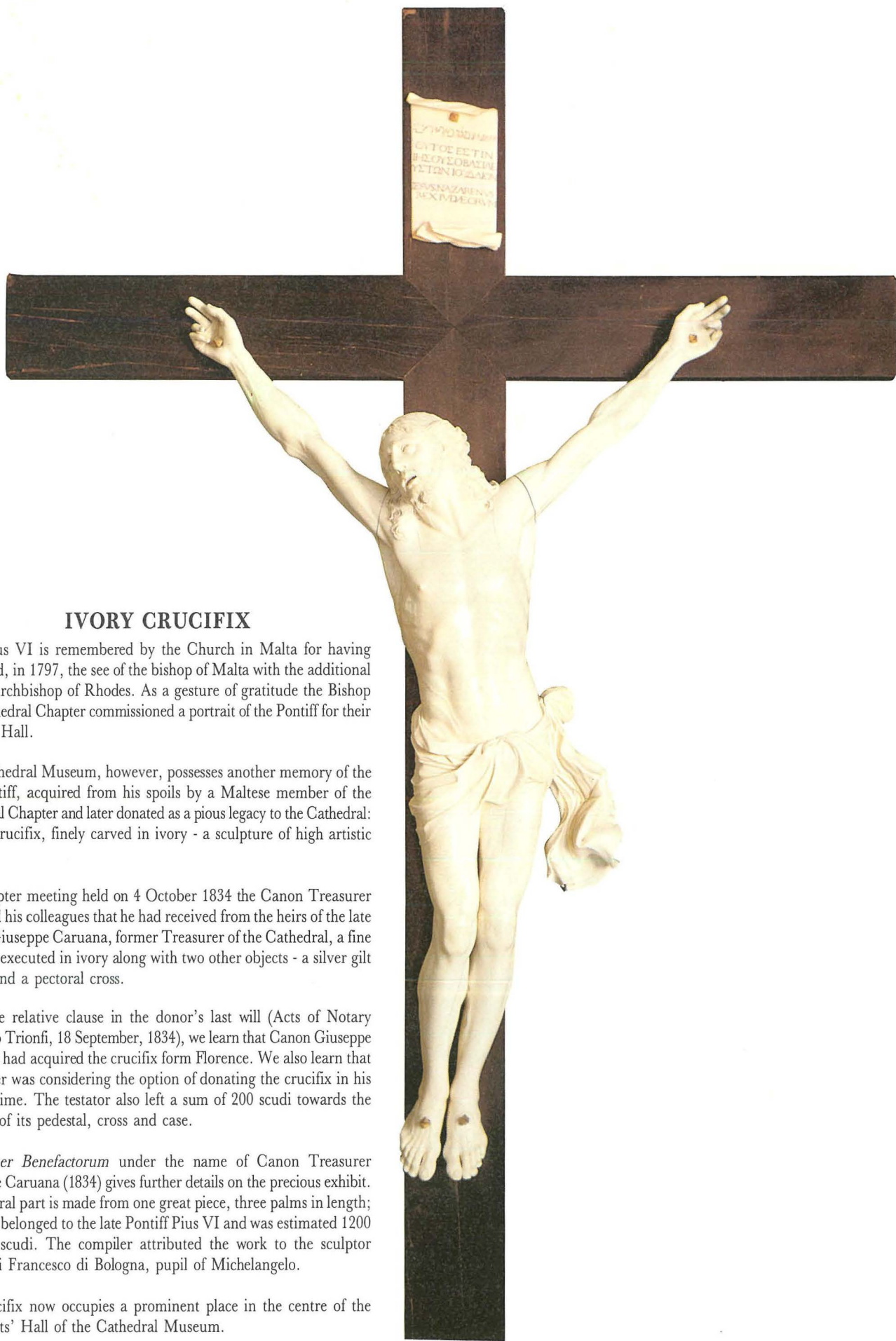
At the foremost plane, on Corradino Heights, a shepherd and his dog tend a flock of sheep. Further on the right, near the entrance to a cave or grotto, another herdsman sits on the ground holding still a sheep or goat as a woman and a girl stand nearby. Reclining over the boundary wall, that delimits the fore-ground, a man stoops to look at Valletta across the harbour. On the opposite sides of the boundary wall passers by go on their way.”



Reference: J. Azzopardi (ed.), *The Schranz Artists - Die Malerfamilie Schranz*, Friends of the Cathedral Museum, Malta 1987.

*View of Grand Harbour  
from Corradino  
Oil on canvas, 62 cm × 95.5 cm*





### IVORY CRUCIFIX

Pope Pius VI is remembered by the Church in Malta for having honoured, in 1797, the see of the bishop of Malta with the additional title of Archbishop of Rhodes. As a gesture of gratitude the Bishop and Cathedral Chapter commissioned a portrait of the Pontiff for their Chapter Hall.

The Cathedral Museum, however, possesses another memory of the late Pontiff, acquired from his spoils by a Maltese member of the Cathedral Chapter and later donated as a pious legacy to the Cathedral: a large crucifix, finely carved in ivory - a sculpture of high artistic quality.

In a chapter meeting held on 4 October 1834 the Canon Treasurer informed his colleagues that he had received from the heirs of the late Canon Giuseppe Caruana, former Treasurer of the Cathedral, a fine crucifix, executed in ivory along with two other objects - a silver gilt chalice and a pectoral cross.

From the relative clause in the donor's last will (Acts of Notary Vincenzo Trionfi, 18 September, 1834), we learn that Canon Giuseppe Caruana had acquired the crucifix from Florence. We also learn that the owner was considering the option of donating the crucifix in his own lifetime. The testator also left a sum of 200 scudi towards the expense of its pedestal, cross and case.

The *Liber Benefactorum* under the name of Canon Treasurer Giuseppe Caruana (1834) gives further details on the precious exhibit. The central part is made from one great piece, three palms in length; the cross belonged to the late Pontiff Pius VI and was estimated 1200 Maltese scudi. The compiler attributed the work to the sculptor Giovanni Francesco di Bologna, pupil of Michelangelo.

The crucifix now occupies a prominent place in the centre of the Vestments' Hall of the Cathedral Museum.

References: Archives of the Cathedral of Malta, *Minute Capitolari*, vol. 25 (1831-5); *ibidem*, *Miscellanea*, Ms 222.



## DIPTYCH RELIQUARY (HAGIOTHECIUM) WITH TWENTY FIVE PLAQUES.

*Thirteenth Century*

The hagiothecium now in the Cathedral Museum at Mdina consists of twenty five small steatite plaques set in the interior of a boxlike diptych. Sixteen of these, of uniform size are grouped on the right side in four rows of four each. The remaining nine are on the left side and vary in size; this side also has a compartment for relics and two empty compartments. The outside of the diptych is covered with red velvet and has five enamel shields on each side, four of which show the cross of the Order and the fifth, the central piece, shows the coat-of-arms of Grand Master Helion de Villeneuve, who ruled from 1319 to 1346.

When in 1394/5 pilgrim Niccolo' da Martoni, an Italian notary, visited the hospice of St Catherine of Rhodes, he described a group of 25 relics in a cona surrounded by lettering describing the relics. He said that these relics had been recently brought from Constantinople.

The art historian Paul Hetherington is of the opinion that the steatites were assembled together during the reign of Grand Master Helion de Villeneuve, whereas Ioli Kalavrezou-Maxeimer believes that the present steatites may have formed part of the reliquary mentioned

by da Martoni and that their assembling in the present form, with red velvet on the outside, may have taken place also in Malta sometime round 1530. The box may also have had a previous usage.

The small busts are homogeneous in carving, style and are carved in a low relief that emphasizes the drapery, whereas the Crucifixion plaque in the centre of the left wing is carved in higher relief.

An engraving and description of the reliquary was published by Paciaudi in 1755.

The diptych was one of the main items on display in the exhibition organized at the Cathedral Museum on the occasion of the world gathering of all Knights of the Order in Malta in October 1989.

References: P. Paciaudi, *De Cultu S. Ioannis Baptistae Antiquitates Christianae*, Rome 1755; P. Hetherington, "Byzantine Steatites in the possession of the Knights of Rhodes" in *Burlington Magazine*, cxx (1978); I. Kalavrezou-Maxeimer, *Byzantine Icons in Steatite*, Vienna 1985; A. Luttrell, cat. entry no 17 in J. Azzopardi (ed.), *The Order's early legacy in Malta*, Malta, Said 1989, p.45.





## LARGE SILVER DISH,

English, London 1838.

*diameter: 75 cm*

This impressive exhibit was received as a gift from His Grace the late Archbishop Sir Michael Gonzi - an inscription on the back of the plate recalls this donation. The donor in turn had received it as a gift from the people of Malta on the occasion of his episcopal silver jubilee.

The following description, by Dr Jimmy Farrugia, has been extracted from the Cathedral Museum inventories:

'A circular presentation dish, diameter 75 cm, weighing 10.25 kg. Centrally recessed with reeded borders, with raised margins chased with ram's head and sea scroll and shell motifs. Central circular plaque also surrounded by raised reeded margins, chased with figures representing the triumph of Charlemagne on a two-horse chariot, accompanied by warriors in armour with a classical architectural background. The central plaque is surrounded by four oval medallions with gadrooned margins, each representing one of the four continents. Each medallion is held by two lateral putti overlying military trophies. The plate was an English silver hallmark: London, early Victorian period, with date letter for 1838. Maker; James Franklin'.





## ILLUMINATED CHORAL BOOK ON PARCHMENT WITH ARMS OF BISHOP MARTIN ROYAS, 1573

The Conventual church of the Order of St John in Valletta, now Malta's Co-Cathedral, is famous for a triple series of choral books with illuminations, donated by Grand Masters l'Isle Adam, (1521-1534), Verdalle (1582-1595) and De Paule (1623-1636). The most remarkable of the whole collection is the series of Grand Master L'Isle Adam.

The Episcopal Cathedral at Mdina likewise had its own series of Choral Books, perhaps not so richly decorated as those of the Order but no less worthy of study and consideration.

The earliest documented choral books were in the Gallican rite and were commissioned to Petro La Cruchi (1528), Frati Joanni Xebiras (1530, 1535), Don Victorio (de) Manuelli (1535), Fra Matheus Arsemone (1536), cleric Joannes Bartolo (1537) and the Dominican Friar Gio. Antonio Manjuni (Mangion -1538).

The Roman Tridentine rite was enforced in the Cathedral on Ascension Eve of the year 1571 and certainly entailed a new set of choral books. These were commissioned in 1573 by Bishop Martin Royas to the Dominican Fr Salvator Ferrarius di Bisignano who worked on them for a number of years at Pozzuoli, as evidenced by an inscription at the last page of two of the volumes: *Fr. Salvator Ferrarius de Bisignano ordinis praedicatorum scribebat in civitate Putheolorum 1573.*

The series consists of seven volumes or parts of a *graduale* in gothic script. The first page of each part carries a beautiful illumination with

a biblical episode enframed within a border or at least an illuminated letter. On the front-page of the first volumes the images of St Peter and St Paul are depicted within the decorated border.

The arms of Royas are inscribed on the front pages along with his motto *In fornace tamquam aurum*, a fitting motto for a bishop whose nomination in 1566 was challenged for many years and finally approved by Pope Gregory XIII in 1573. Some authors have confused these arms with those of Grand Prior Cressino or Bishop Camarasa.

The commission of these books was discussed and approved by the Cathedral Chapter on 22 June 1572 and entrusted to Bishop Royas. There is ample documentation on their payment, the purchase of their parchment and the personal interest of Bishop Royas in their completion.

The illumination here illustrated is on the first page of the first volume. It recalls a messianic Old Testament prophecy with a prophet holding a musical instrument and a reference to the Annunciation. The text *Ad te levavi* introduces the first Sunday of Advent.

References: Archives of the Cathedral of Malta, *Miscellanea* 217 (inventory of 1767); ibidem, *Miscellanea* 222 (historical inventory compiled in 1933); ibidem, *Miscellanea* 167 (*Giornale della cattedrale* 1573); I. Formosa, *Gli Arazzi Goblines della Concattedrale di S. Giovanni*, Malta 1903, pp.30-32; R. Bonnici-Cali, *The Cathedral Museum*, Malta 1952; S. Fiorini, 'Church Music and Musicians in Late Medieval Malta' in *Melita Historica* X, 1 (1988); M. Fsadni O.P., *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u l-Birgu sa l-1620*, Malta 1974.





## DRAWINGS

### LUCA CAMBIASO (1527-1585), *Glory of Saints*,

dated 1581.

Pen ink and wash, 22.7 cm x 37.8 cm. Inventory no: 456

The drawings on exhibition at the Cathedral Museum form part of a bigger collection of about 500 old masters once in the possession of Count Saverio Marchese and now exhibited by rotation.

*Glory of Saints* by Luca Cambiaso, here reproduced, was first exhibited in 1960 in the Sacred Art Exhibition held on the occasion of the centenary of St Paul's Malta Shipwreck.

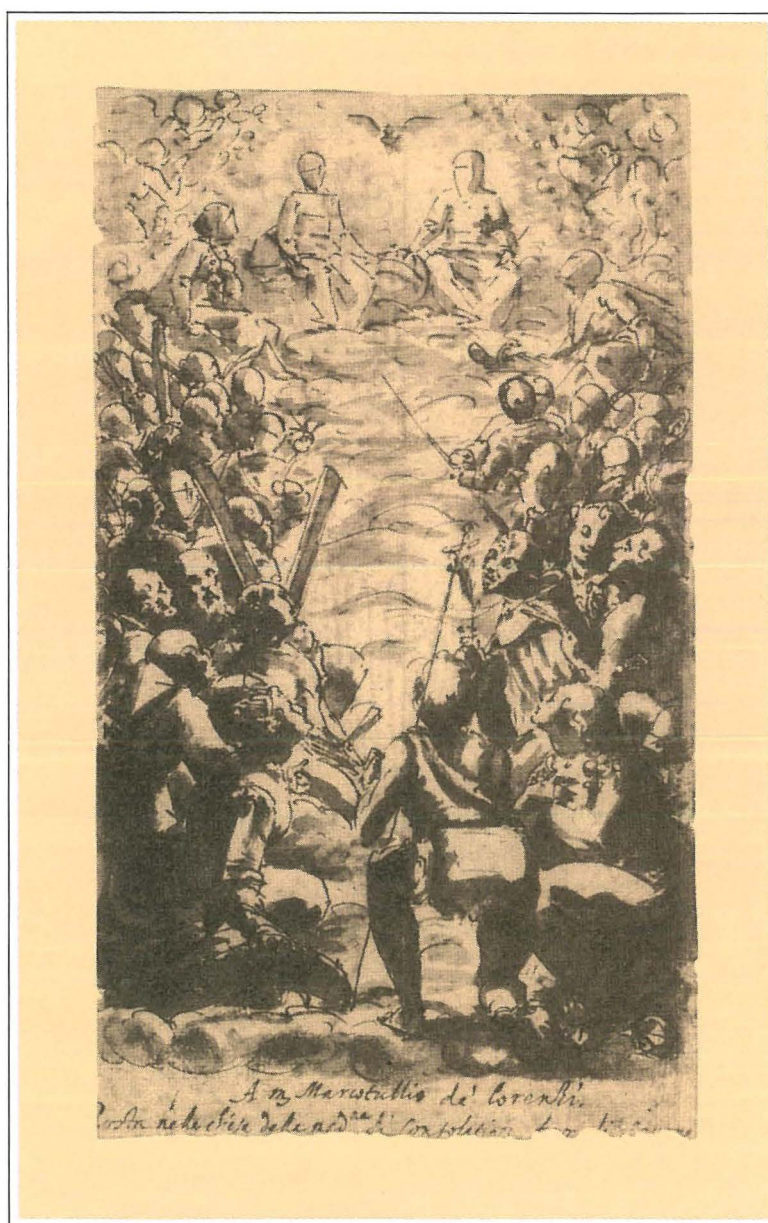
In his entry to the catalogue of that exhibition Dr John A. Cauchi made the following comment: "a good example by this wonderful draughtsman who in the two figures forming the Holy Trinity in the top centre hints at cubism".

At the bottom of the drawing are inscribed the words: *A m. Maristullio di Lorenzi / Posta nella Chiesa della Madonna di Consolazione.*

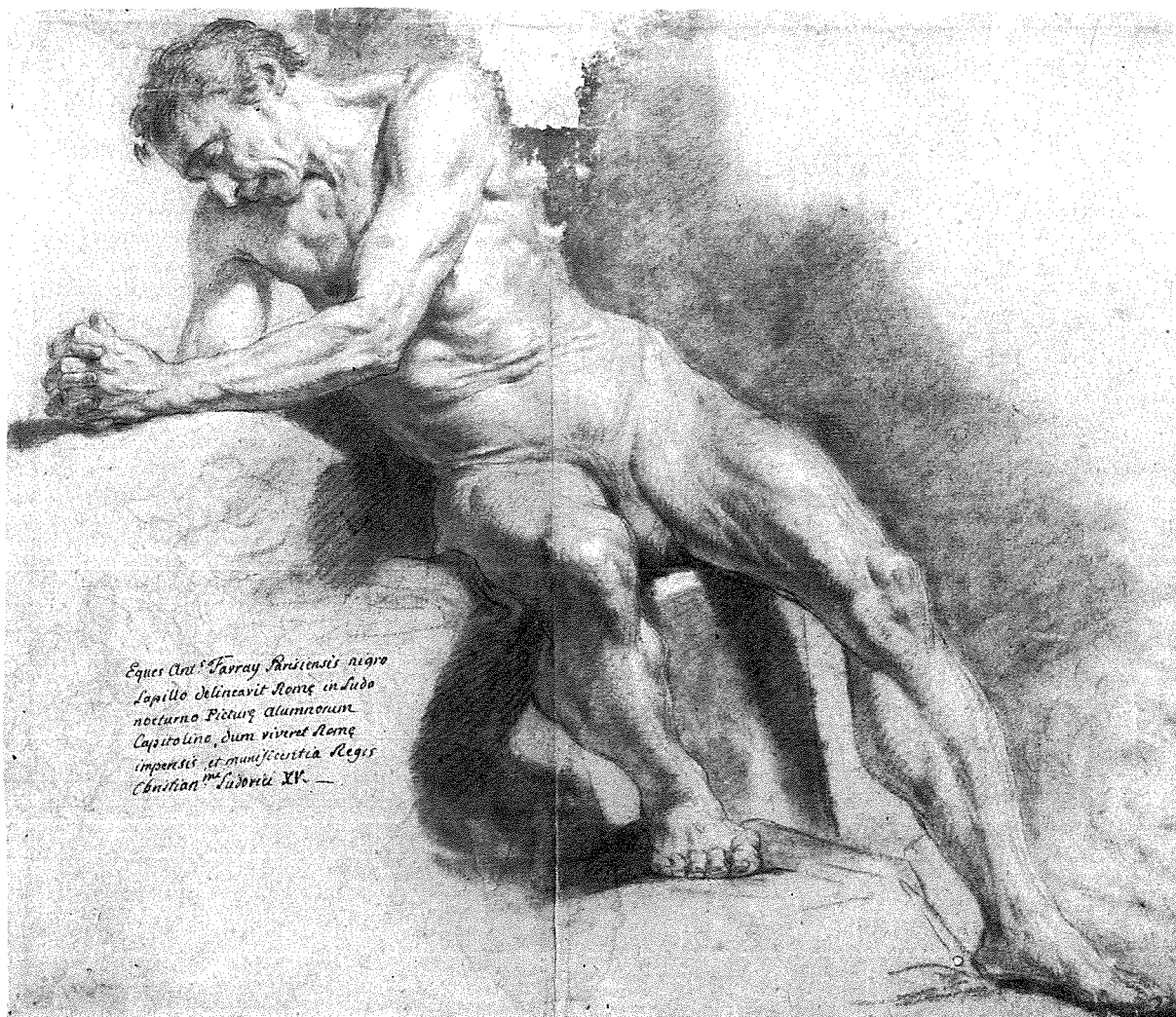
In translation: to m. Maristullio di Lorenzi, placed in the church of Our Lady of Consolation.

Luca Cambiaso was born at Moneglia and learnt the art of painting from his father Giovanni. He executed frescoes, altar-pieces and easel-pictures. At the age of fifteen he started decorating Palazzo Saluzzo. In 1583 he was commissioned by King Philip II of Spain to decorate with frescoes the vault of the Escorial where he died in 1585.

Reference: V. Bonello - A. Cauchi, *Sacred Art in Malta*, Malta 1960, p.111, item 166.







### ANTOINE FAVRAY (1706-1798): Male Academy

*Black lead and charcoal heightened with white, 40 cm x 46 cm,  
inv. no 328*

The French artist Antoine Favray has made an outstanding contribution to art in Malta: churches, museums and many private collections possess canvases and drawings coming from his hand. Apart from his close followers, many local artists drew inspiration from his art especially in portraiture.

Antoine Favray left France in 1738 to further his studies in the Academy of France in Rome. In 1744 he came to Malta and became a member of the Order of St John. He settled here for the rest of his life except the years 1761-1771 which he spent in Turkey. He was a great friend of the Marchese family from where the drawings in the museum collection come.

This drawing was probably one of the life studies he was expected to draw as student at the Academy. Its importance was stressed by John Gash of Aberdeen University. In his essay published on the occasion of the first-ever exhibition dedicated exclusively to the artist he says: "the key drawing for future attributions to Favray is a

melodramatically expressive study of a male nude clenching his hands, in a pose which bears some resemblance to the Dying Gaul, and which carries the inscription; "Eques Ants Favray Parisiensis nigro lapillo delineavit Romae in Ludo nocturno Picturae Alumnorum Capitolino, dum viveret Romae impensis, et munificentia Regis Christiani Ludovici XV." (In translation: the knight Antoine Favray of Paris drew (this study) in black at Rome in the Capitoline (Palace) while he was living in Rome carefree through the generosity of the Christian King Ludwig XV).

Dr John A. Cauchi in the catalogue entry for the same publication notes that the above text was probably inscribed by Saverio Marchese. He also points out that the same sheet has two other drawings on the verso: a standing hooded man, in red chalk, and a Virgin of Sorrows, in black lead.

References: *Antoine Favray (1706-1798)*: an exhibition of paintings and drawings, Malta 1982, contributions by John Gash and Dr J.A. Cauchi.





**ALBRECHT DURER (1471-1528):**  
**Betrothal of the Virgin,**  
 woodcut, 30.7 cm x 21.9 cm

Albrecht Durer is as popular today as he was in his own lifetime. His fame has never faded away. He refined the graphic arts and rendered them an effective way of expressing artistic ideas.

Malta - and the Cathedral Museum in particular - possesses a fairly large collection of woodcuts and copperplates by Durer, including *The Life of the Virgin* and *The Small Passion* as well as some rare subjects and some of the most popular items of his work.

The print here illustrated is the seventh of the series *The Life of the Virgin*, which forms the most valuable group of the Mdina Collection. The series consists of 20 woodcuts, 17 prepared before Durer's visit to Italy and the remaining three after that visit. Durer's visit to Italy established a bridge between the Northern and the Italian traditions.

In 1511 Durer published the whole series in bookform with a Latin text on the reverse, but before that between 1502 and 1506 seventeen prints at least were published as proof sheets without text. The Museum has these seventeen proof sheets, eight of which - among them *The Betrothal* here reproduced - belong to the very first state of the prints, with another eight to the second.

The print is very rich in contrasts although sometimes too darkened in the shaded areas. The Blessed Virgin and St Joseph with the high

priest in the middle form the central part of the picture. All other figures and details recall to our minds not only Jewish customs but also the German way of life in Durer's time. In fact a coloured preliminary sketch for the maiden with head-dress on the right preserved in the Albertina in Vienna (L. 464) carries the inscription: *Also geht manzw Normerck in die Kirchn* (thus they go to church in Nurnberg).

The prints belonged to Count Saverio Marchese: he in turn acquired them partly from an auction sale held in Valletta in 1815 by Mr John Robert Steward (which included the Seratti collection) and partly from purchases in 1815 and 1822 from the painter and engraver Filippo Benucci. The *Betrothal of the Virgin* formed part of the Seratti collection: when its owner was captured, his prints were first taken to Algiers, then sold various times in Malta until they were acquired by Seratti.

The exemplar at Mdina also carried a watermark: a high crown (Meder, n. 20).

References: J. Azzopardi-E. Coleiro: *Durer in Malta* - a permanent exhibition at the Cathedral Museum, Malta 1971; J. Azzopardi, *Count Saverio Marchese, his picture-gallery and his bequest to the Cathedral Museum*, Malta 1982; idem, 'Durer in Malta' in *Forty Years Federal Republic of Germany*, Malta 1989, pp. 68-70; W. Kurth, *The Complete Woodcuts of Albrecht Durer*, New York 1963; J. Meder, *Durer-Katalog*, Wien 1932.





Giovanni Camocio, Map of Malta c. 1560



## GIOVANNI CAMOCIO, Map of Malta

Copperplate engraving, c. 1560

More than 600 maps and plans of Malta have appeared in print between the sixteenth to the eighteenth centuries. This impressive number, definitely out of proportion to the size of the island, is accounted for by the presence of the Order of St John (1530-1798), the Great Siege of 1565 and the importance of the Maltese Harbours. But only 14 maps were printed in the pre-siege period, that is from 1536 to 1565 - their catalogue has been recently published by two Maltese scholars, M. Agius - Vadalà and Albert Ganado. The earliest of these are extremely rare and four - including the one here described - are known in only a single specimen.

The map is a second state of an anonymous map, probably published in Rome circa 1560, intended to highlight the planning of a new city. The only difference is the addition of the imprint *apud Camocium* at the end of the rectangle forming the legend. The whole text of the legend reads: *Melita insula, ab Sicilia disiun / cta Aphrica (m) versus. Hierosolymi / tanor(um) militu(m) sedes est. patet circuitu / Milliar(um) 60.lata 12.longa 20.Paroci / as habet 8.Hominu(m) capita fere.20 / 000. gradus lo(n)git.38 3/4. latit.34 2/3. Abun / dat laudatiss(imis) Cotonu seu gossipio suo / apud Camocium.*

In translation: The island of Malta, separated from Sicily, (looking) towards Africa, is the home of the Knights of (St John of) Jerusalem. Its circumference is 60 miles, width 12, length 20. It has 8 parishes and about 20,000 inhabitants; longitude 38 3/4, latitude 34 2/3. It abounds in its most praised cotton or gossipio. From the workshop of Camocio.

The name of Malta is written in capital letters in the centre. The toponyms have significant corruptions: *lokabbata* for Rabat, etc. The representation of Mdina is remarkable with the fortifications and main gate protected by its medieval barbican. The Cathedral Church dominates; other churches are also indicated including S. Maria della Grotta and Annonciata at Rabat.

The publisher, Camocio, was born in the early sixteenth century, probably at Asolo (Treviso) and was active in Venice between 1552 and 1575 as a publisher of maps and books. His business address was the *Libreria della Piramide* at St Lio. Although the map is undated, scholars have dated it to the early 1560's on the basis of its similarity with other maps of Corsica and Sardinia having the same imprint of Camocio and executed in the same style.

The map, which has no watermark, is one of the only two maps of Malta the Museum possesses to date. It was donated by Dr and Mrs Victor Captur in memory of their son Michael (died 1983).

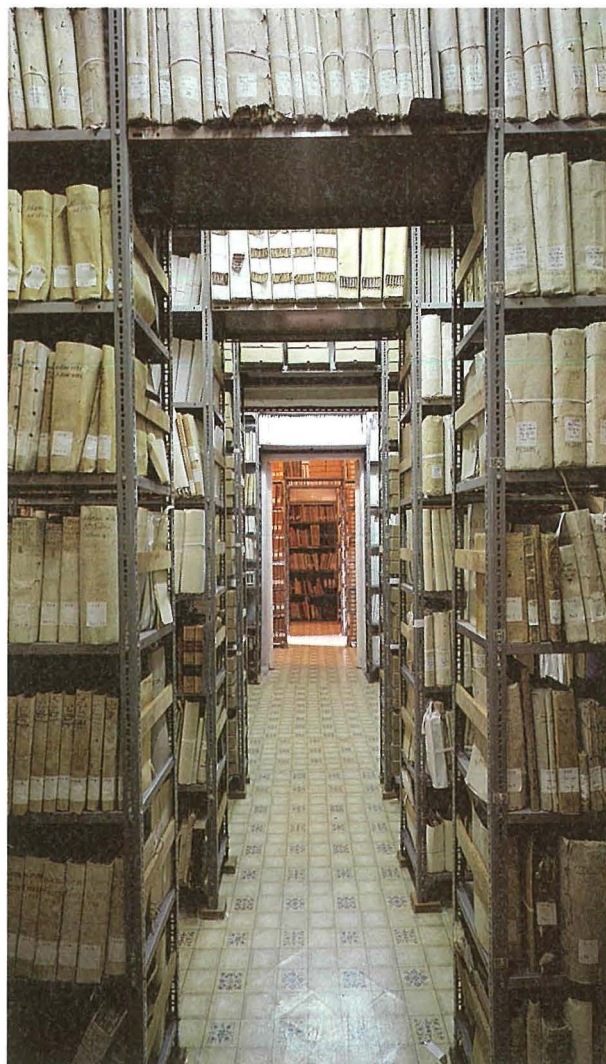
References: M. Agius-Vadalà -- A. Ganado, *The pre-Siege Maps of Malta 1536 - 1563*, Reports and Accounts Investment Finance Bank Ltd. 1986, reprint, item no. 9.

## THE MUSEUM'S ARCHIVES

Located in four spacious rooms, with a few specimens on exhibition in the halls, are the rich archives of the Cathedral Museum. Their importance lies far beyond the shores of our islands.

The Cathedral Museum today houses:

- (1) the complete records of the Cathedral Church of Malta dating from 1419;
- (2) the complete records of the Roman Inquisition in Malta from its institution in 1561 to its abolition by the French in 1798;
- (3) archives of the Bishop's Lawcourts, especially deeds of sessions held in the Mdina Palace;
- (4) archives of the *Assemblea dei Cappellani Conventuali*, the ordained section of the Knights, who were entrusted with the churches of the Order, under the jurisdiction of the Grand Prior;
- (5) archives of the *Università*, or local government of Malta;
- (6) a lot of miscellaneous material, mostly acquired by way of donation.





## THE INQUISITION ARCHIVES

Perhaps the most important section is the documentation of the Inquisition: hardly anywhere else in the world are such abundant records so easily accessible to research workers; revolutionary governments have always sought to destroy most of these records - the Maltese records have only been saved by careful strategem after the French had ordered their destruction.

The proper study of the Malta Inquisition records, with a great number of witnesses of various nationalities, reveals that Malta was really a cosmopolitan island during the reign of the Order (1530-1798). It also dispels a lot of unfounded speculation on the excessive severity of the institution and creates a more balanced judgement, especially when assessed against contemporary usage. Finally this study sheds invaluable light on the social, political, religious and cultural life of the Maltese Islands.

The Roman Inquisition, as distinct both from the Medieval and from the Spanish Inquisition, was instituted by Pope Paul III with the Bull *Licet ab initio* on 21 July 1542 but it was officially introduced in Malta on 21 October 1561. The first Inquisitors were the bishops of Malta (Domenico Cubelles and Martin Royas); later, on 3 July 1574 Pope Gregory XIII appointed an Inquisitor distinct from the Bishop: the earliest Inquisitor was Mons. Pietro Dusina. The Inquisitor was vested with several roles: as Inquisitor he was responsible for the Custody of the Faith, as Apostolic delegate he was the official representative of the Pope on the Maltese Islands on a diplomatic level.

These two distinct roles are reflected in the two main divisions of the Inquisition archives, that related to the Supreme Congregation of the Council and that related to the *Segreteria di Stato*, or Foreign affairs of the Holy See. Each section has its own correspondence, administration records, and other relative documentation.

Among the most intriguing sections of these archives are the Criminal Proceedings, where a number of people were regularly summoned to bear witness, or preferred to present themselves of their own free will, to report others or their own selves, on matters connected with the Faith. Thousands of people of varied nationality as Maltese, Italians, French, Spanish, Portuguese, English, Flemish, Greeks and especially Moslems, were summoned or went freely to bear witness. The cases involved were often trivial and of little importance, but an overall study of these cases sheds considerable light on the social, religious, political, economical, artistic and general history of Malta and indeed of the whole Mediterranean.

## The evidence of Caravaggio

(Processi Criminali, vol. 28 A, f.295 r.)

One curious evidence, to quote one out of many is that of an artist of international repute, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio, whose stay in Malta, a document of the Inquisition has proved, was longer than biographers and art critics had emphatically asserted.

Caravaggio was summoned to give evidence in the Tribunal of the Inquisition on 26 July 1607. His name had been mentioned to Inquisitor Leonetto della Corbara four days before by a certain Paolo Cassar who had denounced of bigamy an unknown painter in the house of Fra Giacomo de Marchese. Marchese was supposed to have made such a statement in the presence of Caravaggio while Cassar was talking to another knight by the name of Fra Giovanni Battista Mont'alto. Both Caravaggio and Giacomo di Marchese were summoned to witness. Marchese explained that Cassar had misunderstood a statement stated jokingly. The Inquisitor was apparently satisfied or at least saw no reason for proceeding further with the enquiry; in fact he did not request the evidence of the other witness who was present, Fra Gio. Battista Montalto.

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The importance of this case lies in Caravaggio's witness which reveals his presence on the Island on as early a date as 12/13 July 1607.

Although one art historian, Faith Asford, had expressed an opinion that Caravaggio might have come to Malta in 1607, all other art critics and historians were expressly against this opinion: a longer stay in Malta would be equivalent to a shorter second stay in Naples where the artist left a considerable number of works, too many - it was argued - to have been executed in a shorter stay.

The document was first published by the present writer in 1978 in an exhibition catalogue commemorating the fourth centenary of the consecration of the Church of St John in Valletta. Its discovery and subsequent re-publication by John Spike, Maurizio Marini and others provoked a number of articles by V. Pacelli, M. Calvesi, M. Marini and other scholars who then discussed two possibilities:

- (1) whether Caravaggio's presence in Malta lasted for 15 months without any interruption or else was discontinued and marked by one or more other visits to Naples;
- (2) whether Caravaggio in Malta might have been working on Commissions received from Naples.

The attitude of Caravaggio as resulting from this evidence is similar to that of other statements by the artist in the law-courts of Rome. He neither heard nor knew anything except that in the house of Cavalier Marchese there was a painter - and here Caravaggio recalls with precision his nationality (Greek), the date of his entry (fifteen days before), how he entered Malta (on the galleys) and the place where he was staying (in the house of Fra Giacomo de Marchese). But as far as the Holy Office was concerned, he had no evidence to offer. Another interesting detail is that Caravaggio's deposition is unsigned and therefore has no legal value; apparently no body, not even the Inquisitor, took him seriously, otherwise he would have ensured that Caravaggio would sign his statement.

References: J. Azzopardi (ed.), *The Church of St John in Valletta, 1578-1978*, Malta 1978; idem, "Documentary Sources on Caravaggio's stay in Malta" in *Caravaggio in Malta*, Mid-Med Bank Ltd, 1989; A. Bonnici, *Storja ta' l-Inkizizzjoni ta' Malta*, Vol. 1, p. 174.

The archives include a collection of musical scores consisting of old choral books, XVII cent printed works by Italian composers, and scores by Maltese composers from the XVII century to modern times.

## XI Cent. Antiphonary

Probably the oldest musical manuscript on the Maltese Islands is an antiphonary with music written in the Aquitanian (and not in the Gregorian) notation.

This notation is closely related to the earliest known Carthusian antiphonary, which comes from the area of Reposoir. The manuscript has been dated by Prof Michel Huglo of the Sorbonne to the first part of the eleventh century. A companion volume, also on parchment, has been dated to the second part of the XIII Cent.

The volume has fifty-one decorated initials in red and blush green and begins with the fourth Sunday of Advent (a few pages are missing at the beginning). An American musicologist, Peter Jeffery, has commented as follows:

"Particularly interesting are the two antiphoners from Malta that are written in an unusual type of Aquitanian notation. The puncta in the earlier codex are lozenge-shaped, using a staff of one ink line and three dry-point lines. The climachus often ascends at a slight angle, instead of at the vertical. A and D clefs outnumber F and C clefs. ... The notational characteristics of these two antiphoners can be seen in some manuscripts from Southern France. The relationship between the Maltese and the French manuscripts deserves to be studied at greater length."

The presence of these manuscripts in Aquitanian notation in Malta is intriguing : it could be that they were imported and may have belonged to a French congregation. An early reference to the presence of these volumes in the Cathedral may be in the inventory registered in the acts of Notary Vincenzo Bonaventura de Bonetiis on 19 April 1543. Although the volumes have attracted the attention of several scholars, they still await proper study and publication.

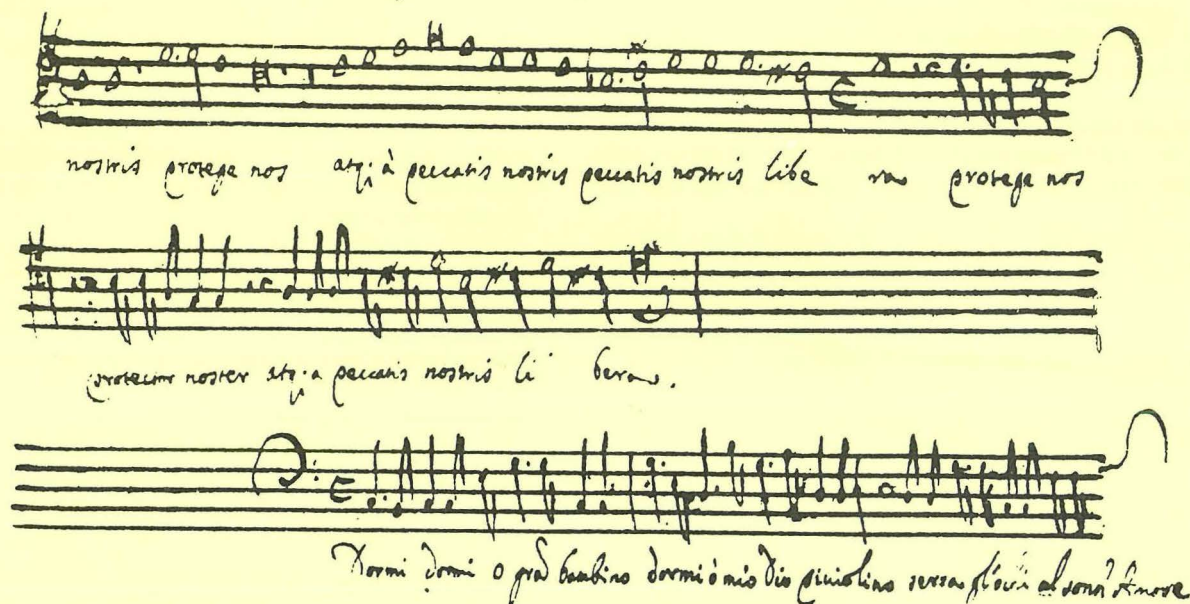
References: P. Jeffery, "Music Manuscripts on Microfilm in the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library at St John's Abbey and University" in *Notes, the Quarterly Journal of the Music Library Association* 35 (1978-9), pp. 7-30; J. G. Plante, "The Hill Monastic Manuscript Library as a Resource for musicologists and Musicians" in *Sacred Music*, 105, 3 (1978), pp. 7-12.



XI Cent. Antiphonary in Aquitanian notation



*Beatus vir Il Sig.<sup>r</sup> G. Giuseppe Balzano 1652.*



**GIUSEPPE BALZANO 'Beatus Vir', 1652**  
*Cathedral Museum, Musical Archives, Ms no 241*

The oldest extant score, known to date, by a Maltese composer, is a motet for Bass and 2 Tenors composed by Don Giuseppe Balzano in 1652. This score preserved in the Cathedral Archives was discovered by the present writer as recently as in 1969 soon after a cupboard with old music scores was transferred from the Cathedral to be incorporated with the rest of the archives.

The activity and the very name of Don Giuseppe Balzano as a composer had been completely forgotten: it was omitted in all publications on Maltese music and first made known when the Cathedral Museum was opened in 1969, with a showcase of music scores by Maltese composers.

Research in the Cathedral Archives revealed that Giuseppe Balzano had served for thirty three years as *maestro di cappella* at the Cathedral. He was born in Valletta on 19 September 1616, ordained priest in 1640, and exercised his priestly ministry for some years at St Paul's Shipwrecked Church, Valletta. Following his appointment as choir master at Mdina he came to live there with his brother Don Domenico. The latter was also a musician, for some time serving as a *musicus salariato* at the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta, as well as a composer. Following Giuseppe's death in 1700, Domenico was appointed to fill the post vacated by his brother and served till his death in 1707. Not long before, Don Domenico donated to the Cathedral both his brother's and his own musical compositions.

Only a few of these scores have survived but their repertory reveals that Giuseppe had composed eighteen masses, seventy parts for Vespers, thirty six hymns and fifty-one motets. Several of these works were scored for two or three choirs. Many of these compositions were possibly lost in the earthquake of 1693 or in the various movements of the manuscripts during the rebuilding of the Cathedral.

The *Beatus Vir* signed and dated *Il Sig. D. Giuseppe Balzano 1652* followed by *Venite omnes* by D. Domenico Balzano 1680 are a most welcome addition to our musical heritage. Before it was believed that the oldest composers with surviving works were Girolamo Abos (1715-1760) who lived and performed outside Malta and in Malta, Don Benigno Zerafa (1726-1804) and Don Michelangelo Vella (1715 - c. 1792).

The *Beatus Vir*, composed in the early Italian Baroque style and written in the older notation without any bar lines, was edited by Mro Joseph Vella and first performed in the Cathedral Museum itself on 4 June 1980 in a German-Maltese concert sponsored by the German-Maltese circle.

References: *Musica restituta*, a revival programme of a concert sponsored by The Sliema Lions Club, 20 November 1980; J. Azzopardi, "The Revival of Old Music from Maltese Archives" in *Vetera Novaque Conventus et Musica*, a revival programme of a concert sponsored by Mid-Med Bank Ltd, 22 September 1985.



## ANDREA RINALDI

### Il Primo libro de Motetti....., Palermo 1634

Cathedral Museum, Musical Archives, Mus. Prints, no. 124

The Cathedral Museum possesses a collection of 157 rare music scores, printed between 1568 and 1798, twenty per cent of which are not listed in RISM, or any other international repertory. Each single page is a woodcut or copperplate engraving, as no other way of printing music was then available. The oldest score is *Messe d'Intavolatura d'Organo* by Claudio Merulo, published in Venice in 1568, the latest is Alessandro Melani's *Motetti*, published in Rome in 1698. The largest groups are those printed in Rome (77 works) and Venice (47 works); the most important section, however, from the point of view of musical history, is the Sicilian group with the largest number of uniques. Once again even the names of some of the composers had been forgotten.

Among these is Don Andrea Rinaldi's unique *Il Primo Libro de Motetti a due, tre e quattro voci*, published in Palermo at the firm of Giovanni Battista Maringo in 1634. The composer is described as "maestro di cappella della Fidelissima Città di Siracusa", a denomination that may stimulate further research.

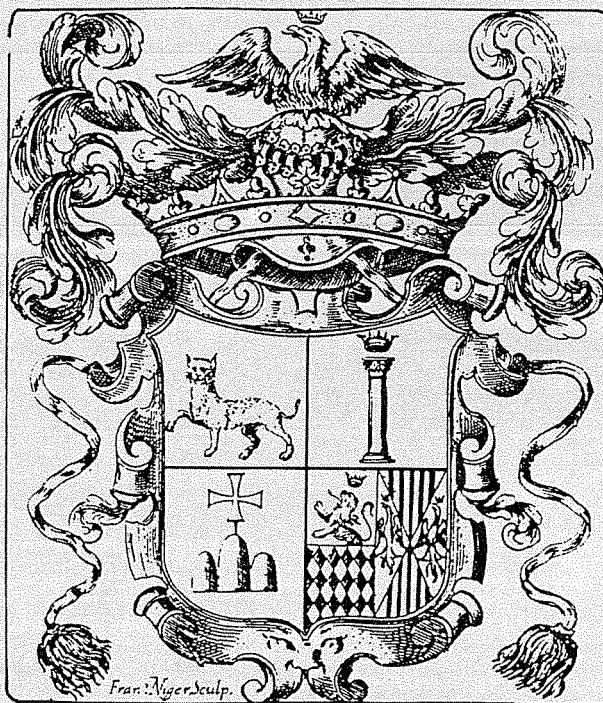
But the Maltese interest in this publication rests in the fact that the composer had previously been active as *maestro di cappella* at the Mdina Cathedral from 18 September 1627 to 30 September 1631. During this period he consolidated the musical chapel after the initial efforts by Don Francesco Fontana and Don Antonino Campochiaro.

Rinaldi's work consists of 22 motets of *concerti, nuovamente composti* - which seems to imply that they were composed towards the end of or probably soon after Rinaldi's activity in Malta. The work was certainly acquired after the composer's departure from Malta in 1631. Rinaldi was later also active in the chapel of Caltagirone, Sicily, which has had various musical connections with Malta.

A manuscript anthology, probably of local formation, includes one other motet by Rinaldi a *Gaudeamus*, which may be anterior to the publication of 1631. At one time the Cathedral possessed another composition by Rinaldi, a motet entitled *Gaude Felix Roma*, which unfortunately has not survived.

Reference: G. Azzopardi, "La Cappella Musicale della Cattedrale di Malta e i suoi rapporti con la Sicilia" in *Musica Sacra in Sicilia tra Rinascimento e Barocco*, Palermo 1985, pp. 47-67.

BASSO  
IL PRIMO LIBRO  
DE MOTETTI A DVE, TRE, E QUATTRO VOCI.  
DI DON ANDREA RINALDI  
MAESTRO DI CAPPELLA DELLA FIDELISSIMA  
CITTÀ DI SIRACUSA.  
Nuouamente Composte, e date in luce.



IN PALERMO, Appresso Gio. Battista Maringo 1634.  
Impr. De Dominici Vic. Gen. Impr. de Blafis P.

D



## CONCLUSION

A final note of explanation is considered necessary after this brief description of some of the main exhibits at the Cathedral Museum. The selection of items, though fairly representative of the museum's main sections, falls short of doing full justice to the richness of the artistic, archival and historical heritage contained in these collections. The picture gallery contains works by artists of international repute as Palma il Giovane (1540-1628), Gian Battista Salvi (1605-1685), Bernardo Strozzi (1581-1644), Eberhard Keil (1624-1687), and others. The Old Master Drawings and Prints collections contain too many important names of artists belonging mostly to the Italian and Flemish schools but also including French, Spanish and German artists. Let us hope that at some later time a complete and fully illustrated catalogue of these works would see the light of day. Moreover reasons of brevity did not permit the inclusion of certain aspects of the collections, as the Punico-Roman pottery, the coinage of Rome as well as that of the Order of St John during their stay in Malta (1530-1798), the parchments in the archive section and the various examples of old ecclesiastical furniture. All these and more can be appreciated by those who pay a visit to the museum and view the exhibits with an attentive eye.

The Cathedral Museum is not just a relic of the past. Contemporary art also has its place in the foyer and glazed-in corridors on the main floor. Besides, exhibitions with works borrowed from other public and private collections are organized at regular intervals; these are accompanied by a catalogue which embraces a lot of research by Maltese and foreign art historians and critics. Exhibitions of works by contemporary local and foreign artists are also held. Revival concerts with edited music by Maltese or Italian composers from the museum's rich musical archives have been organized, at the museum itself and in our churches and halls, since the museum's opening in 1969. Moreover works of art at the museum are occasionally loaned for exhibitions held locally and abroad. All recent scholarly publications on Maltese art and history abound in references and illustrations related to the Museum's art collections and archives.

These collections are in turn only a fragment of the wealth that enriches our museums, churches, palaces, archives and private collections - the artistic and cultural heritage of the Maltese islands.

