

Book Review:

The false domes of the Gozo Cathedral and other churches

Joe Zammit Ciantar

Malta: Self-published (2019); 48 pages

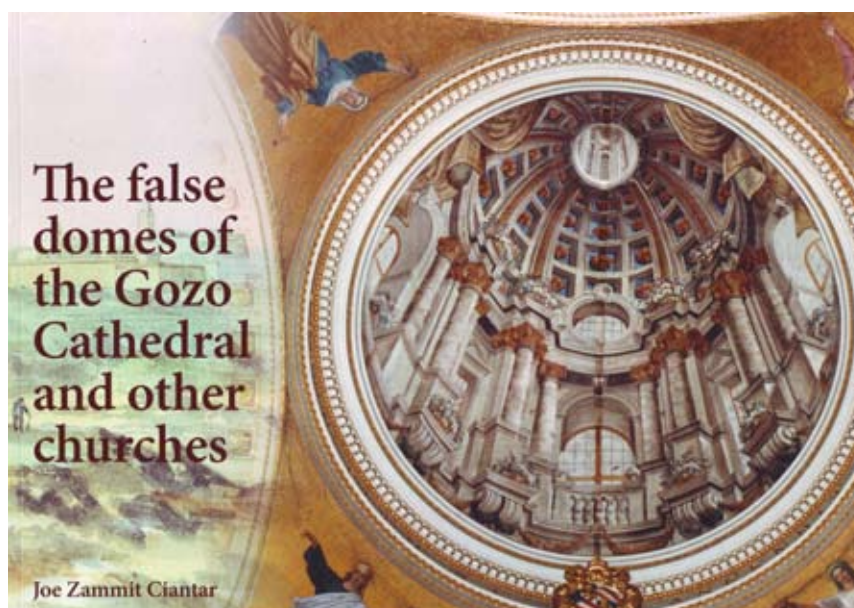
REVIEWED BY GEOFFREY G. ATTARD

The ‘false’ dome of the Gozo Cathedral within the Citadel walls in Victoria is one of the main attractions, if not the main one, in the Cathedral Church dedicated to the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. Metaphorically speaking, one can say that one cannot go to Rome without seeing the Pope, in the same way, one cannot visit the Cathedral without stopping to admire the *trompe l’oeil* that dominates the sanctuary.

For at least a quarter of a century, Gozo-born author and researcher Dr Joe Zammit Ciantar has been researching and collecting information about the various ‘trompe l’oeil’ domes that are to be found in Europe. In the book’s introduction, the author refers to what must have been the first writing about the subject which was published in August 2001 in *The Sunday Times of Malta*. Incidentally, Mr Laurence Grech, a friend of the author and editor of the Sunday newspaper for many years, wrote the foreword for the publication. In his introduction one may come across what may be considered the *raison d’être* of the publication; the author states that in his youth, ‘a painting that has fascinated me and which I loved to look at with awe and admiration was that of the ‘cupola’ of Gozo’s baroque cathedral, up in

the Citadel’. This sense of admiration must have developed into a fascination that moved him forward to delve deep into the subject. The author made it a point to visit the various churches where such domes are to be found; in some cases he corresponded with the persons in charge of these holy places before visiting them physically and taking photos in order to be able to study them better. From time to time, Zammit Ciantar wrote articles about these places which appeared in local newspapers or journals.

From the comparative research that he undertook, the author concludes that the ‘false’ dome at the Gozo Cathedral is in fact one of the best pieces of art within this particular genre. From what I deduced after having various conversations with the author about this recent publication of his, he is of the opinion that throughout the ages this particular artistic masterpiece has been given the importance that it is due. The author states this without leaving any space for doubt: ‘A scrutinizing eye may well appreciate the beauty of this masterpiece; because the Gozo Cathedral’s painted cupola is a masterpiece when compared with other similar ones in Rome, Arezzo, L’Aquila, Vienna and other places’ (cfr. Page 21). This statement speaks for itself; every lover of all



things Gozitan should make it a point to obtain a copy of this publication, go once or twice through the text and then enjoy the sumptuous photos that feature in the book. The size and landscape form of the publication make it easy for the reader to enjoy it better and notice even the details, and if you happen to be in Gozo, don't hesitate to walk up to the Citadel and visit the old Cathedral of Lorenzo Gafà and look up at the dome. The Cathedral parishioners and Gozitans at large should be proud of the newly restored masterpiece that is part and parcel of our national heritage.