

The Knight Artist Lucas Garnier and his Role in Mid-Seventeenth Century Painting in Malta

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Mid-seventeenth century Malta saw the emergence of Lucas Garnier¹ (c.1600²–1672), a French painter who, through his art and family connections, became a servant-at-arms of the Order of St John. After having left his hometown in France, the artist travelled to Malta through Rome, and joined the Order a few years after his arrival. As *fra serviente*, Garnier did not belong to the high rank of nobility, however, his prestigious membership with the Order of St John during a time when there was no other important artist working on the island allowed him to become the most important up-and-coming artist of the period.

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- 1 Research on Lucas Garnier and the knight artist concept was first undertaken by the author for a Master of Arts dissertation presented to the Department of History of Art in January 2015 under the supervision of Professor Keith Sciberras.
 - 2 Unfortunately, research on Lucas Garnier's life did not bring any information about his date of birth to light. In addition to this, documented evidence does not contain any references to his age, making it difficult to calculate his age upon his death, which was only discovered and confirmed following research carried out for the purpose of my M.A. Thus, this estimation is based on primary sources that provided rough estimates of his age, such as the reception of the Commandery of Braux in 1667 as documented in the Archives of the Order of Malta, NLM, Arch., 2112, f. 432r. Garnier specifically requests his Seniority of Justice when requesting the Commandery, which was generally obtained at the age of 40 to 50 (but other archival evidence suggests that Garnier joined the Order a while later in life so he is more likely for have been nearing or over the age of 50).

Although, at this time, actual noble knight artists like Garnier were few in number, the tradition of the ennobled knight artist itself had been an old custom of the Catholic Church, where papal honours were conferred to the laity as a gesture of recognition and respect,³ and was adapted for painters, sculptors and architects largely from the early seventeenth century onwards. Throughout the history of art, a number of distinguished artists were bestowed with honorary titles of knighthood. Such knighthood did not solely decorate the applicant with a title but it also often conveniently came with a pension and graced the family name, all whilst improving the patron's reputation. Seventeenth-century Europe, the age to witness the emergence of this new knight artist concept, was an artistically conscious time of war and grandeur, and European rulers and intellectuals found pleasure in surrounding themselves with the best artists of the century, and often sought to raise the status of those who worked for them.⁴ Notable recipients of such titles include renowned artists like Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Peter Paul Rubens and Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio,⁵ who were bestowed with extremely prestigious honours during their lifetime.

The Sovereign Military Hospitaller Order of St John of Jerusalem of Rhodes and of Malta, being one of the most respected Orders of seventeenth-century Europe, was often involved in the granting of honorary knighthoods. One of its earliest quests for knighthood concerned Caravaggio immediately upon his arrival on the island. The Italian painter had arrived in Malta as a fugitive for the crime of murder, but he consequently managed to artistically collaborate and shelter

3 These early papal honours were mainly conferred through the frameworks of the Orders of Christ and of the Golden Militia. For more information on the involvement of the Holy See in the field of chivalry see Hyginus Eugene Cardinale, *Orders of Knighthood, Awards and the Holy See*. (Buckinghamshire: Van Duren Publishers, 1983).

4 David M. Stone, *Bad Habit: Scipione Borghese, Wignacourt, and the Problem of Cigoli's Knighthood* in Maroma Camilleri and Theresa Vella eds., *Celebratio Amicitiae: Essays in honour of Giovanni Bonello* (St Venera: Midsea Books Ltd, 2006), 212.

5 Keith Sciberras, *Caravaggio 'Obbediente'*. In *The Burlington Magazine* no 1359, volume 158 (June 2016), 424-492.

himself with the Order until his ill-fated escape back towards Italy. The letter sent by the Grand Master of the Order, Alof de Wignacourt, requesting papal permission to knight the artist is a clear example of how the bestowing of knighthood was barely bound by strict rules, and was more of a mere matter of talent, personal choice and favours.⁶ In fact, when a request for another artist was received in 1613,⁷ the same Grand Master strongly objected and insisted that, amongst other reasons, the artist in question was an ordinary painter of low birth who lived off the earnings of his art,⁸ and thus not a suitable applicant. Cases like this show how the Order considered its integrity to be a matter of great importance, and preserved its dignified reputation by being highly selective in awarding knighthood, whatever the circumstances were. Yet, each case was dealt with differently, and while each knighthood was handed out with due diligence, the Vatican's pressure and persistence could greatly influence the final decision taken by the Order. In fact in 1641, Pope Urban VIII sent a Brief to the Grand Master Lascaris in Malta allowing the reception of Mattia Preti, a painter from Taverna, into the Order as a Knight of Magistral Obedience,⁹ leaving the Order with little to no say regarding the matter.¹⁰

Lucas Garnier's knighthood was perceived differently than the aforementioned ones, since his reception into the Order would have received validation through his family proofs of nobility. While honorific titles allowed non-noble artists to join the Order, the concept

6 For a detailed description of Caravaggio's knighthood and life in Malta see David M. Stone and Keith Sciberras, *Caravaggio: Art, Knighthood, and Malta* (Valletta: Midsea Books Ltd, 2006).

7 The artist was Ludovico Cardi, known as *il Cigoli* and the request was made by Cardinal Scipione Borghese (Cardinal Nephew of Pope Paul V). Stone, *Bad Habit: Scipione Borghese, Wignacourt, and the Problem of Cigoli's Knighthood*, 208.

8 Stone, *ibid.*, 215-216, Wignacourt calls him *[una] persona di basso nascimento* and also *un Pittore ordinario [...] che [...] vive con la mercede che cava dell' arte sua*.

9 The document is transcribed in John Spike, *Mattia Preti: I Documenti/The Collected Documents* (Taverna: Centro Di Firenze per la Banca di Credito Cooperativo della Sila Piccola, 1998), 60-61.

10 Keith Sciberras, *Baroque Painting in Malta*, (Valletta: Midsea Books, 2009) 103 and Keith Sciberras, *Mattia Preti, The Triumphant Manner*, (Valletta: Midsea Books, 2012), 9-10.

of the noble knight artist bases itself on painters who had dutifully joined the Order according to its statutes, without requiring any special exemptions. This means that these fully-fledged noble knights and *fra serviente* were practising an art alongside their primary duties. Two other examples are Fra Pedro Nuñez de Villavicencio, a knight of Justice and practising painter in Malta, and the lesser-known Fra Vincenzo di Riccardo, both of whom were associated with Preti during the seventeenth century.¹¹

Generally, young men who aspired to join the Order of St John were faced with a choice of three different ranks – knights, conventual chaplains or serving brothers. The stringent rules surrounding each rank within the Order of St John meant that those joining faced numerous restrictions. In a questioning provided by the Order it is clear that knights being admitted to the langue of Italy were being questioned on whether they had ever been involved in any type of mechanical trade.¹² Similarly, no servant brothers or conventual chaplains were to be admitted if they or their immediate family had ‘ever followed any handicraft business, or practiced any mean mechanical trade,’ which means that practicing painters could have initially been met with a number of difficulties.

Yet, the beginning of the seventeenth century was marked by a new found stance on the arts. In 1601, the Clerk of the Apostolic Chamber had conveniently remarked that ‘painting is a most noble profession, quite different from the mechanical crafts’,¹³ clearly indicating that the profession of painting was slowly being disassociated from the other handicraft trades. As a result, noble artists interested in joining the Order of St John would have possibly faced little to no restrictions since their profession was gradually becoming no longer relevant to the aforementioned handicraft clause. This could mean these applicants

11 Sciberras, *Baroque Painting in Malta*, 166.

12 The statutes of the Order of St John can be found in René Aubert (L’Abbé) de Vertot, *History of the Knights of Malta (Volume II)* (Valletta: Midsea Books Ltd, 1728 from a 1989 facsimile edition).

13 Francis Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: Art and Society in Baroque Italy* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1980), 17.

were being considered as intellectual artists rather than as craftsmen who formed part of the lower labouring ranks of the artistic trade. Upon admission, each applicant could have also possibly clarified that in artistic production, the noble artist would have been responsible for the more scholarly and creative part of the execution of a work of art, which would have been difficult to accomplish and required more thought than the average craftsman would have been capable of.¹⁴

An exact chronological timeline of Lucas Garnier's life,¹⁵ including the precise details of his admission into the Order of St John as *fra serviente*, proved very difficult to reconstruct, however his movements around the continent, from his first decades in the region of Lorraine in France, to Rome in 1636, then to Malta by 1639 and finally back to France by 1672, can be sequentially placed, and his activity on the island can be more or less retraced through an adequate amount of documented evidence. His most significant life events following his reception into the Order are defined through the increase in artistic activity and status during the 1650s, and the commissions of two important works for St John's Conventual Church. Finally, following Preti's permanent arrival in 1661, Garnier experienced a drop in commissions. He was made Commander of Braux in 1667 and left Malta towards the early 1670s prior to his death in France in 1672.¹⁶

The reasons behind his departure from his hometown in France are still to the greatest extent unclear, however, there are a number of plausible ideas that could have motivated him to move further south. It is important to take into account the fact that although the adverse situation in France could have prompted him to leave,¹⁷ the ongoing

14 This idea was first brought forward by Professor Keith Sciberras and was taken up and discussed in detail in my M.A. dissertation.

15 Other variations of his name drawn from the several primary and secondary sources consulted for this study include Luc/Luca/Luka Granie/Garnie/Graniem.

16 NLM, Arch., 2113, f. 101r. Lucas Garnier died on 1 November 1672 and his death was documented on the 6 December 1672.

17 The area where Garnier would have spent the first few decades of his life was reportedly flourishing until the start of the Thirty Years' War in 1618 and the famine in 1626, which followed a meagre harvest that left the region largely devastated. The plague of 1635 then ravaged the area and a large number of inhabitants were

turmoil was not limited to the area, and affected the continent as a whole. Garnier's artistic inclinations would have made him desire to be in a location which was more artistically centred, and rather than Lorraine, Rome was the place to be. The demand for new works of art in Rome was immense, and following Urban VIII's election a new era had begun. Artists would have undoubtedly been attracted to the city and, in fact, a number of French artists are known to have moved to Rome during the seventeenth century, with some of them proving to be extremely successful.¹⁸

Garnier's presence in Rome during the 1630s meant that he would have been able to observe first-hand the most important works that were being produced by the leading artists of the period. He would have been able to study the works of Caravaggio's followers, as well as those of the artists of the Bolognese school, whose members had worked on some of the most important fresco cycles of the first two decades of the seventeenth century. These included the popular executions of Guido Reni's (1575-1642) *Aurora*, Giovanni Lanfranco's (1582-1647) dome fresco at San Andrea della Valle, and later, Guercino's (1591-1666) *Aurora* for the Casino Ludovisi. Pietro da Cortona who, by that time, was already working on the *Glorification of the Reign of Urban VIII* was also, between 1634 and 1638, *Principe* at the *Accademia di San Luca*. Garnier's attendance at the *Accademia* under his directorship in 1636 confirms both his interest in pursuing his artistic inclinations in a more professional manner and his familiarity with contemporary stylistic production. The presence of other academic members like Alessandro Algardi (1598-1654) and Andrea Sacchi (1599-1661) at the *Accademia* also meant that Garnier would have also been in touch with the new wave of classical realism. Although the length of Garnier's stay in Rome remains unknown, the impression given by his attendance at the *Accademia* is that he might have even settled down for a short while

swept away, with the precautions taken to prevent it proving unsuccessful due to the advancing of the troops through Europe which disseminated the disease even further.

18 These include Simon Vouet, Nicolas Poussin and Claude Lorrain.

before deciding to travel to Malta.

Lucas Garnier's eventual arrival in Malta has been narrowed down to sometime between 1636 and 1639, which is the year of his first documented mention in Malta.¹⁹ He was received into the Order of St John in 1643,²⁰ and an early contract for a painting executed for the Church of St Francis in Valletta dating to July 1641 shows that Garnier was already accepting commissions shortly after his arrival in Malta.²¹ Documentation also strongly suggests that, whilst in Malta, Garnier was mingling amongst a rather middle to upper-class entourage primarily of French nationality, which would have certainly elevated his reputation. Yet, Garnier also owes his early success in Malta to the state of artistic production at the time of his arrival. Since the 1620s, native artistic production on the island had stagnated into a mediocre style that was isolated from important continental developments.²² Malta had also experienced a rise in the production of Caravaggist works. Some works were of high quality but the Caravaggist movement was far from unified and a lot of regional differences were identifiable. Although a small number of remarkable foreign works had reached Malta during the period there were no signs of direct sources of Roman Caravaggism. Amongst the exceptions were a representation of *Cain and Abel* (National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta) by the Lombard Giuseppe Vermiglio (c.1587- after 1635) and a *Christ Embracing the Cross* (National Museum of Fine Arts, Valletta) by Guido Reni. *Cain and Abel*, considered as having been one of the most prestigious works in the collection, was originally displayed in the Grand Master's palace and its copies in private collections reflect both its accessibility and

19 Notarial Archives, Valletta, Notary Giuliano Felice, R260, Volume 30, f. 91v.

20 NLM, Arch., 470, f. 27r-27v

21 Convent of St Francis of Assisi, Valletta, AAICV, *Libro di Consigli della Ven: Confraternita della Concezione Immacolata di Maria sempre Vergine*, 1637 – 1687, f. 114v, as mentioned in Eve Cocks, *The Works of Art within the Church of St Francis of Assisi, Valletta*, B.A. (Hons) History of Art dissertation, Department of History of Art, University of Malta, 2012, 28 and as referenced in Joe Calleja, *Kultura u Devozzjoni* (Zabbar: Veritas Press, 1999), 47.

22 Sciberras, *Baroque Painting in Malta*, 79.

popularity.²³ Garnier, being a member of the Order, would have had easy access to the Palace and its collection and thus plenty of time to study such works meticulously.

Upon settling on the island, Garnier started to take careful note of the works that were being produced for Valletta, the surrounding harbour cities, and smaller villages. The artists to gain some sort of recognition in Malta during the first half of the seventeenth century were three; Bartolomeo Garagona, Gaspare Fornica and Filippino Dingli. With works in the Maltese vernacular tradition that display a lack of knowledge in various areas, Garnier was easily able to outdo what they were producing. However, Garnier's success on the island would not have been solely due to his artistic style and skills, but also due to his distinguished origins and his conspicuousness as a *pittore cavaliere*. This undeniably gave him a good reputation with the two most important patrons at that time, the Church and the Order of St John; the latter being regularly on the look-out for artists above the local vernacular level of painting. Some parishes also became well-acquainted with Garnier, with the parish church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ eventually commissioning up to four works by the artist, including the titular altarpiece. At least another six of his works were produced for other churches in Valletta and the surrounding harbour cities, whilst another eleven works were commissioned by smaller parishes and chapels as Garnier gained recognition in the smaller villages.

Garnier's later period was marked by the emergence of Stefano Erardi and the permanency of Mattia Preti. Although both artists were bringing about a change to the state of local artistic production, Preti was the one to take the island by storm once he was permanently settled on the island from 1661 onwards. He would have instigated strong competition for Erardi, and completely assumed Garnier's role as resident knight artist for the Order of St John. This would have meant

23 Keith Sciberras, *Caravaggio and Paintings of Realism in Malta* in Cynthia de Giorgio and Keith Sciberras, eds., *Caravaggio and Paintings of Realism in Malta* (Valletta: Midsea Books, 2007), 30.

that even if Garnier remained in Valletta until the late 1660s, he was no longer the important *pittore cavaliere* that he had been for the previous two decades. Nevertheless, the epitome of Lucas Garnier's success during his stay in Malta is defined through his executions for St John's Conventual Church in Valletta before Mattia Preti and Stefani Erardi had been involved in its redecoration. Two of Garnier's attributed works are found in two of the chapels inside the cathedral: *St Michael on Mount Gargano*, as a side lunette in the chapel of the langue of Provence, and the *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* (Figure 1) as the main altar painting of the chapel of the langue of Auvergne.²⁴

These works would have demonstrated some sort of familiarity with what was happening on mainland Europe; however, it is evident that Garnier was far from having fully grasped the Baroque style of contemporary Rome himself. This means that although at times competent, distinguished cognoscenti would have easily realised that Garnier manifested inconsistencies in both draughtsmanship and modelling. Fully aware of this drawback, the artist would have employed a direct and straightforward approach to infiltrate local artistic production and to impress the inhabitants of the island with both his talent and social status.

Characteristics of Lucas Garnier's oeuvre include recurring compositional devices, dramatic background scenery, limited invention and a style which does not have much reference to the Rome of the 1630s. The treatment of his figures is somewhat rigid and lacks vitality, but then contrasts with his flowing drapery and the strained depiction of chubby angels that animate most of his scenes. Garnier reutilises a number of body gestures, especially in the hands, and treats each of them in a delicate but weak manner that is evidenced in a large number of his works. Most of his facial types are highly comparable to each other and are defined by distinctive features such as large eyeballs and eyelids, contrasting lips and, at times, high and refined cheekbones, and an increasing influence from Guido Reni's facial typologies.

24 These attributions were first made by Professor Keith Sciberras in Sciberras, *Baroque Painting in Malta*, 98.

The general atmosphere that pervades his scenes is rather warm and calm, and is enhanced, in some cases, by Garnier's mild and careful use of the chiaroscuro technique. In contrast with contemporary local artists, Garnier sometimes employed a distinct yellowish tone when treating the highlighted areas on the figures which, as a result, put more emphasis on the modelling of the bodies. As a whole, his palette was heavily composed of a wide range of browns, reds and yellows with the occasional blues, whites and blacks most evident in the clothing of the figures.

The work which best sums up his style, manner and quality is possibly his *St Philip of Agira* which decorates the titular altar at the Parish Church of the St Philip of Agira, Žebbuġ (Figure 2).²⁵ Finely narrated and clearly planned out, it attests a coherent composition that evidences Garnier's efforts during a time when Preti had already introduced his triumphant Baroque style to the island. Although lacking Preti's confident and forcefully inventive manner, the work seems to have been proudly celebrated when it was completed. The animated conversations between the figures, the defined drapery folds, the layered composition, the distant glow in the background and the facial types are all typical of the artist, especially of his later years. His subdued use of a golden chiaroscuro is also reminiscent of some of his earlier works, such as his other most celebrated piece, the *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*.

A thorough survey of Garnier's corpus of works reveals a lot about his approach towards each subject matter. The compositional planning of the scenes seems to have been very carefully thought out and perhaps even briefly sketched aside prior to the commencement of each work (and maybe also in some cases presented to the patron for approval).²⁶ The majority of his works portray a rather unmistakable

25 This work has recently undergone restoration at ReCoop Ltd which has brought the work closer to its original state. The extensive areas of over-painting were cleaned, revealing more of the original palette and colour tones, as well as the brushwork of the artist.

26 The use of *bozzetti* was not popular during seventeenth century Europe (see Haskell, *Patrons and Painters: Art and Society in Baroque*, 11). However it is quite likely that some of the patrons would have requested some sort of basic preliminary sketch

improvement in the distribution of figures and in the refinement of a style that the artist would have been able to work on throughout the years. His earliest known works display a rather basic two-tiered composition; these include a representation of the *Virgin and Child with Sts Barbara, Lucy and John the Baptist* located in the sacristy of the Parish Church of the Nativity of the Virgin, Senglea and two representations of the *Annunciation of the Virgin* found in the Chapel of the Annunciation, Victoria, Gozo and in the sacristy of the Parish Church of the Nativity of the Virgin, Naxxar. Garnier seems to have experimented with and eventually adapted a more pyramidal compositional setting in his later works dating to the 1640s and the early 1650s, as evidenced in the *Holy Trinity with St Crispin and Crispinian* located in the Parish Church of St Lawrence, Vittoriosa and the *Assumption of the Virgin with Sts Lucy and Agatha* which is in the Parish Church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ. These works then compositionally anticipate Garnier's final works.

Garnier's early works were rather uninventive, with more variation in the gestures of the figures than in their arrangement within the scene itself. Apart from the common facial typologies, it was also typical of Garnier to almost superficially direct the saints' gazes, usually upwards, to create internal connections between the figures. His early works also illustrate an initial interest in the intricate depiction of the flowing drapery, which Garnier eventually managed to elaborate on in future works.

It is also evident that Lucas Garnier's earliest works contain both diluted Mannerist and mild Baroque characteristics. Like the other artists present in Rome, Garnier would have taken note of the easily intelligible geometrical compositions that became widely adopted and adapted during the seventeenth century.²⁷ However, direct

or outline for approval before Garnier started working on the final piece.

27 Accessible examples would have included a number of Caravaggio's works, most notably his *Martyrdom of St Matthew* (Contarelli Chapel, San Luigi de' Francesi, Rome), Annibale Caracci's *Assumption of the Virgin* (Cerasi Chapel, Santa Maria del Popolo, Rome) and Guido Reni's *St Michael* (Santa Maria della Concezione, Rome). As analysed in Wittkower Rudolf, *Art and Architecture in Italy: 1600-1750: II. High Baroque*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1999) (revised

Roman influences of this kind are still almost impossible to identify in Garnier's works though most of them portray the obvious interest he had in creating balanced compositions similar to those he had become familiar with in Rome.

Guido Reni's influence can also be observed in the typologies of his female facial features. While the *Assumption of the Virgin with Sts Agatha and Lucy* was previously attributed to the school of Reni,²⁸ the *Sts Ursula, Diego and Carlo Borromeo* (Figure 3) was attributed to Reni himself.²⁹ The former seems to be quite distant from the Italian artist, and the attribution was perhaps based on the modelling of the faces, especially those of the Virgin and St Agatha. St Ursula's face, however, seems to have been drawn with meticulous care and parallels can be found in many of Reni's depictions of female saints which makes it very likely that Garnier had observed his works carefully whilst in Rome. For example, works that strongly evidence Reni's modelling of the female face are his *St Mary Magdalene* (1633, Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Antica, Roma) and his *Death of Cleopatra* (1625-30, New Palace, Potsdam), amongst many others.³⁰

Works by Lucas Garnier assigned to the 1650s, both securely attributed and not, show a considerable progression in both composition and technical and stylistic competence. The increase in commissions also means that this decade was the artist's most active one, and that he would have started to consider himself as a 'professional' artist and to move swiftly from one work to the other. Whilst keeping in mind that

by Joseph Connors and Jennifer Montagu), 76, the trend of compositional devices reached a peak in the years around the 1630s. Other examples include works such as Pietro da Cortona's, and also Gianlorenzo Bernini's sculpture, for instance his Rape of Persephone and his David.

- 28 Luret Vella, *Storja ta' Haż-Żebbuġ*, (Żebbuġ: Knisja Arcipretali ta' Haż-Żebbuġ, 1986) 125-126. Vella refers to the school of Guido Reni as being a 'traditional attribution.'
- 29 George Aquilina, *Il-Frangiskani Maltin (Ta' Ġiezu)*, (Santa Venera: Klabb Kotba (Midsea Books), 2011), 354.
- 30 It is important to note that Garnier might not have specifically studied these works, but they both are a good example of Guido Reni's style, especially with regards to the female facial types.



Figure 1. Lucas Garnier, *Martyrdom of St Sebastian*.



Figure 2. Lucas Garnier, *St Philip of Agira*, titular altar of the Parish Church of the St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ.



Figure 3. Guido Reni, *Sts Ursula, Diego and Carlo Borromeo*.



Figure 4. Attributed to Lucas Garnier, *Virgin and Child with St John the Baptist*, Private Collection.

different subject matters cannot be treated with the same compositional approach, Garnier managed to come up with some remarkable, though unexciting, figure-settings, especially towards the second half of the fifties, as exemplified in his three versions of the *Virgin of the Rosary* at the Dominican Church in Rabat; the Parish Church of St Bartholomew in Ġhargħur; and the Parish Church of St Philip of Agira in Żebbuġ; and in his two versions of the *Holy Trinity with Souls* located in the Parish Church of St Philip of Agira, Żebbuġ and in the Parish Church of St Catherine, Żurrieq; and in the *St Philip of Agira*.

The artist's most celebrated works of the 1650s period also included, first and foremost, his works for St John's Conventual Church. Although possibly commissioned under a small amount of pressure, the artist managed to successfully create two works that seem to have been well celebrated upon their installation in the church. In the lunette of the *Apparition of St Michael on Mount Gargano*, executed for the chapel of the langue of Provence, Garnier devised a layered compositional setting. The figures depicted in the work evidence similar facial types to the *St Philip of Agira*, which acts as a secure basis for the attribution of the lunette.³¹ Garnier's other work for St John's, the *Martyrdom of St Sebastian* executed for the altar in the chapel of the langue Auvergne is possibly one of his best pieces. A sense of monumentality dominates the scene especially through the vertical figure of St Sebastian, which very slightly recalls the Late Mannerism that was still lingering on the island.³²

The modelling of the saint's body is reminiscent of the dead body of the Christ in the *Holy Trinity with St Crispin and Crispinian* which was completed for the Parish Church of St Lawrence, Vittoriosa in 1643, and perhaps also of Guido Reni's well-known *St Sebastian* (1615, Capitoline Museum, Rome), which Garnier had surely taken the time to study.

31 It is interesting to note that quite a few faces depicted in the *Apparition of St Michael on Mount Gargano* are almost identically repeated in the *St Philip of Agira*, which supports the attribution of the former as first proposed by Professor Keith Sciberras.

32 Garnier had also been possibly trained within a Late Mannerist context during his early years in France.

This altar painting is also often discussed within the local vernacular Caravaggist context due to its very evident employment of the *chiaroscuro* technique. In fact, as vaguely mentioned in relation to some of his other works, some pieces do indeed make use of the play of light and shade. However, Garnier's approach must be differentiated from that of Caravaggio, since it is overall quite distant from any type of intense realism. His figures are also free from the natural tension present in Caravaggio's works and are instead either calmly and rigidly depicted, or unknowingly imbued with a superficial type of tension which immobilises the scene rather than loosening it up. But then again, Garnier's works still rise above the level of his contemporaries and have nothing to do with the much less competent so-called Caravaggist works of other artists like Garagona.

Most of Garnier's later works were all undertakings of significance both in terms of invention and context. Defined by fuller and improved compositions, they project a noticeable minor sense of grandeur that the artist would have been happy to achieve. Possibly the first one produced in the 1650s, the *Virgin of the Rosary* for the parish church of Żebbuġ, is the smallest in size and the only one which was consequently replaced and moved to another location. The work is quite interesting since the Baroque idiom is manifested in the surrounding *quadratura*, which reflects the fresh and energetic manner of painting that Garnier struggled to reach in his later years. It also anticipates the later works of the same subject executed for the parish church of Ġħargħur and the Dominican Church of our Lady of the Grotto in Rabat.

Towards the end of the 1650s Garnier produced two versions of the *Holy Trinity with Souls* for the parish churches of Żebbuġ and Żurrieq. These works can, in many ways, be regarded as Garnier's rather successful later compositions. However, in spite of their improvement in invention, some of the body gestures and facial typologies of the figures reoccur and easily give away the authorship. Most interestingly, both works must be placed alongside Mattia Preti's own *Holy Trinity with the Virgin interceding for the Soul in Purgatory*, completed in 1659 for the church of All Souls in Valletta. Such a comparison is a

perfect example of the stylistic division that existed between the two. Evidently, Garnier was becoming stylistically outrun.

Despite the fact that Lucas Garnier produced works over a span of more than twenty-five years, few significant technical and stylistic improvements were made. This shows that although Garnier would have had ample time to develop and somewhat improve and enhance his style while on the island, he seems to have found it difficult to really depart from his original typologies. Yet, this could have meant that, until Preti's arrival, he felt that there was no need to ameliorate his skills further or to attempt to grasp a better contemporary Baroque idiom.³³ His contemporaries were no competition and Stefano Erardi was still not established enough to compete with him (and by the time he was, Garnier had withdrawn from the artistic scene). If this was really the case, it could reflect the impassivity with which he viewed artistic activity in seventeenth century Malta, probably largely due to the important role that he assumed till the end of the 1650s.

Within this context, it is worth referring to a small-scale work representing the *Virgin and Child with St John the Baptist* which was recently attributed to Lucas Garnier (Figure 4).³⁴ The attribution is based on style and the work is characteristically close to other works by the artist. This idea is further supported by the similarities to Garnier's facial typologies, as well as by the depiction of the drapery folds and the manner in which the posture of the figures occupies the picture space. Furthermore, the palette is very typical of the artist and recurs in several of his larger works. The addition of this work to the corpus of works by Garnier initiates a discussion on the artist's smaller private works, many of which unfortunately remain until now unknown.

Overall, Garnier's corpus of works contains some interesting pieces, five of which were added to the list only recently.³⁵ The

33 Although admittedly, apart from the handful of foreign works that dotted Valletta and its surroundings, there was little left to grasp from vernacular artists.

34 This work was identified by Professor Keith Sciberras in 2015 when the work was being auctioned and is being published as a work by Lucas Garnier for the first time. The work is in a private collection.

35 These works were first added to Garnier's corpus of work with the help of Professor

handicap of the study of Garnier's oeuvre is that unfortunately only one of Lucas Garnier's small scale works has been identified. This limits the study to public works, and as of yet still very little is known about his smaller works. Nevertheless, research on the artist has improved his standing within the mid-seventeenth century Maltese artistic context and has also connected the knight artist concept as known on mainland Europe with the Order of St John in Malta. The combined concept with the case-study of Lucas Garnier has confirmed that the French artist's artistic success on the island was truly largely due to the state of art in Malta during his time but also, most importantly, to his social standing as a knight artist.