

ARTISTS, ARTISANS AND CRAFTSMEN AT THE MDINA CATHEDRAL IN THE EARLY SIXTEENTH CENTURY

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In the early decades of the sixteenth century the Mdina Cathedral was being given a face-lift. Gian Francesco Abela records how the roof of the nave was raised by the building of a clerestory pierced by windows to give the church-interior a lighter atmosphere and how the new wooden ceiling was decorated with engravings, paintings with Pauline and biblical themes, and florid arabesques in gold. He also records four inscriptions which he could still read, more than a century after the works were executed. Two of these recorded how the work was commenced in June 1520 when the *Jurati* were Petro Guevara, Martin Ingomes, Petro Stunica, and Manfred Caxaro, the *Economo* being Alvaro Casseres. The other two related how the work was completed under *Jurati* Raineli Calavà, Nicola Saguna and Antonio Bonello, who was also the *Economo*; the painter who depicted the ceiling was *Alexander Patavinus Civis Syracusanus*.¹

This skeletal information can, by and large, be substantiated in all its details from the original *mandati* which are still extant at the Cathedral Museum Archives.² But much else besides emerges from a thorough reading of these documents which give a fuller picture of what was happening. The *mandati* were authorizations by competent authorities, such as the *Jurati* or cathedral treasurer, to procurators for payments to individuals stating the amount and the reason for the payment; a receipt by the payee is appended in most cases. One can thus confirm, for example, who the *Jurati* and the *Economo* were in the year when Patavinus started and finished the work. The object of this paper is to shed some light on the activities of a number of artists, artisans and craftsmen who worked for the cathedral in the period c.1515-c.1540, as revealed in the *mandati* documents.

THE CATHEDRAL CEILING

Preliminary work appears to have started in 1518 when a substantial amount of timber was imported. Mastru Nardu Borg was paid 2 *uncie* and 18 *tari per so travaglu*

¹ G.F. Abela, *Della Descrizione di Malta* (Malta, 1647) 332.

² The long series of *Mandati* in the Cathedral Archives [ACM] at the Mdina Cathedral Museum [MCM] starts with the first volume for 1506-; hereafter they will be simply denoted M1, M2, Some other *mandati* including earlier ones are to be found in ACM Misc. 36 which will also be quoted. The present author is preparing for publication a critical analysis and an abridged listing in tabular form of all *mandati* down to around 1550.

*di portarj li travj changunj et tavulj dila dicta ecclesia di la marsa ala chitajt et dilu portu ala marsa.*³ It is of interest to note that the ceiling timber was imported from Venice: Thomasio di Arrigo *patrunj di so grippio* was paid *22 uncie 22 tari per nolicio di lignamj cum burdunj travj et tavulj portau Jpsu Thomasinu di la chitati di Vinecia a Malta ad opu di dicta Cathedrali ecclesia.*⁴ Nor was this importation of timber from Venice an isolated occurrence; when the church of San Salvaturi, also at Mdina, needed to have a new ceiling at about this time it was *tavuli Viniciani* that were used and a similar purchase is recorded for the cathedral a decade later.⁵ There is no doubt that the planking was protected on the outside with a layer of tiles, called *charamidi*, at least for some section of the roof; some 300 of these needed replacing in 1520 and reference is made to them both earlier and later.⁶

In 1520 the cathedral *massaro* was Mastru Luca Burg, who was also a carpenter by profession.⁷ It was only natural for him to lend a hand with the ceiling wood-work under the direction, however, of the *capu mastru* who came from Syracuse but whose name remains unknown. The *capu mastru* began to be paid from the day he left Syracuse, 28 January 1520.⁸ Regular weekly payments for a seven-day work-

³ M1 (7.ix.1518) f. 32. The *changunj* were not blocks of stone (Modern Malt. *çangun*), but thick blocks of wood, suitable for rafters; G. Piccitto, *Vocabolario Siciliano* (Catania-Palermo, 1977) *sub voce* *ciancuna*.

⁴ M1 (27.viii.1518) f. 37. On Venetian timber originating in the Val di Fiemme c.1500, C. Trasselli, "Società ed Economia a Sciacca nel XV Secolo", in *Mediterraneo e Sicilia all'Inizio dell'Epoca Moderna* (Cosenza, 1977) 244.

⁵ Misc. 36 (4.v.1523) f. 433. M3 (31.viii.1535) f. 254: "per xiv tavulj vinicianj", *ibid.*, (11.v.1538) f.661, (27.v.1538) f.629.

⁶ M1 (19.viii.1520) f. 166: "per 300 charamidj ad opu de dicta ecclesia et lu tectu"; Misc. 36 (15.x.1529) f. 658: " ... per chiamidi per conczarj li tecti et trugli di dicta ecclesia". The use of a pitched and tiled roof in late medieval Malta was much more common than hitherto thought. Evidence for fairly widespread use in the Mdina/Rabat area has already been exhibited (S. Fiorini, *Santo Spirito Hospital at Rabat, Malta: the early years to 1575* (Malta, 1989) 15-17.) but further evidence keeps coming to light. Thus, it is known that no less than 2000 *chiramidi* were bought by the Carmelites from Sicily in 1562 (Notarial Archives Valletta [NAV] Not. G. Muscat R376/43 (4.vi.1562) and the *charamidi di Santu Paulu*, that is, of the cathedral, also figure in other documents (ACM Procura [Pr] I(-1595) f. 14v (Ind. VIII [1476], Procuratore Rogerio Caxario)). The cathedral warehouses (*machazeni*), which were contiguous with the church (M3 (31.x.1532) f. 29), were also covered with *charamidi* (M2 (15.xii.1526) f. 340, (12.xii.1527) f. 317). Yet not the whole ceiling, and certainly not the *campanile*, could have been covered with *charamidi* as some references of 1538 seem to indicate: *bactumi per lo tecto de dicta ecclesia et campanaro levata la cauchina* (M3 (8,30.xi.1538) ff. 502, 496). The *campanile* was in fact surmounted by a wooden dome-like structure, probably hemispherical in shape, as the word *qubba* seems to suggest: *tavulj ki mancaru per la cubba* (ACM Pr I (12.xii.1474) f. 64).

⁷ M1 (24.xii.1520) f. 104, (28.x.1520) f. 132, *et passim*. A number of carpenters surnamed Borg appear at Rabat at the turn of the sixteenth century; "Mastru Salvu Borg dictu Haydud" (1495) and "Mastru Cola Borg figlo di Laydut" (1546) (Fiorini, *Santo Spirito*, 17).

⁸ M1 (5.ii.1520) 206: Week's payment including "la Jornada di lu Capu Mastru che si partio di Sercusa".

week (*ad diem dominicam inclusive*) are encountered in which Mastru Luca Borg *comu massaru dilu gloriosu Santu Paulu* is authorized to pay “*mastri daxa, muraturi, et manuali, intercludendo lu capu mastru per lavuraj lu tectu*”.⁹ Twenty six of these mandati, one per week, out of the possible 32 weeks in the period 28 January - 9 September 1520 are extant.¹⁰ It is therefore clear that the craftsmen worked solidly for the whole of seven months to prepare the material. Often, additional information about purchases of material and costs of freight and transport are given. Thus, one encounters payments for *certi perni per lu tectu* (perhaps, heavy bolts to secure the rafters together), *rina* (sand), *carrikarj di tavuli et certa corda accatao ad opu di lu tectu, perni et conci, carricari tavuli dilu castella ala chitati* (again!), *ix salmi di cauchina, 38 carriki per portari la lignami et cauchina, 200 tavuli, chentu chova et lignami di taglo et serraticzi et altra lignami et nolitu*, and so on.¹¹

Although some mention is made of *rina* and *calcina* in the period January-August 1520, the main purchases of stone and payments to stone masons appear only later in September of the year. One would have expected the stone-work to precede wood-work. By way of explanation one can suggest that during the first eight months of the year, the timber was being prepared and not actually laid in place. When all was ready, the old roof was dismantled, in the summer (and this would make sense, weather-wise) when the few courses of the clerestory were erected and the timber roof assembled soon afterwards. It is certain that the water-proofing operation of caulking the planks came months later in winter and spring of 1521.

Two names of stone-masons are encountered, Mastru Jorgi Vassald and Mastru Nardu Barbara, Vassald being employed the day following Barbara's last payment. Vassald was probably the master-mason, but like Barbara, who was the *mastru pirriaturi* or stone cutter or even quarry owner (compare modern Maltese *barriera* with medieval *pirrera*), he was also engaged in stone-cutting, *pirriarj*. Barbara is encountered early on in May being paid for providing *200 cantunj et 6 capitellj parati ad opu di la maramma de dicta ecclesia per lu tectu*.¹² According to Abela, the ceiling was supported by eight rafters resting on pairs of columns. The overall plan can still be seen from a seventeenth-century design showing four pairs of columns flanking the main aisle and two pairs of half-columns abutting pilasters at the main altar and at the choir-loft (Fig. 1). In view of this lay-out my colleague Mr Mario Buhagiar interprets the six *capitellj* provided by Barbara as intended for

⁹ *Ibid.*, (19.ii.1520) f. 262, (6.viii.1520) f. 170 *et passim*.

¹⁰ In chronological order they are found at M1 ff. 206, 262, 250, 246, 260, 258, 254, 242, 238, 232, 228, 220, 216, 296, 206, 200, 198, 194, 188, 184, 182, 174, 170, 162 respectively. The missing ones occur for the “weeks” beginning, 5 February, 19 May, 3 June, 20 July, 14 and 26 August.

¹¹ M1 ff. 198, 202, 206, 220, 228, 230, 244, 248.

¹² *Ibid.*, (2.v.1520) f. 222.

six new two-light windows in the clerestory, three on each side, each directly above a corresponding column of the main aisle; some slender marble columns in the Cathedral Museum, commonly held to have come from the old cathedral, could well have belonged to these windows.¹³

Later in the month Barbara also provided *tanti cantuni et canali* and others in July (300 *cantuni* and 28 *canali*) and in August (400 *cantuni* and 3 *canali*); in all probability the canali were stone gutters running along the eaves to collect rain water.¹⁴ Vassald is encountered on 5 August *lavurarj et Jndriczarj di fora ala xara 465 cantuni et 55 canalj*, probably meaning that he carried out the dressing of the stone-blocks on the quarry-site, and later in September he is similarly engaged. Work on site at the cathedral appears to have taken place by December, when Vassald is paid for his own work and that of his *manuali* and for *calchina, balati, et altri cosi*.¹⁵

In January 1521, the completed clerestory windows were not fitted with glass-panes but were covered with *inchiratj*, waxed material,¹⁶ a practice that was still in use a century later.¹⁷ At the same time, work on the water proofing of the ceiling was begun as is evident from payments to the *mastru calafatu*, the master caulker, and the purchase of a *pisa di stuppa*, a bale of oakum. Similar purchases and payments continued to be made till mid-May.¹⁸

While the ceiling was thus being completed on the outside, the decorative work on the inside was commenced. Abela refers to the *intaglio* work in the ceiling but had no way of determining who was responsible for it. It appears from the *mandati* that the *mastru carpinteri* in this case was Cola Curmi, who is recorded on several occasions being paid for periods of work *circa lu Jntaglarj di lu tectu*. He spent a total of some 175 working days on the job between October 1520 and August 1521;

¹³ There is an uncanny similarity between this reconstruction of the cathedral and a church that appears in a painting of the Madonna of Loreto made in 1507 by Alessandro Padovano, now in the Museo Nazionale di Palazzo Bellomo, in Syracuse; it depicts the *Casa di Loreto* as a three-aisled Romanesque church with a gabled tiled roof, having a single free-standing *campanile*, and a clerestory with three two-light windows on each side. Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's engraving (c. 1580) showing the old cathedral is worth comparing.

¹⁴ M1 (27.v.1520) f. 210, (28.vii.1520) f. 190, (4.viii.1520) f. 180. The function of the *canali* is evident from a different context: "fari canali alo machazeni dicti cathedralis ecclesie per exiri laqua Infora ala ruga" (M3 (30.xi.1532) f. 33).

¹⁵ M1 (5.viii.1520) f. 176, (16.ix.1520) f. 148, (24.xii.1520) f.104.

¹⁶ M1 (19.i.1521) f. 443.

¹⁷ M. Fsadni, *Id-Dumnikani fir-Rabat u fil-Birgu sa l-1620* (Malta, 1974) 70.

¹⁸ M1 (19.i.1521) f. 443, (18.iii.1521) f. 421, (26.v.1521) f. 395.

Mastru Luca Borg and Mastru Manfre Chakym also put in some 10 working-days each in his assistance.¹⁹

ALESSANDRO PATAVINO

Alessandro Patavino²⁰ appears to have worked at the Mdina Cathedral on more than one occasion, but the longest stretch was his first visit between March 1520 and October 1521. The first reference to him occurs on 2 March 1520 when it is clear that his expenses to travel to Malta to paint the cathedral ceiling are being defrayed: a total of 15 *unci boni* are paid to Bernardo Vital for 20 *tavuli*, presumably purchased abroad, and *per succurriri alu mastru pingituri per veniri ad pingiri lo tecto di dicta catedrali ecclesia*.²¹ Soon afterwards no less than 12 *uncie* are paid directly to him to enable him to go abroad and purchase the coloured paints necessary for the job: *per andarj et comperarj coluri et altri cosi necessarij per pingiri lo tecto di la dicta catedrali ecclesia dandovj Jpsu per pleiu alo Magnifico Signuri Don Paulo dalagona di adimpliri sua promissioni*.²² An entry dated 22 December 1520 confirms that Patavino was already in Malta by March of that year. It is a payment of *floreni iv et tareni iv bonj* to the heirs of Giglu Zammit in respect of eight months' rent of a house where Mastro Alexandro the painter of the cathedral ceiling was residing during the period 1 April of the eighth indiction to the end of December of the ninth indiction.²³ One concludes that payment of lodgings was part of Patavino's remuneration. A similar payment of a year's rent on behalf of *Mastro Alexandro Paduano picturi seu mectanti doru dilu tectu*, this time to Petruczo Zammit, is recorded in October 1521.²⁴ Several payments to Patavino at irregular intervals and for amounts varying between three and twenty *uncie* are recorded *comu salario per pintura et mectitura di oru alu tectu*; several of the receipts bear Patavino's signature (Fig.2).²⁵ The total payment to Patavino exceeded 150 *uncie*. Final payments a

¹⁹ References as in fn. 19 and M1 (21.x.1520) f. 136; (4,11,18.xi.1520) ff. 128, 126, 122; (24.xii.1520) f. 104; (??.1520) ff. 98,100; (4.ii.1521) f. 439, (4.iii.1521) f. 427, (2,?,22.iv.1521) ff. 419, 417, 409; (13.v.1521) f. 399, (24.vi.1521) f. 391, (11.viii.1521) f. 379.

²⁰ Usually referred to in these documents as *Mastro Alexandro Paduano picturi* or *pingituri*; each of the following spelling variations occurs once, Lixandro (M1 f. 403), and Padoano (M2 f. 415).

²¹ M1 (2.iii.1520) f. 248.

²² *Ibid.*, (23.iii.1520) f. 256.

²³ *Ibid.*, (22.xii.1520) f. 106.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, (14.x.1521) f. 357.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, (30.iv.1520) f. 224, (11.viii.1520) f. 172, (4,19.ix.1520) ff. 154, 120; (31.xii.1520) f. 102, (1.iii.1521) f. 431, (10,16.iv.1521) ff. 415, 411; (7,18.v.1521) ff. 403, 397; (8.vi.1521) f. 393, (17.vii.1521) f. 387. Patavino's work is variously described as *pintura deaurata* (f. 120), *pintura et mectitura di oru* (f. 102), *opera che fa in pingirj lo tecto* (f. 224), or *deaurarj seu mectirj deauratura alu tectu* (f. 387). It appears to have been the practice that the same master who executed the painting was also responsible for the gilding; compare G. Bresc-Bautier, *Artistes, Patriciens et Confréries* (Rome, 1979), for example pp. 251-257, Documents LXI-LXIV, LXVII-A et passim. I am indebted to my colleague Mr Mario Buhagiar for bringing this publication to my attention.

complimento dila pictura and a complimento di xx miglara di oru li quali havi assectato alu tectu, amounting to more than 36 *uncie* were made in late 1521.²⁶

Patavino appears to have been helped in his work by his son Joannello who, on just one occasion, appears receiving payment independently of his father; on that occasion he was paid one *uncia*.²⁷ At other times he may have been included, anonymously, among the *mastri et manuali per lavurari lu tectu*, paid by Mastru Luca Borg.

A craftsman who was constantly at Patavino's side was Mastru Paulu Burlo, *bactituri di oru*. He produced the gold leaf used by Patavino in *mectirj alu tectu* by beating down the gold ingots. The variant Imburlo in the spelling of the surname suggests a Catalan origin, but his immediate provenence was Messina.²⁸ On one occasion he was paid 22 *tari* which were *restanti di so salario di bactiri oru ad opu di lu tectu . . . 22,500 pannelli di oru*,²⁹ but most of the time he must have been demanding payment in Sicilian money; he was paid in *ducati* in August 1520, on another occasion in *ducati trionfi* and at yet another time he was given *trionfi sidichi di oru pro quillu bactiri . . . li quali ascendino ad unczi sej tarejvinti novj et grana dudichi*.³⁰ In spite of the fact that Burlo was a skilled craftsman, he was quite illiterate and could not even sign his own name; this is clear from the fact that all his receipts were signed on his behalf by a third party, often Salimbeni Cuglituri also of Messina, asserting openly *perche non sachu scriviri*.³¹ One can deduce that by the time the work was completed no less than a total of 32,500 *pannelli di oru* were produced by Burlo.³²

The services of Patavino were required also later by the cathedral on more than one occassion. In April 1528 he was employed on a rather simple job of painting four ceremonial seats used by the cathedral chapter. He was paid ten *tari per so travaglio per haver pinto quatro banchetti per assectarisi li canonici ad li cappi*.³³ It is hard to imagine how an artist of Patavino's calibre could have been requested to come

²⁶ *Ibid.*, (19.viii.1521) f. 375, (12.x.1521) f.363.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, (14.ix.1520) f. 124: "... a Joanello figlio di Mastro Alexandro Infra pagamento dilj servicij dilu Mastru Alexandru".

²⁸ For the prefix Im-, S. Fiorini, "Catalan-Maltese connexions in the Late Middle Ages. An exploratory search in Maltese archives", in (Ed.) C. Martinez-Shaw, *Proceedings of the Spanish-Maltese History Conference, 1990* (in print). The spelling Imburlo appears at M1 (9.vii.1520) f. 186 whereas the Messina provenence can be deduced from M1 (12.x.1520) f. 138.

²⁹ M1 (??.1520) f. 96.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, (6,12.v.1520) ff. 218, 217, (9.vii.1520) f. 186, (13.viii.1520) f. 168, (12,14.ii.1521) f. 435, 433, (2.iii.1521) f. 430.

³¹ *Ibid.*, (13.iii.1521) f. 426

³² *Ibid.*, (4.ii.1521) f. 437, 441.

³³ M2 (10.iv.1528) f. 415.

over from Sicily merely to paint four *banchetti* for a total remuneration of 10 tari. It is more likely that the purpose of the visit was of greater moment and that the opportunity of his presence was taken to request this very minor commission. Whether he executed any major work during his stay on that occasion, perhaps not for the cathedral, then that remains to be discovered.

He was again in Malta for more than a month a year later when he is known to have performed three important interventions on works of art at the cathedral. In June 1529 he renovated a painting in the cathedral ceiling. He also painted various candelabra (*blanduneri*), the tabernacle (*per conczamentu dilu tabernaculu*), and another receptacle for the pyx (*per depingiri la caxa sive armariu dila custodia dilu corpu di Christu*).³⁴ But perhaps most important of all was his intervention on the main altar-piece, the St Paul polyptych: *per anectari et conczari la cona de dicta cathedrali*; that this was probably only a routine cleaning can be deduced from the paltry sum of eight tari that he was paid.³⁵ A more drastic intervention (*infra*) on this retable was effected a decade later.

This was not the end of Patavino's connexion with Malta. Some four years later he was engaged again on what appears to have been another minor task *per mastria di iij blandunerj et loru deaurarj et per una lasta di la cruchi di pumi deaurati et uno scannello dilu altaro maJurj*; for all this he was paid 2 uncie 16 tari.³⁶

GOLDSMITHS AND SILVERSMITHS

Returning to the earlier time around 1520 when the work on the ceiling was being carried out, one encounters a number of goldsmiths and silversmiths, both local and foreign, being commissioned by the cathedral.

In the years immediately preceding the structural alterations, the services of two, presumably Sicilian, silversmiths were required. At the end of April 1517, Frati Antonj di Mayda, the Vicar General of the newly elected Bishop Bernardo Catagnano, authorized the payment of 24 tari to the *mastru arginterj* Bartolomeo

³⁴ Misc. 36, (8.19.vi.1529) ff. 620, 624. This tabernacle was used as a model for another built ten years later by the goldsmith Santorus Vella of Mdina for the Augustinian Priory in Rabat (NAV Not. G. Muscat R376/1 (11. vi. 1539) f. 318v.)

³⁵ *Ibid.*, (6.vii.1529) f. 626.

³⁶ M3 (21.vi.1534) f. 133. Compare Guillelmo de Pisaro's payment of 2 uncie 1 tareno 10 grana for gilding two *blandoneria* at Alcamo in 1476 (G. Bautier-Bresc, "Guglielmo Pesaro: 1430-1487, Le peintre de la croix de Cefalù et du polyptique de Corleone?", *Mélange de l'Ecole Française de Rome - Moyen Age* vol. 86 (1974) 244 Doc. IV); I should like to thank Mr Mario Buhagiar for drawing my attention to this publication.

Maczuni *per mastria in haviri conczato la coruna episcopali et crocza episcopali et altri cose ecclesie*. It is conceivable that Maczuni was absent from the island because the receipt of payment was made on his behalf by another silversmith, Mastru Joanni Scarpa.³⁷ This same Scarpa, was engaged a number of times over a period of some twenty years so that, although clearly a foreigner, he must have been settled here; he appears, in fact, as a member of the town council in 1536.³⁸ In 1515 he was paid one-and-a-half *uncie per magisterio per haver deorato la spera dilo horologiu civitatis et ecclesie*, and in 1520, he was paid no less than seven *uncie boni per compliri la caxetta facta ad opus di lu Corpus Domini* and for other unspecified work. Scarpa was still in Malta in 1530, and working for the Cathedral in 1534, when he was commissioned and paid *per conczatura et mastria di dui Inchinseri et uno lamperj et certo argento per la conczatura*.³⁹

In 1519 Scarpa was commissioned to execute by far his most important work in the Cathedral that can still be admired to-day in the Cathedral Museum. The Cathedral possessed a New Testament of great antiquity which was also held in great reverence. It was the gospel on which solemn oaths, such as the oaths of office taken by *Università* officials, were taken. It was referred to as the *libro di Sancto Paulo* because of the image of the Apostle inscribed on its cover.⁴⁰ In 1519 Scarpa was entrusted with this *evangelistarium* to have its boards covered in silver and decorated with the image of St Paul and of other saints on one side and with a crucifixion scene on the other (Fig. 3). For this work he was paid 2 *uncie 15 tari et sunno per sua mastria In havirj facta et operato labia coperta di lo evangelistaro dicti Sancti Pauli di argento figurato cum la figura di Sancto Paulo et altri figuri*

³⁷ M1 (30.iv.1517) f. 73. Maczuni, however, was certainly in Malta a few weeks before this date (National Library of Malta [NLM] Univ. 12 (22.iv.1517) f. 161v). A couple of decades earlier, another Maczuni (a Mastru Antoni, Aurifex) had been commissioned by Don Antoni de Nicolachio, vice parish priest of Żejtun, to make a gilt silver chalice for the church of St Catherine (NAV Not. G. Zabbarra R494/1(IV) (28.xii.1496) f. 42).

³⁸ NLM Univ. 13 (?ii.1536) f. 102v.

³⁹ M1 (22.i.1515) f. 49, (9.x.1520), f. 142. NAV Not. Geronimo Cumbo R196/1(I) (21.vii.1530) f. 35v, M3 (15.vi.1534) f. 94.

⁴⁰ On this twelfth-century codex, vide S. Grech, *Il Codice Melitense dei Vangeli* (Malta, 1897) and V. Pace, "Untersuchungen zur sizilianischen Buchmalerei", in *Die Zeit der Staufer* 5 vols., Band V Supplement, Wurtembergisches Landesmuseum, Stuttgart Katalog der Ausstellung (Stuttgart, 1977) 431-476; these references have been very kindly brought to my attention by Rev. Can. John Azzopardi, Curator of the Mdina Cathedral Museum. Also, NLM Univ. 11 (20.vi.1473) f. 249v: "Omnes de consilio eligerunt et approbaverunt viros infrascriptors . . . tamquam deputati cum juramento super libro Sancti Pauli"; *Ibid.* (25.x.1479) f. 405v: "Nobilis Johannes la habica et antonius falca . . . eligerunt pro supramarammerio marammatis castri maris malte Nobilem Johannem de ovedo vicecastellanum . . . qui nobilis Johannes Juravit tactis scripturis et manibus supradictorum". *Ibid.* Univ. 12 (15.xi.1515) f. 132v: "Quia orta differentia inter Petrum [Axac] et Perium Caruana olim collectorem bonorum Judeorum . . . juratum super Libro Sancti Pauli".

(Fig. 4). The conditions of the agreement between the Cathedral and Scarpa were detailed in a deed in the Acts of Notary Giulio Cumbo, unfortunately now lost.⁴¹

In 1521 the Maltese silversmith and goldsmith Mastro Joseph Bonello, perhaps the earliest known to date, makes an appearance with his major work on a crucifix for the cathedral. His work consisted in making a silver crucifix and then gilding it. Work seems to have started early in 1521 as Bonello was paid nine *uncie* in March *per compliri et expediri la cruchi de argento*. By August of that year he had been paid a further four *uncie per factura et mastria*. Early in 1522 he needed to buy half a rotolo of silver for this work and somewhat later a further four ounces which cost in all just under six *uncie*. The silver work appears to have been completed by June 1522 when a final two *uncie* were paid *Infra pagamento di mastria dila cruci Ji Jam operatam*. The last payment for the gilding, *per deaurari la cruchi*, was effected in December of that year; it came to eleven *ducati di oru in oru*.⁴²

This was not the only work of art executed by Bonello for the cathedral. In 1528 he is again encountered *renovarj et deorarj uno calichi* whose cup was damaged and which, although belonging to the cathedral's treasure, came from the nearby church of Sancta Maria di Donna Manna.⁴³ In 1538 he was then commissioned and paid for making a number of silver *objects d'art*, including silver cruets, for the cathedral and also a new crozier for the new Bishop Fra Tomaso Bosio. Josep Bonello, who was quite illiterate,⁴⁴ was probably the progenitor of two other *aurifichi*, encountered a generation later, a Mastro Antonucio Bonello and another Joseph Bonello (junior).⁴⁵

⁴¹ M1 (16.iv.1519) f.268. It is of interest to note that Scarpa is encountered, precisely at this time, buying a silver cup weighing $9\frac{3}{4}$ ounces by auction (NLM Univ. 12 (7.vi.1519) f. 210v). The silver-covered *evangelistarium* figures in all later inventories of the cathedral's silverware, including the earliest extant (Not. V. B. De Bonetiis (1543) and that drawn up by Notary Angelo Bartolo (NAV R48/7 (21.xi.1565) f. 56v): "Item uno evangelistaro di pargamena coperto di tavoli di argento".

⁴² *Ibid.*, (14.iii.1521) f. 423, (24.iv.1521) f. 405, (19.viii.1521) f. 373, (15.iii.1522) f. 328, (8,27.iv.1522) ff. 318, 312; (22.vi.1522) f. 298, (23.xii.1522) f. 273. For other works by Bonello, G. Wettinger, "Artistic Patronage in Malta: 1418-1538", in (Ed.) A.T. Luttrell, *Hal Millieri, A Maltese Casale, its Churches and Paintings* (Malta, 1976) 113.

⁴³ M2 (8.vi.1528) f. 387. This "Donna Manna" chalice is listed in Notary Bonello's inventory of 1565 (f. 54v): "Item uno calici di argento con la sua patena, coppa et pomo deorati ... olim lassato per la Magnifica Donna Manna pesa con la sua patena unczi vinticinque et una quarta". Other artefacts made by Bonello likewise figure in this inventory, including "la crozza seu baculo pastorale di argento con suo ligni et ferro pesa rotuli quatro unczi vinti tre et mezza", and "una cruchi grandi di argento deorata cum sua lignami et pomo di argento" (f. 53).

⁴⁴ M3 (27.vi.1538) f. 603; the receipt for this payment was signed on his behalf by the aromatarjo Antoni Callus, for he confessed he could not write. *Ibid.*, (13.x.1538) f. 515.

⁴⁵ Archivum Archipresbyteri Cathedralis Melite, Liber Baptizatorum I (27.i.1555) f. 102: "Baptizavi Angelicam filiam Magistri Antonucij Bonello aurificis"; *Ibid.*, (21.iv.1558) f. 126: "Baptizavi Isabellam filiam Magistri Hiosephi Bonello aurificis".

At about the same time that Bonello is encountered, another goldsmith, *Mastru deauraturi* Vincenzo Vineciano, was executing work on a tabernacle for the cathedral. Vineciano was almost certainly a foreigner, probably of Venetian origin, who never appears again later. The tabernacle Vineciano was gilding was made by *Mastru Carpinteri Cola Curmi*, already encountered earlier engraving the new ceiling; he was paid five *uncie per fari la bara* (or *vara*) *di Santu Paulu*.⁴⁶ A difficulty of interpretation is here encountered because one cannot really differentiate between the letters ‘b’ and ‘v’ in initial position in scripts of around this time. The word *bara* meaning coffin cannot be entirely ruled out since the tabernacle could have been meant for the Maundy Thursday ceremony when the terminology used (to this day) is that of “interment” of the Blessed Sacrament; but then the term usually used, then (*vide infra*) as now, was *Santo Sepolcro*. On the other hand, the interpretation *vara*, or processional statue is also admissible if the tabernacle in question was meant as a receptacle for the Blessed Sacrament that was carried in solemn processions such as that held on *Corpus Domini*; this procession is well documented in the Mandati documents themselves.⁴⁷ In view of the fact that very similar terminology with a clear interpretation in this latter sense is encountered in near-contemporary documentation for Sicily, the term *vara* is preferred.⁴⁸

Vineciano commenced work around October 1521 when he was paid a deposit in advance (*capara*) for the work he was about to perform. Other payments followed in December of that year, and in each of the months between January and April 1522, when a final settlement was made bringing the total remuneration to 6 *uncie* and 20 *tari*. The work is variously described as *mastria dila deauratura dilo tabernaculo*, *deauramento di la vara dilu Corpus Christi*, and *mastria in posirj loru in la custodia sive vara Corporis Christi*.⁴⁹ In May 1522, then, he is made one further payment of 2 *uncie* 12 *tari a complimento di sua mastria et preczu dilu aczolu operau et fichi ad opu di la vara*.⁵⁰ It appears, therefore, that the finishing of the tabernacle was in azure and gold, probably complementing the general colour scheme of the main altar, a very attractive proposition, in the then current Romanesque Gothic style.⁵¹

⁴⁶ M1 (2.ix.1521) f. 371, (18.i.,1522) f. 342, (8,22.iii.1522) ff. 332, 326.

⁴⁷ For example, M2 (5.ix.1524) f. 74: “tari xxvij per preczo di tanto vino che disi in sua taberna ali sonaturj dila festa di Corpus Christi”; (4.vii.1531) f. 463; Misc. 36 (9.ix.1529) f. 646, (1.vii.1530) f. 724.

⁴⁸ G. Bresc-Bautier, *Artistes*, 264-5 Doc. LXXVI (5.v.1454) “... ponere de auro et de volo quamdam varam ad opus Corporis sacratissimi Christi ... forma vare Corporis Christi majoris Panormitane ecclesie”, interpreted to be similar to what Mongitore describes as “una custodia grande ... la quale portavasi in ispalla de 24 sacerdoti nella sollennità del Corpus Domini”.

⁴⁹ M1 (5.x.1521) f. 365, (24.xii.1521) f. 367, (18.i.1522) f. 340. (29.?.1522) f. 338, (22.ii.1522) f. 334, (11.iii.1522) f.330, (23.iv.1522) f. 314.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, (6.v.1522) f. 306.

⁵¹ The crucifix on the main altar in the cathedral at Cefalù, made in 1468, was also painted “de azolu ultramarinu et oru finu” (G. Bautier-Bresc, Guglielmo de Pisaro, 242 Doc. I).

CHURCH VESTMENTS AND ORNAMENTS

While work on the cathedral ceiling was still in progress the chapter spent close to 300 *unci boni*, an enormous sum of money at the time - compare the yearly salary of the *protomedico* which in that year came to 32 *uncie* - on the acquisition of a *capella di bruccato*, which was a complete set of liturgical vestments made of brocade. This set, which included a *cappa* and two *dunicelli cum loru frixi et guarnimenti* was bought in Palermo by the Magnifico Alexandro Catagnano (the Bishop of Malta was then Mgr. Bonifacio Catagnano whose predecessor was Mgr Bernardo Catagnano) to whom the money was sent through the Noble Andria Manduca and Ambrogio Falzono.⁵² The total amount came to 292 *uncie*, 4 *tari*, 10 *grani* and the insurance, underwritten by several Mdina men who insured amounts varying between 5 and 20 *uncie*, came to 10 *uncie* 21 *tari* 18 *grani*. According to the insurance agreement, drawn up by Notary A. Rapa on 1 June 1520 (deed untraced), the insurers *volino che la securitate si intenda et incurri dilu Jorru et hura che dicta capella di bruccato si parti di la dicta felichi chitati per terra et marj et fina che sia Insalvamento In lo portu dila marina dila dicta chitati*.⁵³

Several other purchases of ornaments and vestments are recorded at this time. Two carpets were obtained from Magnifico Anfrano Camogi in 1534, most probably from abroad, at a cost of nine ducats, whereas Magnifica Imperia di Grugno procured another carpet sometime later.⁵⁴ In 1532 a *blandunera dilo cereo paschali* was bought for fifteen *carlini* and, two years later, two pairs of *blanduneri novi cum loru Jntagliari* cost one *uncia* fifteen *tari*. Nearly 23 *uncie* were paid to the Noble Nofrio Catanio Gerbino, a Genoese merchant, for *canni quattu palmi tri et meczu di velluto carmasino et tila scandinisca per Inforra per fari certi tunicelli et amicti*; the sewing of these tunics and their accessories came to another 21 *tari*. Two *albi novi* in 1532 cost no less than six *uncie*.⁵⁵ Other purchases were certainly made abroad. In May 1535 no less than 70 *ducatos auri in auro largos boni auri* were refunded to the Spaniard Nobili Peri Ruys de Vilasco who had transferred that amount to the Magnifici Paulo de Naso and Antoni de Armanya who were in Palermo purchasing damask and velvet for the Cathedral; the payment was in fact made to another Spaniard, Antonio Carriglo who was Ruys's creditor.⁵⁶

⁵² *Ibid.*, (27.iii.1520) f. 236. On another occasion Catagnano procured velvet from Palermo at a cost of 23 *uncie* (M2 (17.viii.1525) f. 18).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, (2,5.iv.1520) ff. 208, 240; (1.vi.1520) f. 209.

⁵⁴ M3 (22.vii.1534) f. 131, (31.v.1537) f. 444.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, (20.iv.1533) ff. 73, 75; (10.xi.1532) f. 31.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, (5,20.v.1535) ff. 299, 298; (7.vii.1535) f. 270.

It is clear that nothing was spared when it came to the decoration of the mother church and the care lavished on anything that concerned the cathedral can be seen from the constant attention and regular maintenance given to vestments and other church apparatus. Apart from the regular cleaning of linen, such as table-cloths, corporals and other furnishings in daily use,⁵⁷ all vestments were evidently kept in good repair at all times. In this connexion, the name of one craftsman, Mastru Custureri Laurenczu Saura, keeps cropping up in the cathedral's pay-rolls *per conczamentu di cappi, gazòbbli, stoli* and other liturgical vestments.⁵⁸

This routine maintenance of the church brings us face to face with several other craftsmen, otherwise little known, who performed occasional or regular tasks for the church. Thus, the blacksmith Mastru Petro Blondeo is encountered on several occasions, in 1535 alone, either obtaining iron and coal for the cathedral, or making iron hinges and locks for the cathedral side-door (*ferramenti dila porta pichula et per una serratura seu cathanaczo dubla cum soy guarnimenti et bracci di ferro*), or windows (*octo para di frintesi et quattru firmituri per li finestri*), or repairing candelabra and the like (*per guarnimento dilo scannello, et per conczari li candaleri et per conczatura dili catini dili lamperi*) or making a safe chest to contain the very precious brocade vestments (*per chinco para di frintesi per la caxa dili vestimenti di imbruccato*) which had cost so much.⁵⁹ A similar job had been done earlier by Mastru chavitteri Bartholomeo Liftech who had made a lock for the cathedral jewel-chest – *per la caxa per mettirichi la argenteria et jogali di Santu Paulu*.⁶⁰

Although the names of Antoni Callus and of Giglu Xuerib, who respectively constructed the *Santo Sepolcro* for Holy Week in 1537 and once made a ladder for the church,⁶¹ will not be forgotten, many other craftsman who worked far more in the church must remain anonymously described merely as *mastru*. Thus, we will never know who made the velvet and silk frontal for the high altar in 1531, nor the maker of the Grandmaster's or the Bishop's *cathedra* in 1533 and 1538 respectively, nor the sculptor of a holy-water font on a tripod,⁶² although it is no great loss to Maltese art history not knowing who made the hinges of the choir stalls which were falling apart in 1523.⁶³

⁵⁷ For example, M2 (4.xii.1525) f. 22, (16.xii.1526) f. 338, (15.ix.1527) f. 282, Misc. 36 (1.vi.1529) f. 618, M2 (20.v.1531) f. 465, M3 (20.iv.1532) f. 9, (15.viii.1533) f. 49.

⁵⁸ M1 (9.viii.1521) f. 381; M2 (22.ii.1527) f. 176, (30.iv.1530) f. 450; M3 (1.ii.1534) f. 163, (19.iv.1538) f. 653.

⁵⁹ M3 (3.vii.1525) f. 276, (5.9.viii.1535) ff. 252, 244; (23.xii.1535) f. 180.

⁶⁰ M2 (13.ix.1528) f. 394.

⁶¹ M2 (20.iv.1521) f. 469; M3 (23.iii.1537) f. 465.

⁶² *Ibid.*, (24.ii.1531) f. 475; M3 (16.vii.1533) f. 63, (7.xi.1538) f. 500, (23.iii.1537) f. 465.

⁶³ M2 (24.x.1523) f. 44.

THE CLOCK AND BELFRY

The cathedral had a free-standing *campanile* as can be deduced from Abela's description and from the seventeenth-century plan. Besides the bells, the oldest of which dated from 1370 and came from Venice,⁶⁴ the belfry also carried a clock. As the clock was considered to be also the town-clock, responsibility for its upkeep was shared between the Cathedral and the *Università*.⁶⁵ The *Università* also paid for the ringing of the bells in connexion with guard duty and other municipal needs: *per sonari la prima cum la campana dila prima Juxta solitum; per fari sonari la seconda ave maria che si sona a mezza ura di nocti ... la quali fu ordinata per lu capitano et Jurati di dicta chita; per la corda dila campana dila guardia quali intocca ali dui huri dila notti*.⁶⁶

The town clock figures among the earliest extant town council agendas and in fifteenth-century *mandati*,⁶⁷ but some time after 1500 it apparently fell into disuse as the next appearance it makes is around 1515, when it is evident that 7 *unci* was spent on repairs to the belfry, the clock itself, and its dial; all details are neatly laid down in the *mandati* and include *per uno travo di castagna quali sta ala finestra dicti horologij, uno travu per lu ponti dila spera, mencza salma di calchina, per achito, argento vivo, tartaro et sulfaro, and per vino, panj et altri companaciu per lo dicto mastro et manuali*. The names of a number of artisans and craftsmen are mentioned in this list, including Mastru Ginayno, probably a carpenter engaged in making the scaffolding (*ponti*), Mastru Jacubu who whitewashed the dial, and Joanni Micheli La Pucella who painted the dial.⁶⁸ The gilding of the dial was done

⁶⁴ Document of 7.viii.1645 published by A. Mifsud, "La Cattedrale e l'Università", *La Diocesi* vol. ii (1917-18) 76-77.

⁶⁵ For example, M1 (23.x.1521) f. 359, where a payment of 12 *tari* 10 *grani* is made by the cathedral and an equal payment (*Ibid.*, f.361) is made by the *Università*. The clock is often described as belonging to church and city; thus, in M1 (22.i.1515) f. 49: "lo horologiu civitatis et ecclesie".

⁶⁶ M1 (23.xi.1520) f. 118; M2 (1.vi.1530) f. 439. NLM Univ. 84 (21.ix.1545) f. 36v. Also M3 (31.viii.1534) f. 113.

⁶⁷ NLM Univ. 11 (11.ix.1461) f. 133: "super salario di lu orlogiu"; (c.viii.1463) f. 192: "per conczari lu orlogiu"; (19.xii.1470) f. 196: "super facto cimbali fiendi ad opu dilu orlogiu". MCM Misc. 36 (23.ii.1491) f. 59: "uncza una bona a Presti Joanni Cassar per so salario anni instantis per lu conczamento dilu orloJu".

⁶⁸ M1(31.v.1515) f. 78. Joanni Micheli La Pucella later figures in the documentation as the town gunner (*bombarderi*): NLM Univ. 12 (28.i.1520) f. 231v. This unlikely position of *armerj salariato di quista chitai* was occupied by yet another La Pucella, a Frati Johanni Antoni, between 1481 and 1506 (M1 (29.iii.1506) f. 6) who was, no doubt, identical with the painter of 1496 and 1508 (Texts in Wetinger, 113-114). For the painters Joannes Nicola La Pucella and Nicolaus Federico, mentioned by Wetinger (p. 115), *vide infra*. The La Pucellas appear to have been from Żebbuġ, (MCM ACM Misc. 437 No. 7 (c. 1480) f. 6, NLM Univ. 12 (7.xi.1520) f. 254, NAV Not. B. Haxixa R32/2 (5.iv.1559) f. 368) whence they moved to Qormi by the end of the sixteenth century, by which time the surname assumed the form "bucel" and "Pucelli", (Parish Archives Qormi (San Ġorġ), Liber Baptizatorum II

by Mastru Joannj Scarpa *arginteri*, already encountered, and the mechanical alterations and repairs were made by Mastru Vincenzo di Bruges, who was the town blacksmith.⁶⁹

It appears that when the clock was finally made to work again, Mastru Vincenzo di Bruges was entrusted to keep it in good repair as is evident from a payment of three years' salary for this job in 1518.⁷⁰ For the next decade or so, a Don Leonardo Pisano appears to have taken over the task of *conczari et teniri in ordini lu orologiu di sonarj tucti li huri* as is evident from several payments to him made both by the Cathedral and by the *Università*; he was paid two and a half *uncie* annually for his labours and one *uncia* for the oil.⁷¹ Once during these ten years, the intervention of Mastru Vincenzo de Bruges was required.⁷² There was a crisis situation in 1533 when a reduced salary of two *uncie* was acceptable to neither Don Leonardo nor to Frati Joannes Xebiras; in fact in that year Mastru Joanni de Muset, *bombarderi di la Sacra Religione* had to step in to keep the clock ticking. But by the following year Don Leonardo is encountered again, this time working in tandem with his son Simuni, in charge of the clock.⁷³

Other works and repairs were later needed both in the clock tower and in the clock itself such as when in 1529 and again in 1534 Mastru Petro Blondeo had to provide *chavi et toppi per conczamento di la porta dilu campanaro* and in 1530 the Augustinian Friar Joanni Xebiras had to paint the dial again, or when the minute hand needed seeing to by the blacksmith Mastru Cola Xebiras in 1532 (*per fari la filecha dila spera dilu arlogiu*) and again a year later by Mastru George Ginuysi. In

(7.iv.1590) f. 374v; "Paulina Puccell figlia di Naino", *ibid.* (1611) f. 485v: "...Pucelli Bucel"). presumed to be early forms of the modern surname Bugelli. It is of interest to note that a Johannes de Puzellis, son of Thomia from Licata and living in Palermo, is recored as being a goldsmith apprentice in 1429 (Bresc-Bautier, *Artistes*, 192).

⁶⁹ M1 (22.i.1515) f. 49, (5.ii.1515) f. 57; M2 (12.xii.1524) f. 54. Vincenzo was the father-in-law of the other blacksmith Mastro Petro Blondeo (M3 (5.ix.1534) f. 109).

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, (3.ix.1518) f. 36.

⁷¹ M1 (22.x.1520) f. 134; (2,10.iv.1521) ff. 324, 413; (23.x.1521) ff. 359, 361; (3.viii.1521) ff. 383, 385; M2 (6.iii.1522) f. 26; (3,4.iii.1524) ff. 137, 10; (16.viii.1524) f. 87; (1.iii.1526) f. 385; (26.iii.1528) f. 419; (20.iii.1530) f. 452; M3 (1.iii.1531) f. 5. The conditions of employment were laid down in a contract in the Acts of Notary Antonio Rapa (22.ii.Ind.VIII [=1520]); deed untraced.

⁷² M2 (23.xii.1524) f. 48. Vincenzo di Bruges was not very happy with his salary as town blacksmith and he threatened to emigrate to Tripoli in 1526 (NLM Univ. 12 (30.iv.1526) f. 405) but he did not seem to have carried out his threat as he is encountered again working for the cathedral in 1528 and 1529 (M2 (16.iv.1528) f. 413, Misc. 36 (22.vi.1529) f. 625).

⁷³ For Pisano, NLM Univ. 13 (7.iii.1533) f. 52. M3 (10.v.1533) f. 69, (31.vii.1534) f. 117, (4.iv.1535) f. 333; M4 (25.iv.1536) f. 71; M3 (11.iv.1537) f. 463, (26.vi.1538) f. 607. For de Muset, M3 (9.iv.1533) f. 81).

March 1535, then, both Mastru Luca Borg and a Mastru Balistrera from Gozo, were engaged on repairs, the latter *ala porta dilu campanaro*.⁷⁴

All these efforts were crowned with glory in 1537 when the tower was surmounted by a proud mast that carried the banner: *per una antenna che si conczau per la bandera et per sua pintura et lavuratura et conczatura che la conczau lo mastro et per chova et conczatura dilo orlogiu et bastasi et mastria di conczari la troya (sic) di detto orlogiu*.⁷⁵

THE GRAVES

The first three months of 1534 saw an upheaval of the church pavement as all graves within the church were being properly constructed with stone walls and slab (*balati*) roofing. Several loads of *cantuni*, hundreds at a time, were purchased and several *mastri* and *manuali* were engaged on a regular five- or six-day week basis. The stone-cutters' names are not given but no less than 1,350 *cantuni* are known to have been purchased and although the numbers of *balati* is rarely given, on one occasion 110 were bought. The work is generally described as *per li sepulturi* but the occasional odd reference such as *in conczari li monumenti intro la dicta ecclesia*, sheds more light showing that the graves were already in existence and were only being renovated. On one occasion *cherti perni ad opu di li sepulturi* were bought from the blacksmith Vincenzo di Bruges and on another occasion *coffi et chova* were needed. All the carrying of the heavy material was done by beasts of burden.⁷⁶

Abela describes how the church had once been surrounded by chapels belonging to the wealthier families of the island with burial rights in them. He notes how by the time he was writing, only the Monserrat chapel had survived belonging to the Gatt Desquanez family and refers also to the Vagnoli family chapel existing in 1419.⁷⁷ In 1493 there was also an altar belonging to the Vaccaro family.⁷⁸ As the primary aim of these chapels was the family's right to be buried in them, it is very probable that gravestones were decorated, probably with the family's coat-of-arms,

⁷⁴ Misc. 36 (22.vi.1529) f. 625, M3 (30.viii.1533) f. 51, (21.ix.1532) f. 43, (22.iii.1533) f. 87, (5.ix.1534) f. 109. M3 (7,27.iii.1535) ff. 351, 343.

⁷⁵ M3 (25.v.1537) f. 448.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, (17,25,31.i.1534) ff. 171, 167, 165; (7,21,28.ii.1534) ff. 161, 157, 159; (8,11,15,29.iii.1534) ff. 153, 151, 149, 145.

⁷⁷ Abela, 331.

⁷⁸ NAV Not. B. Sillato MS. 1069/1 (8.vi.1493) f. 36v. For a detailed description of these chapels, A.A. Caruana, *Monografia Critica della Cattedrale Apostolica di Malta* (Malta, 1899) 13.

as evidenced for similiar burials in other churches.⁷⁹ One such sarcophagus is encountered in 1535 when it had to be moved to allow repairs to the chapel where it belonged; 6 *tari* were paid for the wine given to the handymen, by way of payment, for handling the sarcophagus. The wording of the text is particularly interesting: *Et pio li darriti altri tari sey ponderis per una quartara di vino havj spiso per portari lo tabuto seu monumento Intro la dicta cappella che de novo si havjfacto In dicta ecclesia*.⁸⁰ This sarcophagus perhaps belonged to the St John chapel of the De Mazara family. Some time after moving the sarcophagus extensive works were in progress in this chapel: *per la fabrica di la cappella di Santo Joanni dili mazari*; Mastro Antoni Habele and Mastro Joanni Vassallo were engaged in this work and Mastru Vincenzo [di Bruges] made the *barra per la spiragla di la ecclesia [sive cappelletta] di Santu Joanni [Intra la ecclesia catedrali]*.⁸¹

This information must be read in conjunction with the Apostolic Visitor Dusina's comments in 1575 regarding burials in the cathedral: *In ecclesia cathedrali predicta omnino fiant usque ad tres tumbas concameratas pro sepeliendis mortuis, nec posthac amplius sepeliantur humo revoluta, qui mos, et impletatem praesefert, et ecclesiam deformat*.⁸² A possible interpretation is that burials in the cathedral were of different kinds. There were burials for the nobles in side-chapels, embellished with marble sarcophagi bearing coats-of-arms and similar trappings. There were then the stone-chambered graves, which were being renovated in 1534, for those who could afford such burials but could not aspire to have their own chapels; these would include merchants, craftsmen and other middle-class families. But then there were also common graves in which the poorest among the faithful were buried, as these too had a right to a church burial; these were simply buried in the undignified *humo revoluta* manner denounced so often by Dusina. The texts could, in fact, be reconciled, due weight being given to the operative word *omnino* in the 1575 document - burials, IN THEIR ENTIRETY, had to be properly constructed, meaning that some were but others were not. However, one other comment in Dusina defies interpretation and seems to ignore completely the construction of chambered graves in 1534, documented above. When visiting the Monserrat chapel, Dusina had this to

⁷⁹ G. Wettinger, "Burials in Maltese Churches: 1419-1530/40", in T.F.C. Blagg, A. Bonanno, A.T. Luttrell, *Excavations at Hal Millieri, Malta* (Malta, 1990) 135-140. *Idem*, *Il-Ġrajja Bikrija tal-Knisja Matriċi T'Għawdex 1435-1551* (Malta, 1975) 1-17.

⁸⁰ M3 (28.xi.1535) f. 190. In the receipt to the payment the sarcophagus is again referred to as *lo tabuto*. Some work on graves at about this time - *calcina per conczari sepulturi* (M3 (8.xi.1535) - possibly related to graves in this chapel. In November 1536 the altar of the Holy Trinity was founded by the Manducas with burial rights in the cathedral: NAV Not. B. Caxaro R175/2 (9.xi.1536) f. 82.

⁸¹ M3 (13.v.1538) f. 637, (15.vi.1538) f. 617, (11.28.viii.1538) ff. 569, 545; (18.ix.1538) f. 502; (6.xii.1538) f. 492. References at M3 ff. 535, 547, 573 possibly also refer to this project.

⁸² MCM AIM Misc 7 (Visitatio Dusina) p.16.

comment: “*Intus dictum sacellum est tumba pro sepeliendis mortuis, et in ecclesia cathedrali non est alia tumba, nisi in dicto sacello, et in sacello Sancti Michaelis: sepeliuntur mortui revolta humo*”.⁸³ A satisfactory reconciliation of the two texts remains elusive.

THE FRONT DOOR

No sooner was the stone-work in the church interior completed than the cathedral was whitewashed; Simuni Bartolo supplied five *salme* of lime for the operation and Mastru Zaccaria Busayle provided the scaffolding.⁸⁴ The cathedral façade was tackled next. Work on the main door began in March 1535, when the voussoirs for the arches were cut, and many *petri* and *cantuni*, including *pechi grossi di petra* were purchased from the *pirriaturi* Mastru Nardo Barbara. Work under the master-mason Mastru Jaymo *moraturi* dragged on till the end of the year.⁸⁵

A new wooden door was made of chestnut wood imported for the purpose from Sicily - *per andarj in sichilia et accactari quantita di legnami di nuchi per fari porti et guarnicioni* - although some other timber was obtained locally later; thus, a piece of oak was supplied by the Magnifico Mattheo Fauczuni - *peczo di ruvuru per li porti* -, five beams were similarly obtained from Joanni Surdo - *chincio travi ad opu dili porti che si fanno novi*, and fourteen *tavuli viniciani* were also procured.⁸⁶ The master craftsman who made the door was Mastru Cola Curmi, already encountered, who also went personally to Sicily to choose the timber; a payment of twenty *tari* was made to Bernardo Cassar, Juliano Muscat, and Antonio Xeberras for insuring the material according to an insurance agreement in the Acts of Notary Joanni Rapa (deed untraced). He was helped by Mastru Joanni Calleya and their *garsuni*.⁸⁷ Mastru Petro Blondeo made the iron hinges and probably also later *lo braczo di la porta grandi*.⁸⁸

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.25.

⁸⁴ M3 (14,22,28.ii.1535) ff. 363, 359, 357; (7,14.iii.1535) ff. 353, 349; (10.iv.1535) f. 325, (6.vi.1535) f. 294.

⁸⁵ M3 (14.iii.1535) f. 346: “*Jorni chincio di mastri et manuali che lavurano li petri per li arkatj*”. M3 (21,27.iii.1535) ff. 345, 343; (5,7,11,18.iv.1535) ff.331, 329, 323, 321; (2, 9, 16, 17, 23, 30.v.1535)ff. 315, 311, 307, 347, 296, 292; (6, 13, 21, 25, 27.vi.1535) ff. 286, 284, 280, 319, 278; (3, 10, 17, 25.vii.1535) ff. 274, 268, 264, 256; (8, 14, 22, 27, 30.viii.1535) ff. 246, 248, 238, 232, 224; (5, 12, 20, 25.ix.1535) ff. 220, 216, 214, 212; (7, 10, 17, 25, 31.x.1535) ff. 210, 208, 206, 204, 198; (6, 14, 22, 28.xi.1535) ff. 196, 194, 192, 190; (6, 12, 25.xii.1535) ff. 188, 186, 178. Mastru Jaymo is possibly identical with Mastru Balistrera from Gozo encountered earlier working on the *campanile* door; a Mastro Jaymo Balistrera sculpted the king’s arms on the city gate in 1527 (M2 (10.viii.1527) f. 262).

⁸⁶ Ms (30.iii.1538) f. 339, (6.vi.1535) f. 288, (31.vii.1535) f.254, (26.viii.1535) f.234.

⁸⁷ M3 (17.v.1535) f.305; (4, 17.vii.1535) ff. 272, 262; (28.viii.1535) f.230.

⁸⁸ M3 (19.viii.1535) f.244; (26.i.1537) f. 481.

The main door being described here has in fact survived the ravages of the 1693 earthquake and can still be admired to-day as it was adapted to fit the doorway leading from the sacristy to the rebuilt cathedral. That the front door remained unscathed in 1693 is not an outrageous proposition as can be seen from the fact that the more fragile organ loft which stood directly above the door did not suffer any great damage, was in fact salvaged, and is still preserved in the Cathedral Museum. One can still make out the shape of the old main door ogive and, taking into consideration the sawn off parts of the panels at the two jambs, one can also compute the width and height to have been 216 cms and 397 cms, respectively. That this sacristy door was the 1535 door can be deduced from a partly mutilated inscription that can still be made out at the level of the springing of the arch. A probable reconstruction of the whole inscription is suggested to be:

[PER]ACTUM HOC OPUS // ANNO DNI. MDXX[XV]

The lower half of the first three characters is completely missing and so is the terminal V. What remains of the initial and penultimate letter is not clearly legible but is not incompatible with the present interpretation. The upper halves of the second and third letters are extant and permit a reading of E or F in second position, and a B, P or R in the third.

The last four characters of the inscription show that the year of construction came between 1520 and 1539. The suggested year 1535 tallies both with the evidence in the *Mandati* and with the bishop's coat-of-arms, on the right hand side of the ogive, (Fig. 5) that shows that the door was constructed at a time when the See was vacant; this has been pointed out by Can. John Azzopardi. Bishop Tommaso Bosio took possession of the Maltese Diocese in 1539,⁸⁹ and the *Mandati* themselves prove that there were *Vicarii Generales Sede Vacante* throughout the period October 1523 - 31 December 1538.⁹⁰ Mr Mario Buhagiar has further noted that the script of the inscription is also consonant with the year 1535 and would have been in angular Gothic had it been earlier.

Mgr Mifsud's suggested FACTUM... MDXX,⁹¹ uncritically accepted by many, ignores the truncation at both ends and does not tally with the documented works

⁸⁹ A Ferres, *Descrizione Storica delle Chiese di Malta e Gozo* (Malta, 1866) 35. It has been noted above that Joseph Bonello made the Bishop's crozier in June 1538.

⁹⁰ Relevant *Mandati* between M2 (22.x.1523) f. 42 *et seq.* and the end of M3 (31.xii.1538) f. 486 were all issued by one or other of *Vicarii Generales, Sede Vacante*, Don Jacobo Raficano, Don Consalvo Canchur, and Don Lucas Bartholo, or their deputy.

⁹¹ A Mifsud, "La Cattedrale e l'Università, ossia il comune e la chiesa in Malta", *La Diocesi* vol. ii (1917-18) 35.

of 1535 exhibited here, so that it is untenable; so also is a conjectured FRACTUM.... untenable, as the destruction of a door is hardly an event to commemorate. Mifsud's sharp eye for relevant documentation, however, unearthed an interesting attestation, signed by four witnesses on 25.iv.1697, to the discovery of what they believed was the old cathedral door, found in the clock-tower when this was pulled down after the devastation of the 1693 earthquake. They give the measurements as *larga palmi nove, et alta palmi dicieotto* which tally with those of the present sacristy door.⁹² The description they give shows it to be different from the present sacristy door and the fact that they needed to record the important find suggests that it was in such a dilapidated state as not to warrant preservation. One can conclude that we now have the cathedral main door that was made in 1535, survived the 1693 earthquake, and adapted to fit the sacristy doorway, probably in 1695;⁹³ we also know of the existence of an earlier door, discovered in 1697, which was probably the one that was discarded in 1535.

THE MAIN ALTAR

In his description of the cathedral, already quoted, Abela hints at the existence of *quel trave, che sostiene, e regge il Crocifisso* but makes no comment about its provenance. Here again the *mandati* can shed some light on the matter. By 1538 the major restorations described above were drawing to a conclusion and attention was then being given to interior decoration. A little known painter from Syracuse⁹⁴ called Mastro Calcerano Orobello (also written Lorubello (Fig. 6), de Orobello, De Laurobello and de Lorobello) was commissioned to provide the Cathedral with a crucifix. It is not absolutely clear whether the crucifix was painted on wood or whether a figure of Christ was affixed to a wooden cross, but the fact that a *pinturi* was engaged to carry out the work would tend to give some more weight to the first opinion. The relevant texts read as follows: *per lo crucifixo divi fari sublevato per la ecclesia, infra pagamento di la ymagini di Christu, la opera dilu crucifixo, per la factura dilu crucifixo, per dipingiri la cruchi et la contracruchi dilu cruchifissu*

⁹² Text in A. Mifsud, "Troni ed arme regia nelle Primaziali Maltesi", *La Diocesi* vol. i (1916-17) Doc. I pp. 58-59. The existence of this document was kindly pointed out by Rev. Can. John Azzopardi.

⁹³ There is no evidence whatsoever of a door being adapted between the sacristy and the cathedral when the new sacristy was built under Cagliares in 1626 (MCM ACM C1: "Conti della Fabrica della Sacristia che rende il Decano Vassallo del Anno 1626"). When the cathedral was being rebuilt after 1693, however, one encounters expenses in connexion with "la porta della sacrestia che da in chiesa" (Conti 7 (22.i.1695) f. 37), and "a Mastro Guglielmo Alfard per giorno uno in mettiri laporta della sacrestia nel suo loco - tarenì 5" (Conti 7 (26.iii.1695) f.43).

⁹⁴ NAV Not. N. De Agatiis R202/1(II) (3. vii. 1537) f. 84: Purchase at Birgu, by Calcerano de Laurobello *pittori* citizen of Syracuse, of a white Christian slave called Francesca, aged 22.

ala matri ecclesia.⁹⁵ One other reference that is illegible is unclear except for the date (30.v.1537) and the amount paid (5 *uncie* 18 *tari*); the total amount came to around 22 *uncie*.

The painting and gilding of the beam to which the crucifix was attached was painted by Mastro Joanni Cola La Puzella and his partner Mastro Cola di Fiderico, *mastri pinturi* who were payed in at least two instalments whose *mandati* survive: *per pintura dilu dictu travu dilu cruchifisso* and *a complimento di pintura et deauratura dilo travo dilo crucifixo*; another related payment was made *alo pinturi per pingiri lu travo dilo crucifixo et dui ducati preczo dilo travo di sucta lu crucifixo et tarenì dechinovi per altro travo dilo crucifixo et lavanzi per bastasi lueri di cavalcatura, chova, saccodima et altri dispisi*.⁹⁶ The agreement between the *pinturi* and the cathedral was drawn up by Notary Giuseppe De Guevara.⁹⁷ The gold-leaf used for the gilding cost five *uncie* and was imported from Sicily.⁹⁸

Other major changes to the main altar and to the St Paul retable appear to have happened at that time. In May 1539 payment of 20 *tari* was made *per conczari lu altari maJuri di Santo Paulo, a scavari la cona, ad arrupidari (?) lo scannello di la cona maJuri, a lavurari cordunij Jntagliati de dicta cona, et lavurari la caja di lu Corpu di Christu, et affari et lavurari lu scannello dilo altaro maJuri et lo tavulamento di detto altaro*.⁹⁹ From an entry under sundry payments for June 1539 it is clear that whoever retouched the polyptich came from afar, possibly from abroad, as payment for his transport on horseback has been recorded: *per cavalcatura alo pingiturj che pingi seu renova la cona di Sancto Paulo*.¹⁰⁰

CONCLUSION

It is clear that in the two decades between 1515 and 1535 the Mdina Cathedral was a beehive of activity during which vast sums of money were spent on rebuilding, improvements, renovations, and investment in new works of art. This paper has focussed attention on a limited assortment of activities, ignoring other equally

⁹⁵ The references taken from M3 are respectively (4.vii.1537) f.428, (18.viii.1537) f.420, (19.ix.1537) *olim* f. 200, (15.x.1537) *olim* f.195, and (6.ii.1538) f.685. A further reference dated 14.i.1538 (M3 f.691) must allude to Lorobello: "per zafarana alu pinturi". Compare the costs of painting the Cefalù and the San Pietro di Petralia crucifixes by Mastro Guillelmo de Pisaro which came to 34 *uncie* and 24 *uncie*, respectively (Bautier-Bresc, "Guillelmo de Pisaro", 242, 244).

⁹⁶ M3 (16.xi.1537) f. 384, (15.ix.1538) f. 529, M4 (2.ii.1539) f.247.

⁹⁷ Text in G. Wettinger, "Artistic Patronage", 115.

⁹⁸ M3 (26.ix.1538) f. 521: "per mandare et comprare et portare dal Regno di Sichilia MD pannelli di oru ad opu di deaurari lo travo sucta lo cruchifixo"

⁹⁹ M4 (c.18.v.1539) ff. 189, 191, 193.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.* (13.vi.1539) f. 177.

important enterprises concurrently undertaken, such as the production of liturgical texts and the promotion of sacred music, discussed elsewhere.¹⁰¹ To make all this happen the treasurer had to fork out an amount in excess of 2,000 *uncie*, a sum of massive proportions by any standard. There must have been a reason why precisely at this point in time all this was happening. An event that coincided with this outburst of activity was the concession in April 1520 of the Indult *Hujusmodi supplicationibus* by Pope Leo X.¹⁰² It has been a long-cherished dream and a hard-striven-for ideal of the Maltese Church supported by the municipal council and the people that ecclesiastical benefices of the Maltese church should benefit the local clergy and not foreigners as had so often happened in the past.¹⁰³ Traces of the last throes in the protracted struggle to get the Holy See to consent and support this deserving cause can, in fact, be found in the *Mandati* themselves.¹⁰⁴ It is not improbable that in the

¹⁰¹ S. Fiorini, "Church Music and Musicians in Late Medieval Malta", *Melita Historica* vol. x no. 1 (1988) 1-11.

¹⁰² V. Borg, "Important Canonical Enactments on the Ecclesiastical Benefices of the Maltese Islands" (unpublished D. Theol. thesis, Royal University of Malta, 1960). Text in Abela, 340-42.

¹⁰³ A.T. Luttrell, "Approaches to Medieval Malta", *Medieval Malta. Studies on Malta before the Knights* (London, 1975) 60-62.

¹⁰⁴ NLM Univ. 12 (20.xi.1519) f. 226: "Consilium ... ex quo civitas et universitas habent litteras a Sacra Regia Magestate directas Sanctissimo Domino Papa ne beneficia ecclesiastica existentia in dicta Insula ulterius conferantur exteris sed habitatoribus et Incolis Jpsius civitatis ... si videatur Jpsius de concilio pro obtinendo tam grande beneficio universali mictere aliquem ecclesiasticum ad expensas cathedralis". M1 (11.ix.1522) ff. 287-291: "Infra pagamento dili xxxv unci divi pagari dicta cathedrali ad opu dili bulli et concessionj dilo Santo Patri supra li benefici et dignitati Jpsius Insule" ... "unci quatu a Bertu Muscat nomine et pro parte di Salvu Briffa so compagno per altritanti Jpsu Salvu appi per lictera di concursu di Joanni gilbertu per so travaglu per sollicitarj li execucioni dili bulli et concessioni a quista Insula" ... "desi unci chincio a Salvu Briffa seu misser Fidericu Bonet per la expedicionj dili bulli dilu Santu Patri". M2 (18.iii.1522) f. 28: "a Bertu Muscat comu procuratur et commissionato di Salvu Briffa per altritanti havi Jpsu pagatu in la expedicionj dila bulla ad nuj et dicta chita concessa per la Sanctita dilu Papa circa li beneficij che non si poczano conferri sinon alj oriundi di dicta Insula ad complimento videlicet di ducati sej chentu che ci custao dicta bulla"; M2 (20.iv.1522) f. 32. NLM Univ. 12 (27.i.1516) f. 132Av: "Consilium ... ex quo Rev. Donpnus Bartholomeus Bonavia obtinuit Jn beneficio dicte civitatis et Insule ac sui cleri a Sacra Regia Magestate super eo quod beneficia Jn Insula existentis non conferantur exteris." *Ibid.* (4.ix.1523) f. 333v: "consilium super eo videlicet ex quo Magnifici Jurati Jmpediverunt certas bullas apostolicas Jn personam Reverendissimi Domini Bonifacii Catagnano Episcopi meliveti et alia privilegia collacionum beneficiorum Jn personas familiarum dicti Reverendissimi Episcopi ob quod Reverendissimus Vicarius pretendens dictos Magnificos Juratos Incidisse in censuris ecclesie Interdixit eisdem Juratis Jngressum ecclesiarum et participacionem sacramentorum"; (19.iv.1526) f. 405: "Consilium: Et etiam ex quo ad litteras Egregij Notarij Jacobi Bondino qui scripsit Jpsius dominis Juratis ex romana urbe et ex civitate neapolis che si ipsi Jurati chi mandano chento ducati che ipso si obligava di farj conczari la bulla che li beneficij ecclesiastici di Malta non li pigliano de cetero sino li oriundi et che siano cassati illa verba che lu Episcopo nostro di Malta pocza darj ali soj consanguinei et familiari ac commensales et alia contenta in ipsa bulla quod ad hanc civitatem et suos cives ac oriundos non pertinent..."

euphoria following the granting of the *Bulla* the church went on a spending spree to celebrate the event investing a lot of money in the embellishment of the mother church.

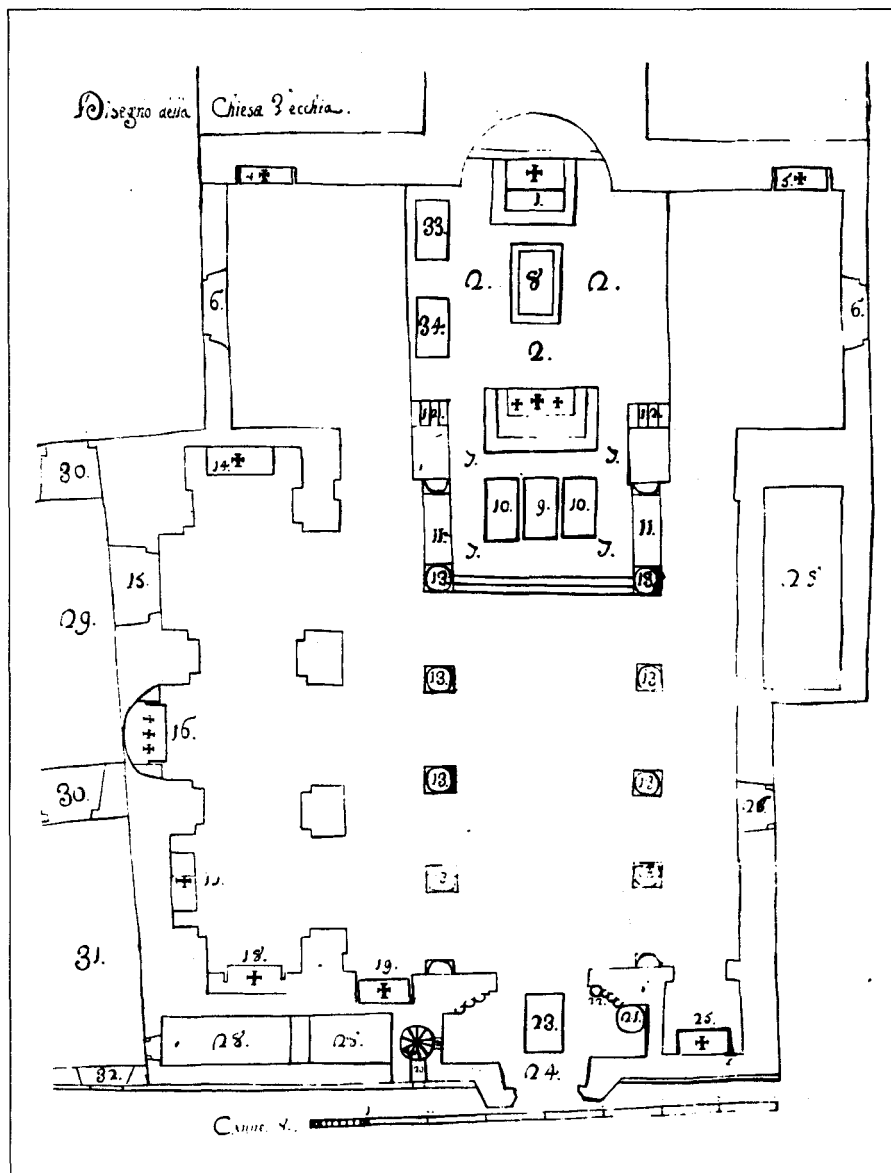
Be that as it may, the resulting activity is an assertion of a flourishing of the arts at the time and depicts a landscape that rather contrasts sharply with the view, so often presented by other documentation, of these islands immersed in dire poverty and on the verge of starvation.¹⁰⁵ It is evident that the more prestigious works were executed by Sicilians of repute, like Patavino, some of whom were induced to settle here, as Scarpa did. Local artisans and craftsmen, like the La Puzellas and the Bonellos who kept the secrets of the trade within the family came increasingly to the fore contributing important works.

It is a pity that the works of art which are here shown to have been executed have not been as fully documented as desired and the supporting notarial deeds of commissions which would have provided a deeper insight into the conditions in which they were wrought, are unfortunately generally lacking. One hopes that this vital documentation will eventually surface.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

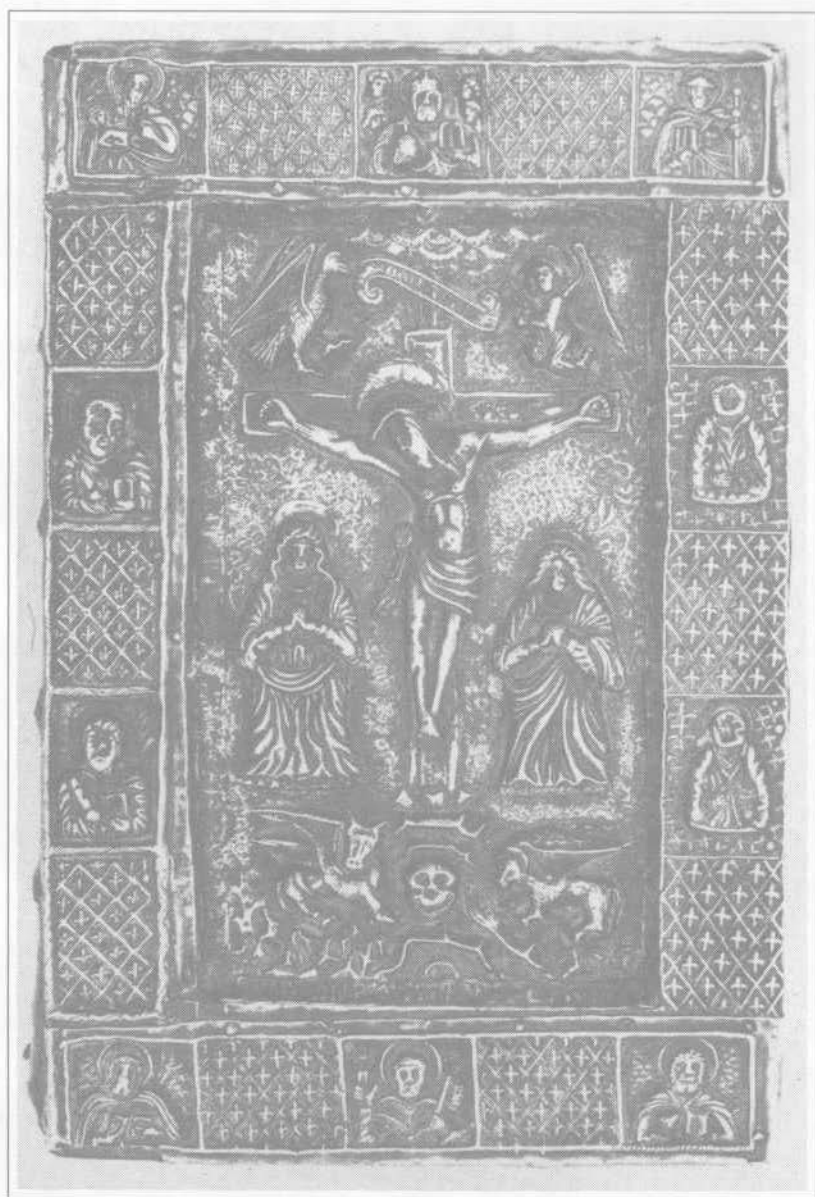
The assistance and encouragement of Canon John Azzopardi, Curator of the Cathedral Museum, during the writing of this paper and the stimulating conversations with Mr Mario Buhagiar on the subject are very gratefully acknowledged.

¹⁰⁵ NLM Univ. 12 (7.ii.1529) f. 498: "Consilium super eo videlicet ex quo in dicta Jnsula vigeat maxima penuria frumenti et victualium adeo che la genti morino di famj ..."



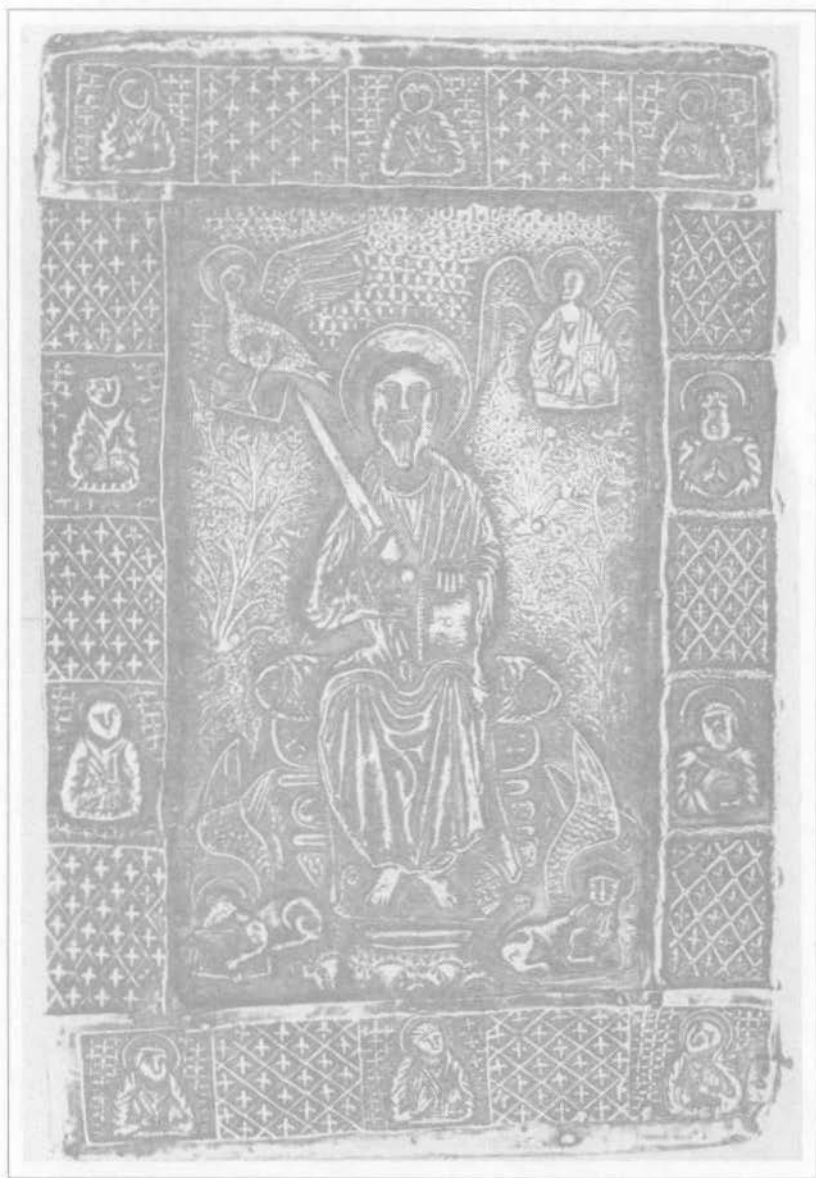
1. Late seventeenth-century plan of the medieval cathedral.

Courtesy: The Curator, Cathedral Museum.



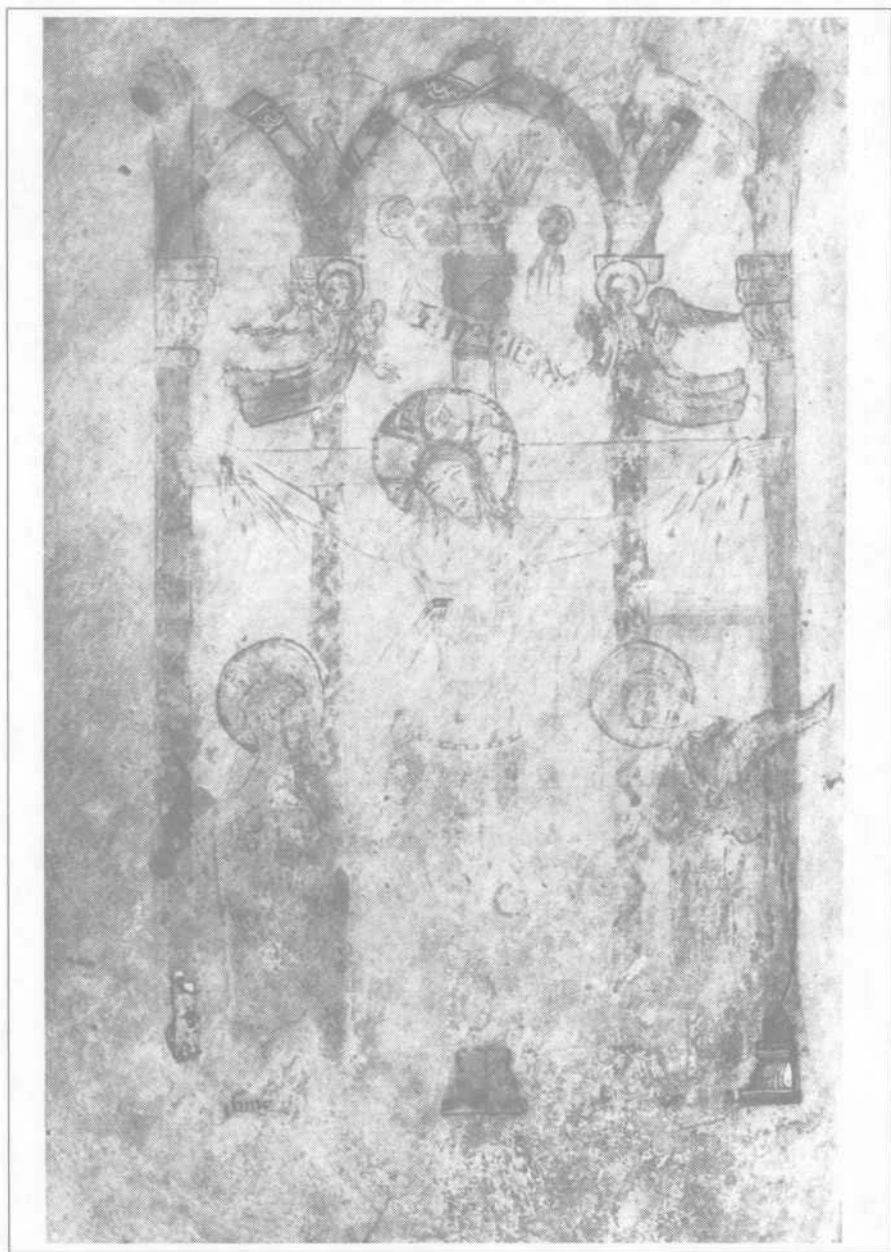
3. a. Joanni Scarpa's silver covers for the Evangelistaro Sancti Pauli.
 b. St Paul enthroned as depicted in the Evangelistaro.
 c. The Crucifixion as depicted in the Evangelistaro.
 Note the similarities with Scarpa's silver relief.

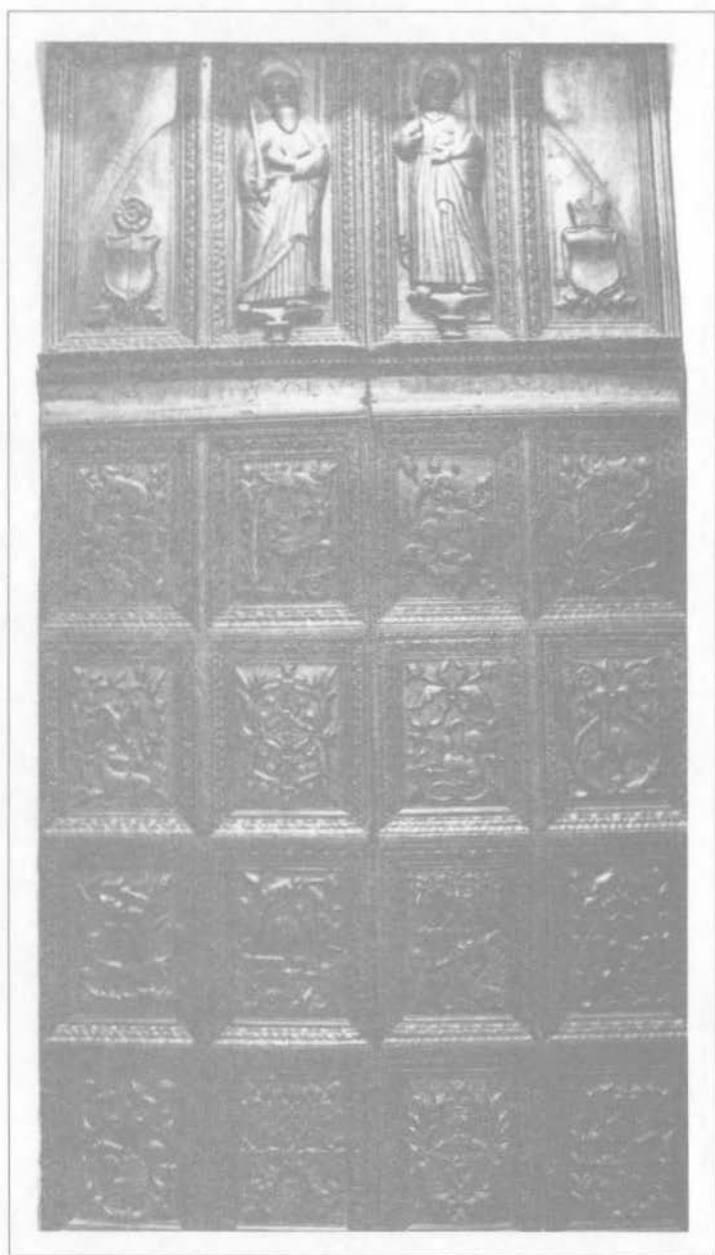
Courtesy: The Curator, Cathedral Museum.





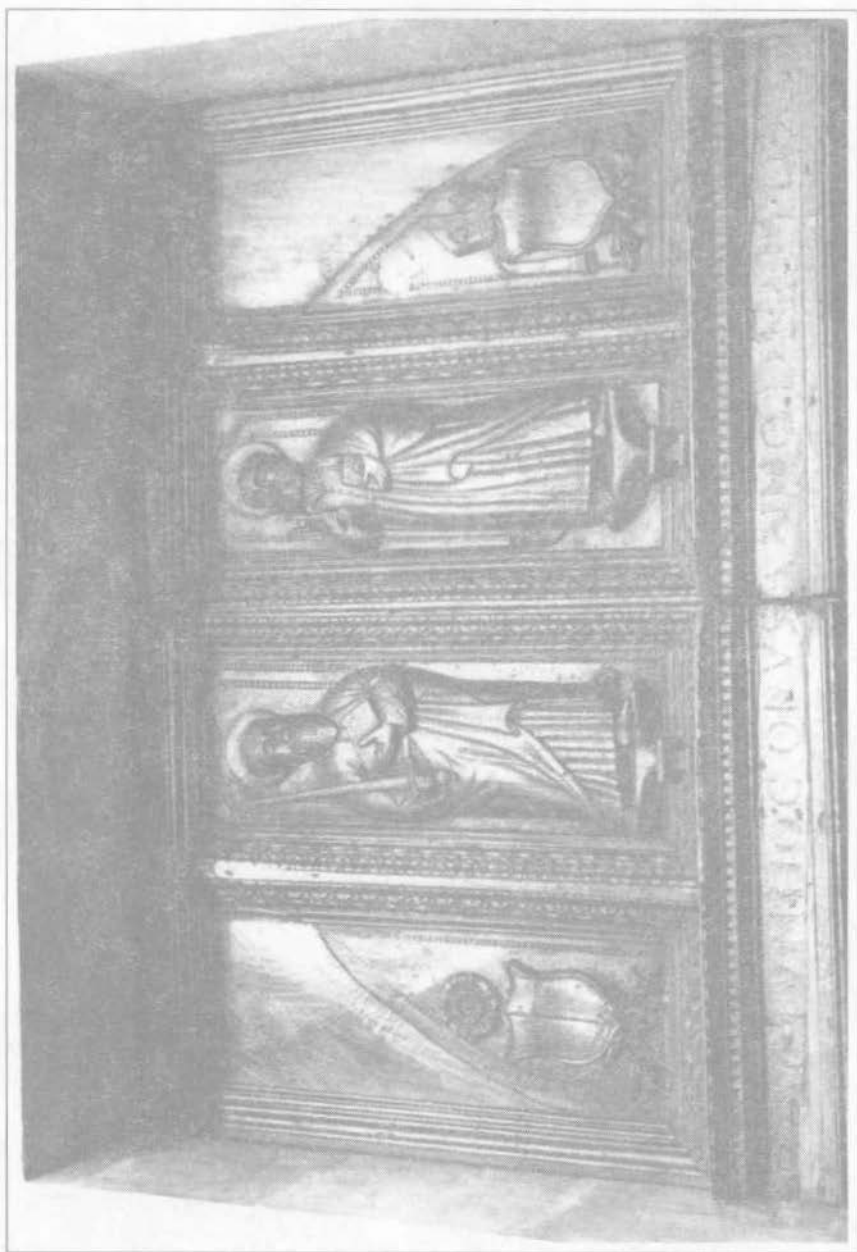
3. b.





5. a. The Sacristy door.
b. Detail of inscription.

Photo credit: Giuseppe Cassar. Courtesy: The Curator, Cathedral Museum.



Die xxvij Julij 1537 Nos don lucas barcelo
 vromos fidei deofis metry sede vacante in fidei deoz
 juray fidei Con^{is} episcopi Comalano vrom
 no andrea maderia vromonomu ex p^{re}no d^{omi} Castellan
 et s^{en} p^{re}no d^{omi} de lo jurayro de bon et d^{omi} benuto
 et d^{omi} vrom jurayro p^{re}no de juray d^{omi} et p^{re}no
 de no no Calcedano orubello p^{re}no f^{idei} m^{re}
 In q^{ui} p^{re}no p^{re}no et in fidei p^{re}no et g^{lo} et
 de bono q^{ui} Comalano vrom juray p^{re}no p^{re}no
 et in d^{omi} Comalano vrom juray p^{re}no f^{idei}
 lo p^{re}no Comalano f^{idei} p^{re}no p^{re}no p^{re}no
 g^{lo} m^{re} lo q^{ui} et p^{re}no ad n^{on} f^{idei} p^{re}no
 non solo vrom et

+ ego don lucas barcelo vrom fidei p^{re}no
 p^{re}no p^{re}no Comalano
 vrom vrom p^{re}no f^{idei}
 lo vrom juray confirmo
 vrom de p^{re}no juray confirmo

Die xxvij Julij 1537 En Calcedano orubello
 f^{idei} vrom juray p^{re}no d^{omi} et d^{omi} m^{re} d^{omi}
 f^{idei} vrom juray p^{re}no d^{omi} et d^{omi} m^{re} d^{omi}
 Comalano et d^{omi} Comalano f^{idei} vrom juray p^{re}no

6. Authographed receipt by Calcedano Lorubello dated 24.vii.1537. (Mandati 3 f. 428.)
 Courtesy: The Curator, Cathedral Museum.