

THE CRYPT AND CHURCH OF S. MARIJA TAL-VIRTU' AT RABAT*

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The rotunda of S. Marija tal-Virtù (1) is situated in a grove of pine and carob trees on the easternmost extremity of the Rabat plateau on lands that formed part of the *mensa vescovile*. (2) Once a popular shrine, it is now abandoned and its fabric is dangerously cracked. It stands some 192m above sea level, in a zone particularly susceptible to earth tremors, and looks out over one of the finest prospects in all Malta. The site has archaeological significance and is rich in Phoenician and Romano-Punic tombs some of which have yielded important finds. (3) Close to the church, A.A. Caruana recorded many bell-shaped excavations, similar to those at Mtarfa, which unco-operative landowners prevented him from investigating. (4) He believed them to be

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A.C.M. = Archives of the Cathedral of Mdina, Cathedral Museum Mdina

C.E.M. = Curia Episcopalis Melitensis, Cathedral Museum Mdina.

N.M.V. = National Museum Valletta

N.L.M. = National Library of Malta

P.A.R. = Parish Archives, Rabat.

1. The dedication to the Virgin under the title of *tal-Virtù* (of Virtue) is unique in Malta and does not seem to be common in other Roman Catholic countries. It is worth pointing out that while the two earliest documents, respectively of 1438 and 1454, (see *infra*) refer to it as *Ste Marie de Virtutibus*, the church was also known as *Annunciationis B.M.* (N.M.V., *Visitatio Dusina* 1575, f.195); *S. Maria del Annunciazione della Virtù* (A.C.M., Misc. 180, 36v); *Nominis B.M. Virg (Visitatio Pace Forno* 1863-6, f.19v) and *N.S. della Nativita sotto il titolo della Virtù* (P.A.R., *Account Books of tal-Virtu Church*, 1856-1936, f.4). According to T. Zammit, *Museum Annual Report* 1910-11, p.10, "Tal Virtù is a name corrupted from *ta Birtuta*, as the district was known in old times."
2. As recorded in various visitation reports such as *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v; *Cocco Palmieri* 1708-10, f.24v; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27; *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54rv.
3. Such as the two-chambered tomb discovered in Jan. 1890 at tal-Merħla on the Tal-Virtù Rd, described in A.A. Caruana, *Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Cemeteries*, Malta 1898, 69 and pl.XIII. Also significant were a group of tombs discovered on a building site at ix-Xaghri tal-Virtù in 1968-9, (*M[useum] A[nnual] R[eport]* 1968, 1969 and T.C. Gouder in *Heritage* vol. 1, 313-5).
4. N.L.M. BL/6/23: A.A. Caruana, *Report on the Antiquities in tal Virtù* (typescript)

Roman tombs but it is not improbable that they were Bronze-Age storage pits related to a Borg in-Nadur type hill-top settlement. (5) A more important monument was a presumably paleochristian hypogeum 'of very limited extension and not deeply tunnelled under the surface rock' (6) which G.F. Abela in 1647 (7) and A.A. Caruana in 1901 (8) both associated with the rock-cut crypt beneath the church. The hypogeum, now walled up, seems to have consisted, rather uncharacteristically, of 'locular graves'. (9) Caruana dated it, perhaps correctly, to the end of the 5th or the beginning of the 6th centuries. (10)

The crypt

The crypt was possibly formed by the recutting and fusion of several burial chambers of the hypogeum. (11) It has a lobed plan roughly resembling a Latin cross with three apsed recesses which probably contained altars. All around it ran rock-cut benches and the walls were stuccoed to make them water-proof and, possibly, to receive murals. (12) Two pilasters supported the ceiling and light was filtered through two skylights. (13) The facade of built masonry is stylistically datable to the 15th century. It has a low, slightly pointed, arched doorway with large voussoirs round which runs a Gothic hood-mould with end rosettes which is beautifully decorated with acanthus leaves. (14) Both voussoirs and jambs have relief carvings of zig-zag patterns between which leaves meander and intertwine. The crypt is reached down

dated 17 June 1901). The Mtarfa pits were, possibly, similar to the two excavated by J.B. Ward Perkins in 1939 (M.A.R. 1938-39) and discussed in J.D. Evans, *The Prehistoric Antiquities of the Maltese Islands*, London 1971, 107.

5. Bronze-Age hill settlements and bell shaped excavations are discussed in Evans, 200-1, which, however, does not mention the tal-Virtù pits.
6. Caruana, *Report on the Antiquities in tal Virtu*.
7. G.F. Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta*, Malta 1647, 47.
8. Caruana, *Report*. It is also mentioned, but not described, in *Ancient Pagan Tombs and Christian Burials*, 14, 18, 35, 38.
9. Caruana, *Report*. The Christian hypogea of Malta contain several types of tombs, the commonest being of the window and *baldacchino* variety. Loculus tombs were usually intended for the burial of small children. Access to the hypogeum was already blocked in 1647 as reported by Abela, 47.
10. Caurna, *Report*.
11. The same thing happened at St. Agatha and possibly at S. Marija tal-Grotta, Abbatija tad-Dejr and elsewhere.
12. Abela, 47. Several other rock churches had both stone benches and mural paintings. See M. Buhagiar "Medieval Churches in Malta" in *Medieval Malta-Studies on Malta before the Knights* ed. A. Luttrell, London 1975.
13. Abela, 47.
14. There are similar hood-moulds at Bir Miftuh.

several steps which in the 17th century were covered by an arcaded portico which must have abutted the late medieval church. (15)

Similar rock-cut churches are fairly common in Malta where the tradition may have come from Sicily and southern Italy. (16) They are all of unknown antiquity. (17) The more important were, apparently, concentrated in the Rabat area where they are usually either connected with or in close proximity to paleochristian hypogea. They seem to have been cult centres and some of them became important shrines. (18) The tal-Virtù crypt was a *primitiva ecclesia* in 1615, (19) and the 1744 visitation recorded the tradition that services were once held in the old Greek liturgy with the congregation going round the altar three or seven times to receive graces. (20) In 1575 it was *satis devota*; (21) in 1722 it was held in *magna veneratione* by the inhabitants of Mdina and Rabat; (22) and in 1744 it was *valde devota*. (23) In 1744 and 1781 masses were sometimes celebrated out of piety, (24) and in 1809 the neatly kept altar was found suitable. (25)

The crypt had several altars in 1575 (26) but only one altar is mentioned in subsequent reports and in Abela's 1647 description. (27) It stood in the apse (*in tribuna*) and was detached from the walls. (28) In 1722 it had an old painting on wood defaced by time. (29) This was eventually substituted by an alabaster statue of the Virgin (30) which was probably the one bought in c. 1731 in Trapani, Sicily, for 3 *scudi*. (31) The altar was painted in 1731, (32)

15. The portico is first mentioned in A.C.M, Misc. 181, (*Visitatio Cagliares* 1615), f.80 and described in Abela, 47.
16. For Sicilian and south Italian rock-churches see G. Agnello, "Architettura rupestre bizantina in Sicilia", in his *L'Architettura bizantina in Sicilia*, Florence 1952; and "Circolo La Scaletta", *Le chiese rupestre di Matera*, Rome 1966.
17. Maltese rock-churches are discussed in Buhagiar, *op.cit.*
18. Such as St. Paul's cave, the Virgin of the Grotto, and St. Agatha (Rabat), and the Sanctuary of the Virgin (Mellieha).
19. A.C.M., Misc. 181. (*Cagliares* 1615), f.80.
20. *Visitatio Alpheran* 1744-51, 54-55v, "...ut mos erat antiquorum et tenacissimi ritus Grecorum, in quo celebratur ex devotione fidelium confluentium, et solebant fideles circuire dictum altare ter vel septies ut impetrarent postulata".
21. N.M.V, *Visitatio Dusina* 1575, f.195.
22. *Visitatio Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.
23. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54-55v.
24. *Ibid.*, *Visitatio Labini* 1781, f.17v.
25. *Visitatio Mattei* 1809, f.21.
26. N.M.V, *Dusina*, f.195.
27. Abela, 47.
28. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54-5v.
29. *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.
30. *Labini* 1781, f.17v.
31. C.E.M, C185, f.49.

and in 1744 it had everything necessary. (33) In 1781 it did not have a cross (34) but one was soon afterwards provided and in June 1782 the carpenter Saverio Vassallo was paid 6 *tari* for making a stand for it. (35)

The skylights were sealed when a church was erected above the crypt (36) presumably in the early 15th century. They were opened again after the building of the rotunda and in c. 1731 they were fitted with iron screens which cost 6 *scudi*. (37) In 1615 the entrance to the crypt was closed by a gate. (38) In November 1682 a new gate was made by the carpenter Consalez Camenzuli, and in 1693 the blacksmith Tomaso Taleana manufactured a lock and key for it. (39) In c. 1731 it was substituted by another gate, complete with lock and key, which cost 3 *scudi*. (40)

The late medieval church

A church seems to have been built above the crypt by 1438 when Antonio di Bigliera, in his will drawn up on 28 May before Notary Luca de Sillato, endowed the *ecclesia Ste Marie de Virtutibus* with a piece of land called *ta Formag*. (41) The church was further endowed by Bartolomeo de Bordino in his will of 6 December 1454, registered in the acts of Notary Angelo de Manuele. (42) Both the author of the *Stato di tutte le chiese della diocesi di Malta* (1680) (43) and the compiler of the 1744 report of Bishop Alpheran de Bussan, (44) who may have been familiar with the original text, describe this bequest as consisting of 2 *salmi* of land near Żebbuġ. They further report that the church was endowed *pro suo margamate* which seems to imply that

32. C.E.M., C185, f.49.

33. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54-5v.

34. *Labini* 1781, f.17v.

35. C.E.M., C185, f.95.

36. Abela, 47.

37. C.E.M., C185, f.50v.

38. A.C.M., Misc. 181, f.80.

39. C.E.M., C185, f.11v, 12.

40. *Ibid.*

41. A.C.M., Misc. 280, f.1. The will is only known to the author in an early modern summary. It is improbable that the church mentioned in the will was the crypt for the term *ecclesia* usually denoted a built church. Rock-cut churches were usually called *gripta* (N.M.V. *Dusina*, 195), *cripta* (A.C.M., Misc. 181, f.80), or *ecclesia crypta* (*Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54).

42. A.C.M., Misc 280, 46. The will is only known to the author in an early modern summary.

43. A.C.M., Misc 180, 37. The ms is generally held to be the notes for the 1678-80 visitation report of Bishop Molina, but this is arguable.

44. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54-5v.

it was either being rebuilt or enlarged. (45) The endowment ran into trouble because Bishop Antonio de Alagona pretended and got a fourth part, but following an appeal by Bartolomeo's heirs he surrendered his claim in 1436. (46) Bartolomeo de Bordino also left the church another 2 *salmi* of land called *il chiseyer ta chivel Rahal*. On 13 November 1472 Leonardo de Bordino, as heir of Bartolomeo, disposed of these lands in favour of Don Enrico de Bordino, rector and beneficiary of the church. (47) Bartolomeo de Bordino was commemorated by an escutcheon carved in relief on the floor of the church (48) where it possibly marked his tomb. The Falzoni and Caxari families were other probable benefactors for their escutcheons were sculptured on the main facade. (49)

The church was *satis decenter constructa et ampla* in 1575; (50) *ampla* in 1615; (51) *antiqua et satis decens* in 1671; (52) and *antiquissima* in 1722. (53) Like other late medieval Maltese churches, it was a seemingly box-like structure with an east-end apse and a probable flat ceiling of stone slabs carried on the backs of seven large arches, presumably rising from wall piers, which divided the internal space into eight bays. (54) Two doors facing west and south respectively are mentioned in 1667 and 1671 (55) but only a west door is recorded in 1615 and 1722. (56) On the west front the gable was pierced by a well proportioned round eye (57) and enlivened by the arms of the Falzoni and Caxari families. (58) Above it was an arched bell-cot in which hang a bronze bell, (59) which was repaired in November 1682 by Mro. Francesco

45. *Alpheran*, f.54, says that the church was built in 1454. A. Ferris, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo*, Malta 1866, 125, presumably basing himself exclusively on the Alpheran report gives 1454 as the date of foundation of the first church.
46. As reported in A.C.M., Misc 180, f.37, and *Alpheran*, f.54rv. The bishop may have backed his claim by the fact that the church stood on lands belonging to the *mensa vescovile*.
47. A.C.M, Misc. 180, f.37; *Alpheran*, f.54rv.
48. A.C.M, Misc. 180, f.37.
49. *Ibid.*
50. N.M.V, *Dusina*, f.95.
51. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v.
52. *Ibid.*, f.321v.
53. *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.
54. On late medieval church architecture see Buhagiar, *op. cit.* The apse is mentioned in *Buenos* 1667-8, 20v. The church is described in A.C.M, Misc. 181, 79v. and *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.
55. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v; M.C.A. Misc. 181, f.321v.
56. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.
57. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v, and M.C.A, Misc. 180, f.37r.
58. A.C.M., Misc. 180, f.37. They were placed above the eye.
59. A.C.M, Misc. 181. f.79v, 80, 321v, *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v, *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.

Debrincat who was paid 1 scudo. (60) In 1667 the apse served the purpose of a vestry. (61) About the end of the 17th century it was demolished and a small vestry was built in stead. The vestry had a small door and in 1703 its roof was repaired by Lorenzo Vella. (62)

The Church had one altar in 1575 and five altars in 1597. (63) Only one stone altar is mentioned in subsequent reports starting from 1615. (64) In the 17th century it stood outside the apse (65) apparently on a raised chancel (66) isolated by a stone balustrade. (67) On the altar was a painted and gilt-wood retable first mentioned in 1615, (68) while in front of it hang a metal lamp which was lit daily thanks to the contributions of pious people. (69) In 1575 the altar had a painting protected by a light yellow curtain. (70) It was soon afterwards replaced by a new altar-piece of the Virgin and Child described in 1615 as the work of a skilful painter. (71) This painting which survives in a poor state of preservation has stylistic affinities with Filippo Paladini who was active in Malta in the late 16th century and, apparently, in the first decade of the 17th. (72) In 1615 it was protected from dust by a curtain of violet cloth on which was painted or embroidered a cross, and in 1722 it had a painted and gilt-wood frame. (73) By 1667 it had become a cult object, and by 1722 silver crowns had been placed on the heads of the Virgin and Child. (74)

The altar was adequately furnished in 1575, and in 1597 it had two

60. C.E.M, C185, f.12v-13.
61. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v.
62. *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv; C.E.M, C185, f.12v-13.
63. N.M.V. *Dusina*, f.195; M.C.A, Misc. 181, f.36v.
64. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v.
65. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v.
66. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v.
67. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv; A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.321v.
68. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v, 321v.
69. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v; *Cocco Palmieri* 1708-10, f.24v-25; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv; A.C.M, Misc. 181, (*Astiria* 1671), f.321v. *Astiria* and *Gori Mancini* describe it as a *sublampadario stanneo*, while *Cocco Palmieri* calls it *sublamparario aneo*. It seems to have been fixed after 1615 since the inventory that accompanies the report of that year makes no mention of a lamp (A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.80).
70. N.M.V, *Dusina*, f.195.
71. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v.
72. On Filippo Paladini see Cesare Brandi's introduction to the *Catalogo della Mostra di Filippo Paladini — Palermo Palazzo Dei Normanni Maggio/Settembre 1967*. The painting, the lower part of which is a complete loss, is in process of restoration by Maurice Cordina under the expert guidance of Dr John Cauchi who was the first to ascribe it to the circle of Paladini.
73. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v, 80r; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.
74. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.208; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.

wooden candlesticks. (75) In 1615 it had linen and worked wood candlesticks but no cross. (76) The inventory compiled in that year, lists among other items: a chalice with a gilt-copper stand and silver cup and paten; an antependium of peacock-blue damask and three other antependiums two of which were respectively of white and green cloth; two white linen altar-cloths one of which measured 3 *canni*, while the other was 'old'; two other altar-cloths one with fringes of red and white silk, the other with white thread embroidery at the corners and a surround of white thread fringes; two pairs of cushions of red and green silk; a pair of black silk cushions lined with yellow silk; and a white kerchief (*moccatore*) lined with gold thread. (77) In front of the altar were the effigies of two *Agnus Dei* each surmounted by a gilt cross in a gilt glory of radiating rays. (78) There was also a marble holy water stoup. (79) In November 1626 Don Pietro Mallia, the procurator, commissioned a *baldachino* from Mro. Gregorio Sicaluna and Mro. Vincenzo Haius and paid them respectively 6 *tari* and 3 *tari*: 10 *grani*; the iron framework was made by Mro. Angelo Seichel for 10 *tari*. (80) About 1703 Mro. Silvestro Pace, a tailor, did some upholstery works for 1 *tari*: 12 *grani*, while in 1715 Mro. Domenico Tabone was paid 7 *scudi*: 8 *tari* for making another antependium and a vase of artificial flowers. (81) The church had, besides, several sacred vestments (82) preserved together with other valueables in a wooden chest. In 1615 the chest was kept in the house of the verger, Josephus Pisani, (83) but it was subsequently moved to the church where it was placed on the gospel side of the altar. (84)

The church was shaken in the earthquake of 1693 and Mro. Lorenzo Grima assisted by his son Francesco and by Gratio Vella worked for five and a half days to repair the damage. (85) Lorenzo Vella and his *manuale* Tommaso Gauci then spent two and a half days water-proofing the roof, and the church was subsequently white-washed. (86) The roof was kept in a constant state of repair and annual maintenance works are recorded for the periods 1673-82,

75. N.M.V., *Dusina*, f.195; M.C.A, Misc. 181, f.36v.

76. A.C.M, Misc. 181; f.79v-80.

77. *Ibid.*, f.80.

78. *Ibid.*

79. *Ibid.*, f.79v.

80. C.E.M, C185, f.141.

81. *Ibid.*, f.13.

82. A.C.M, Misc. 181, (*Cagliares* 1615), f.79v, 80, where they are listed in the inventory. They were the gift of priests who officiated in the church and of pious devotees.

83. *Ibid.*, f.79v.

84. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.208; *Cocco Palmieri* 1708-10, f.24v-25; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv; A.C.M, Misc. 181, (*Astiria* 1671), f.321v.

85. C.E.M, C185, f.12.

86. *Ibid.*

1683-92, 1694-9, and 1704-16. (87) More extensive works seem to have been carried out in 1682, 1700 and 1703. (88) The doors were kept in good shape. In 1682 the side door was repaired and fitted with a new key made by the blacksmith Tommaso Taleana. (89) The main door was repaired in c. 1693. (90)

The rotunda

The decision to replace the old church by a rotunda, in 'a modern and elegant architectural style', (91) was apparently taken by Canon Don Antonio Castelletti soon after he became procurator on 8 May 1717. (92) Fund raising activities were organized and generous donations made, (93) but a collections-box placed in the church was forced open by thieves on 2 December 1718. (94) The response was at first disappointing. In 1717 and 1718 contributions amounted to 8 *tari*: 2 *grani* and 1 *scudo*: 3 *tari*: 10 *grani* respectively and only 4 *tari*: 5 *grani* were found in the collections-box on 8 May 1719. (95) Then money started pouring in. A gold ring and a silver cross valued together at nearly 4 *carlini* were donated on 27 May 1723 in the church of St. Paul at Rabat, and nearly 6 *scudi* were collected during a penitential procession from Mdina Cathedral to the Rabat Dominican church after the earthquake of 3 March 1743. (96) Benefactors included Grand Master Vilhena who donated 44 *scudi* in 1726 and, on several occasions, the Mdina Università and its officials. (97) Between 1721-30 Baron Inguanez donated 351 *scudi* and Baron Castelletti nearly 500 *scudi*. (98) Handsome contributions were made by other noblemen and church officials while humbler folk came forth with their modest donations. The latter included Mro. Paolo, the Gozitan barber, who in 1727 gave 1 *scudo*: 4 *tari*, and the pious person, who wished to remain anonymous, who on 29 May 1721 contributed 1 *scudo* through the vice parish priest of Rabat. (99) Other benefactors made donations in kind. In 1726 Leonardo Falzon presented a slave who was sold for 42 *scudi*, and in 1727 Dr. Gauci, the physician, gave

87. C.E.M., C185, f.12.

88. *Ibid.*, f.11v, 12, 12v, 13.

89. *Ibid.*, f.11v.

90. *Ibid.*

91. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54.

92. C.E.M., C185, f.30v. Antonio Castelletti remained procurator until his death in 1743.

93. *Ibid.*, f.30-33v.

94. *Ibid.*, f.30.

95. *Ibid.*

96. *Ibid.*, f.31, 33.

97. *Ibid.*, f.32rv.

98. *Ibid.*, f.32.

99. *Ibid.*, f.31, 32v. There were other anonymous contributions.

another slave who was sold by public auction in the courtyard of the Municipal Palace for 95 *scudi* from which over 2 *scudi* were, however, deducted to cover general expenses. (100) In all between 1717-43 over 1,954 *scudi* were collected. (101) To this sum should be added a further 100 *scudi* gained in 1725-6 through the sale of donated hens and from other sources. (102)

The 1722 report makes no reference to the building of a new church, (103) but work seems to have started as early as May 1717 when the three workmen Salvatore Sillato, Dionisio Catania and Bartolomeo Grixti were employed for five days to cut stone from a nearby quarry. (104) More stone was cut in the following months but in the first few years work seems to have been intermittent. (105) Boys cleaned the stone blocks which were then carted to the building site. (106) In 1725 stone was cut from two separate quarries known respectively as *Giolgiolena* and *ta Sirina*. (107) Stone from *ta Sirina* cost 1 *tari* per cartload while that from *Giolgiolena* cost 15 *grani*. (108) Between July and October 1725, 946 cartloads are recorded from *ta Sirina* and more than 800 from *Giolgiolena*, and in 1726-7 there were at least 713 cartloads apparently from *ta Sirina*. (109) Nine *balate* or large slabs (Maltese *xorok*) were bought from *Giolgiolena* in September 1725, while five other *balate*, seemingly from *ta Sirina*, are reported together with sixty-five cartloads of ordinary building stone on 27 July 1726. (110) The lower courses up to and including the cornice were completed under the direction of mastermason Petruzzo Debono for a total fee of 455 *scudi*. (111) Work then stopped until 19 May 1728. (112) On 5 June Mro. Debono and his assistants were paid a further 7 *scudi*: 4 *tari a far il giro della filata* (113) which may perhaps refer to the building of the narrow attic band above the cornice. Another 1,093 loads of stone were meanwhile carted from a new quarry called *della Vittoria*. (114) and on 14 August 1728, 13 *scudi*: 4 *tari* were paid for the

100. C.E.M, C185, f.32rv.

101. *Ibid.*, f.33.

102. *Ibid.*, f.33v.

103. *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv.

104. C.E.M, C185, f.35.

105. *Ibid.*, f.34-38v.

106. *Ibid.*

107. *Ibid.* The *ta Sirina* Quarry may probably be located at the ta' Srina district outside Zebbug.

108. *Ibid.*, f.41v.

109. *Ibid.*, f.41-42.

110. *Ibid.*, f.41v.

111. *Ibid.*, f.42.

112. *Ibid.*, f.44.

113. *Ibid.*, f.42.

114. *Ibid.*, f.45-46.

transport and sifting of earth from the 'hospital'. (115) The dome apparently began early in 1729 was completed on 27 April 1731 when the lantern was fitted with window-frames made by the carpenter Isidoro Magri. (116) Petruzzo Debono was once more in charge of the work for a fee of 300 *scudi*. (117) The flagstone pavement was, finally, laid in August 1731. (118) The workmen were seemingly adequately remunerated and they were often served with refreshments, (119) but the work was not without its risks and an entry in the account books records the bonus of 8 *tari* paid on the Friday half day 'when the tragedy occurred.' (120)

The church was modelled on the 1678 Sarria rotunda at Floriana which was seemingly designed by Mattia Preti. (121) Meticulously described in the 1744 Alpheran report, (122) it is beautifully proportioned and remarkable for the clarity of its internal arrangement where all elements are disposed in calculated symmetry and even the flagstones are laid in circles to harmonise with the spatial rhythm. Tall coupled pilasters with composite capitals rise from plinths to carry the cornice and attic band above which springs the dome originally crowned by a lantern with eight windows. (123) The altar with its elegantly designed reredos is set in a shallow apse dominated by an ornate cartouche, with a closed crown above, in which is incised the prayer: *MAGNA NOBIS VIRTUTE SUCCURE*. (124) On the opposite side a beautiful screen in lathed wood closes the west doorway above which rises a bulbous polished wood organ gallery. Both screen and gallery were the gift of the Inguanez family whose munificence was commemorated by an escutcheon. (125) Two side doorways with oval eyes above, open on the grounds while other doors, carrying cartouches with identical floral motifs, flank the west doorway and the apse. Those on either side of the west doorway give access, respectively, to the crypt below and the gallery above. On the sides of the apse, one door leads to the vestry while the other is a *porta finta* fitted for the sake of

115. C.E.M, C185, f.44. Presumably S. Spirito Hospital.

116. *Ibid.*, f. 46v. 117. *Ibid.*

118. *Ibid.*, f.48.

119. *Ibid.*, f.49v: *per collazione alli travagliatori in diverse volte = 25 scudi.*

120. *Ibid.*, f.52.

121. On the Sarria church see A. Cremona, *Il-Knisja ta' Sarria*, Malta 1968. The attribution to Mattia Preti is maintained by V. Bonello in *L'Architettura a Malta — Atti del XV Congresso di Storia dell'Architettura (Malta, 11-16 Settembre 1967)*, Rome 1970, 461-2.

122. *Alpheran 1744-51*, f.54rv.

123. *Ibid.* The lantern was removed in 1901 when the statue of the Redeemer was placed on the dome.

124. The inscription which survives is recorded in *ibid.* and *Labini 1781*, f.17v.

125. C.E.M, C185, f.50. No trace of the escutcheon survives.

symmetry. (126) The four bays not pierced by doors contain crisply sculptured stone frames which carried paintings of the Ascension, St. Joseph, the Vision of St. Paul, and St. Theresa. (127) They were painted in about 1731 by Enrico Reno who sent a bill for 91 *scudi*: 2 *tari*. (128) Reno may also have painted the canvas of the Virgin of Light which was hung in about the same time and cost 21 *scudi*: 3 *tari*. (129) The internal arrangement is echoed on the outside where the ribs that buttress the strongly realised dome come down onto the coupled pilasters. A spacious slightly raised podium surrounds the church which was further isolated from its surroundings a stone balustrade. (130)

In 1731 the stone altar with its *bradella* or retable was fitted in the apse and the sculptor Benedetto Saliba carved the reredos for a fee of 17 *scudi* paid in several instalments. (131) The altar and reredos were then painted and gilt. (132) At about the same time another sculptor, Antonio Fabri, carved the capitals of the pilasters and the stone frames for the side paintings. He was paid 51 *scudi*: 9 *tari* in several instalments. (133) The carpenter and wood carver, Lorenzo Magri, did most of the woodwork. This included: the *porta finta* to the left hand side of the apse; the altar *bradella*; two lamp brackets; frames for the gloria cards and introit prayer; five frames for paintings; and the refashioning of two old predieus. (134) There were also an organ; a confessional; two marble holy water stoups; a marble *altaretto*; and two glass boxes bought in Venice for nearly 33 *scudi*. (135) Beneath each of the four side paintings were two painted-wood cornucopia, (136) and a similar cornucopia is recorded beneath the altar-painting in 1781. (137) In 1743 the total cost of building and decorating the church was estimated at 2,845 *scudi*: 4 *tari*: 13 *grani*. (138) Other works of decoration were carried out in subsequent years. In 1798, following the French occupation, the arms of the French Republic

126 C.E.M, C185, f.74.

127. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.55v; Labini 1781, f.17v.

128. C.E.M., C185, f.49.

129. *Ibid.*

130. This arrangement described in *Alpheran*, f.54rv, survived until the church was abandoned in the 1930s.

131 C.E.M, C185, f.48v.

132. *Ibid.*

133. *Ibid.*, f.49. Antonio Fabri could have been related to the brothers Gerolamo and Francesco Fabri who were responsible for several statues and carved stone decorations in 18C churches. (P.P. Castagna, *Storja ta' Malta*, vol. iii, 202).

134. C.E.M, C185, f.72-74v. Magri lists his works in a bill for 26 *scudi*: 5 *tari*, dated 1748.

135. *Ibid.*, f.48-49v, f.50v.

136. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54rv.

137. *Labini* 1781, f. 17.

138. C.E.M, C185, f.53v, 49.

were carved in stone and the Republican flag and cap were displayed in the church. (139)

The altar was kept with great reverence. In c.1731 Mro. Paolo was paid 9 *scudi* for gilding the candlesticks and the flower bouquets, and about the same time a missal stand was made at the cost of 1 *scudo*. (140) In 1744 the seal of the consecrated stone was found broken and the celebration of mass was forbidden until a new stone was provided. (141) Two gilt bronze lamps, lit by the contributions of devotees, hang before the altar in 1744 but only one lamp is mentioned in 1781. (142) In c.1740 the altar had six large and four small candlesticks, and ten bouquets of flowers that had cost 15 *grani* each. (143) In 1783 six of the bouquets were fitted with stands and in 1784 Biagio Bianco worked six pieces of wood in the shape of candles for the large candlesticks. (144) In 1792 a bronze crucifix was cast by the founder Aloysio Morello for a fee of 2 *scudi*: 6 *tari*, and a pedestal, costing 6 *tari*, was made for the cross. (145) A missal inspected in 1781 may have been found un-serviceable for the bishop ordered a new one to be provided, (146) and in 1783 Don Giuseppe Gambin was paid 2 *scudi*: 6 *tari per aver scritto de antifone e Messa*. (147) In 1863 the missal was found without bookmarks and one of the corporals was condemned as un-serviceable. (148)

The altar was adequately provided with linen and there were several sacred vestments. In the 18th century these and other drapery works were often manufactured by the Sapiano family. In 1782 Antonio Sapiano mended two chasubles and made an altar-cloth out of another. (149) On 12 April 1789 Modesto Sapiano was paid over 12 *scudi* for a satin chasuble, and on 28 January 1791 he was paid 23 *scudi*: 11 *tari* for two stoles, a maniple, and a damask antependium for which he had used 15 *palmi* of material. (150) The vestments were kept together with the sacred vessels, in the vestry, in ward-robes made in c.1731 at the expense of the Università. (151) A new chest

139. C.E.M, C186, f.35.

140. *Ibid.*, C185, f.48v, 49.

141. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54rv

142. *Ibid* and *Labini* 1781, f.17v.

143. C.E.M, C185, f.50rv.

144. *Ibid.*, f.95v, 96.

145. *Ibid.*, f.134.

146. *Ibid.*; and *Labini* 1781, f.17v.

147. C.E.M, C185, f.95v.

148. *Pace Forno* 1863-6, f.19v.

149. C.E.M., C185, f.95v.

150. *Ibid.*, f.114v, 116v, 118.

151. *Ibid.*, f.50; *Labini* 1781, f.17v; *Mattei* 1809, f.21.

was made in 1791. (152) The sacred vessels included a silver chalice; a pair of cruets made in October 1784; and a small flask for oil. (153) In 1783 the goldsmith Michele Vassallo renovated two old silver patens which were valued by Gio. Battista Borg, consul for gold and silversmiths. One of them was of Maltese silver and weighed nearly 3 *oncie* while the other weighed nearly 5 *oncie*. (154)

The altarpiece of the Virgin and Child remained an important cult object and in 1744 the walls were full of ex-voto paintings. (155) The crowns on the heads of the Virgin and Child were cleaned in June 1782 and silver-plated in October 1784. (156) In November 1886 the new procurator, Don Paolo Debono, declared that he had received from Canon Gio. Battista Micallef, his predecessor, a gold necklace and a silver crown to be placed on the head of the Virgin. (157) In June 1784 a blue curtain made by Antonio Sapiano was hung in front of the painting. (158)

In 1743 the church was shaken by an earthquake and repair works were undertaken at a cost of almost 21 *scudi*. (159) Other tremors caused serious damage. In 1757 the lantern had to be rebuilt; in 1780 alarming cracks appeared; and in 1856 extensive works of restoration had to be carried out. (160) The 1863 report noted that the fabric was deteriorating fast and ordered immediate repairs. (161) Maintenance works on the dome are recorded in January 1747, December 1748, June 1782, November 1783, June 1791, as well as on other unspecified dates. (162) In November 1781 some stones were replaced. (163) Other repair works are recorded in September 1804 when the church was also whitewashed. (164).

The popularity of the church was injected with new life in 1901 when, to commemorate the consecration of the 20th century to the Redeemer, a gilt metal statue of Christ holding a large cross was placed on top of the church.

152. C.E.M., C185, f.134.

153. *Labini* 1781, f.17v; *Mattei* 1809, f.21; C.E.M., C.185, f.96 Another cruet was made in 1782 (C185, f.95).

154. C.E.M., C185, f.95v, 105.

155. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54rv.

156. C.E.M., C185, f.95, 96.

157. P.A.R., A.B.V.C., (1856 — 1936), f.14.

158. C.E.M., C185, f.95,96

159. *Ibid.*, f.53.

160. *Ibid.*, f.66,67; P.A.R., A.B.V.C., (1856 — 1936), f.1.

161. *Pace Forno* 1863-6, f.19v.

162. C.E.M., C185, f.64v, 95, 95v.

163. *Ibid.*, f.67v.

164. C.E.M., C186, f.81

The initiative was taken by Notary Pietro Bartoli who appealed to every Maltese family to contribute one penny (1d) so that the monument would be truly national. (165) A committee was set up by Bishop Pietro Pace in November 1900 and the statue was commissioned in Rome from the Rosa Zanzio Co. Ltd. It arrived in Malta on 20 August 1901 on board the steamship *Enna* of the *Compagnia Generale Italiana*. Three days later it was transported to tal-Virtù on a carriage drawn by eight horses, accompanied by a detachment of soldiers of the Royal Malta Artillery under the command of Lt. Carbonaro. The inauguration ceremony was held on Sunday 22 September in the presence of civil and ecclesiastical dignitaries and some 9,000 pilgrims who had come from all over the island accompanied by their parish priests. Judge Paolo Debono delivered an address and Bishop Pace blessed the statue which was then hoisted to its plinth on the top of the dome amidst the firing of petards and crackers and the pealing of church bells. (166) Hymns and poems in Italian were composed for the occasion by Can. Aloisio Farrugia, the Rev Paolo Gauci, Alberto Cesareo, G. Muscat Azzopardi, and young Dun Karm (Sac. Carmelo Psaila). (167) Two large marble plaques with Latin inscriptions were also fixed on the outside walls of the church, one on either side of the west door.

The celebration of the feast of the Redeemer became an annual event. (168) A small statue of Christ was placed in the church and 800 *immagini* were ordered at a cost of 17s-7d. (168) The church was also decorated with new furniture that included: three benches bought from P. Vizzari for 3s-4d; two carpets costing 3s-10d and 10s-4d, respectively; four pairs bouquets of artificial flowers in vases costing 12s-11d; fourteen small paintings of the Via Crucis costing £1-2s-10d; a tabernacle-box with damask covering costing 19s-6d. (170) To these may be added three altar under cloths costing 16s-9d and a red altar cloth made at a cost of 5s-6d. (171) A length of white damask bought from G & C Busuttill Bros for £1-11s-6d was made into a chasuble at a manufacturing cost of 10s-10d. (172)

The placing of a cumbersome statue on a baroque dome in the place of an elegant lantern that had been purposely designed to give the right climax

165. Pietro Bartoli's appeal was published in *La Gazzetta di Malta* (n.5043) 23/8/1900.
 166. P. De Bono, *Solenne Inaugurazione del Monumento Nazionale A Nostro Signore Gesu Cristo Redentore Eretto Dalla Pieta Dei Maltesi sulla Collina tal-Virtu — Discorso Inaugurale*, Malta 1901. The ceremony is described in M. Galea, "L-Istatwatar-Redentur f'Tal-Virtù" in *Lehen is-Sewwa*, 24/9/1977.
 167. The hymns and poems are reproduced in P. Debono, 15-23.
 168. P.A.R., A.B.V.C., (1856 — 1936), f.19 *et passim*.
 169. *Ibid.* f.19.
 170. *Ibid.* f.23v, 25v.
 171. *Ibid.* f.25v.
 172. *Ibid.* f.23v.

to the architecture was not, on aesthetic considerations, a happy compromise. It was also an engineering blunder. The fabric of the church weakened by a succession of tremors was not sufficiently strong to support the 4.57m high statue and the stress soon became apparent. On 18 September 1923 another earthquake caused alarming cracks in the masonry. (173) Repair works were immediately undertaken, (174) but the church remained structurally unsafe and Bishop Mauro Caruana ordered its closure. (175) Architectural experts were of the opinion that it could be rehabilitated if the statue was removed from the dome. (176) In 1935 the parish priest of Rabat, Antonio Buhagiar, petitioned the *Sacra Congregatio Concilii* for permission to channel into a restoration fund an interest of £24 accumulated over a period of 49 years on an endowment for masses made in 1736 by the priest Flamineo Bonnici and deposited with the *Cassa Pie Amministrizioni* of the Episcopal Curia. (177) Permission was granted through the local ecclesiastical authorities on 29 March 1935, on condition that fifteen masses be celebrated. (178) The statue was brought down from the dome by Salvatore Sapiano in September 1935 at an expense of £27-14s (179) and it was erected on a plinth outside the precincts church. On 12 March 1936 Salvatore Sapiano was paid another £4-15s for unspecified works. (180) The church was subsequently abandoned.

The Precincts

After the building of the rotunda a new access road across the lands of the *mensa vescovile* was opened to replace an older one which was broken up and turned into a field. (181) From at least the mid-18th century the precincts were seemingly surrounded by a wall. A gate fixed in it in December 1752 was replaced by a new one in 1759. Both gates were made by the carpenter Saverio Vassallo and they both had a collections-box. (182) A cemetery is mentioned in 1615. (183) There is no other reference to a cemetery until

173. Plans and elevations of the church showing the damage caused by the tremor can be seen at the Collegio, Rabat. The dome of St. Paul's church, Rabat, was also seriously damaged.
174. The parish priest of Rabat, Enrico Bonnici, made an appeal and £60 were collected. Information given by Dun Gwann Azzopardi.
175. P.A.R., A.B.V.C, (1856 — 1936), f.27.
176. *Ibid.* f.27-28v.
177. *Ibid.* The Flamineo Bonnici endowment is discussed below.
178. *Ibid.*, f.28rv. The Bishop of Malta was instructed to grant the petition by a minute from Rome, dated 4/3/1935, on the signature of Cardinal Serafini.
179. P.A.R., A.B.V.C, (1856 — 1936), f.34 Receipt dated 29/9/1935, marked Doc. V.
180. *Ibid.*, f.35. Receipt dated 12/3/1936, marked Doc. VI.
181. C.E.M, C185, f.49v.
182. *Ibid.*, f.64v, 65.
183. A.C.M, Misc. 181, *Cagliares* 1615, f.80. The report may have been referring to the

January 1792 when the burial ground was provided with a new gate made by Mro. Simone, the carpenter, for over 9 *scudi*; and in November 1803 the cemetery wall was mended at an expense of nearly 6 *scudi*. (184) In the early 20th century work started on a parish cemetery outside the precincts but the project was abandoned. (185) In 1615 there were two wells, one in *principio cemeteriis*, and the other to the left of the entrance gate to the precincts. (186) One of them was repaired in c.1780 by Paolo Suereb who submitted a bill for 1 *scudo*: 4 *tari*. (187)

In 1575 a pious man who opened and closed the church lived in an abutting house. (188) In 1615 the verger, Josephus Pisanus, had his quarters in three rooms built in a courtyard to the right of the church. (189) In the late 17th century the kitchen may have been a separate building for the account books distinguish between repair works in it and repair works 'in the house'. (190) The house was repaired in 1682 and general maintenance works on the roof were carried out annually between 1673 and 1716. (191) The building of the rotunda necessitated its demolition. No new house was at first built and the verger had to be lodged in a room in the vestry. (192) In 1731 a *stanza loggia* was built abutting the vestry, (193) and the verger may have taken up residence in it.

Procurators, incomes and liturgical life

The care of the church was normally the responsibility of rectors or procurators who were often called upon by the bishop to give an account of their administration. (194) From 1673 they kept detailed records of incomes and expenditures. (195) Of the known procurators, Dr. Pietro Monpalao (2 June 1673-27 Jan. 1717) and Salvatore Catania (July 1862-Oct. 1880) were laymen, (196) and Ciacinto Cesare Gauci (26 Oct. 1901-13 Jan. 1903) was a deacon. (197)

paved *zuntier*, outside the west wall which, as in other churches, may have been used for buriales (see Buhagiar, *op.cit.*)

184. C.E.M, C186, f.77, 80.
185. Information given by Dun Ġwann Azzopardi.
186. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.80.
187. C.E.M, C185, f.101.
188. N.M.V., *Dusima*, f.195.
189. A.C.M., Misc. 181, f.79v-80.
190. C.E.M, C185, f.12.
191. *Ibid.*, f.13.
192. *Ibid.*, f.37, 42; *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.55v.
193. C.E.M, C185, f.49v.
194. *Cocco Palmieri* 1708-10, 24v-25; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, 27rv; *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.50rv.
195. C.E.M, C185/C186; P.A.R, A.B.V.C, (1856 — 1936).
196. C.E.M., C185, f.2; P.A.R., A.B.V.C, (1856—1936), f.6.
197. P.A.R, A.B.V.C, (1856 — 1936), f.19.

The list starts with Canon Enrico de Bordino who is recorded in 1472. (198) In 1575 the office was held by Don Simone Bonniccio, Cannon of the Cathedral and Vicar of Vittoriosa, who relinquished it in 1577 to join the Society of Jesus. (199) He was succeeded in turn by Don Josephus Prat (1577-after 1615) and Don Paolo Mallia (recorded in 1626). (200) Other procurators included Canon Don Antonio Castelletti (8 May 1717-3 March 1743), Don Paolo Mompalao Apap (1746-22 Jan. 1782), Don Valentino Vella (5 March 1782-31 Dec. 1784), Don Lorenzo Cachia (1 Jan. 1789-Dec. 1790), Don Giuseppe Vassallo, (1 March 1797-Feb. 1800), Don Giuseppe de Conti Manduca (25 April 1856-1858, Don Giuseppe Maria Gauci (Aug. 1858-62), Canon Don Gio Battista Micallef (6 November 1883-14 Oct. 1886), Paolo Debono (1886-c. 1901), Don Vincenzo Sant (5 Jan. 1903-30 Sept. 1906) and Don Giuseppe Formosa Kerr (1 Nov. 1917-24 Nov. 1934). (201)

The church had a fairly steady income from owned property and 'pious burdens' which carried with them obligations for masses, vespers and other liturgical functions. (202) Several other celebrations were held thanks to the devotion of the people. By 1575 it had become a venerated shrine where people gathered to pray in times of tribulations such as pestilence and war, and several masses were celebrated. (203) The 1615 visitation records a weekly mass celebrated by the Dominicans of the Virgin of the Grotto out of a legacy left by Don Antonio Inguanez. (204) A benefice for another weekly mass was set up by Pietro Mompalao in his will drawn up in Syracuse on 28 November 1634 in front of Notary D'Avolio. The beneficiary was to receive a stipend of 2 *oncie* a year but Pietro's heirs preferred instead to pay him on his nomination a total of 20 *oncie* which he was expected to invest at an interest of about 10 per cent. (205) The stipulated mass was celebrated every Monday until about the beginning of the 18th century when it started being

198. See *supra*. Enrico de Bordino registered his will in the Acts of Notary Luca Sillato on 26/3/1481 (A.C.M., Misc.280, f.73).
199. N.M.V, *Dusina*, 95; A.C.M, Misc. 181, 79v. On Simone Bonniccio who was probably the first Maltese to join the Jesuits, see V. Borg, "Life and Works of Girolamo Manduca" in *Melita Historica* vol. vii no.3, 249 n.11.
200. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.79v; C.E.M., C185, f.141.
201. C.E.M, C185, f.30v, 60, 91v, 107v; C186, f.27; P.A.R., A.B.V.C., (1856 — 1936) f.1, 4, 17, 19, 23, 25.
202. The complicated machinery through which the finances of Maltese churches were administered are discussed in T. Mangion 'Religious Life at Hal Millieri: 1575-1975' in *Hal Millieri: A Maltese Casale, Its Churches and Paintings* ed. A. Luttrell, Malta 1976, 13-4.
203. N.M.V, *Dusina*, f.195.
204. A.C.M, Misc. 181, 79v. According to M. Fsadni. *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u fil-Birgu sal-1620* (Malta 1974, 295-6), this mass was first celebrated in 1588.
205. A.C.M, Misc. 281 B, f.622.

said once a fortnight. (206) In 1722 and 1744 the benefice was valued at 5 *scudi* a year. In 1744 it was held by the Franciscan Friars of the Rabat convent of St. Mary of Jesus. (207)

In 1667 the church was visited by devotees from all over the island. (208) The colourful festival of the Virgin of Flowers and Seeds (*B.M.V. floris seminum*) which the country folk called *Sta Maria di Nuarezzara* (*S. Marija ta' Nwar u z-Zahar*) was organized annually during the greater part of the 17th century on the second Sunday after Easter. The parish priest of the Cathedral accompanied by regular and secular clergy and lay confraternities went in procession to tal-Virtù from where he blessed the fields and vineyards and the four compass points of the island. (209) This celebration had been discontinued by 1680 but penitential processions still went to the church in times of national need. (210) One such occasion was the drought of 1717 when at least two pilgrimages were held in April, one of them by the Franciscan Friars of St. Mary of Jesus who organised a return pilgrimage of thanksgiving after rain had been obtained. (211) In 1744 the walls of the church were filled with ex-voto paintings. (212)

In the 17th and 18th centuries the church observed the festivity of the Ascension with considerable solemnity. The highlight of the celebrations was a chanted mass supported by the burden on a c.1680 legacy left to the Monastery of St. Ursola in Valletta by the nun Imperia Sciberras. (213) The celebrant was generally the archpriest of the Cathedral who, after 1717, also intoned first vespers. (214) In the period 1673-1717 six low masses were also recited and two priests heard confessions. (215) In 1718-22 the number of low masses was reduced to five. (216) Masses were besides recited and confessions heard on other occasions during the year. These extra masses numbered four in 1688-92, 1694-7, 1698, 1700-3; three in 1693, 1706; and two in 1707-8. (217)

206. A.C.M, Misc. 181, f.321v; *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20v; *Cocco Palmieri* 1708-10, f.24v-25; *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27rv; *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.55.
207. *Gori Mancini* 1722-3, f.27; *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.55.
208. *Buenos* 1667-8, f.20.
209. The festivity is mentioned in several reports the most detailed account being in *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54rv.
210. A.C.M, Misc. 180, f.36v.
211. C.E.M. C185, f.34v.
212. *Alpheran* 1744-51, f.54v.
213. The legacy is first reported in A.C.M., Misc., 180, f.37 and mentioned in most subsequent visitations.
214. C.E.M, C185, f.34r.
215. *Ibid.*, f.10.
216. *Ibid.*, f.34,37.
217. *Ibid.*, f.10rv. 11.

The priest Flamineo Bonnici, who had often said mass and heard confessions in the church, (218) in his will registered in the Acts of Notary Ignazio Debono on 17 March 1736, burdened the field called *ta Ghadir il Bordi*, near Lija, with the obligation of a chanted mass and first vespers and six low masses to be celebrated in tal-Virtù church on the feast of the Holy Name of Mary. (219) Flamineo Bonnici's instructions seem to have been adequately carried out until 1886 when the income from the property started being deposited with the *Cassa Pie Amministrazione* of the Episcopal Curia. In 1935 it was valued at £16-3s-4d and had an accumulated interest of £24. (220) Another burden on a legacy of 3 *scudi*, established by the priest Raffaele Portelli in his will of 20 January 1745, provided for a mass celebrated in the church by the Franciscan friars of Rabat. (221)

The church also benefited from money which pious people invested to produce a capital in its interest. On 9 January 1747 a sum of 72 *scudi*: 6 *tari* was consigned on long loan to Don Paolo Mompalao Apap to invest at an interest of 1 *scudo*: 10 *tari*: 10 *grani*. (222) Two similar transactions on respective capitals of 25 *scudi* each were registered by notarial deeds in the Acts of Salvatore Vitale on 20 June 1782 and 20 December 1782, (223) while Notary Calcedonio Bonello registered the investment of respective capitals of 25 *scudi*, 62 *scudi*: 6 *tari*, and 23 *scudi* in separate deeds dated 10 August 1786, 9 March 1788, 16 August 1789. (224) The property owned by the church included a *luogo di case* given on emphyteuses on 12 November 1656 for an annual ground rent of 9 *scudi* and sublet on 25 April 1662. (225)

The account books record the expenses incurred in decorating the church for the festivities of the Ascension and the Blessed Name of Mary. In 1699-1702 damask hangings were loaned, presumably from other churches. (226) In 1703 a carpet was borrowed and the bell was rang during the procession. (227) In 1717, 1 *scudo*: 7 *tari* were paid for the transport to the church of damask hangings, chairs, benches and unspecified decorations. (228) In 1717-20 the

218. C.E.M, C185, f.10r, 10v, 11, 34, *et passim*.

219. *Ibid.*, f.61v, 64.

220. *Supra*.

221. C.E.M, C185, f.62. Raffaele Portelli's will was also registered in the Acts of Ignazio Debono.

222. *Ibid.*, f.62v.

223. *Ibid.*, f.92v.

224. *Ibid.*, f.111v, 112v.

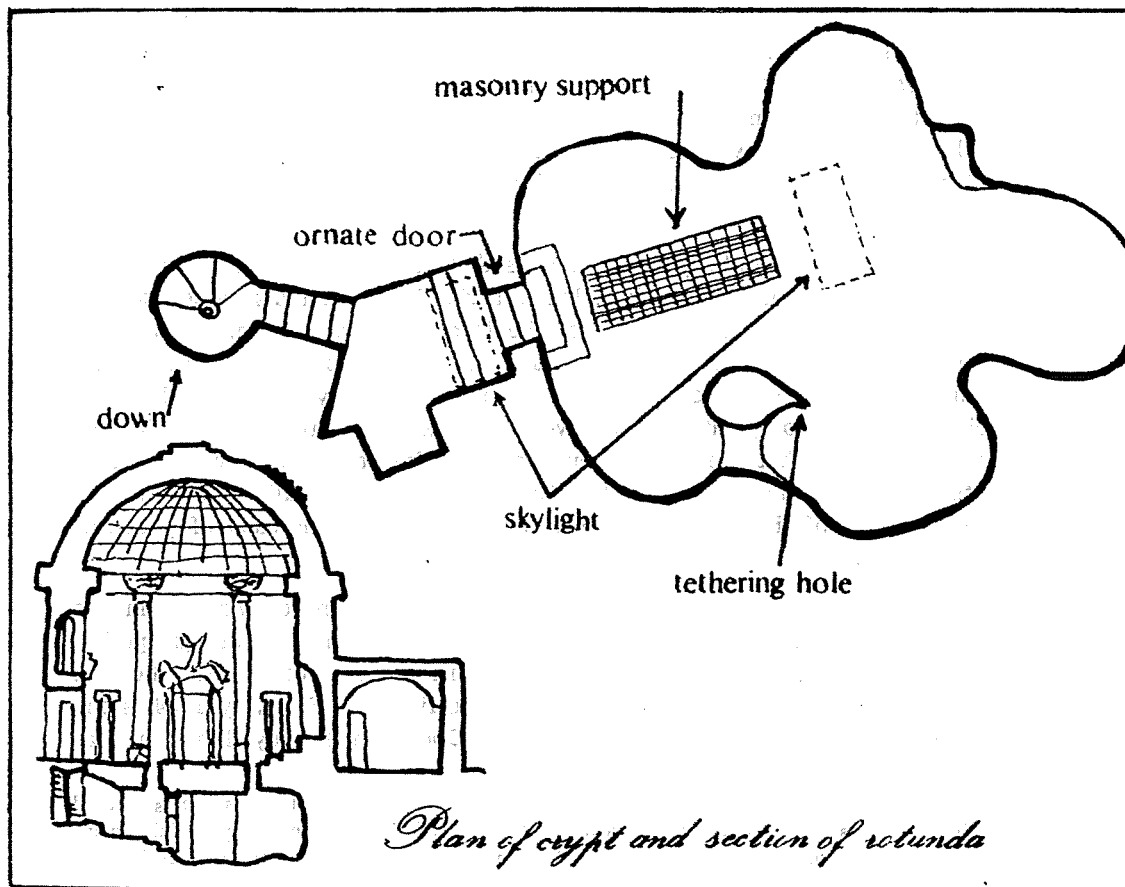
225. *Ibid.*, f.61v.

226. *Ibid.*, f.10v, 11r.

227. *Ibid.*, f.13.

228. *Ibid.*, f.34.

candle-maker, Baldassare Pace, made 3 *rotoli* of candles. (229) In 1789-92 a dozen petards were fired on the feast of the Blessed Name of Mary. (230) The solemnities of this feast were further enhanced in 1789 by a plenary indulgence granted by the Holy See through the good offices of an agent in Rome. (231) The last recorded celebration of the feast was on 19 November 1936. The church had by then been abandoned and the service of chanted vespers was instead held at the parish church of Rabat. (232)



229. C.E.M., C185., f.34v.

230. *Ibid.*, f.114r, 116v, 133v.

231. *Ibid.*, f.115r.

232. P.A.R., A.B.V.C., (1856-1936), f.33.