

*Maritime ex-voto paintings from Malta
With Sicilian links*

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Introduction

The brief given for the present report was to:

- a. carry out a survey of relevant *ex-voto* paintings to include a detailed written description and a photograph together with a transcription of any inscriptions on the painting;
- b. carry out the necessary archival research to put the relevant *ex-voto* paintings in a historical context;
- c. compile a report on the material collected which shall include the result of the survey and archival research.

The aim of this report is to carry out the above mentioned three aspects in relation to maritime *ex-voto* paintings that 'highlight the maritime and historic links between Sicily and Malta'. For the purpose of this exercise the maritime area surrounding Sicily, including the islands such as Stromboli in the Aeolian archipelago, Favignana in the Egadi archipelago, and Pantelleria, Lampedusa and Linosa in the south, together with the Gulf of Taranto, has been considered as a contingent sphere of Sicilian influence. *Ex-voti* relating incidents happening in these parts have therefore been included. (Map 1)

The Maltese archipelago is made up of three main islands, and is situated in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea just south of Sicily. Till early modern times Sicily always played the role of hinterland to the Maltese islands supplying them with much needed foodstuffs and other merchandise that had to be ferried across the sea¹³⁸. This need to transfer goods created a seafaring element within the Maltese population that has been present and active throughout the islands' long history. Mariners were in contact with the sea as their source of living, and had to cope with all that it had to fling at them: be it turbulent weather conditions or attacks by sea borne bandits. Seafarers knew how helpless they were when facing peril at sea. They believed that their skill and experience were not enough to ensure a safe passage in rough weather. Thus when disaster threatened religion provided the main solace and a pivotal hope of survival. Besides prayer, people on board vessels, be they mariners or just passengers often made vows and promised to donate offerings if they came through unscathed. In Malta we find a variety of these maritime offerings spanning over a wide period of time, and donated to a variety

¹³⁸ D. Abulafia, 'Henry Count of Malta and his Mediterranean Activities: 1203-1230', in *Medieval Malta, Studies on Malta before the Knights*, ed. A.T. Luttrell, (London, 1975).

of churches and chapels which were considered as having exceptional miraculous powers. The offerings could be bits of sail or cordage belonging to the vessel, chains - symbols of slavery, and canon balls. However, the most popular offerings were paintings commissioned by the person or persons who had been miraculously saved from disaster. More than 400 such paintings, of which only 26 are relevant for the present purpose, relating to maritime incidents survive in more than 12 locations, while an unknown number of others must have surely perished.¹³⁹ These locations are churches, chapels, oratories and museums spread all over the Maltese islands. Most of these *ex-voto* paintings, also known as *tabelle*, were executed according to a loosely adhered to formula. The scene of impending disaster occupies centre stage while a holy Icon or Icons look on from the top part of the painting. Indeed the Icon is a crucial element in the whole painting. The icon represented the Virgin, a Holy Person or Christ himself whose intercession was sought and who miraculously granted safety since the suppliant lived to fulfil the vow made. In most instances one Icon sufficed but in others one sees that the suppliant prayed to two different holy persons or even to three. These would be called a duplex and triplex intercession respectively. Often but not always an inscription either in a scroll or, as was the case during the nineteenth century, in a ribbon at the bottom of the painting described the events briefly or in detail, while the *sigla V.F.G.A* 'Votum Fecit Gratiam Accepit' meaning 'Offering made grace received', is seen on most of the *ex-voto* offerings.¹⁴⁰ The artists who were commissioned to paint these *ex-voto tabelle* were known as *Madonnari*, as often the Icon was of Our Lady; however few of them signed their work.

These paintings although often done in an artistically naïve manner offer insight into a particular sphere of human suffering, and the suppliants reaction to the suffering within the sphere of the deep religiosity of the catholic religion. The need to give thanks led to the creation of this particular form of vernacular artistic expression embodied in the *tabella*. In his seminal study on maritime *ex-votos* from the Maltese islands, the Dutch anthropologist A.H.J. Prins argued that these paintings would make no sense to the outsider who views them merely as drawings and does not make an effort to perceive the communicative system of meaning to which they belong.¹⁴¹ Such a system of meaning could be simplified as - 'disaster threatening, having faith, which leads to the making of the vow, which then leads to the fulfilment of the vow which would be the placing of the *ex-voto tabella* in the desired sanctuary'.¹⁴²

The maritime *ex-voto* paintings have been the subject of study on a number of different occasions by various scholars. Prins analysed them from the anthropologist's point of view, while Joseph Muscat concentrates more on the spiritual and naval aspect. Muscat's expertise in all things maritime enables him to glean much from a detailed analysis of the paintings, and opens up a wealth of knowledge to the interested layman and scholar alike.¹⁴³ Isabelle Borg on the other hand delves into the matter from the art

¹³⁹ A.H.J. Prins, *In Peril On The Sea Marine Votive Paintings in the Maltese Islands*, (Malta, 1989), ix.

¹⁴⁰ A. Cuschieri & J. Muscat, 'Maritime Votive Paintings in Maltese Churches' in *Melita Historica*, 10 (1989)2, 124.

¹⁴¹ Prins, 9.

¹⁴² Prins, 11.

¹⁴³ J. Muscat, *Il-Kwadri Ex-Voto Marittimi Maltin*, (Malta, 2003).

historian's point of view. In Borg's words the aim of her study was to 'explore the connection between the Miraculous Image in religious art in Malta and the *ex-voto tabella*'.¹⁴⁴ Borg strongly believes that the *ex-voto tabelle* in Malta should also be studied within history of art rather than regarded solely as a social document.¹⁴⁵ In her work she categorised the *tabelle*, identified stylistic trends, and examined the influence which two particular madonnari Vincenzo and Michele Gonzi had on the genre.

Having said this, to date no formal catalogue of all the maritime *ex-voti* exists. This lacuna is filled albeit in an unofficial manner by Joseph Muscat's slide collection. Over a lifetime of work Muscat managed to photograph these paintings; his resulting collection will continue to serve as a record until the *tabelle* are formally catalogued and published.

The Sanctuaries

To use Prins's model, the sanctuaries are divided in two categories, those considered as major and those as lesser. The criterion for this distinction is the popularity which the sanctuary enjoyed with seafarers which is then translated into the amounts of maritime *ex-voto* paintings donated. Thus a big parish church will not be considered as a major sanctuary if it houses just one or two paintings, whereas a wayside chapel which houses a substantial number of *ex-voti* would be classified as major. Although Muscat lists more than 30 locations where maritime *ex-voti* can be found, for the present purpose only 8 locations, 7 in Malta and 1 in Gozo, are of interest, (map 2). From the collections housed in these 8 locations only 26 paintings are considered as relevant in highlighting some sort of maritime link between Malta and Sicily.

The locations of interest are as follows, the sanctuary of Our Lady at Mellieħa houses 7 paintings of interest, the sanctuary of Our Lady Tal-Ħerba in Birkirkara houses 8, the parish museum at Żabbar parish church has 5, the chapel of Our Lady tal-Ħniena in Qrendi, 2, while the chapel of Santu Kristu in Ġħaxaq, the chapel of Our Lady tal-Ħlas in Qormi and the Minsija chapel in San Ġwann each have 1. Of these Mellieħa, Birkirkara, Żabbar and Qrendi are considered as major shrines, while the rest as lesser. A comment has to be made about the *ex-voto* found in Gozo. Originally it was at the church of our Lady of Liesse in Valletta, also considered as a lesser shrine, but it found its way into private ownership. Presently it is housed at the Kelinu Grima maritime collection in the village of Nadur.

The Ex-Voto paintings

The last section of this report consists of a descriptive catalogue of the 26 paintings under consideration. Each painting is reproduced on a data sheet together with location, description and transcription of the inscription where such exists. An effort was made to retain the original spelling of the inscriptions. Words or letters in [] were inserted by the present author when deemed necessary for a correct understanding of the text. Illegible sections of the inscriptions are indicated by [...]. In the following text paintings will be referred to by the page number of the individual data sheets. The colour bar at the top left

¹⁴⁴ I. Borg, *The Miraculous Image and the Ex-Voto Tabella in Malta*, M.A. dissertation in History of Art, (Malta, 1994), 1 and I. Borg, *The Maritime Ex-Voto a culture of thanksgiving in Malta*, (Malta, 2005).

¹⁴⁵ Borg, iv.

side of each sheet corresponds to the colour location squares on Map 2, intended to facilitate the identification of the location of the particular *ex-voto*. A bibliographical note beneath each picture indicates if and where the actual painting has been published. Although some *ex-voti* are listed as unpublished it has to be remarked that Prins has published comments, if not the pictures, about the majority of the *tabelle*. These comments were referred to when in doubt or to confirm ideas about what one actually sees on the paintings. Due to various reasons it was not always possible to examine or indeed photograph the actual paintings on site. Joseph Muscat generously allowed me to make use of his slide collection and notes, and willingly endured my questioning on more than one occasion. Without his help this report would have been impossible to compile. Reference to Muscat's slide numbering is also made.

Although a detailed description is attached to each individual painting, some general observations, that will help to put the *tabelle* in context, need to be made at this point.

The incidents that the *tabelle* deal with are poignant ones, nothing less than a matter of life and death for those ensnared in them. Documentary evidence is however often absent as such incidents were also frequent and the norm in the life of the seafarer then. If one chose to live off the sea one knew that rough weather, peril and possibly death were all part of his daily bread. The best records of the incidents are the *tabelle* themselves. Of course exceptions exist when great naval actions, like the battle of Lepanto, were concerned.

However in our case most of the *tabelle* do not depict anything so dramatic but rather the routine and mundane activity of frequent crossings between the different ports. The purpose of these journeys was to transport merchandise, passengers or both. The only documentary trace left behind would be an entry in a shipping register where a customs clerk would usually note down the name and type of vessel, the name of the captain or *padrone* and more importantly the kind of cargo being transported.

Indeed the nineteenth century customs registers at the National Archives of Malta reveal a thriving commerce being carried out between different Sicilian ports and Malta on board numerous small vessels, similar to the ones depicted on the *tabelle*.

Of the 26 votive offerings under consideration only 5 are from the 18th century while 16 are from the 19th century. Although 5 of the paintings show no date, one can cautiously attempt dating some of them after a careful examination of the marine architecture of the vessels or the style of clothes portrayed. So for example the undated painting on sheet 21 could have been commissioned during the first half of the 17th century when two masted rather than single or triple masted galleys were the norm, whereas the clothes worn by the two persons kneeling in the foreground of painting 24 indicate a 19th century style of dress. The date of 27 November 1761 appears on sheet 17, one wonders if this could be a later addition.

As mentioned earlier a necessary part of the votive painting is the Icon or the holy picture painted as part of the scene and to whom the vow was made. Our Lady and Child, with or without a crown, figure in all the pieces except in one, sheet 22, which is totally devoid of an Icon. Seventeen offerings portray just the Madonna and Child. Six paintings portray a *duplex intercessio* and so show another Holy Person besides the Virgin. These

include a crucified Christ¹⁴⁶, Saint Roque¹⁴⁷, Holy Souls in Purgatory¹⁴⁸, Saint Louis¹⁴⁹, and Christ the Redeemer¹⁵⁰. There is just one case of a *triplex intercessio*, where the Virgin is together with Saint Paul - who rarely makes an appearance - and Saint Genevieve, the latter could have been added because the vessel in question was called the S. Geneveva¹⁵¹. There is another case which shows an exceptional instance of four; the Madonna of Trapani, Our Lady and Child, Santa Rosalia and the Holy Souls in Purgatory are all watching the scene being enacted before their eyes¹⁵². This has an especially Sicilian flavour since both the Madonna of Trapani and Santa Rosalia enjoy great cultic following in Sicily. The Madonna of Trapani also had a chapel in Lampedusa which was revered by seafarers. Indeed once a year the knights of the Order used to go to Lampedusa to collect any money offerings made and transport them to the Madonna's sanctuary in Trapani. Santa Rosalia seems to have also enjoyed the devotion of seafarers; an ex-voto model of a galley hanging in the saint's grotto sanctuary on Monte San Pellegrino bears witness to this. One has to add that the cults of Our Lady of Providence and Our Lady of the Light, were both imports from Sicily to Malta. Although no *tabelle* relevant to the present exercise are located at the two shrines, both enjoyed the devotion of Maltese mariners.

Although the cataclysmic representation of the incident in the painting itself is often enough to portray the series of miraculous events and the narrow escape from the jaws of death, it is often the case that the person making the offering felt the need to recount the events by having an inscription written. This of course provides a wealth of extra information often giving the name of the vessel, the name of the donor, the date and the name of the place where the incident occurred. In our case 19 out of the 26 paintings have an inscription which has been duly transcribed. The dangers recounted often have to do with the rough sea, twice however, in sheet 5 and sheet 10, the inscription reveals Calabrian bandits, who were still operating during the nineteenth century, as the source of a vessel's problems. Sheet 24 depicts another such attack although the lack of an inscription leaves one in the dark as to the details of the incident. Unfortunately at times the ravages of time have destroyed or rendered parts of the inscriptions illegible. One cannot be sure if the white box on sheet 17 indicates that the inscription faded away or that the Madonnaro never got round to writing it down.

Besides the inscription the *sigla* of thanksgiving, V.F.G.A, is present in 19 of the paintings.

Varied types of vessels are portrayed, all of them sail propelled. Besides the galleys of the eighteenth century the other vessels portrayed are mostly merchantman. The most common is the speronara that workhorse of the Maltese *padrone*, the brigantine, brig, barque, bombardarda, balanza and a couple of unidentified crafts all make an appearance. During the eighteenth century one finds them flying the Order's flag whereas during the nineteenth century on the coming of the British the Maltese vessels start flying the

¹⁴⁶ Sheet 11.

¹⁴⁷ Sheet 16.

¹⁴⁸ Sheets 17, 20, 24.

¹⁴⁹ Sheet 21.

¹⁵⁰ Sheet 23.

¹⁵¹ Sheet 4.

¹⁵² Sheet 24.

English red merchant flag known as the red duster. In a couple of instances vessels are flying the white ensign which was the flag of the Royal Navy. This indicates that they somehow were attached to the British Navy. Maltese vessels are often referred to as English.

As the *ex-voto tabella* were the fulfilment of a promise made it is of interest to know who made the offerings. In 11 instances it was offered by the captain and crew of the vessel whereas in 5 by the crew on their own. It could be that the captain made a separate vow. In 3 instances the vow was made by a passenger on board. In certain cases a crew made a vow and promised an *ex-voto* to two different sanctuaries as seems to be the case with sheet 7 and sheet 15 where an almost identical painting of the Brig Marietta is in two different locations describing the same events. Most of the *ex-voti* seem to be made by Maltese mariners on board Maltese vessels as indicated by the flags they fly, while the captain of a Raugsan vessel that ran into trouble 60 miles off capo Passero saw fit to deposit his *tabella* at the Mellieha sanctuary.

Conclusion

In conclusion one notes that the frequent life threatening situations which the Maltese seafarer encountered when at sea gave rise to this vernacular artistic expression which was formulised and categorised within a framework of convention. The person prayed for safety and found it necessary to demonstrate gratitude publicly. Ultimately the *ex-voto tabella* was a public demonstration of thanks giving. In turn a particular chapel or sanctuary was enriched and increased in wealth and miraculous power the more *ex-voti* were donated as more miracles were granted.

The examples considered in this report not only demonstrate this but often strive to anchor the events in a known landscape or rather seascape. Attempts at drawing maps are made by the madonnari, easily recognizable landmarks, such as volcanoes, are drawn and topographical names of islands, ports, towns, capes and coasts are often given. It is possible that other certain landmarks which are difficult to identify and puzzling to the researcher nowadays, would have been instantly recognizable then. In our case the incidents occurred to shipping operating around Sicily, or to and from one of the islands within Sicily's sphere of influence. The variety of vessels, from the galleys of the Order to the small sponararas, to brigs, brigantines, and bombardas are often seen to run into storms around Pantelleria, Lampedusa, Linosa, Stromboli, Favignina, or Capo Passero. As if nature was not a great enough peril Calabrian bandits are also seen attacking shipping in the area right into the nineteenth century. Thus a religious offering of thanksgiving that results from narrowly escaped tragedy serves to further strengthen and demonstrate the link that has always existed between Sicily and Malta two islands of the middle sea.

Acknowledgments

My deepest thanks go to Professor A. Bonanno, Dr Nicholas C. Vella, Joseph Muscat, Lykke Lyngsø, Martin Attard and Chris Gemmell for their valuable help in different ways.

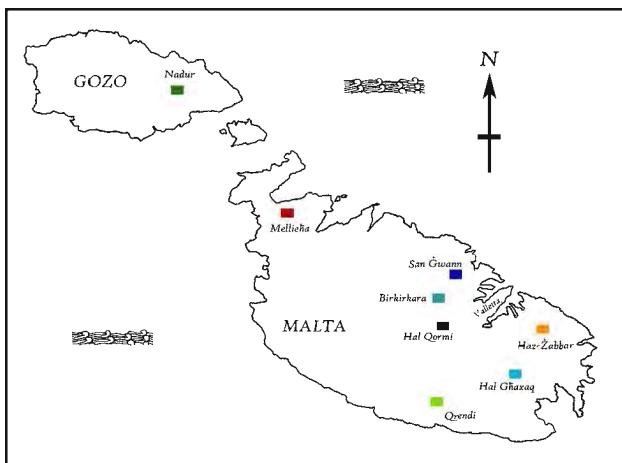
Glossary

Aft	Back end of a vessel.
Balanza *	A vessel common around Italian coasts and used mostly as a fishing boat. It was usually fitted with lateen sails, while a huge jib sail was a characteristic of this type of vessel.
Bombarda	A merchant vessel with the sail arrangement of a warship.
Bowsprit	A pole extending out from a vessel's prow, used to attach forestay(s).
Fore	Front end of a vessel, also the prow or bow.
Fore and aft sail	A sail whose normal position runs along the length of the vessel.
Fore mast	The mast nearest to the fore part of a boat.
Gaff	A pole attached to the top of the square gaff sail and attached to the mast.
Galley	The main vessel of the Order, it made use of large lateen sails and oars as a means of propulsion.
Jib	A small triangular sail attached to the fore stay.
Lateen sail	A large triangular sail whose top end is suspended from a pole called an antenna. The main type of sail on the Order's galleys.
Main mast	The mast in the middle or waist of a vessel, usually it is the tallest mast.
Mast	A pole that holds sails. All the ropes and sails connected to a particular mast will have the mast's name as part of their name, thus a stay attached to a fore mast will be a fore stay while a stay attached to a main mast will be called a main stay, and so on.
Mizzen mast	The mast nearest to the aft part of a vessel.
Oculo	A decoration in the shape of an eye found on the bow of a boat, intended as protection against the evil eye.
Rigging	All the masts, sails and ropes that together propel a sailing ship.
Spanker	A gaff rigged fore and aft sail hoisted on the mizzen mast.
Speronara	A small open boat that was very popular with the Maltese <i>padroni</i> . It takes its name from the beak like spur, or <i>sperone</i> , jutting out at the bows.
Sprit sail	A rectangular fore and aft sail held open by a sloping pole called a sprit that is attached to the mast and to the upper outer corner of the sail.
Stay	A rope that holds the mast from the front and back.
Waist	Middle part of a vessel.

* For a good identification of the different vessel types in use, one should refer to Joseph Muscat's line drawings either in Prins 1989 or in Muscat 2003.



Map 1



Map 2

- Location: Mellieħa, Sanctuary of Our Lady.
- Description: Madonna and Child. A 38 x 26 cms panel offered by padron Giuseppe Diacono and crew of the speronara S. Francesco di Paola. The vessel is depicted sailing in a rough sea. Five members of the crew including the captain are attempting to repair the rudder broken at sea between Linosa and Lampedusa, three other persons are seen imploring the divine aid of the holy icon. The speronara is flying a jib and a foresail. The bow of the speronara is decorated with an *Oculo*.
- Inscription: *“Voto fatto alla B.V. della Mellieħa da Padron Giuseppe Diacono ed il suo equipaggio dalla speronara nominata S. Francesco Di Paola si e rotto il timone tra Linosa e Limpidosa il di 9 Dicembre 1843. V.F.G.A.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 26.

Bibliographical references: A.H.J. Prins, *In Peril on the Sea, Marine Votive Paintings in the Maltese Islands*, (Malta, 1989), plate 24; J. Muscat, *Il-Kwadri Ex-Voto Marittimi Maltin*, (Malta, 2003), 42; I. Borg, *The Maritime Ex-Voto A Culture of Thanksgiving in Malta*, (Malta, 2005), title page.

- Location: Mellieħa, Sanctuary of Our Lady.
- Description: Madonna and Child. Panel offered by Giovanni Albanese who managed to survive drowning despite being unable to swim. The bombarda La Concezione is depicted breaking up in the rough sea. The vessel is flying the red duster on its main mast. The sails are in tatters and flying off in the wind while naked mariners can be seen in the sea attempting to swim to shore well visible in the background. Both the captain and crew survived.
- Inscription: *“Giovanni Albanese se ando a traverso nella spiaggia di Amasa in Calabria li 13 Marzo a 1800 e libesso non sapèvo nadara [nuotare] la S[ant]ja fede si obligeva di pregare alla S.S. V[er]ginje della Mellieħa subito la divina madre a dato la grazzia d’esser liberato senza verun danno con tutto l equipaggio la bombarda nominata La Concezione Cap[itano] Giosepe Panaioti. V.F.G.A.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 43.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

- Location: Mellieħa, Sanctuary of Our Lady.
- Description: Crowned Madonna and Child. Panel offered by captain Antonio Semini of the Ragusan brigantine La Clorinda. The two masted brigantine was caught in a rough sea sixty miles off Capo Passero. All the sails are reefed except a jib and the Ragusan flag on the stern. The painting is initialled M. G. for Michele Gonzi.
- Inscription: *“Berghentino nom La Clorinda Cap. Antonio Semini Ragoseo li 24 Febraro 1803 fuori Capo passaro miglie 60.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 65.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, 96.

- Location: Mellieħa, Sanctuary of Our Lady.
- Description: Madonna and Child, S. Paul and S. Genevieve. A 40 x 26 cms panel offered by Salvatore Lotard passenger on the speronara S. Genova. The speronara can be barely seen in the rough sea. A headland to the left runs down to a reef . A castle flying a Sicilian flag is depicted on the headland. On the right a curving coast line is shown. The painting is initialled V. G.
- Inscription: *“Voto promesso dal Sig. Salvatore Lotard essendo di passaggio con la spironara nom S[an]ta Genova, si rtirovorono in un fortunale con grosso mare e vento di Gregale ancorati in fra l’Isola del Capopassero nella parte di dentro, che per il Miracolo Grande della B.V. che aguantarono bene, il capo e l’ancora perche se venissero mancante le dette, erano in un grande pericolo di andase inpunziando sopra il fragante delle secchi, li 20 settembre 1812, il Voto Fatto e la Grazia Avuta.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 58.

Bibliographical references: Prins, plate 16; Muscat, 240; Borg, 14.

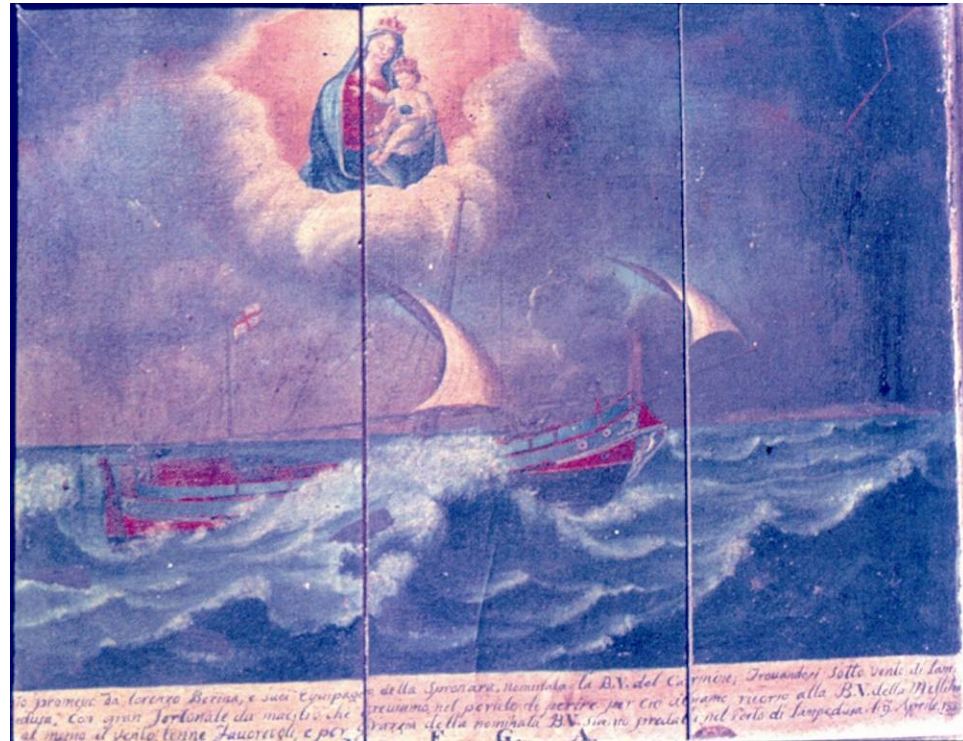
- Location: Mellieħa, Sanctuary of Our Lady.
- Description: Madonna and Child can be seen in the top left hand corner of the painting. A two masted balanza is depicted flying a jack and a lateen rig. In the foreground a strange looking Calabrian bandit vessel, with a high curving fore post and a sprit rig, is attacking the balanza. The Calabrian vessel has 15 oars in the water and is flying a white flag with an eagle on it. Stromboli can be see in the background.
- Inscription: *“La Balanza Maltesa era vicina di stromblo e contro la barcha furba Calabrese dove legati per gettano in mare pero per la intercesione di M.V. della Melliħa fu liberati. 1815. V.F.G.A.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 35.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, 203.

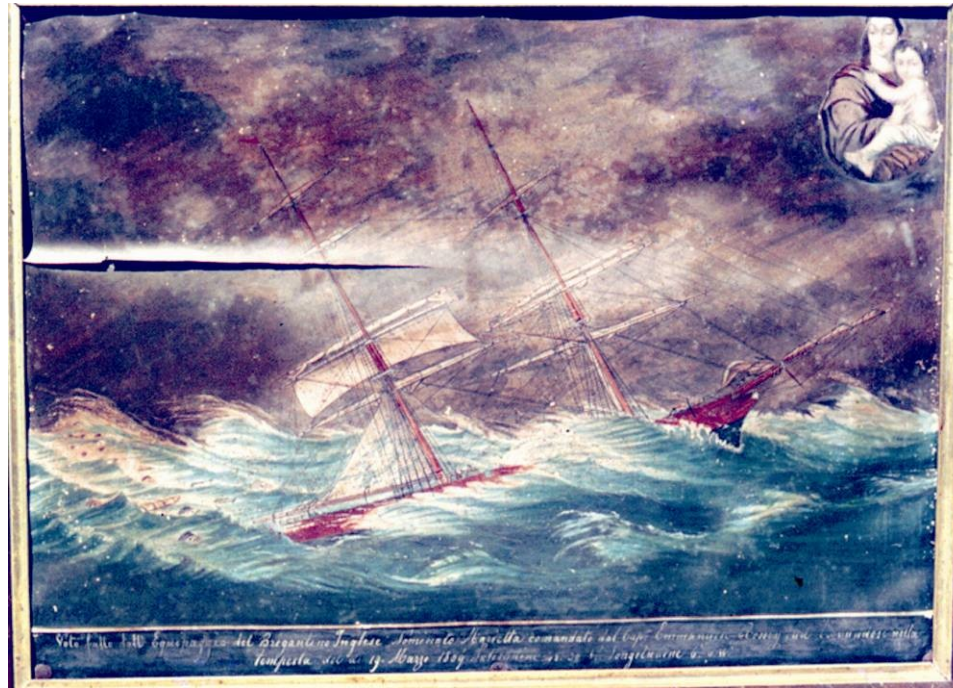
- Location: Mellieħa, Sanctuary of Our Lady.
- Description: Crowned Madonna and Child. The panel was offered by Lorenzo Bezina and his crew of the sponara La B.V. del Carmine. Their sponara is depicted underway in a heavy sea near the island of Lampedusa. The vessel is flying a main lateen sail and a small jib. It is flying the white ensign. An *oculo* decorates the prow of the vessel. A low lying coast line is barely visible in the background. The panel is initialled V. G.
- Inscription: *“Voto promesso da Lorenzo Bezina e suoi equipaggio della Spronara nominata la B.V. del Carmine, trovandosi sotto vento di Lampedusa con gran fortanale da maestro che troviamo nel periclo di perire per cio abbiamo ricaso alla B.V. della Mellieħa al [...] il vento tenne favorevoli e per grazia della nominata B.V. siamo prodati nel Porto di Lampedusa li 9 Aprile 1833. V.F.G.A.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 33.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

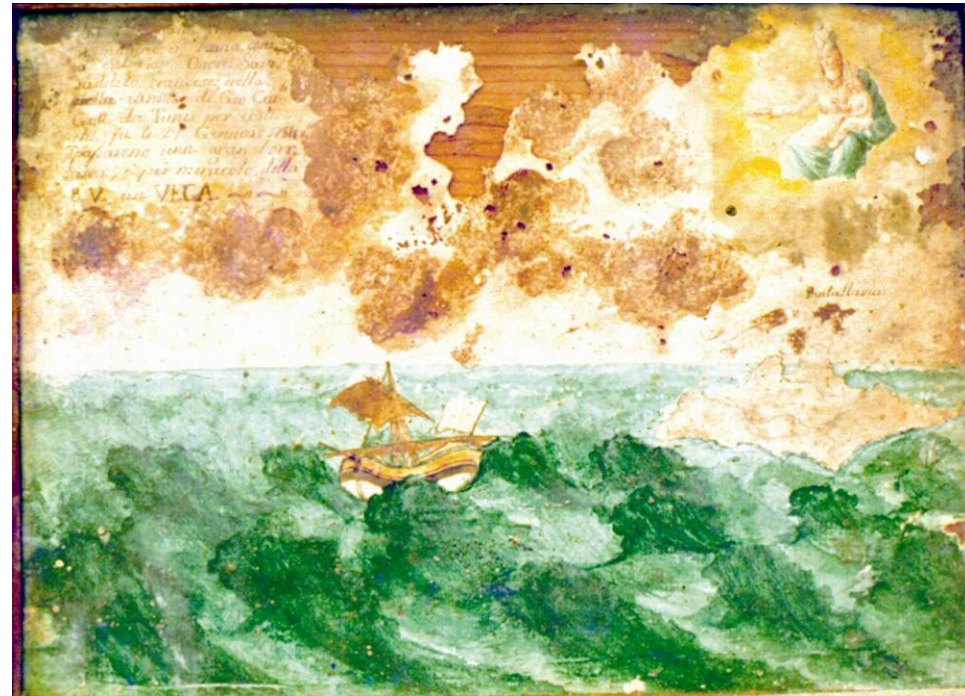
- Location: Mellieħa, Sanctuary of Our Lady.
- Description: Madonna and Child looking over a brigantine making way in a rough sea. The painting is almost identical to another one at Tal-Ħerba Sanctuary which refers to the same incident and so could be a case where the crew made the vow to two different sanctuaries for extra help. [See sheet 15]
- Inscription: *“Voto fatto dall’Equipaggio del Bregantino Inglese nominato Marietta comandato dal Cap[itano] Emanuele Rossignaud nella tempesta dell di 19 Marzo 1869 latitudine [...] longitudine [...]”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 54.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-Ferba.
- Description: Madonna and Child. The picture is severely damaged showing a French vessel of unknown type in danger of getting shipwrecked on the shores of the island of Pantelleria.
- Inscription: “[...] S. Anna com. Dal Cap. Onore Sairi [...] suddito Francese nella [...] di Gio. Car.do Call da Tunis per costi che fu li 29 Gennaro 1784 passarono una gran burrasca e per miracolo della B.V. V.F.G.A.”



Joseph Muscat slide collection 160.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-Ferba.
- Description: Madonna and Child. A speronara can be seen in the rough sea, sailing with just a small sprit sail. Six crew members seem to be in distress while the captain is at the helm. A passenger can be seen under the awning, while the flag of the Order is flying in front of the awning. Stromboli can be clearly seen in the background.
- Inscription: None. "V.F.G.A. 1789".



Joseph Muscat slide collection 104.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-Ferba.
- Description: Madonna and Child. A speronara depicted on a calm sea, the danger being human rather than natural. The sail is reefed and tied to the fore mast, while the crew is making use of oars to make way. Bandits can be seen threatening the speronara's crew with weapons, two other speronaras can be seen faintly in the background.
- Inscription: *"Voto promesso da Pad. Felice Agius e compagni essendo nella seccha di Sicilia furono assaltati da 8 sbanduti furono costretti di portarli sul collo abbordo contanta minacchia di darli la morte ed e con scopetti, con pistola, e con sciabole in mano doppo giorni 4 di navigazione fossi giunti in Calabria e li sono sbarcati li 8 luglio 1807 V.F.G.A."*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 105.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

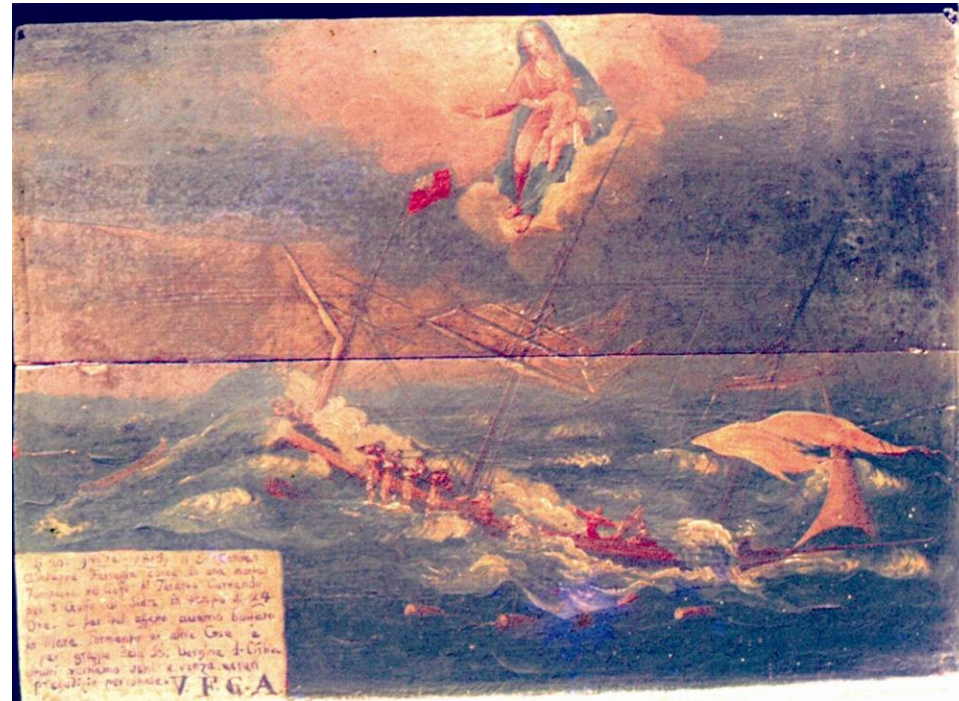
- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-Ferba.
- Description: Madonna and Child on the right hand side, Crucifix on the left. A bird's eye view of a bombarda in distress. The red duster can be seen flying from the mizzen mast. The main mast is split in two at the cross trees. The upper half is in the sea, the main sail and jib are open, one mariner is aloft on the yard while the others are praying. The event is seen as happening somewhere between Sicily, Zante and Malta. Sicily is marked by Etna the other two islands by their respective names.
- Inscription: *“Voto fatto da com. Broncalli e suo equip. per esser stati in grandissimi temporali in Sicilia, canale di Malta e sopra Zante colla perdita per tre volte l’albero e carrigo e per grazia della B.V. sono stati dal detto liberi nel marzo 1815. V.F.G.A.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 198.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, 216.

- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-Herba.
- Description: Madonna and Child. A three masted vessel in shown in distress in the gulf of Taranto. The crew are throwing cargo overboard to lighten the vessel and keep it afloat. A small boat is being towed behind the bigger vessel. The vessel which could be a barque is flying the red duster and a jib.
- Inscription: *“Li 20 Novembre 1815 il s. Capitan Gioseppe Farrugia corse in una mortal tempesta nel Golfo di Taranto correndo per il Golfo di Sidra in tempo di 24 ore e per tal effetto avemo buttato in mare formento et altre cose e per grazia della SS. Vergine d. Herba tutti restiamo sani e senza verun pregiudizio personale. V.F.G.A.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 190.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, 215.

- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-Herba.
- Description: Madonna and Child. This painting is severely damaged. The brig La Providenza can be seen in a heavy sea off Capo Passero with the sails in tatters flying off in the wind.
- Inscription: *“Voto fatto dall [...] Brig nominato la Providenza com. dal [...] Francesco Consiglio per aver trovato un 20 Feb. 1828 nella da Triaste sopra Capo Passero ed erano nel pericolo di naufragarsi [...] B.V. dela Herba ed anno avuta la grazia. V.F.G.A.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 130.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-Herba.
- Description: Madonna and Child. The sponnara S. Francesco is depicted sailing with all the sails reefed except for a small jib. The white ensign is flying near the stern of the boat while an *oculo* can be seen decorating the prow. Captain and crew made a vow to the Virgin and were saved. The painting is signed Vincenzo Gonzi.
- Inscription: “*Cap. Francesco Portelli e suo equip. della Sponnara S. Francesco essendo nel Canale tra Malta e Lampedusa anno sofferto un gran fortunale da Libici e anno ricorso alla B.V. del Herba e furono prodati in Malta a salvamento [...]nel giorno 27 Ottobre 1846.V.F.G.A.*”



Joseph Muscat slide collection 106.

Bibliographical references: Prins, plate 25, Borg, 24.

- Location: Birkirkara, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Tal-ferba.
- Description: Madonna and Child in top right hand corner. The painting depicts a brigantine being swamped by huge waves. All the sails are reefed except the top mizzen and a spanker. Debris can be seen floating behind the vessel.
- Inscription: *“Voto fatto dal Equipaggio sul Brig[anti]no Maltese Marietta Cap[ita]no Emanuele Rossignaud trovandosi nelle vicinanze di Lampedosa nella tempesta del di 19 Marzo 1869.”*



Bibliographical references: Prins, plate 26.

- Location: Żabbar, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces.
- Description: Madonna and Child and S. Roque. A bird's eye view of the galley squadron. Six galleys can be seen with the capitana painted black, the four other galleys that can be seen in the distance could be the same squadron at a different point in time. The topography shows the Favigniana channel with Trapani on the left and the island of Favigniana on the bottom of the picture.
- Inscription: *“Voto fatto delli volontari della galera S. Luigi per la gran tempesta nel canale della Favignana soccesso a di 9, 10 [...] della Mat. 8 Maggio all’ anno 1745.”*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 286.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, 82.

- Location: Żabbar, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces.
- Description: Madonna and Child, Holy Souls in Purgatory and an unidentifiable figure kneeling to the right of Our Lady. The painting shows a bird's eye view of the gulf of Taranto with its two major capes; capo Colonna and capo Santa Maria. The vessel in distress is a polacca sailing across capo Colonna, it is flying a foresail and the flag of the Order on the mizzen mast. Its crew is trying to keep it afloat in the storm by throwing its cargo overboard. Sailors are shown aloft on the yard.
- Inscription: The inscription seems to have faded away and a date “27 November 1761” could have been added later. “V.F.G.A.”



Photography: Nicholas C. Vella.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, illustrations, 70.

- Location: Żabbar, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces.
- Description: Madonna and Child appearing on illuminated clouds. The eight galleys of the Order are depicted in a rough sea, the black capitana is seen sailing ahead. All the galleys are using a treo or emergency square sail. A faint 'Calabria' can be seen marking the coastline in the background.
- Inscription: None. "V.F.G.A."



Joseph Muscat slide collection 303.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.

- Location: Żabbar, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces.
- Description: Madonna and Child are seen sitting on a luminous cloud. The painting shows four galleys of the Order that on their return from Sicily were caught in rough weather off Marsaxlokk. The towers of Benghisa, S. Lucjan, ta' Zondadari, Xropp I-Ghagin and S. Tumas can all be seen on a beautifully drawn Marsaxlokk. The vow was made by one of the captains of the galleys.
- Inscription: *“Essendo di ritorno dalla Sicilia a Malta la squadra delle galere di questa Sacra Religione per insorta tempesta sotto il comando ILL. Eccl. mo Capitan Generale Fra' Luigi Frevllaj la galera San Luigi comandata dall'ILL. mo Sig. Capitano Gio. Filippo Maruscelli fece un voto alla Beatissima Vergine sotto titolo Della Gratia, alli 18 dicembre 1790 V.F.G.A.”*



Photography: Nicholas C. Vella.

Bibliographical references: Prins, plate 1; Muscat, 123; Borg, 16.

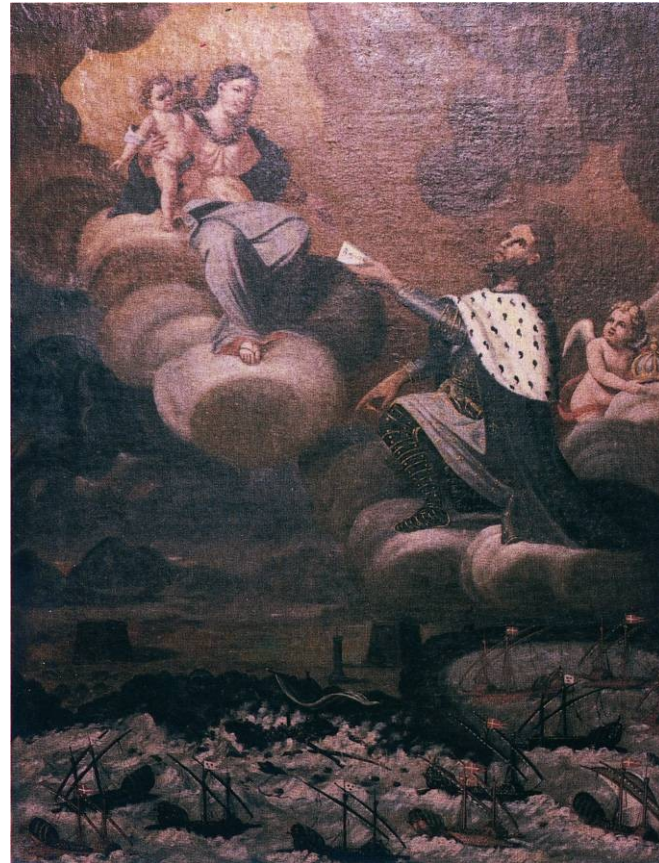
- Location: Żabbar, Sanctuary of Our Lady of Graces.
- Description: Madonna and Child sit on a cloud with the Holy Souls in Purgatory at the Madonna's feet. The Order's squadron of seven galleys is seen heading for shelter near Taranto. The topography shows the gulf of Taranto with the towns of Garipoli [Galipoli] and Taranto marked out. The galleys are depicted in three consecutive scenes. First sailing in, then becalmed, then near the town of Taranto where they seem to have suffered losses.
- Inscription: None. "V.F.G.A."



Photography: Nicholas C. Vella.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, Illustrations, 65.

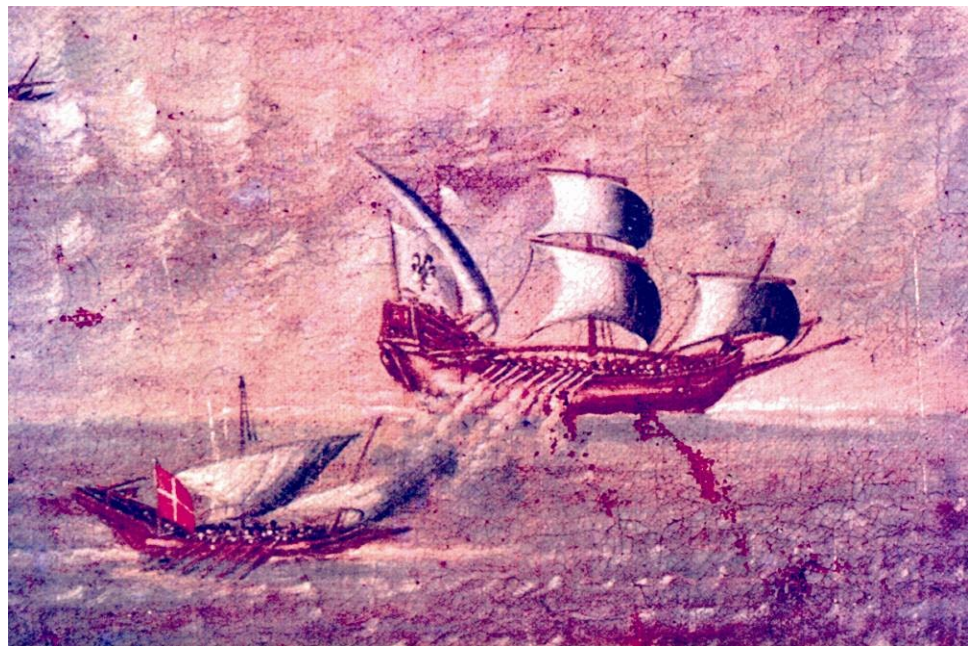
- Location: Qrendi, Church of Our Lady tal-Ħniena.
- Description: A large canvas measuring 107 x 83 cms. The painting shows the Maltese galley squadron operating with the squadron of the Kingdom of Naples and Sicily. The vessels are battling against a raging sea and seeking the shelter of the relatively calm waters of a harbour. Intercession is sought through St Louis seen kneeling in front of Our Lady. The quality of the painting is of a much higher standard than that of the usual tabella. This could indicate that the offering was made by an affluent person.
- Inscription: None.



Joseph Muscat slide collection 325.

Bibliographical references: Prins, frontispiece; Muscat, 129; Borg, 6.

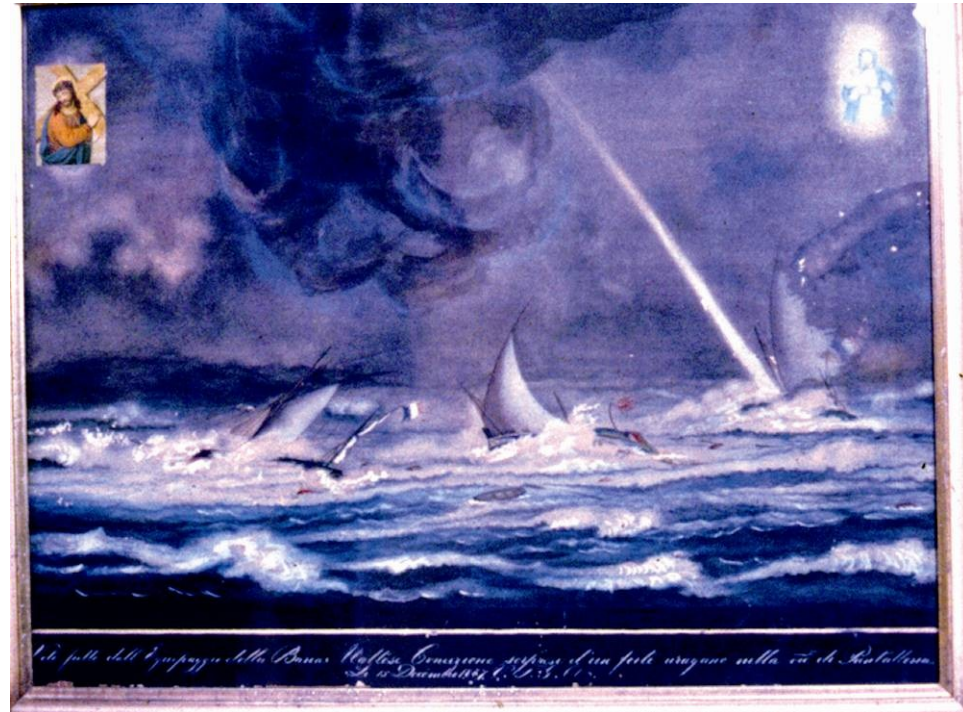
- Location: Qrendi, Church of Our Lady tal-Ħniena.
- Description: A strange incident where a Sicilian tartana under full sail, and flying the two headed eagle flag, is seen opening fire on a smaller vessel. The smaller vessel is a Maltese brigantine also under sail and with oars in the water. It is flying the flag of the Order. No date is evident on the painting.
- Inscription: None.



Joseph Muscat slide collection 405.

Bibliographical references: Muscat, illustrations, 8.

- Location: Għaxaq, Church of Santu Kristu.
- Description: The icon of Our Lady is on the right. The picture of the Redeemer on the left is pasted on the tabella rather than drawn. Two vessels, one flying a French flag, the other a Maltese spononara flying the red duster run the gauntlet against a rough sea and what appears to be a water spout.
- Inscription: “*Voto fatto dall’equipaggio della Barca Maltese Concezione sorpresa d’un forte urugano nella vicinanza di Pantelleria li 15 Dicembre 1867. V.F.G.A.*”



Joseph Muscat slide collection 424.

Bibliographical references: Borg, 24.

- Location: Hal Qormi, Church of Our Lady Tal-Flas.
- Description: Madonna of Trapani, Madonna and Child, Holy Souls in Purgatory and S. Rosalia are all looking on the proceedings. The canvas, 45 x 35 cms, shows an exceptional case of multiple intercession with a strong Sicilian flavour. A vessel flying an English flag is fighting off an attack by a smaller bandit vessel. Two persons praying on shore may be giving thanks for being spared. Stromboli can be seen in the background. Although the painting is undated the style of dress of the persons kneeling on the shore, in the foreground, show that it belongs to the 19th century.
- Inscription: None. “V.F.G.A.”



Joseph Muscat slide collection 416.

Bibliographical reference: Prins, plate 35; Borg, 20.

- Location: San Ġwann, Minsija Church.
- Description: The Annunciation is painted in the right corner. The panel is split horizontally in two and shows a bombarda almost overwhelmed by the rough sea under sail with top main sail, jib and flying the red duster. The bombarda was on its way to Malta from Mascali a port about twelve kilometres south of Taormina. The panel is signed 'A. B. fecit'.
- Inscription: *"Voto fatto da Cap. Giovanni Bonnici e suo equipaggio e passigieri della bombarda Inglese Santa Anna e San Giuseppe li 2 Aprile 1837 essendosi di ritorno dai Mascali per Malta scoppio un gran fortunale con grosso mare e poi abbiamo ricorso alla B.V. della Mensija e cosi avuta la Grazia. V.F.G.A."*



Joseph Muscat slide collection 352.

Bibliographical references: Borg, 28.

- Location: Originally at Ta' Liesse Church Valletta, now at the Kelinu Grima Maritime Collection Nadur.
- Description: A small, 20 x 30cms, badly split and badly repaired wooden panel which is in a very poor condition overall. Our Lady of Liesse looks over a Sicilian tartana battling the waves with just a jib as a means of propulsion.
- Inscription: *“Essendo che [...] trovandosi partito colla Tartana Siciliana ed in quel atto die essi era nel Mare [...] gran tempesta e non aspetare [...] mentre che e nel medesima [...] con gran [...] fece un voto alla vergine di Liesse per mezzo dal voto [...] oratore per un miracolo che l'oggi fu liberato sotto li Aprile 1842. V.F.G.A.”*



Photography: Martin Attard.

Bibliographical references: Unpublished.