



Edizioni Caracol

LEXICON

Storie e architettura
in Sicilia e nel Mediterraneo

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Editoriale

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STEFANO ITTAR - ARCHITECT OF THE ORDER OF ST JOHN IN MALTA, (1784-1790)**

*Conrad Thake**

The Bibliotheca or National Library building in Valletta was the last major public building project undertaken by the Order of St John in Malta, before their expulsion from the island in 1798 [figs. 1-2]. Although the construction of the Bibliotheca dates to the period 1786-1796, the origins of establishing a public library can be traced to the early days of the Order in Malta. In 1555 Grand Master Claude de La Sengle issued a magisterial decree which stated that all books of the deceased knights were to be bequeathed to the Treasury of the Order. This ordinance must not have been rigorously adhered to as in 1612, Grand Master Wignacourt reiterated the prohibition on the sale of books that formed part of the *spogli* of the knights. The first depository of the Order's volumes can be traced to 1650, where the books were stored in the vestry situated in a room

located over the Oratory of the Conventual church of St John in Valletta. The collection was later transferred to a building in the Strada Reale in a premises referred to as the Forfantone. However, it was not until 1776, that the formal foundation of the *Bibliotheca Publica* was established at the Cathedral Chapter convened by Grand Master Emmanuel de Rohan¹.

Although a decision had been taken to construct a new library building it was only nine years later on the 16 April 1785, that the procurators of the Order's *Comun Tesoro* formally commissioned the architect Stefano Ittar to design and supervise the Bibliotheca in Valletta. From the deliberations of the *Comun Tesoro*, one can surmise that Ittar had been working on the designs for the project since October 1784: «Avendo noi chiamato in Convento l'Architetto D. Stefano Ittar per fabricare la nuova Bibliotecha abbi-



Fig. 1. Valletta. View of the Bibliotheca and the former Piazza della Conservatoria (by D. Cilia).

amo convenuto col medesimo di dargli l'assegnamento annuale di scudi mille cinquecento che deve principiare a decorrere dalli 2 Ottobre 1784, con pagargli in oltre, lo affitto di casa»² [fig. 3].

The Order of St John had always demonstrated a preference to engage accomplished foreign architects or military engineers when implementing prestigious projects in Valletta. Prior to Ittar's appointment, several other Italian architects had been commissioned by the Order. These include Francesco Laparelli who was responsible for the plans of Valletta, Francesco Buonamici and Romano Carapecchia who both contributed to the embellishment of the "City of the Order", by their designs for a number of churches and public buildings. Grand Master De Rohan continued this tradition, keen on ensuring that the Bibliotheca would be an architectural landmark in the city befitting his legacy³. By the time of his appointment, Ittar would have been over sixty years of age and in the twilight years of an outstanding architectural career having designed several prestigious buildings in Catania⁴. He would have just completed a fifteen-year-long

period (1767-1783) working for the Benedictines on the project of the church of San Nicolò l'Arena and the adjoining monastery⁵. Ittar's architectural career was until then almost exclusively based in Catania. The Order of St John's proposal to design a Library building in Valletta coupled with a handsome annual salary of 1500 scudi besides the payment of rent for his lodging would have been an appealing offer for an established architect seeking a new challenge overseas. It would be interesting to establish the identity of the intermediary who recommended Stefano Ittar to the Order. It has been suggested that this could very well have been don Ignazio Paternò, principe di Biscari (1719-1786), a very influential and wealthy patron of the arts in Catania, and with whom Ittar had a close working relation⁶. Certainly the decision to outsource the project of the Bibliotheca to a non-Maltese architect was not well received by the Order's experienced *Capo Mastro delle Opere* Antonio Cachia⁷. Soon after construction works commenced in 1786, it appears that some workers, presumably instigated by Cachia, were not cooperating with Ittar to such an



Fig. 2. Valletta. Bibliotheca, view of the exterior.

extent that the latter had to resort to writing to the procurators of the *Veneranda Camera* lamenting about this state of affairs. In his petition dated 4th August 1787, Ittar stressed the need to be in full charge of all the related works and that he should be in total control of the workforce: «Ma perche possa con ogni facilità e con un gusto uniforme perfezionarsi l'intrapresa opera è necessario che non solo siano dall'oratore qual architetto ordinati i lavori necessarj a quest effetto tanto riguardo la scielta, taglio, e fabrica delle pietre; quanto ancora riguardo alli legnami, ferramenti, ed altri necessarie per la perfezione della fabrica sudetta. Ma pure richiede il buongoverno che tutti li maestri fabricatori, tagliatori di pietra, Guardiani ed altri addetti ai lavori dell'istessa fabrica siano in tutto e per tutto sotto li ordini, direzione, e governo dell'oratore architetto, riguardo a quello sarà necessarie»⁸.

A few months later on 15 December 1787, the *Veneranda Camera* considered his appeal and decreed that Ittar would be officially appointed as *Architetto della Religione* and with this newly bestowed title it was made clear to all that they were obliged to abide to his directions and commands pertaining to any works he was directing.

«Alcuni disgusti che hà dovuto provare il loro servi dove Stefano Ittar, in occasione di esser stato chiamato per dare il suo sentimento circa varj lavori fuori di quelli che dalle SS loro Illustrissime e stato particolarmente incaricato lo porgono nella necessità di supplicarle di dare il provvedimento, ...

Trovando noi giusta la domanda dell'oratore e per ovviare all'inconvenienti alli quali si è trovato esposto in varie circostanze li concediamo il titolo di Architetto della Religione»⁹.

During the course of the works on the Bibliotheca, Stefano Ittar together with his family took up residence in a house *nella Strada Principale* in the nearby parish of St Dominic, Valletta¹⁰. One can safely assume that he would have been closely supervising works on a daily basis. The main facade of the new Bibliotheca would serve as an important backdrop to the public square known as the Piazza della Conservatoria as it fronted the Order's Treasury building on the opposite side of the site. Ittar's design had to carefully consider the surrounding urban context and in particular its linkages to the adjoining Grand Master's Palace and its relationship both to the square and the streets leading to it [figs. 4-5]. The bibliotheca was designed with

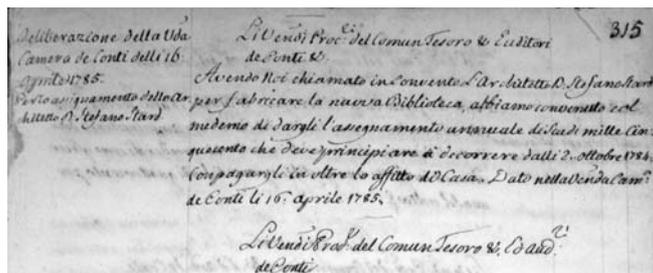
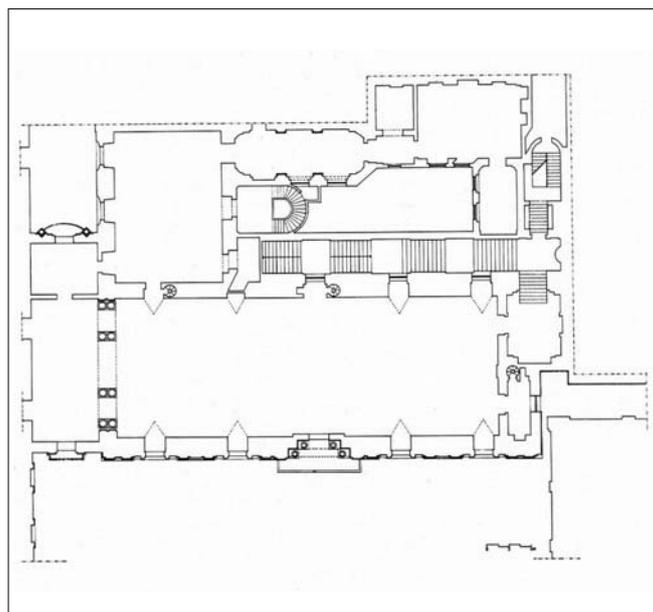
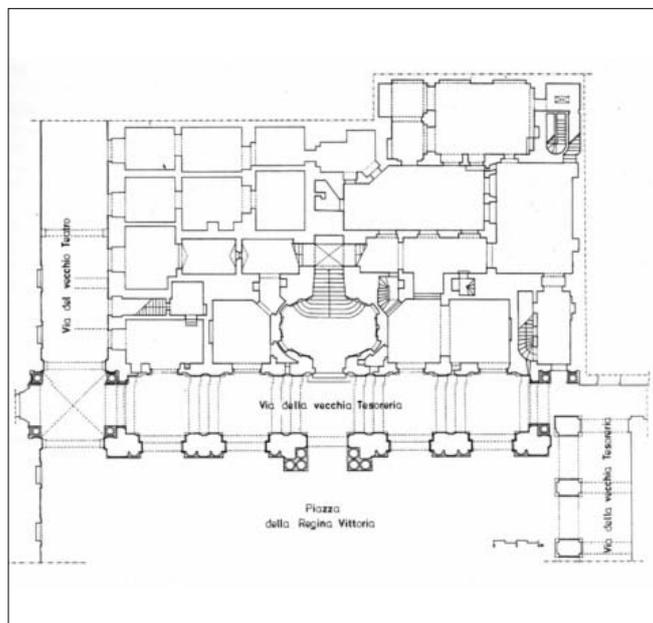


Fig. 3. Extract from original archival document *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera de Conti delli 16 Aprile 1785*, NLM, AOM, no. 634, fol. 315.



Figs. 4-5. Valletta. Ground floor and first floor plan of *Bibliotheca, Valletta* (en B. Azzaro, *Gli ultimi architetti...*, cit.).

an impressive vaulted arcade at the ground level with the main entrance portal flanked by two shops on both sides. The arcade was aligned directly along with the *Via della Vecchia Tesoreria* (Old Treasury Street) [figs. 6-7]. The main entrance to the bibliotheca was set along the main central axis of the square [Fig. 8]. Immediately beyond the doorway is a grand entrance vestibule designed to an oval plan and with its main axis parallel to the facade.

The monumental staircase is a grand scenographic gesture as it cascades down the entrance vestibule from a long straight flight of steps that at the top-most landing turns in a perpendicular direction to a shorter flight that in turn leads to the ante-room preceding the main library hall at the piano nobile level. There are no less than four full-landings that provide the user with some respite whilst providing studied pauses in order to appreciate the surroundings. Along the way, large window openings set within the wall overlooking a large internal

yard allow natural light to flood the interior, in the process highlighting the decoration of the vaulted spaces [fig. 9]. The staircase is an architectural setting worthy of some grand processional route that winds its way through the building. Ittar in his design of the Bibliotheca's staircase would certainly have been inspired by some notable Sicilian examples such as Luciano Ali's staircase in the courtyard of the palazzo Beneventano, Syracuse (1779) described by Anthony Blunt as «one of the last great Baroque staircases of Sicily»¹¹. Another possible model expressed in a more Neo-Classical style could have been the staircase of the Benedettini at Catania, by Antonio Battaglia for although this was completed in 1794 four years after Ittar's death, conceptual designs could have been available years earlier and given Ittar's past involvement in this project he could very well have been familiar with these preliminary designs¹².

The design for the main facade of the Bibliotheca



Fig. 6. Valetta. Bibliotheca, view of vaulted arcade underlying.



Fig. 7. Valetta. Bibliotheca, detail of vaulted arcade.

represents a marked stylistic break from the more rhetorical and ornate Baroque palace facades of the early to mid-19th century. Ittar's facade exudes a sober aura of sophisticated but restrained classicism. He divided the facade into five distinct bays with engaged Doric columns flanking each of the five arched openings of the colonnade and the plain *piattabande* separating the lower arcade from facade of the overlying piano nobile level. Superimposed Ionic pilasters frame the large windows of the first level each capped with projecting classical triangular pediments supported by corbels [fig. 10]. Each window is surmounted by an oval opening set vertically along its main axis. The main emphasis is concentrated along the central bay with a monumental open balcony supported by two pairs of Doric columns that project from the rest of the facade. At the piano nobile level the doorway leading to the balcony is set within a grand semi-circular arch that is seemingly supported by two pairs of

freestanding Ionic columns that are receded in relation to one another, thus creating an illusionistic visual effect of depth [fig. 11]. The central bay is framed within a temple-front motif utilising Ionic pilasters. The plain entablature breaks forward over the central part and is capped with a classical triangular pediment that is surmounted with a frontispiece.

Ittar connects the Biblioteca facade with the adjoining side facade of the Grand Master's Palace by means of an arched passageway [fig. 12]. The arcaded passage at first floor level takes the form of an open wrought-iron balcony supported on corbels and a main doorway provides access to it and is capped by a broken pediment adorned with a relief carving of a classical head with a laurel wreath. In the facade of the Bibliotheca, Ittar's style has radically shifted and is far removed from Borrominesque interplay of concave and convex surfaces that characterize his earlier works in



Fig. 8. Valletta. Bibliotheca, entrance.



Fig. 9. Valletta. Bibliotheca, view of staircase.

Catania, particularly the church facades of Collegiata and San Placido. The only surviving architectural element, testimony to his fascination with Borromini is the surface treatment of the portal leading to the balcony on the other side of the arched-passageway facing Merchant's Street and hence not visible from the square. Here the projecting convex hood-mould combines with a similarly curved entablature with splayed ends, that is supported by freestanding Doric columns on bases that are obliquely rotated [fig. 13]. This element is directly inspired from its architectural counterpart in Borromini's facade for the Collegio di Propaganda Fide in Rome.

The decorative details on the facade including festoons, swags, garlands, laurel wreaths used as frame mouldings and rams' heads that adorn projecting stone consoles [fig. 14]. These Neo-Classical motifs are refined and restrained in character without in any way compromising the clarity and legi-

bility of the the facade design subdivided rhythmically as it is by pilasters. Similar decorative motifs were employed within the main interior spaces such as the rams' heads and garlands that decorate the pediments within the entrance vestibule and more intricate festoons that are interspersed with low reliefs featuring classical medallions and war helmets set within other military paraphernalia [figs. 15-16]. The decoration is inspired by a revival of Classical Greek and Roman art forms. The interior decorative programme is most probably the work of Ittar's eldest son Sebastiano who would prove himself to be an excellent draughtsman. The Neo-Classical decoration is also evident within the ceiling vaults of the arcaded colonnade as each of the individual bays are decorated by meander pattern borders and stone-engraved rosettes that are set within recessed square panels along the underside of the arches.

The main architectural highlight of the interior of



Fig. 10. Valletta. Bibliotheca, detail of first floor level (by D. Cilia).



Fig. 11. Valletta. Bibliotheca, detail of balcony and temple-front motif.

the Bibliotheca is the monumental and majestic library hall at the piano nobile level which occupies the entire length of the facade [fig. 17]. The main sources of natural light are the series of long rectangular windows and overlying oval openings on the facade. The grand interior space with its high ceiling provides a suitable setting for the storage of the Order's vast collection of books, manuscripts and documents. Although the building was completed in 1795, it was only seventeen years later, in 1812 that the Bibliotheca was officially inaugurated and the library hall filled with the books, manuscripts and archives formerly in the possession of the Order¹³.

Stefano Ittar did not live to see the Bibliotheca completed as he died on 18th January 1790. Sebastiano, his eldest son, assumed responsibility for all the works after his father's death and steered the project to completion by September 1795. Payments issued to Sebastiano Ittar on a regular basis are document-

ed for the period April 1790–September 1795¹⁴ [fig. 18]. These payments dispel in a definitive manner the possibility that capo mastro Cachia completed the building¹⁵. Considering the fact that six years had elapsed from the Stefano Ittar's death to the completion of the Bibliotheca it would be reasonable to assume that it was most likely that the architectural decoration within the interior spaces particularly the entrance vestibule and the main internal staircase are the work of Sebastiano. To date few accounts of local architectural history have given due credit to Sebastiano Ittar's contribution and it is now opportune that his role in the construction of the Bibliotheca be seriously re-evaluated.

Stefano Ittar's death has also been the subject of speculation and controversy with unsubstantiated rumours that he had committed suicide¹⁶. The source of his severe personal distress that culminated in the alleged suicide being that the horizontal stone *piattabande* spanning between the columns at



Fig. 12. Valletta. Bibliotheca, arched passageway link to Grand Master's Palace.



Fig. 13. Valletta. Bibliotheca, detail of balcony on back facade of passageway facing Merchant's Street.

the ground floor arcade had cracked in tension and as remedial measure a second set of semicircular arches had to be introduced underneath the “fractured” *piattabande*, in the process compromising the integrity of his original design. A visual inspection of the hefty monolithic stone lintel blocks does in fact reveal a crack right through its depth in three of



Fig. 14. Valletta. Bibliotheca, ram's head motif to piano nobile windows.

the four arched openings. However, it is not clear whether the secondary arches underneath were added on as a result of the failure of this *piattabande*. Could it be that the half-Doric columns engaged within the pier walls were originally intended to be freestanding full-Doric columns fully detached from the piers? However, from a close visual



Fig. 16. Valletta. Bibliotheca, detail of vaulted ceiling of internal staircase.

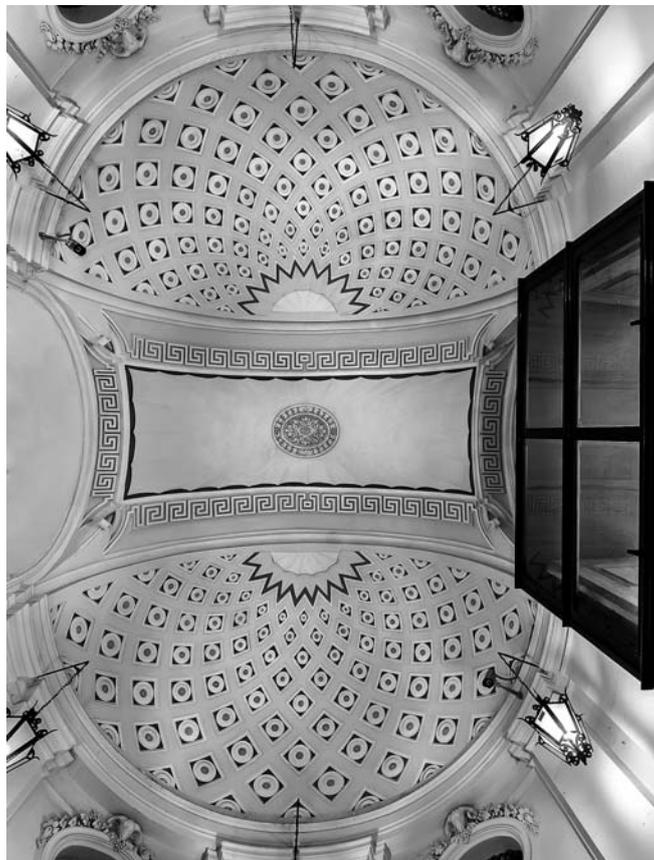


Fig. 15. Valletta. Bibliotheca, view of vaulted ceiling in main entrance vestibule (by D. Cilia).



Fig. 17. Valletta. Bibliotheca, main library hall at piano nobile level (by D. Cilia).

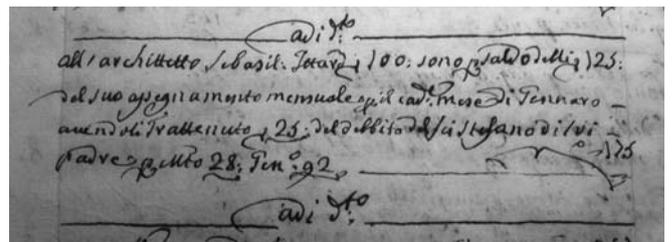


Fig. 18. Archival document recording payments to Sebastiano Ittar (NLM, AOM, Terzo Giornale Esito del Conservatoria, Com.re Vespoli dal 1 Novembre 1791-1792, no. 731, fol. 33).

inspection there is no apparent disjunction in the masonry joints between the pendentives to the arched vaults and the double arches to indicate a later remedial intervention. An alternative explanation would be that the sheer weight of the overlying stonework coupled with the settlement of the mortar caused the stone lintels to crack.

The rumour of Ittar's alleged suicide could well have been instigated by his former local adversaries who in the past had spared no effort in challenging him. There is absolutely no tangible evidence to substantiate the claim that Stefano Ittar had taken his own life and the allegation is for all intents and purposes unfounded. The relevant entry in the *Libro dei Morti* of the Parish of Sancta Maria Portus Salutis (the Dominican parish church in Valletta) is dated 18th January 1790 and states that Stefan Ittar died in «communione Sanctae Matris Ecclesiae»¹⁷ and «Sanctis munitus Sacramentis»¹⁸. On that same day, a mass for the repose of his soul was celebrated by the Franciscan Minor Observants friar, Carlo da Villanova at the church of St Mary of Jesus (*Ta' Giezu*), Valletta where he was buried¹⁹. These traditional funeral rites would then not have been possible at the time had he committed suicide.

Villa Agata/Villa Testaferrata Bonici, Floriana

In 1786 at the same time that works commenced on the Bibliotheca, Stefano Ittar was commissioned to design a summer residence overlooking the Argotti Gardens in Floriana for the noble Gio Francesco

Bonici (d. 1793), the Second Baron of Qlejgħa, a prince-builder from a patrician family and an enlightened patron of the arts²⁰. The late art historian Edward Sammut described it as a "Bibliotheca in miniature"²¹ [fig. 19]. The two-storey facade is well-articulated and proportioned. It is divided into five principal bays, each separated with a strip of blank wall surface. Each individual bay accommodates an elongated doorway framed on either side by a pilaster, Tuscan at the ground floor and superimposed by Ionic pilasters on the piano nobile level. The central bay is wider than the others, with a semicircular-arched portal at ground level and an overlying door with a segmental pediment at the upper tier. An open-wrought iron balcony runs the entire length of the facade and is supported by the underlying entablature. The full-length open balcony seems to have been inspired from an earlier Sicilian work, the collegio Cutelli in Catania designed by Giovanni Battista Vaccarini and Francesco Battaglia. The classical temple-front motif is a dominant central feature which attains an architectural climax with the a sculptural ensemble featuring the baronial family coat-of-arms and crown supported by cherub figures [fig. 20]. Unfortunately in recent times, Ittar's palatial façade of the Villa Agata has been engulfed and totally hemmed in by the development of the surrounding buildings and the facade is now entirely out of sight to the public. Besides the facade has suffered from various insensitive interventions and accretions



Fig. 19. Floriana. Villa Agata, facade which originally overlooked Argotti Gardens (by D. Cilia).



Fig. 20. Floriana. Villa Agata, detail of centrepiece of facade.

that have compromised its original appearance. The back facade has fared just as badly with the addition of a totally incongruous modern stone balcony and anodised aluminium window frames set within the original window openings²² [fig. 21].

Urban Tenements no. 163-168, Strait Street, Valletta

In 1787, the Assembly of the Venerable Langue of Provence embarked on a project that envisaged the construction of a terraced row of urban tenements on the site that was originally occupied by the back-garden of the Auberge de Provence [fig. 22]. The project seems to have been instigated by a need to generate revenue that would be obtained from the lease or sale of such tenements. The commissioners called upon both Stefano Ittar and his local rival *capomastro* Antonio Cachia to submit designs for the

project. Soon after Ittar's design was selected as the commissioners stated «le sentiment de suivre le plan de l'Architect a ètè approuvé par voix»²³. For his unsuccessful design Cachia was paid the sum of 60 *scudi*. Soon after commencement of works there were serious financing issues, as with the confiscation of the commanderies in France, funds had totally dried out and a loan was obtained from the Order's *Comun Tesoro*²⁴. By the time that Ittar died in 1790, construction was still on-going and one would assume that his son Sebastiano took over responsibility for the works as he had done at the Bibliotheca.

The buildings are rather pedestrian in their appearance. The emphasis was on maximising the use of the rather constrained spaces and to introduce sufficient natural light within the interiors, a consider-



Fig. 21. Floriana. Villa Agata, detail of original facade.



Fig. 22. Valletta. Urban tenements no. 163-168, Strait Street.

ation which was even more relevant when one considers that at the time that part of Strait street was very restricted in width²⁵. The facade is articulated on the basis of repetitive rows of long narrow windows along the first and second floor level. The buildings were built on a tight budget and the main objective was to provide economic and utilitarian residential units as expediently as possible. The architectural decoration on the facade is very sparse and is limited to the meander motif along the string course and the carved pediments at the second floor level. Otherwise the building is unspectacular in terms of architectural aesthetics, and its main interest lies more in the diverse floor-plan typologies that were employed²⁶.

Conclusion

Stefano Ittar's involvement on the local architectural scene was brief and spanned around six years. His magnum opus in Malta was undoubtedly the Bibliotheca. This was a pioneering milestone in local architectural history as it represented the belated advent of Neo-Classicism in Malta. As the last major public project of the Order of St John on the island it marked the definitive end of an era. Ittar's work had evolved from overtly Baroque architectural interpretations combining curved forms and spaces inspired by Borromini to a restrained architectural language where the principles of Classicism were evoked. The Bibliotheca

exudes an aura of serene gravitas and decorum, which is radically different in spirit to the rhetorical and ostentatious posturing of mid-18th century buildings like the Auberge de Castille and the Castellania, Valletta. Roberto Paribeni described it in the following terms: «la bibliotheca, bell'edificio fatto costruire dal Grand Maestro Emanuel De Rohan (1775-1797) sembra per talluni elementi percorrere il sorgere dell'architettura neo-Classica seppure tali elementi non sono però dovuti ad un architetto maltese o catanese Stefano Ittar, che ebbe incarico dei lavorarvi intorno al principio del sec XIX»²⁷.

Beyond purely stylistic issues, Ittar's Bibliotheca should be primarily viewed as an urban design project, as a sensitive intervention in which the new building was grafted within the context of the existing urban fabric. It provided a fitting backdrop to one of the most picturesque squares in the city. In more ways than one it was the swansong of the Order's architectural legacy. The glorious era of the Order of St John in Malta would come to an ignominious end with its expulsion by Napoleon's troops in 1798. The brief French interlude heralded in British colonial rule and architecture in Malta steered an entirely different route and would never be the same again.

*Ph.D (Berkeley), A.&C.E, Senior Lecturer, Department of History of Art, University of Malta.

" I would like to express my appreciation to the director and staff at the National Library of Malta (NLM), Valletta, for their assistance during research conducted in the Archives of the Order of St John (AOM) and the staff at the Archives of the Dominican Priory in Valletta for allowing me to consult the relevant historic documents within the archives of the parish of Santa Maria Porto Salvo, Valletta. Credit is also due to Mr Daniel Cilia who generously permitted me to publish several photographs of the Bibliotheca. Credit for the floor plans of the Bibliotheca is due to Prof. Arch. B. Azzaro as originally published in «Palladio».

¹ NLM, AOM, *Memoria sopra la publica Bibliotheca di questa Sacra Religione Gerosolimitana*, 26 November 1776, vol. 312, f. 375.

In 1760 Fra Louis Guérin de Tencin, a Bailiff Grand Cross of the Order had acquired a collection of 5.570 volumes from the late Cardinal Joaquin Portocarrero who had just died. De Tencin donated all his books, amounting to around 10.000 volumes, to the library. This bequest to the Order of St John was subject to the condition that all the books would be merged to create a *Bibliotheca Publica* that would be accessible to all. The Library was initially referred to as Biblioteca Tanseana in honour of de Tencin who died in 1766. De Tencin is for all intents and purposes considered to be the founding father of the Library. Refer to Q. HUGHES, *The Building of Malta, 1530-1795*, London 1956, p. 188.

² NLM, AOM, n. 634, *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera del Tesoro A, 1759-1797*, f. 315 - *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera de Conti delli 16 Aprile 1785. Per lo assegnamento dello Architetto Stefan Ittard*.

³ Grand Master Emmanuel de Rohan-Polduc was a member of the wealthy and influential Rohan family of France and the 70th Prince and Grand Master of the Order of St John in Malta from 1775 until his death in 1797. During his rule Fort Tigne was built and St Lucian's Tower and battery were upgraded and as a result the tower was renamed Fort Rohan. De Rohan authored the *Code de Rohan* a constitutional law book published in two volumes titled Saint John of Jerusalem of Rhodes of Malta in 1782. The Grand Master was also responsible for the publication of the *Codice Municipale di Malta* in 1784.

⁴ Stefano Ittar's architectural works in Catania include the facade of the church of Santa Maria dell'Elemosina (Collegiata) (1767), works on the Benedictine monastery (1768-1783), the Porta Ferdinandea today referred to as the Porta Garibaldi (1769), the church of San Martino ai Bianchi (1769), the church of San Placido (1769) and works on the facade of the church of Santissima Trinità (1769). A. BLUNT, *Sicilian Baroque*, London 1968, pp. 21-23; S. BOSCARINO, *Sicilia Barocca architettura e città 1610-1760*, [Roma 1981] 1997, pp. 195-199.

For biographical profiles of Stefano Ittar refer to ANONIMO, *Cenni biografici sulla vita e le opere di Stefano e Sebastiano Ittar*, Palermo 1880; M.G. D'AMELIO, *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani*, vol. 62, Rome 2004, pp. 685-687. A seminal contribution on Stefano Ittar's work in Malta is E. SAMMUT, *A Note on Stefan and Sebastiano Ittar*, in «Proceedings of History Week», 1982, pp. 20-27.

⁵ Ittar received his last payment relating to his employment with the Benedictines in April 1783. S. BOSCARINO, *Stefano Ittar in Studi e rilievi di architettura siciliana*, Messina 1961, pp. 83-113.

⁶ B. AZZARO, *Gli ultimi architetti della Sacra Religione gerosolimitana: Stefano Ittar*, in «Palladio», XII, 23, 1999, pp. 65-87, provides an excellent and comprehensive overview of Ittar's work in Malta.

⁷ «Si trattava di un edificio fortemente rappresentativo della nuova politica intrapresa dai cavalieri, tanto che l'affidamento del progetto a un architetto straniero generò nel capomastro delle opere dell'Ordine A. Cachia, un atteggiamento tanto ostile da boicottare i lavori a cantiere aperto». *Ivi*, p. 68.

⁸ NLM, AOM, Arch. n. 658, *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera del Tesoro A*, ff. 185-186.

⁹ NLM, AOM, n. 659, *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera del Tesoro A*, f. 214.

¹⁰ Payments of 6 scudi were issued to Pulera Peralta on a regular basis «per l'affitto della casa dell'architetto». NLM, AOM, n. 697, *Fabrice Nuove – Biblioteca in Libro Maestro Cassa di Conservatoria per l'anno dati Maggio 1789 all'Aprile 1790*, f. 123; Stefano Ittar was married to Rosaria, daughter of the architect Francesco Battaglia, and had nine children – six sons by the names of Sebastiano, Errigo, Salvatore, Giuseppe, Benedetto and Franco, and three daughters named Agata, Francesca and Concetta. Sebastiano and Errigo became architects whilst Benedetto was a painter and engraver. *Archivum Sancta Mariae Portus Salutis, Valletta (ASMPS) Status Animarum*, vol. 35, f. 55v. cited in E. SAMMUT, *A Note on Stefan...*, cit., p. 21.

¹¹ A. BLUNT, *Sicilian Baroque*, note under caption for photographic illustrations 44 and 45.

¹² *Ibidem*.

¹³ The short-lived French administration started transferring the books to the new Library but the revolt of the Maltese brought this to a halt. The Library building was used as a coffee club and also accommodated the Malta Garrison Library during the early years of the British colonial rule. The British Civil Commissioner, Sir Hildebrand Oakes persevered in ensuring that this last important public building of the Order was put to its intended use. On the 4 June 1812, on the occasion of King George III's birthday the Library was officially inaugurated, some sixteen years after the building was completed.

¹⁴ NLM, AOM, *Terzo Giornale Esito del Conservatoria, Com.re Vespoli dal 1 Novembre 1791-1792*, n. 731, ff. 12, 25, 33, 48, 57, 82, 83, 97, 127, 142, 145, 161, 165; Documentation of various monthly payments, *100 scudi – del suo assegnamento mensuale*, issued to Sebastiano Ittar. The entry dated 28 January 1792, f. 33, refers to *Del debito del fu Stefano di ivi padre*. Also, NLM, AOM, *Cassa di Conservatoria, 1 May 1795 – April 1796*, n. 732, ff. 26, 38, 50, 66, 80 refers to other payments issued to Sebastiano, with the last payment of 53 scudi 11 tari 13 grani dating to October 1795.

¹⁵ The theory advanced by Edward Sammut and Vincenzo Bonello that the *capo mastro dell'opere* Antonio Cachia assumed charge of works of the Bibliotheca upon Stefano Ittar's death is now totally discredited on the basis of the documented payments issued to Sebastiano Ittar. Refer to A. GANADO, *The Funeral of Angelo Emo in Malta in 1792: a Pictorial Record*, in «Proceedings of History Week», 1993, pp. 151-180; also, M.G. D'AMELIO, *Dizionario Biografico...*, cit., pp. 686-687.

¹⁶ The tradition of the architect having committed suicide is recorded in V. BONELLO, *Posizione Storica dell'Architettura Maltese dal '500 al '700*, in *Atti del XV Congresso di Storia dell'Architettura*, Roma 1970, pp. 453-457. Vincenzo Bonello makes the following statement: «L'architetto siciliano ebbe un grosso infortunio maneggiando il dolce ma bizzoso calcere maltese: costruendo la Biblioteca, le enormi piattabande del pianterreno, messe con spalle troppo es-nase, gli si incrinarono, e si dovette ricorrere all'ausilio di quattro archi, incassati tra le colonne, ridotte così a mezze colonne, modificando il ritmo e il tono del progetto originale; la tradizione vuole che l'Ittar, avvilito e sgomento, si sia tolto la vita; e toccò al maltese Antonio Cachia completare l'edificio».

¹⁷ ASMPS, *Liber Defunctorum* vol. VII, *Morti dal 1787-1805*, f. 37r. The entry states that Ittar was 70 years of age which would indicate that he was born in 1720. However, the biographical entry in M.G. D'AMELIO, *Dizionario Biografico...*, cit., states he was born in 1724 in Ovruč, Volinia, then forming part of Poland, now within Ukraine. It is unclear which is the correct year of his birth.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ Provincial Archives of the Franciscan Minors, Valletta, Malta, Libro Messe, 1790: «A di 18 Gennaio Lunedì, Una messa Cantata per il fu Stefano Itta (sic). † P. Carlo da Villanova Celebrante e Cantata per il detto».

²⁰ The aristocratic honour was first granted to Ignazio Bonici by Grand Master Ramon Despuig on 2 June 1737. NLM, AOM, *Libro Bullarum*, 1737, n. 541, ff.188r-v.

²¹ E. SAMMUT, *A Note on Stefano...*, cit., p. 25.

²² C. THAKE, *SOS-Villa Agata, Floriana*, letter in «The Times of Malta», 10 March 2012, <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20120310/letters/SOS-Villa-Agata-Floriana>. The property has been leased to private individuals for several years. During the mid-20th century it was used as the "Silver Eagle" music hall. Refer to E. SAMMUT, *A Note on Stefano...*, cit., p. 25, note 16. The original facade and interiors have been subject to various alterations and accretions which detract from the intrinsic architectural value of Ittar's original design. The property was scheduled as a Grade 1 histo-

ric building by the Malta Environment Planning Authority (MEPA). There are on-going negotiations for the descendants of the original owners to re-acquire the palazzo and restore it to its original state.

²³ NLM, AOM, vol. 2089, *Deliberations de la Venerable Langue de Provence*, f. 203, cited in E. SAMMUT, *A Note on Stefano...*, cit., p. 25.

²⁴ NLM, AOM, vol. 2089, *Deliberations de la Venerable Langue de Provence*, ff. 235-238.

²⁵ That part of Strait Street was widened in the mid-20th century with the demolition of the Order's *Forni* or Bakery building and the construction of the mixed-use commercial and residential block known as Vincenti buildings which facade was setback from the original building alignment.

²⁶ An analysis of the different plan typologies together with the plans and elevations of the terraced urban tenements project in Strait Street, Valletta are provided in B. AZZARO, *Gli ultimi architetti...*, cit.

²⁷ R. PARIBENI, *Malta*, in «Italia Artistica series», 101, 1930, p. 112.

Documents

1

Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera de Conti delli 16 Aprile 1785. Per lo assignamento dello Architetto Stefan Ittard. Li venerandi Procuratori del Comun Tesoro e Auditori de Conti.

Avendo noi chiamato in Convento l'Architetto D. Stefano Ittar per fabricare la nuova Bibliotecta abbiamo convenuto col medesimo di dargli l'assegnamento annuale di scudi mille cinquecento che deve principiare a decorrere dalli 2 Ottobre 1784, con pagargli in oltre, lo affitto di casa.

Dato nella Veneranda Camera de Conti li 16 Aprile 1785.

(NLM, AOM, *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera del Tesoro A*, 1759-1797, n. 634, f. 315)

2

Illu^{mi} Sigⁿⁱ

Stefano Ittar servo umilissimo, ed oratore delle SS. Loro Illustrissime con tutta riverenza espone d'aver l'onore di servire questo V.C Tesoro in qualità di architetto per la fabrica che si va erigendo nel sito dove altre volte era la Conservatori. Ma perche possa con ogni facilità e con un gusto uniforme perfezionarsi l'intrapresa opera è necessario che non solo siano dall' oratore qual architetto ordinati i lavori necessarj a quest effetto tanto riguardo la scielta, taglio, e fabrica delle pietre; quanto ancora riguardo alli legnami, ferramenti, ed altri necessarie per la perfezione della fabrica sudetta. Ma pure richiede il buongoverno che tutti li maestri fabricatori, tagliatori di pietra, Guardiani ed altri addetti ai lavori dell'istessa fabrica siano in tutto e per tutto sotto li ordini, direzione, e governo dell' oratore architetto, riguardo a quello sara necessarie, e richiesti per tale fabrica, affine di potere con piu spedizione anzi speditezza, meno dispendio del nominato Comun Tesoro, uguale gusto, e metodo, ed appropriazione delle SS. Loro Illme perfezionarsi l'incominciata opera, essendo questo l'unica fine dell' oratore, quale umilmente supplica le medesime SS. Loro Illustrissime perche si degnino dargli le addimandate facolta all'effetto sudetto e della Grazia - Li Venerandi Procuratori del Comun Tesoro, Trovando noi giusto la domanda dell' oratore, incarichiamo il commissario dell'opere Cav^{re} de Custellan e di far eseguire la medesima in tutte le sue parti

Dato nella Veneranda Camera, 4 Agosto 1787.

(NLM, AOM, *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera del Tesoro A*, n. 658, ff. 185-186)

3

Illustrissimi Sigⁿⁱ

Alcuni disgusti che hà dovuto provare il loro servi dove Stefano Ittar, in occasione di esser stato chiamato per dare il suo sentimento circa varj lavori fuori di quelli che dalle SS loro Illustrissime e stato particolarmente incaricato lo porgono nella necessità di supplicarle di dare il provvedimento, che stimeranno il più opportuno per autorizzarlo a dare il suo parere, tutte le volte, che il vantaggio di questa Sagra Religione lo richiederà senza trovarsi esposto a quelle opposizioni che si sono state fatte da chi credeva che non dovesse ingerirsi d'altri travagli che di quelli della nuova Conservatoria e della Grazia le rimarrà obbligatissimo e li Venerandi Procuratori della Ven:^{da} Comun Tesoro, Luog:^{ie} del Gran Commendatore e Cons:^{re} Conv:^{le} Trovando noi giusta la domanda dell' oratore e per ovviare all'inconvenienti alle quale si è trovato esposto in varie circostanze li concediamo il titolo di Architetto della Religione.

Dato nella Ven:^{da} Camera li 15 Dicembre 1787.

(NLM, AOM, *Deliberazioni della Veneranda Camera del Tesoro A*, n. 659, f. 214)