

# BOOK REVIEWS

DE MAJO, Paul, *Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio*. Malta, Department of Information, 1959. 33p.

This is one of the useful pamphlets which the Department of Information issues from time to time on subjects of local interest. It contains 35 pages of well-written text, illustrated by 11 half-tone reproductions of Caravaggio paintings, including the picture cover of the Martyrdom of St. Matthew (Rome, San Luigi dei Francesi). The master himself is shown in the frontispiece. The list of references at the end includes some recent publications on Caravaggio.

Professor John Pick, who was Fulbright Lecturer at the Royal University of Malta in 1955/1956, writes as follows in his Preface to this survey and appreciation of the famous master: "In the present study Paul De Majo modestly presents a synthesis of the scholarly researches devoted to Caravaggio during the last fifty years. His appeal is not so much to specialists or advanced art historians as to that larger public eager to be introduced to one of the most powerful of the Renaissance painters. His little booklet weaves together a survey of the life of Caravaggio with an analysis of some of his most important and representative paintings which have been newly examined and freshly observed."

Few will disagree with this fair assessment of De Majo's pamphlet.

J.C.P.

DENARO, Victor F., *The Maltese Obsidional Coins of 1800*. Reprinted from the "Numismatic Chronicle", Sixth Series, Vol. XVIII, 1958, pp. 173-176.

The author of this extract has already published a few studies on the coinage struck by the French in Malta in 1798-1800. In the present article he turns his attention to the 30-tari pieces of the Occupation Period identical with those struck by the last Grand

Master, Hompesch. In giving the results of his inquiry, Mr. Denaro not unnaturally finds it hard to believe that the eight-pointed Cross of the Knights should have been struck by the French on the obsidional coins under review. On the insufficient evidence available, however, the author did not feel justified in reaching any definite conclusions and he very prudently ended by saying that "after having stated all the facts the writer does not feel himself competent to pass a verdict on the coins forming the object of this paper". The door is thus left open to further research on the subject.

J.C.P.

GALEA, Dr. Joseph, *The Sovereign Order of Malta*. Windsor, Ontario, Canada, 1958. 29p.

In this admirable digest Professor Galea, Vice-President of the Malta Historical Society, fulfils the aim he set out to achieve "...to give a slight idea of the glorious history of the Order. If it stimulates the reader to seek better information about the Order our labour will not be lost."

Perhaps the best chapter is that devoted to the Order after its departure from Malta — a period characterised first by various attempts to acquire some territorial possession, gradually giving way to a policy of promoting the grouping of Knights into national associations and finally culminating in a return to the Order's pristine ideals and activities for the benefit of suffering mankind. The circumstances leading to the appointment of a Commission of Cardinals by the Pope and the submission of their preliminary report in March, 1953, are also touched upon. Within the brief compass of this booklet the author managed to include a short list of references and various illustrations.

J.C.P.

SAMMUT, Edward. *The Valletta Armoury and a letter from Sir Guy Laking*. Malta, Progress Press, 1959. 16p.

Dr. Sammut, who is already well-known for his studies on various aspects of the history of Art in Malta, gives a summary of the origin and development of the Valletta Armoury in this reprint of his article from "Scientia" (Vol. XXV, No. 1, 1959). The best part of his study is devoted to the publication of the text of a letter sent to Lord Grenfell, then Governor of Malta, by Sir Guy Laking who was engaged in 1900 to classify, catalogue and rearrange the Armoury.

We agree with the author that the letter is "of great interest". The following extracts from Laking's judgment on the value of the Armoury are revealing. From its historical and sentimental interest "I venture to say that no armoury or arsenal in Europe can boast of being its equal, for it has been brought together under conditions that affect most closely the history of Malta". As regards its artistic value "a little less enthusiasm may be felt..... a vast quantity is of a type too often duplicated to be of any particular artistic merit". Viewed from its monetary value, Laking placed this "at a figure of between £18,000 and £24,000 and of that sum six or seven thousand pounds alone can be accounted for in the magnificent suit made for Alof de Wignacourt, without doubt the most precious possession of the Armoury."

One hopes that, with the material already at his disposal, the author will find time to make a more solid contribution to the history of art in Malta.

J.C.P.