Pietro Paolo Zahra
and the Roman Baroque Manner
at the Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea

Gabrielle Agius
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Pietro Paolo Zahra
and the Roman Baroque Manner
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Supervisor: Professor Keith Sciberras

Long essay submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements for
the Degree of Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in History of Art,
Faculty of Arts, University of Malta

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DECLARATION OF AUTHENTICITY

I, the undersigned, Gabrielle Agius declare that this dissertation is my original work, gathered and utilised especially to fulfil the purpose and objectives of this study, and has not been previously submitted to any other university. I also declare that the publications and archival material cited in this work have been personally consulted.

Gabrielle Agius
Preface

This dissertation discusses the sculptural work by Pietro Paolo Zahra, found in the Oratory of the Crucifix in Senglea and analysis how the Maltese sculptor adapts typologies created by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in Rome into a coherent local variety.

The oratory is placed within the context of the Maltese Baroque, which flourished during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, mainly due to the presence of the Knight Hospitallers of the Order of St John, who sought to enrich their artistic patrimony. The Knights of St John were a crucial link between the otherwise insular island and mainland Europe; where the major artistic developments were being made.

An analysis of the iconography and stylistic execution of the sculptures within the Oratory of the Crucifix reveals an awareness of important works which had been created in Rome or were present on the Maltese islands during the period. The works of art commissioned by the Knights, as well as the work by artists such as Pietro Paolo Troisi, who had studied at the prestigious Accademia di San Luca, were a very probable source of inspiration to Pietro Paolo Zahra who sought to create a scheme which reflected the developments and philosophy of this age. Apart from referring to works present on the island in this sculptural scheme, it is also probable that Pietro Paolo Zahra was also working from prints of Roman works, particularly Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s. So far, no documentation which shows that Pietro Paolo Zahra ever left the country has been found. Hence it is improbable that he was working from first-hand knowledge of the works.

This dissertation considers the work of Pietro Paolo Zahra as a local offshoot of the Roman Baroque tradition, and analyses the origin and adaptation of the different elements and typologies used within the oratory. So far there has not been a study devoted to Pietro Paolo Zahra which discusses his work and the main sources of inspiration and influence within it. This dissertation aims to do so, focusing mainly on the Oratory of the Crucifix in Senglea. The importance of Gian Lorenzo Bernini in this work is highlighted, as he succeeded in creating a style which permeated Roman
Catholic Europe in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Through its links with Rome, Malta was able to become suffused within this artistic language.

Chapter One deals with the context within which Pietro Paolo developed from an artisan *scalpellino* into a more prolific sculptor. An analysis of the general decorative scheme of the Oratory dedicated to the Holy Crucifix is also given in this chapter. The following three chapters deal with the three main typologies found within the Oratory; the Gloria, the *Angeli Adoranti* and the Angels holding the Passion Symbols. Stylistic and iconographical comparisons within Zahra’s own work, as well works which may have been of influence to the sculptor are made. The typologies are also traced to their origin in the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, and thus given as evidence that Zahra as well local sculptors were emulating the Roman Baroque. This also strengthens the importance of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s work, as his manner was transported out of Rome.

The main difficulties encountered throughout this dissertation resulted from the fact that a number of documented works by Pietro Paolo Zahra no longer exist, as church interiors went through considerable redecoration during the nineteenth century. As Pietro Paolo repeated his typologies of figures within different works, his schemes do not achieve varied exciting results. However a sense of development in conception as well as execution of altar reredoses can be traced throughout his career.

This dissertation is indebted to the numerous publications which focus on Baroque sculpture in Malta and Rome. The work of Bernini scholars, particularly Irving Lavin, Rudolph Wittkower, Jennifer Montagu, Valentino Martinelli and Mark Weil was a reference point throughout the research. *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta* by Keith Sciberras was also invaluable in terms of in-depth research on individual works imported from Rome by the Knights of St John. *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His Life and Art in Mid-18th Century Malta* also Keith Sciberras provided the context and analysis of works being produced during this period in Malta. The publication by John Debono *Documentary sources on Maltese Artists: Pietro Paolo Zahra (1685-1747) and his son Francesco Vincenzo (1710-1773)*, which groups the notarial deeds of the sculptor, was critical in the early stages of research.
Acknowledgments

This research on the sculptural work within the Oratory of the Crucifix has proved to be challenging and stimulating, and was made possible with the help and support I encountered throughout. I would sincerely like to thank my dissertation supervisor and Head of the History of Art Department at the University of Malta Professor Keith Sciberras for his constant advice and encouragement.

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Special thanks go to the photographer Joe P. Borg for allowing me to use his professional photographs, and also for his advice. I am very grateful to everyone who has aided me with my research especially Paul Camilleri and the staff of the Notarial Archives in Mdina; the staff at the Melitensia section at the University of Malta Library; and Mario Gauci from the Mdina Cathedral Archives. I would also like to thank the Parish Priests, members of the clergy and sacristans of the various churches I visited, particularly those of Senglea, Haz-Zebbug and the Augustinian church in Rabat as they were very helpful throughout. My thanks also go to Fr Edgar Vella, Neil Borg and Mario Caruana.

Finally I would especially like to thank my parents for their endless encouragement and support throughout my studies, particularly during the past year.
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Introduction
Pietro Paolo Zahra’s sculptural program, within the eighteenth century Oratory of the Crucifix, found adjacent to the parish church of Senglea, is considered to be one of the most eloquent examples of the Roman Baroque tradition on the Maltese islands. In this collective effort between three Maltese artists; the stone-carver Pietro Paolo Zahra, the architect Francesco Zerafa and the marmista Carlo Duranti, all from the fortified harbour city of Senglea,¹ the intention was the creation of one complete, harmonious interior which fused the arts of sculpture and architecture together. This is a Maltese variant of the Roman Baroque spirit, where emphasis on the amalgamation of the arts was crucial to the ideology of the age.

Apart from the prominence given to the role of the Arts in the reaffirmation of the importance of the Roman Catholic Church and its doctrine, the Counter Reformation had also been responsible for the setting up of religious societies and confraternities. The purpose behind these religious societies was one which offered a more direct and active role in caring for the needs of the members of the congregation. In Malta, the establishing of confraternities can be traced back to the sixteenth century with the fraternity of the Holy Sacrament in Vittoriosa. The Oratory of the Crucifix, which this dissertation aims to discuss, was commissioned by the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix and Our Lady of Charity in Senglea, which had taken over the obligations of the Fraternity of Charity in the summer of 1715.² The aim of this confraternity was to take care of the burials of the poor and to revive Christian ethics within the community of Senglea. It eventually began to attract a number of prestigious members such as knights and merchants, as membership to the confraternity had become a symbol of elitism.³ Thus a substantial amount of wealth was circulated within this religious society and allowed for the realization of the ambitious desire to build a larger oratory.⁴

During this period, numerous parishes on the Maltese Islands were undergoing significant change, as various churches were being erected, rebuilt and enlarged in a

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¹ A. Bonnici, L-Isla fi ġrajjet il-Bażilika-Santwarju ta’ Marija Bambina, iii, (L-Isla, Parroċċa ta’ l-Isla), 1981-1991, p. 226
² A. Bonnici, p.223
³ Grand Master Manuel Pinto da Fonseca (1681-1773) was a member of this confraternity.
⁴ More research on the confraternity has been carried out by I. Robinich for his dissertation in Baroque Architecture; The Fraternity of the Crucifix and its Oratory in Senglea, (unpublished dissertation) Diploma in Baroque Architecture, 2008
number of villages in order to suit the needs of the growing communities.\textsuperscript{5} Hence, Maltese painters, \textit{scalpellini} and sculptors were thoroughly engaged in these works.\textsuperscript{6} Family workshops began to emerge; among the more prominent ones were the Casanova, Zahra and Fabri families of sculptors, all located within the Three Cities.\textsuperscript{7} It is out of these circumstances that Pietro Paolo Zahra developed as a \textit{scalpellino} working with his father Antonio Zahra on various commissions before becoming an independent sculptor in his own right. Eventually Pietro Paolo began working with other prominent local artists, such as Gio Nicola Buhagiar, as well as members of his own family.\textsuperscript{8} These new churches were built out of globigerina limestone which is the most common type of stone quarried in the Maltese islands. Due to its soft nature and predisposition for modelling, this type of stone offers an ideal medium which sculptors gradually began to exploit to its fullest potential.

The early eighteenth century Oratory of the Crucifix (Figure 1) is a Maltese adaptation of the inventions made within the Roman Baroque to suit the requirements of the Confraternity dedicated to the Holy Crucifix and Our Lady of Charity which necessitated a larger space in which to meet due to the increasing number of members. The decorative scheme within this oratory is evidence of an awareness of the more significant benchmark works which had been created in Rome during the previous century, particularly those of Gian Lorenzo Bernini. Thus a reflection of the predominant changes in ideology and mode of representation is evident. Francesco Zerafa, the architect of the project, as well as Pietro Paolo Zahra who was in charge of designing and executing the sculptural arrangement, made use of adaptations of a number of typologies which were originally seen in Bernini’s work.

\textsuperscript{5} See C. Thake, \textit{Baroque churches in Malta}. (Arcadia) 1995
\textsuperscript{6} See K. Sciberras, \textit{Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His Life and Art in Mid-18th Century Malta} (Midsea Books) 2010 for a more extensive survey on the artistic scene on the Maltese Islands during the eighteenth century.
\textsuperscript{7} The Zahra and Casanova families were situated in Senglea, whilst the Fabri family was situated in Vittoriosa.
\textsuperscript{8} J. Debono, \textit{Documentary Sources on Maltese Artists: Pietro Paolo Zahra (1685-1747) and his son Francesco Vincenzo (1710-1773)} (Gudja, Gutenberg Press Ltd) 2010, p. xiii and K. Sciberras 2010
The figure of God in glory in the prospettiva,\textsuperscript{9} as well as the adoring angels,\textsuperscript{10} and the angels holding the symbols of the passion of Christ are a case in point.\textsuperscript{11} Bernini’s oeuvre had had a very rapid impact on the artistic scene in Rome and influenced a number of artists working in the city who adopted his types and followed his manner when creating their own works. Since the time of the creation of Bernini’s works (1624-1678), there were a number of subsequent adoptations of the types by other artists who followed Bernini’s manner as they were inspired by the grandeur of these achievements. These stylistic developments eventually reached the Maltese Islands, predominately through one major patron: The Order of the Knights of St John.

Despite being an island, Malta became exposed to works of art created in Italy, principally due to the presence of the Order of the Knights of St John which began to commission works from Rome during the seventeenth century.\textsuperscript{12} Thus Maltese artists

\textsuperscript{9} \textit{Infra} This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Two.

\textsuperscript{10} \textit{Infra} Chapter Three deals with a discussion of the angeli adoranti typology, particularly in the work of Pietro Paolo Zahra and the creation of the typology by Bernini.

\textsuperscript{11} \textit{Infra} These will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{12} K. Sciberras, \textit{Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta} (Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti) 2004, p.1. This publication analyses the patronage of the Order and discusses the works commissioned and the context out of which they emerged.
and artisans were able to acquaint themselves in a direct manner with the style and typologies which were being developed and spreading in mainland Europe. These artists were subsequently influenced by this new artistic language, which was dramatically different from the vernacular works which they had been producing so far. Of notable importance is Mattia Preti’s (1613-1699) contribution to the renovation of Valletta into a Baroque city. His program of decoration for the interior of the Conventual Church of St. John entailed the craftsmanship of a number of local artisans.13

The scalpellino Pietro Paolo Zahra was born in 1685,14 when this extensive ornamental program which had taken place during the 1660s, was completed. Following Mattia Preti’s death in 1699, there was a gradual decline in invention and quality of the works being produced on the islands.15 Thus, the Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful felt the need to re-establish Malta’s strong links with mainland Europe, particularly Italy. This was accomplished through the sending of a number of young artists to Italy to further their studies in the artistic field, as well as the commissioning of works from Rome.16 Upon their return to Malta, the knowledge and experience which these artists had gained was evident in their production which reflected the Baroque language. As it does not appear that Pietro Paolo Zahra himself ever studied abroad, his knowledge of the Roman Baroque was probably filtered through the influence of Pietro Paolo Troisi (1686-1742) and the presence of imported Italian works, as well as prints of influential works.17

Zahra is a typical example of a relatively talented stone-carver (scalpellino) who eventually ventured into sculpture in the round and architecture. Towards the end of his career he proclaimed to be an architect, which meant that he saw himself as a fully developed artist in charge of his own workshop. Pietro Paolo Zahra was extremely

13 See K. Sciberras, Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta (Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti) 2004 for more detail on Mattia Preti’s decorative program of the Knight’s Conventual Church in Valletta. See also J. Debono, ‘St John’s Conventual Church: Stone Carving, Gilding and Marble Works (1640s-1660s)’ Art and Artisans in St John’s and Other Churches in the Maltese Islands ca. 1650-1800 stone carving, marble, bells, clocks and organs, 2005
14 PAI, Liber Baptizatorum, Vol. III(1679-1724), f.78
15 K. Sciberras 2010, p.6
16 J. A. Briffa, Pietro Paolo Troisi 1686-1750, (International Institute for Baroque Studies, University of Malta) 2009, p.xiii
17 For more on Troisi see K. Sciberras 2004, p. 41-45. See also J. A. Briffa, Pietro Paolo Troisi 1686-1750, 2009
prolific and worked extensively on the Maltese Islands. Important examples of his work are the altar of the Holy Family found in the Parish Church of Rabat (Plate 2); the transept termination dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory in the Zebbug Parish Church (Plate 3); as well as the altars dedicated to the Annunciation (Plate 4) and to the Virgin of the Light (Plate 5) both located within the church dedicated to St. James in Zurrieq.

Harmony in the entirety of execution is one of the more significant features of the Roman Baroque, as the arts were combined together to create noteworthy works which defied the classical boundaries which had been so far assigned to each of the arts, in order to keep them distinct from each other. Within the Oratory of the Crucifix, architecture and sculpture become subordinate to the overall design, particularly in the apsidal termination which has a pictorial quality. The variation in the depth of relief; from the low relief rays of the Gloria to the large angels which are almost modelled in the round, acts as an aid in the perception of depth and distance. Architectural motifs, which had been popular in the decoration of altar reredoses, are not present in this apsidal termination. The plain border which frames the niche does not function as a denominator of the spaces assigned to the sculptural work, as the playful putti and the clouds on which they are supported are not restricted to the exterior of the frame. Despite it being a very successful project, there are evident inconsistencies within the modelling of the figures, as well as some incongruence in the overall execution, which reminds us that Zahra had no academic training, and learnt sculpture through emulation and practice.

The most striking element which captures the viewer’s attention as he enters the Oratory is the sculpted image of God in glory surrounded by putti and cherub heads. The rays which seem to be emanating from the figure of the Creator are an adoption of the same motif seen in the Cathedra Sancti Petri (Plate 6), located in the Basilica of St. Peter’s in the Vatican. This element was introduced by the virtuoso sculptor Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who throughout his long and impressive career succeeded in orchestrating an extensive transformation of Rome’s appearance. The gold gilt

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19 The transept of the Zebbug parish church and the altars within St James chapel in Zurrieq will be discussed in Chapter Three.
Cathedra Sancti Petri has become a symbol of the triumphant Roman Catholic Church over the Protestant Reformation. Despite it having served as a fountain of inspiration and has been replicated numerous times, as seen in the adaptation designed by Pietro Paolo Zahra on the Maltese Islands, its brilliance has not yet been reached. The stone gloria found within the Oratory of the Crucifix is a much more subdued and less ambitious conception. The quality of execution also indicates certain technical problems which the sculptor was unable to solve accordingly.

The large angels, placed on either side of the niche which contains the Crucifix (as well as various relics of saints), also hark back to a typology first introduced by Bernini. These angeli adoranti as components of an altar reredos were first brought to the Maltese Islands by Pietro Paolo Troisi, a Maltese artist who spent some time studying in Rome, in his design for the altar reredos of the Immaculate Conception in the Franciscan Minors Conventual Church in Rabat. The execution of this reredos was collaboration with Pietro Paolo Zahra, and due to the positive response which this altar received, various adaptations of the typology later ensued.

The six angels on pedestals, which hold symbols of the Passion of Christ, were a later commission by Pietro Paolo Zahra. However they formed part of the initial conception, as the space within which they are placed was designed around the idea of containing these full-length angels. The angels are placed in front of blind arcades, a decorative element which is used to articulate the wall space. These angels are a derivation of the ones which form part of Bernini’s grand project for the Ponte Sant’Angelo.

The Roman Baroque manner reached its apex in the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, who took centre-stage during the pontificates of Pope Urban VIII, Innocent X,

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20 There are numerous important publications on the role of the Gloria, R. Wittkower’s *Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (London, Phaidon) First published in 1955 (Third edition 2010) is one such publication which also discuses the actual project of the Cathedra Sancti Petri.

21 *Infra* The reredos of the altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception will be discussed in more detail in Chapter One.

22 K. Sciberras 2010, p.10

23 NAV, Not. V. Marchese, R 343/36, ff. 752-753 Refer to Appendix, Figure A2

24 In the 1731 contract regarding the commission of the Oratory between Giuseppe Muscat and Pietro Paolo Zahra, it is specified that the execution has to follow the drawing with the exclusion of the six large angel statues. Refer to Appendix, Figure A1

25 Blind arcades are a decorative feature in their own right, and were not originally intended to act as niches for statues, however during the Baroque period, they were generally utilised in this manner.
Alexander VII and Clement IX. He created an extraordinary number of masterpieces which transformed the city of Rome and which influenced the story of art and religion in the consecutive years. His inventive genius departed from the more classical and naturalistic manners of the two intrinsically different predominant artistic styles of the late sixteenth century. Bernini instead opted to focus on a graphic manifestation of the inner spirit of the being, a visible rendering of emotion and spirituality.

In order to achieve this dramatic effect, the barriers between the three arts: architecture, painting and sculpture dissolved and were moulded into a fusion where it becomes almost impossible to distinguish one from the other. This resulted in what can be seen as the exuberant and extravagant spirit of the age. The impact of Bernini’s work gradually infiltrated into the other major cities and peripheral centres. Malta was no exception, and the Oratory of the Crucifix is a significant example of how the local artists adopted and adapted his manner within their own native context.
Chapter One:

The Sculptor

and the Context for the Oratory
During the seventeenth century, the Maltese communities living in small villages on islands had not been directly impacted by the developments in building type and artistic decoration which were occurring within Valletta. Gradually through the patronage of the parishes within villages, this novel mode of ornamentation started to be emulated. The enlargement and rebuilding of churches in various localities, to suit the needs of the growing congregations, provided numerous opportunities for the decorative manner of the Baroque style to be explored and adapted to suit these buildings. Variations occurred depending on the skill and inventive capacity of the workers. It was a period when Maltese artists and artisans were thoroughly engaged in the construction and decoration of these buildings. Slowly the sense of refinement as well as the decorative elements of the Italian Baroque style was adapted to the more provincial taste of the local parishes.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the proliferation in the number of workshops of stone carvers on the Maltese Islands, mainly situated around the harbour area, especially in Senglea and Vittoriosa. The Zahra family of artisan sculptors from Senglea, known by the nickname ta’ l-Iskarpellin was one of the more prominent families of carvers during this period. Pietro Paolo was born to Antonio and Anna Zahra on the 30th June 1685. He was the eldest son of at least four children.

Pietro Paolo’s father, Antonio Zahra was already a relatively prominent scalpellino, who had been commissioned various carving works in churches. He is known to have executed work in the Augustinian church at Rabat in 1694 (Appendix, Figure A4); as well as within the old parish church of Birkirkara in 1703 where he executed his own design for the chapel dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, St Joseph and St Dominic (Appendix, Figure A5). The earliest known record of the father and son collaboration dates to the 17th Jan. 1706, for the carving of the altar

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26 K. Sciberras 2010, p.10. See also Thake 1995.
27 For more information on the work being carried out in local churches during the period see: J. Debono, Art and Artisans in St John’s and Other Churches in the Maltese Islands ca. 1650-1800 stone carving, marble, bells, clocks and organs, 2005
28 J. Debono 2010, p. xiii
29 PAI, Liber Baptizatorium, Vol. III (1679-1724), f.78
30 J. Debono 2010, p. xiii
31 Antonio rebuilt the chapel dedicated to St Giovanni Facundo. NAV, Not G.D. Pace, R 388/13 (1693-94), ff.451-452. See Appendix A, Figure A4
dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, in the old parish church of Birkirkara, for the sum of 60 scudi (Appendix, Figure A6).  

As was natural given the circumstances, the young Pietro Paolo was exposed to the work being executed by his father from a young age, and was eventually nurtured into becoming an assistant carver in order to assist his father in the carrying out of these commissions. Pietro Paolo’s brother Giacomo is also known to have formed part of their father’s workshop.  

As father and son, Antonio and Pietro Paolo are documented to have worked together on various other altar reredos carvings. However in some cases, there is the possibility that Antonio’s name was written instead of his son’s, as it would have been assumed that the established father would have been engaged in executing a major part of the commission. Thus the work which Antonio Zahra carved for the aforementioned Birkirkara Parish Church in 1703 may have included the work of his son, who by this time had also ventured into the execution of independent work. As Pietro Paolo Zahra was more artistically able than his father, he succeeded in moving into the realm of figurative work.  

In keeping with the Maltese custom of strengthening bonds between artisan families; Pietro Paolo Zahra married Agostina Casanova, the daughter of the sculptor Vincenzo Casanova in 1706. Their marriage bore at least seven children, three of whom are well documented in contracts of work, as assistants to their father. Their second eldest child, Francesco started off as an assistant carver to Pietro Paolo, however he was more inclined towards painting and it is highly probable that he was sent for tuition with the artist and family friend Gio Nicola Buhagiar. Pietro Paolo Zahra had a friendly working relationship with Buhagiar, and they worked together on numerous ecclesiastical collaborations.

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33 J. Debono 2010, p.xv - xvi  
34 In a number of notarial deeds ‘Pietro Paolo’ is shortened to ‘Paolo.’  
35 J. Debono 2010, p. xiv  
36 K. Sciberras 2010, p.10  
37 PAI, Liber Matrimoniorum, Vol. IB (1675-1715), p.1074. Published in K. Sciberras 2010  
38 J. Debono 2010, p. xiii- xvii  
39 Francesco Zahra’s early works come close to the horror vacuii style of Buhagiar. Eventually Francesco surpassed his teacher and became the leading local artist of the period, executing mainly ecclesiastical works. K. Sciberras 2010, p.28
Figure 2: A view of the door leading to the Oratory of the Crucifix from the south transept of the Senglea Parish Church.

Figure 2a: Senglea Basilica before World War II.  Figure 2b: Post-war interior of the Basilica.
In spite of the fact that Zahra could boast of a family workshop which as able to execute an entire reredos scheme which included sculptural work as well as the painting, he did not replace Gio Nicola Buhagiar completely as a collaborator. As the need for carvers, sculptors and painters was so vast, Pietro Paolo was able to work on altar reredoses with both painters.

The first major development in Pietro Paolo Zahra’s career occurred in 1710, when he was in his mid-twenties. He had the opportunity of working in on an altar reredos with Pietro Paolo Troisi on an innovative altar reredos, dedicated to the Immaculate Conception, for the Church of the Friar Minor Conventuals at Rabat (Figure 3). In the notarial deed which dates to the 7th July 1710, Zahra agreed with the Doctor of Medicine Filippo Giacomo Gauci to build and decorate the altar, following a design drawn up by Pietro Paolo Troisi.

This commission was to be completed within ten months for the sum of 250 scudi. It is expressly stipulated that the stone must be of good quality and quarried from Lija, Siggiewi or Zebbug and not the area known as Vittoria. Zahra was to supply the required stone slabs for the building of the altar, the statues as well as the reliefs and other embellishments. The notarial deed also specified that Troisi was to be responsible for the supervision of the reredos, and thus work had to be approved by him before it was deemed complete. Troisi was also to be in charge of selecting the workers to assist with the works.

The development which Troisi introduced in this altar reredos design was the inclusion of the two large kneeling angels set on clouds which gaze in devotion at the altarpiece. These angeli adoranti which seem to be floating in mid-air upon light clouds are an adaptation of the sculptural typology which had been introduced by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in the work which he executed for the Basilica of St. Peter’s in the Vatican. These angels act as mediators between the congregation and the Virgin Mary.

Francesco Zahra eventually matured into the leading Maltese artist on the island. As late as 1742, in the transept of the Souls in Purgatory, Zebug Zahra was working in collaboration with Gio Nicola Buhagiar. NAV, Not G. Grech, R 303/2, ff. 867-870. The contract could not be seen due to conservation issues. See J. Debono 2010 for a transcription and translation of the deeds.

The altar was completed by April 1711, as Pietro Paolo Zahra acknowledged the receipt of the final sum on the 25th April. 25 April 1711. NAV, Not. I . Debono, R 210/26, ff. 833-833v. Published in J. Debono, 2010.

"...darlo in luce a tutta perfesione secondo l’istruzione, e sbozzo del Signor Pietro Paolo Troisi Architetto"
Figure 3: Altar of the Immaculate Conception, Minor Conventual Friars Church, Rabat. Executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra during 1710-1711, following the design of Pietro Paolo Troisi
The angel situated on the left hand side of the painting faces the viewer and directs attention to the depiction of the Virgin Mary through his gestures, whilst the angel on the right is absorbed in mediation and prayer. The drapery is also stylistically influenced by Bernini’s dramatic rendition of the folds which defy gravity; however the effectiveness of the work is compromised due to inconsistencies in the quality of the work. This can be seen as an affirmation that the young Zahra, not Troisi was responsible for the execution of the altar. Troisi was much more confident in his portrayal of the human figure, due to his academic background whilst Zahra had not yet mastered a sense of naturalness within his executions. The facing altar of St Anthony (Plate 7) was also commissioned from Pietro Paolo Zahra, however it is not executed to the same degree of finish as that of the Immaculate Conception, and even more unnatural rigidity can be observed.\textsuperscript{45} As the execution of the figures of the angels does not follow Zahra’s characteristic typologies, there is the possibility that it was largely executed by one of his assistants.

In his design for the reredos for the Immaculate Conception, Troisi combined architectural elements with figurative sculpture. The design for the altar is set within a large arch which sets this altar within a niche-like setting.\textsuperscript{46} The painting of the Immaculate Conception is placed within a carved frame which is decorated with a thin ribbon, and a garland of acanthus leaves. This reredos is designed in a classical manner which made use of architectural elements and was popular during the Renaissance.\textsuperscript{47} In this case, two sets of engaged Corinthian pilasters are set on either side of the painting. Symmetry and equal distribution of elements are notable features in this reredos and despite the numerous decorative elements; balance of composition is successfully achieved.

The central component above the painting is an oval Gloria of the Holy Spirit (Plate 8a). This is merged into the reredos through the surrounding foliage and architectural motifs. Set above the moulding, which creates a spatial division, are two seated angels draped in garments with dynamic folds. The remainder of the space in the upper level of the reredos is articulated by means of a window, winged putti, and a

\textsuperscript{45} K. Sciberras 2010, p.13
\textsuperscript{46} For the development of the altar reredos on the Maltese Islands in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see N. Attard, An art historical gazetteer of the figural baroque altar reredoses of the Maltese Islands (Unpublished Dissertation, B.A Hons History of Art) 2006
\textsuperscript{47} N. Attard, p. 11
winged cherub as well as through the use of carved stylised foliage. These are elements which become characteristic within Pietro Paolo Zahra’s work, and can be noticed in various other reredoses executed by the sculptor.

Pietro Paolo Troisi (1686-1742) is the first known Maltese artist to venture to the Accademia di San Luca in Rome during Grand Master Ramon Perellos y Roccaful’s magistry. The seventeen year old Troisi had already received initial training as a silversmith with his father Carlo Troisi who was the Master of the Mint and also worked as a silversmith. Thus, apart from studying at the Accademia, Troisi also continued his training as a silversmith in a bottega in Rome, probably that of Pietro Papaleo, an established accademico. Troisi’s experience at the Accademia di San Luca proved to be a fruitful one, and culminated in his placing first in the prestigious Concorso Clementino of 1705, along with the Roman artist Antonio Arrighi.  

Troisi returned to Malta equipped with a sound knowledge of design and inspiration taken from the works present in the Eternal City, which had been transformed in the previous century due to Bernini’s extensive output. Troisi’s corpus of works includes architectural designs and sculptural work as well as the designs of coins and medals for the Grand Masters. His knowledge of the angeli adoranti, which was adapted to the needs of the altar of the Immaculate Conception (discussed above), is his first known commission after his return to the Maltese Islands from Rome. Due to the positive response with which this decorative scheme was met, the typology was reused in a number of other altars, especially by Pietro Paolo Zahra.

The development of Maltese artistic and decorative church interiors developed in line with foreign Roman Catholic trends, particularly in their architectural structures. One of the major reforms of the Counter Reformation had been the increased importance given to the Holy Eucharist as the real presence of the Body of Christ.

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48 Troisi was under the patronage of the Order’s ambassador in Rome; Marcello Sacchetti. See Sciberras 2004, p. 41
49 In 1736, Pietro Paolo Troisi replaced his father in his post as Master of the Mint. J. A. Briffa, p. 58
50 The work with which he won the Concorso, a bass relief sculpture representing Romulus offering an ostentatious sacrifice to Hercules in thanksgiving for the edification of Rome, is not known to have survived. See K. Sciberras 2004, p.41
51 Antonio Arrighi later executed a set of fifteen silver statues for the Altar of St. John’s Conventual church in Valletta.
52 In 1724, he made the silver medal which commemorated the Manoel Island fortifications project for G. M. Manoel de Vilhena. J. A. Briffa, p. 43
within the Church. During the Council of Trent, which was held between 1545 and 1563, the Eucharist was assigned the central role in the order of the liturgy thus leading to important developments in church decoration, particularly that of the altars.\(^\text{54}\) Thus the significance of the titular altar as the focal point for the congregation within the church was emphasized during the seventeenth century, as it was where the celebration of the Eucharist was held. The arts were used to increase the visual significance of the titular altar, through the creation of more elaborate altar reredoses which functioned as a three-dimensional backdrop to the altar.

In Maltese churches the altar reredoses evolved from the Renaissance typology which comprises of architectural motifs and an emphasis on symmetry and verticality; to the more dynamic figurative reredoses which started to appear around the island in the last decades of the seventeenth century.\(^\text{55}\) These more flamboyant reredoses typically feature winged angels, and extended to the point of merging with the surrounding architecture. During the seventeenth century the altar reredos became a manifestation of the Roman Catholic response to the Protestant ideals, thus emanating a triumphant atmosphere, which fused effortlessly with the dynamic qualities that greatly characterized the new Baroque art. Artists and architects were influenced by Carlo Borromeo’s manual; which gave precise instructions about the form, orientation and dimensions of the altars and their construction.\(^\text{56}\) The elaborate decorations were at first typically reserved for the titular altar, but were later also adapted to the side altars. Amongst the innovative decorative developments; the apsidal cap became the favourite location for the scalpellino to carve the elaborate theme of the Gloria, which incorporates exploding rays of light, typically from behind a dove, surrounded by a glory of angels which became popular imagery in numerous local altar reredoses.

By the 1730s, the work of Roman Baroque artists who sought to fuse architecture and sculpture in order to create a pictorial whole had become known to the artists working on the Maltese islands, as is evident with the production of the Oratory of the Crucifix in Senglea. Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s design for the small church of Sant’

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\(^\text{55}\) For a more detailed analysis of the development of altar reredoses see: N. Attard, An art historical gazetteer of the figural baroque altar reredoses of the Maltese Islands (Unpublished Dissertation, B.A Hons History of Art) 2006

\(^\text{56}\) See Charles Borromeo’s Instructiones fabricate et supellectilis ecclesiasticae, 1577, Book I, a translation with commentary and analysis. Translated by Dr. Evelyn Carol Voelker, 1977
Andrea al Quirinale (Plate 8) in 1670 epitomises the Baroque theatricality which employs the fusion of the different arts in order to achieve one overall effect. Elements used within this magnificent small church, which exudes the High Baroque in its rich polychromies, have been adapted to more localised purpose on the Maltese Islands.

The garlands, foliage, playful putti and angels which act as intermediaries between the onlooker and the heavenly vision of the saints became increasingly popular throughout this era. The first recorded Maltese example of an oratory which is conceived to be a total work of art was the Dominican Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, found adjacent to the church of Porto Salvo in Valletta (Plate 9). It dates to 1673 and succeeded in emulating the sober, almost claustrophobic effect through the rich decoration of the interior.\(^{57}\)

On the 16\(^{th}\) Feb. 1731, Pietro Paolo Zahra agreed with a procurator of the Confraternity dedicated to the Holy Crucifix and Our Lady of Charity to engage in the carving of the newly built oratory and its altar, based on a design drawn up by Zahra himself (Appendix, Figure A1).\(^{58}\) He was to follow the design, with the exception of the six angel statues.\(^{59}\) All relief carving had to be completed within five years. The cost of the work amounted to 400 scudi and was to be paid in a number of instalments. As Pietro Paolo Zahra was a member of this Confraternity, he promises not to charge extra costs if the designs are altered. In a marginal entry dating to the 30\(^{th}\) Aug. 1734, Zahra acknowledges the receipt of the final balance. Zahra also received an additional 40 scudi, as a gift for his exceptional work in the oratory on the 17\(^{th}\) March 1735.\(^{60}\)

The interior space of the oratory is designed with the theatrical and awe-inspiring spirit of the Roman Baroque in mind. The rectangular plan oratory (Plate 10) can be accessed either through the door from the south transept of the main church itself, or through a side door. Currently the oratory is painted in a pastel colour scheme with accents in white and a dark shade of ochre. It is highly unlikely that these were the original colours of the interior; however the restorations which have taken place

\(^{57}\) For more on this Oratory, see E.V. Borg, *The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament Valletta*, (Malta : P.E.G.) 1988

\(^{58}\) NAV, Not. F. Alessi, R 14/7, ff. 684-685. Published in J. Debono, 2010.

\(^{59}\) ‘Sotto li patti infrascritti, e prima, che detto Maestro Paolo non sara tenuto fare, e scolpire le sei figure, che si veggono nel disegno dell’i lati di detto Oratorio, e non altrimenti etc.’

\(^{60}\) ‘... li fratelli di detta Confraternita per Consulta determinaron dare di regalo al suddetto Zahra per il buon travaglio da esso lui fatto nella scultura dell’Oratorio di detta Venerrand Confraternita.’
recently (2013-2014) only resulted in a cleaning and repainting in the same colour scheme.

The height of the oratory is divided into three levels through the use of a continuous entablature which distinguishes one level from the other. The lower part houses the wooden seating for the *fratelli*, which runs along the length of both side walls, as well as the corners at the back of the oratory. An entablature which spans along the length of the oratory, beneath the ribbed barrel vaulted ceiling separates the second level from the topmost part. This is the section in which the Passion of Christ is enacted, as a reminder to the *fratelli* of Christ’s suffering.\(^{61}\) The upper level is intended to act as a manifestation of God’s love for humanity through His image sculpted in the Gloria in the apse, above that of the Crucifixion.

A sense of harmony of proportion is achieved in the interior division of space through the use of 1:2:2 ratios with respect to each other.\(^{62}\) The length of the oratory is divided into three bays, through the use of a blind arcade with a set of engaged pilasters on either side (Plate 11). The base of the pilasters meets the double moulding which acts as a division between the first and second levels. At their point of intersection, the moulding juts out, thus continuing the vertical line created by the pilasters.

The window openings located in the vaulted ceiling of the Oratory allow considerable light to enter, however three of these windows are blind openings due to the adjoining buildings. Their presence creates a symmetry and balance in the overall design. Another source of lighting are the skylights found at the topmost section of the ceiling. These numerous windows allow a natural, albeit very well-lit ambience which avoids the theatrical use of light coming from one direct source which was typical of Baroque *macchina* creations and created a more dramatic effect.

\(^{61}\) I. Robinich, p.48  
\(^{62}\) Ibid. 
The apse at the east end of the oratory with the representation of the Crucifix is the focal point of decoration (Figure 4). In the apsidal cap, a rayed Gloria emanates from behind the anthropomorphic image of God.\textsuperscript{63} The Eternal Father is suspended on a cluster of clouds upheld by two winged putti. The variation in depth of relief is an attempt at creating a perspective illusion of depth; however the awkward anatomy of the figure of God is evident nonetheless. Two oval windows set within a flowing, scroll-like frame are found on either side of the Gloria. Two doorways located in the apse lead into the sacristy. Both are topped by an entablature on which a broken segmental pediment, with a scallop shell at the centre, is carved (Plate 12).

The present polychromised marble altar, which is elevated by two steps, is a later reconstruction, after the original was destroyed during the bombings of April 1942. In these Second World War attacks the basilica suffered greatly, however the oratory miraculously survived.\textsuperscript{64} The bombings resulted in the collapsing of the ceiling, and the crypt; as well as cracks in the side wall adjoining the church; and the destruction of one of the six angels (Plate 13).

Above the altar, a large wooden cross is set within a framed recess at the very centre of the apse. The crucifix itself is not the work of a Maltese artist, but was brought from Rome.\textsuperscript{65} Behind the crucifix is a cross-shaped network which houses a number of relics (Plate 14). The large angel on the left hand side of the Crucifix seems to be lost prayer, whilst the angel on the right beckons the viewer towards the representation of the crucified Christ. The angels are represented in typical affetti gestures. The two winged putti also serve the same purpose of intermediaries; however they are represented in a more playful manner than the larger angels.

\textsuperscript{63} \textit{Infra} Chapter Two.
\textsuperscript{64} H. Braun, \textit{Works of Art in Malta: Losses and Survivals in the War} (London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office) 1946, p. 21
\textsuperscript{65} A. Bonnici, p.231
Figure 4: The apsidal termination of the Oratory of the Crucifix, executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra between 1731-1733
The heavy folds of drapery which engulf the angel’s bodies defy the laws of gravity and swirl upward as though there were blown by an unexpected gust of wind. Whilst the garments of the angel on right hand side of the Crucifix swirl in an agitated upwards motion, those of the angel on the left are more subdued. This visual device was first encountered within the Basilica of St. Peter’s in Rome Bernini’s St. Longinus (Plate 15). This marble statue differed from his previous works, which had so far respected the classical representation of drapery which fell in natural folds. A break from the naturalistic tradition is seen, as Bernini seems to give the folds a life of their own. They act as an externalization of the emotional experience of the figure. This dramatic rendering of drapery became very typical of Bernini’s later work, particularly in that of his angels whose spirit was clearly manifested in the abstracted folds of drapery.\(^{66}\)

The three bay division of the length of the oratory serves to articulate the space in a manner coherent with the ceiling vaults. The large space of each bay is occupied by a carved stone frame in which paintings executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra’s son, Francesco Zahra, representing the Passion of Christ, are placed (Plates 16 and 17).\(^{67}\) Around these frames, flowing Baroque motifs and stylized foliage are executed in relief. Set above each of the frames is a broken pediment; at the centre of which is a cartouche, topped by a scallop shell, which is supported by a pair of playful winged putti. The intrados of the pediment is also decorated with curvilinear carvings.

The areas which act as a division between the bays are where the heaviest concentration of sculptural decoration is to be found (Plate 18). Starting from the topmost level, in line with the bay windows, are pairs of putti which are holding on to an oval frame (Plates 19a - 19b). The flowing curves which protrude from behind the frame and serve as decoration complement the soft drapery folds of the putti. Each set of putti located in the upper levels is individualised (Plates 20a - 20f). Below the heavy moulding, winged cherub heads are set at the entablature level, above a decorative feature which contains a scallop shell (Plate 21a). The motif of the winged cherub heads is found on the two side pilasters, whilst at the central division there is a winged putto holding a garland of foliage (Plate 21b). The sets of engaged pilasters located on either side of the angels are topped with Ionic capitals. Vertical garlands

\(^{66}\) See R. Wittkower 2010  
\(^{67}\) K. Sciberras 2010, p. 35
and elaborate scrolls embellish the upper section of the pilaster, and direct the onlookers gaze towards the angels executed in full length set in front of the blind arcades. The angel holding the cross is a reconstruction after the original one by Zahra was destroyed during the war. 68

The side walls of the oratory are decorated in a relatively parallel fashion, with the exception of the space taken up by the side door on the right and the niche of the Redeemer on the left (Plate 22). Above the side door, another window is located, set within a decorative frame above which a cartouche with the Sacred Heart is embellished. Fronting it is a painting framed by the same type of moulded frame as that of the window. Below this painting, is the small polychromised marble altar and niche which contains a venerated eighteenth century statue of Christ Redeemer. The altar in front of the niche of the Redeemer was a later addition to the Oratory, due to the increased devotion to this statue. In 1751 a papal plea was made to the Vatican in order to build another altar within the oratory, and permission was granted by Pope Benedict XIV. 69

At each of the four corners of the length of the oratory, set in the upper level are two winged putti holding on to a coat of arms. Facing the altar is a balustrade balcony supported on decorated corbels and pilasters. Above the balcony door, a relief of angels holding an image of the cross is carved within a decorative architectural setting (Plate 23).

From the general decoration of the interior of the oratory, the Roman Baroque inspired love for the almost plastic rendering of architectural motifs becomes very evident. The features used within this oratory come close to other designs of reredoses executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra. It is evident that the sculptor worked closely with Francesco Zerafa, who was the architect of the oratory, as the result is of a premeditated, well-thought out conception.

68 M. Caruana Il- Gimgha l-Kbir fl-Isla, Parrocca ta’ l-Isla, 2000 , p.23
69 This altar was used to celebrate mass on. See A. Bonnici, p.235
Chapter Two:

The Gloria;

Origin and Transformation
The apsidal termination of the Oratory of the Crucifix which acts as a backdrop to the altar is where the main sculptural decoration is situated. This chapter will focus on a discussion of the figurative relief sculpture in the apsidal cap, namely the Gloria of the Eternal Father (Figure 5). This stone-carved Gloria which was designed and executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra is rooted in the tradition which Gian Lorenzo Bernini created through his glory of angels as part of his majestic *macchina*; the Cathedra Sancti Petri, in Saint Peter’s Basilica in Rome (Figure 6).

Prior to the commission which entailed the decoration of the interior of the new oratory of the Fraternity of the Crucifix, Pietro Paolo Zahra had already executed a number of altar reredoses which feature the typologies found in the apse of this oratory. The design by Pietro Paolo Troisi’s for the altar of the Immaculate Conception (c1710) features a small oval Gloria of the Holy Spirit above the altar painting (Plate 8a). The first known documented Gloria by Pietro Paolo Zahra dates to 1713-1715, for the parish church of Zabbar for the altar dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary. In the notarial deed, ‘A glory of angels carved under the picture-frame of the altar’ is specified.

Zahra is also documented to have executed three early glorias within the city of Vittoriosa. In the parish church dedicated to Saint Lawrence, Zahra is documented to have executed a ‘reredos carving with a “glory of angels” amongst heavenly clouds’ following his own design, for the altar of Our Lady of Charity (1716-1718). Around 1728, Pietro Paolo Zahra carves ‘the figure of the Eternal Father in His glory surrounded by seraphs, puttini and other embellishments’ for the Chapel of Saint Andrew, within the same church in Birgu. In 1718 Zahra also executed ‘A glory of angels, puttini amongst clouds and inscriptions according to a design drawn up by the artisan himself’ for the chapel dedicated to St Francis of Paola located within the Church dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Birgu.

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70 The Cathedra Petri was executed between 1647 and 1653.
71 This commission was to be completed in two years for the sum of 180 scudi. NAV, Not. P.P. Saliba, R 424/5, ff. 564-565.
74 NAV, Not. A. Pace, R 386/2, ff. 89-90. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
Figure 5: The Gloria in the apsidal cap of the Oratory of the Crucifix, executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra.

Figure 6: The Gloria which is part of the Cathedra Sancti Petri, by Gian Lorenzo Bernini.
The Gloria within the apsidal cap behind the high altar of the Balzan parish church (1711-1714) is a notable example which was mainly designed by Pietro Paolo Zahra himself (Plate 24). Despite having agreed with the procurators of the altar; Reverend Domenico Tonna and Baptista Agius, to carve the altar reredos according to his own design, it appears that the procurators made amendments to the scheme. At the centre of the Gloria is a silver dove, symbol of the Holy Spirit, with gold rays which project from behind this central motif in irregular clusters. The outer projection of these rays terminates with a ring of winged cherub heads and putti which frolic around clusters of clouds. The dove is the focal point of all the action, as the putti gesture towards it or gaze directly at it. Zahra succeeds in achieving a symmetrically composed, harmonious effect.

The Gloria at the Oratory of the Crucifix is the most ambitious conception which the sculptor has attempted to execute so far in his career. Zahra follows the established iconography for the portrayal of God the Father as a majestic bearded figure. In the case of the Oratory of the Crucifix, the Eternal Father looks directly beneath Him, at His crucified Son. This direct interaction between the reredos and the titular sculpture creates a theatrical, unified effect and enhances the termination’s pictorial nature. God’s wide open arms can be seen as gesture of benevolence as He offers His only Son to redeem humanity. The drapery which swirls in an upwards and circular manner around the figure enhances the dramatic qualities of the work. This drapery is executed in large planes with deep folds; as had become characteristic of Pietro Paolo Zahra’s figurative sculptures. As has been noted, this is very typical of Roman Baroque works, and can be traced to Bernini’s St Longinus (Plate 15).

In this case, the Gloria is part of a whole decorative scheme, thus full effect is achieved in the unified arrangement of the apsidal decoration. As can be noted in the other instances when Zahra sculpts the central figure of God, his lack of training in the study of human anatomy becomes very evident due to a somewhat distorted pose. The drapery does not give away the underlying figure, rather it disguises it through the use of heavy folds. The arrangement of this Gloria is not a flamboyant one; the rays are relatively spaced out and the space is not overcrowded with angelic beings. The rays

75 Refer to (Appendix, Figure A7) The decorative scheme cost 350 scudi. NAV, Not. G. M. Felice, R 259/13 (1709-11), ff. 317-318 (1710-11)
76 As a result of these changes, Zahra required additional payment, and this case resulted in a litigation between the two parties. NAV Not. D. G. Bonavita, R 62/3, ff. 270-272. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
of the Gloria are partially covered in some instances by a few clouds with winged cherub heads upon them. The apsidal cap also features two oval windows which are framed by sculptural motifs, however the Gloria does not abide strictly to the space which is left and parts of the decoration of the windows are hidden by the clouds executed in low relief.

It is evident that by this time, Zahra had already adopted a number of typologies in his work which he repeated with minor alterations. The figure of the Eternal Father comes very close to the one executed for the Altar of the Annunciation in Zurrieq (Plate 26b). Both are portrayed in the same pose as they partially kneel on a bed of clouds, and follow the same facial typology. The figures are supported in mid-air by winged putti. The same can be noted of the cherub heads and the chubby putti; whilst they are not direct copies of each other, they are all very close in modelling and execution.

These typologies also emerge in Zahra’s most ambitious work; the figurative scheme for the south transept dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory in the Parish Church of Zebbug which dates to 1742 (Plate 26c). As the apsidal cap in the church of Zebbug is of considerable size, Zahra has room to create a much more elaborate scheme. Above the Gloria of the Eternal Father is another Gloria of the Holy Spirit (Plate 25). It is placed directly above the stained-glass window which acts as a source of direct light on the scheme. This follows the same basic structure as the one in Balzan; however the rays are completely encircled by a ring of decorative clouds. Not compartmentalized by the decorative foliage and architectural features.

The facing north transept of the Zebbug Parish church, dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary (Plate 27) was decorated before transept of the Souls in Purgatory; however it suffered the loss of the lower part of the decoration due to the Purist movement in the nineteenth century. It had been believed that the whole altar reredos was a reconstruction, however photographic evidence of the reconstruction work in progress shows that the upper level (above the cornice) remains original (Plate 28). The adoring angels and putti below the apsidal cap are a later plaster

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78 In the nineteenth century there was a reaction against the Baroque style by the Nazarenes and Purists.
79 This fact and the photograph have been brought to my attention by Joe Borg, who had intended to publish a paper on the subject.
intervention which attempted to restore a Neo-Baroque spirit to the scheme. The figures in the apsidal cap conform to Pietro Paolo Zahra’s typologies, particularly the playful winged putti. Thus the original apsidal cap sculpture can be attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra on a stylistic basis, as notarial deeds or documents regarding this commission have not been traced. The side altar which dates to 1736, dedicated to Our Lady of Charity (Plate 29) located within the same transept of the church is documented to be the work of Pietro Paolo Zahra,\(^{80}\) hence increasing the probability that Zahra was responsible for the decoration of the entire transept, as was the case with the south transept.

The main element of the apsidal cap of the altar dedicated to the Holy Rosary is the central area with the Gloria of the Holy Trinity which comes remarkably close to that by Andrea Pozzo (1642-1709) for the altar of St. Ignatius Loyola for the church of Il Gesu in Rome (Plate 30b). Christ holds on to a symbol of the cross, whilst God the Father has his left arm raised in blessing as he rests his right arm on a blue orb. Behind the two figures is the third member of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit which takes the form of a dove with gold rays which project from behind him. Andrea Pozzo’s work is unquestionably superior to the local variation, especially in the rendering of the anatomy and intricate details. The possibility that Maltese artists and artisans acquired knowledge of such works and typologies through the distribution of prints was quite high, as the Roman Catholic Church sought to diffuse the new iconography of the triumphant church.

The origin of the iconography of the Gloria can be traced to the commission which Gian Lorenzo Bernini was given by Pope Alexander VII; that of building an extravagant *macchina* which would give prominence to the relic of the chair of Saint Peter.\(^{81}\) As the Basilica of Saint Peter’s is of enormous dimensions, Bernini conceived the Cathedra Sancti Petri on a monumental scale, in order for it to act as a suitable apsidal termination and also act as the culmination of the decorative program which he had undertaken within the Eternal City. The Cathedra was erected between 1657 and 1666.\(^{82}\)

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\(^{80}\) The cost of this altar reredos was 150 scudi. 27 September 1736. NAV, Not. A. Pullicino, R 408/21, ff. 44-45. See J. Debono 2010
\(^{81}\) Wittkower 2010, p. 121
\(^{82}\) It was unveiled on the 16\(^{th}\) January 1666. Wittkower 2010, p.279
The richly ornamented throne in gilded bronze, which is at the centre of the Cathedra Sancti Petri, gives the illusion of being partially suspended in mid-air, and is loosely linked to the Four Fathers of the Church: St Ambrose and St Augustine of the Roman Church; and St Athanasius and St John Chrysostom of the Greek Church. The religious significance is an affirmation of the consistency of the teachings of the Doctors of the Church with Saint Peter's original teachings as they developed theological doctrine. The Chair of Saint Peter symbolizes the everlasting continuity of the Roman Catholic doctrine and its promise of infallibility. It is a demonstration of the Church’s triumphs over all heresies throughout the centuries.

The apsidal termination engages the viewer on a spiritual level through the intense visual language. The viewer is led to a full expressive experience which depends on the act of emotional participation rather than rational interpretation. The gold gilt which captures the rays of sunlight also gives it an ethereal aura and more visual significance. The permanent nature of the gospels is manifested through the symbol of the Holy Spirit, the dove which accompanies the teaching of the church. It is at the centre of the angelic glory and the angels react dramatically to it.

The Cathedra Sancti Petri features the first known example of a rayed Gloria within a sculptural decoration. Clusters of angels upon clouds which surround an important personage such as the Virgin Mary and the Eternal Father had been a popular pictorial motif throughout the centuries. However it was Bernini who adapted this pictorial image and transformed it into a sculptural scheme without losing the fluidity or chromatic nuances achieved in painting. The central window, surrounded by golden clouds and angels flying between rays of light, casts mystical warmth through the basilica. Despite the fact that Bernini does not seem to have had a premeditated plan for the transformation of the Vatican, his work which revolves around Saint Peter’s Basilica acts as a complete spiritual decorative program which is the finest example of the spirit of the Baroque age on such a large scale.

The Gloria which forms part of the Cathedra Sancti Petri was the main feature which served to attract the pilgrim’s attention upon entering the enormous Basilica in the Vatican, thus it was necessary for it to be visually striking and of immense

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83 Wittkower 2010, p.121
84 Wittkower 2010, p.120
proportions. The gold gilding adds to the dramatic effect, especially when struck by rays of light. On a considerably smaller scale, the Gloria in the Oratory, is carved and not gilt, and is restricted to the apsidal cap. The figure of God with widespread arms executed in high relief embraces the congregation. Seen as part of the whole conception, the positioning of the all-embracing Creator above His crucified Son in the niche, acts as a representation of God’s sacrifice for humanity’s sins.

The conception and design of this work is that of Gian Lorenzo Bernini, however numerous artists and artisans were engaged for the actual execution of the work. The ones known to have worked on this project are Ercole Ferrata, Antonio Raggi, Lazzaro Morelli, Paolo Naldini and Giovan Paolo Schor.85 Vincenzo Coralli was responsible for the gilding (May to Dec. 1665) and Schor for the painting of the Holy Dove in the Window (Jan. 1666).86

From Bernini’s designs it is evident that he conceived the Cathedra in close conjunction with the baldacchino.87 Bernini studied the Cathedra as it would appear from the entrance of the church seen through and framed by the columns of the baldacchino.88 Thus the baldacchino also functions as a decorative framing device, to a certain extent emphasizing the pictorial qualities of the Cathedra (Plate 31). The baldacchino acts as a visual focus within the basilica; it itself is a very large structure and acts as a visual mediator between the enormous scale of the building and the human scale of the people celebrating the religious ceremonies at the papal altar beneath its canopy.89

During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, art produced in Italy was exported throughout the Christian world in order to strengthen the image of the Roman Catholic Church through a unified artistic language. Rome was at the forefront of the creation of this new style. The manner of decoration and typologies which permeated the

85 Ercole Ferrata, Antonio Raggi, Lazzaro Morelli, Paolo Naldini also worked with Bernini on the Ponte Sant Angelo project which will be discussed in Chapter Four.
86 A number of these artists work with Gian Lorenzo Bernini on the project of the Ponte Sant Angelo which is discussed in Chapter Four. Wittkower 2010, p.121
87 Wittkower 2010, p.121 This baldachinno is at the centre of the crossing and directly under the dome of the basilica. It was intended to mark, in a monumental way, the location of Saint Peter’s tomb which lies beneath the high altar of the basilica. Commissioned by Pope Urban VIII, the work began in 1623 and ended in 1634.
89 Wittkower 2010, p.121
Vatican through the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini was emulated throughout the rest of Italy. It was not the sole dominant style, as classicizing works were still being produced. However it was the style which best encompassed the image of a triumphant Church. The Gloria of the Cathedra Sancti Petri was later transformed and adapted profusely by other artists. As can be seen in the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, the rays of light did not remain linked solely to the image of the Holy Spirit, but were also used as a backdrop to various religious themes.

This diffusion of established Roman Baroque typologies can be seen in the marble Gloria of the Eternal Father found within the Corsini chapel in the church of Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence (Plate 32). After suffering damage caused by a fire in the church, the chapel was rebuilt in 1675 by the architect and designer Pier Francesco Silvani (1620–1685). The titular and lateral altar pieces are marble relief sculptures by Giovanni Battista Foggini (1652-1725) which depict scenes from the life of the recently canonized San Andrea Corsini. Above the titular altar is a remarkable sculpture of the Eternal Father surrounded by clusters of gold rays.

In this Gloria, the Eternal Father has his arms spread in a gesture of benediction and welcoming, as He is suspended upon a cluster of clouds and winged cherubs, with a winged putto on either side of Him (Plate 33). This scheme comes to mind upon viewing the Gloria in the Oratory of the Crucifix, as the basic elements are present and come very close to the Roman work. Such similarities between works executed throughout this period, in different locations, is a manifestation of the successful attempts of the Roman Catholic Church in creating a unified visual language which reflected the spirit of the age.

The influence of Roman Baroque art on the Maltese Islands was made possible due to the fact that the Order of St. John looked to Roman art when they required artistic commissions, thus the relationship with the Papal City was strengthened. The Order of St. John was also dependent on the Pope himself, thus it was natural for the Order to commission art which was created in the Papal State.

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90 Francesco Silvani studied in Rome. The chapel was completed in 1685.
91 Andrea Corsini (1302–1373) was canonized in 1629 by Pope Urban VIII.
92 For a thorough analysis of works imported from Rome, see Sciberras 2004
It was towards the late seventeenth century that the admiration of the art of the Roman Baroque by the Order of St John became manifested in their commissions. The important decision to import Roman Baroque sculpture was taken whilst their Conventual Church was still very much a bare building. Hence a thorough transformation in both sculptural and painterly aspects could take place (Plate 34).

The Order desired the works of art which it commissioned to reflect its importance, hence the best artists which Rome could offer were engaged. 93 This was due to the fact that the decoration and embellishment of the Conventual Church of St. John was a task which was held high in importance by the members of the Order. The adornment of the interior of the church was made in honour of their venerated patron saint: St. John the Baptist. The fact that all langues held different chapels within the church was also an important factor in this development.

Mattia Preti (1613-1699), who was in Malta working for the Knights of St. John is the possible author of the first-known sculpted Gloria on the Maltese Islands. This is found within the Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, adjacent to the Church of Porto Salvo in Valletta (Figure 7). 94 The oratory was decorated by Preti, thus it is very probable that this stone-carved Gloria was of his design, if not execution. At the centre of this Gloria is the Holy Eucharist within a gold monstrance. The closely knit rays of this Gloria span into a wide circle, projecting even below the altar painting. Clusters of clouds and pairs of winged cherub heads are distributed in a symmetrical manner around the picture frame and towards the outer area of the Gloria. The overall effect is an awe-inspiring, serene one which is not based on dynamic movement.

93 K. Sciberras 2004, p.1
94 For more on this Oratory, see E.V. Borg, *The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament Valletta*, (Malta : P.E.G.) 1988
Figure 7: The Gloria found in the Oratory dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament, at the Church of Porto Salvo. Design attributed to Mattia Preti.
The most awe-inspiring Baroque Gloria on the Maltese Islands forms part of the apsidal termination for the Conventual church of Saint John, and was imported from Rome. It is also the oldest-known imported Gloria present on the islands. It acts as a magnificent polychromized backdrop to Giuseppe Mazzuoli’s white marble group representing St. John baptizing Christ in the River Jordan (Plate 35). There is a possibility that the design for a Gloria had been part of Melchiorre Cafà’s original project for the choir termination and was probably transmitted through the project of his brother Lorenzo.

The bronze Gloria of the Holy Spirit, manufactured by Giovanni Giardini (1646-1721) is a spectacular metal sculpture in relief, with a combination of bronze and gilt parts. The central rayed motif, which ‘explodes’ from the representation of the dove of the Holy Spirit, is gilt and set against the bronze of the clouds and the gilt flying putti (Plate 35b). Giovanni Giardini was an exceedingly talented silversmith, and executed large-scale works as a metal founder. The commission for the Gloria for the Knights of St John came about when he was appointed to the position of Founder of the Sacro Palazzo Apostolico in 1698, hence enforcing the fact that the Order desired top quality work. This Gloria is one of his major works, as it is remarkable for its stylistic interpretation and for its technical accomplishment.

Giardini’s main source of inspiration seems to have been the Gloria accompanying the image of the Virgin for the main altar of S. Maria in Campitelli, Rome (Plate 36), for which Melchiorre Cafà is recorded to have produced a model at the time that he was working on the Maltese project. It is uncertain however whether Cafà was also responsible for the design of this Gloria, or whether it was invented with the assistance of the architect Carlo Rainaldi. The Campitelli scheme is in turn, obviously derived from Bernini’s invention for the Cathedra Sancti Petri for St. Peter’s Basilica. The major difference between these two magnificent Glorias is that Bernini’s grouping of the rays which achieves the effect of different planes of relief,
as well as the compact arrangement of angels are abandoned in favour of a full ‘exploding’ motif with putti and cherub heads dispersed at intervals within the clouds.

Thus, a different effect from Bernini’s is achieved in the Campitelli Gloria, particularly in the sense of movement created as well as the textural effects. Giardini’s Gloria, as well as most of the Glorias present on the islands, adopts the Campitelli scheme of a full circular representation of rays with a similar grouping of angels and putti; which play in between the clouds, rather than creating a collective sense of movement.

The presence of Giardini’s creation within the Conventual Church must have been the source of inspiration for a number of works which include this motif. As the Gloria is a polychromised Baroque macchina, the full effect could be appreciated by the Maltese artists who visited the Conventual Church. It must have left quite an impression on them as the motif of the Gloria became merged with sculptural reredos, particularly in the apsidal cap.
Chapter Three:

The Angeli Adoranti
and the Berninesque Tradition
By the first decades of the eighteenth century, the theme of the *angeli adoranti* had become part of the established Baroque repertoire in Italian cities, and it was also being diffused throughout other Roman Catholic countries. Within the Oratory of the Crucifix, the *angeli adoranti* are represented as part of the altar reredos for the titular altar.

The late years of 1720 saw Pietro Paolo Zahra reaching a certain level of maturity and competence within his work. The rendering of the sculpted figures had lost most of the rigidity and awkwardness which had been very evident in his earlier work; most noticeably in the altar reredoses within the church of the Friar Minor Conventuals in Rabat. Apart from the new naturalness which his figures acquired, he was also working on more ambitious and elaborate inventions.

By the mid-1720s Pietro Paolo was also an architect. The most important of his architectural work dates to c1725 when he was given the task to design the building of the small church dedicated to St. James in Zurrieq in around 1725. This particular commission was very probably brought about by family connections, as Zahra’s wife, Agostina was the sister of the parish priest of Zurrieq. This church is another example of a unified Baroque conception for the interior space of a building. As the interior space was also designed by Pietro Paolo Zahra, it can be used for a comparative study with the decorative scheme of the Oratory of the Crucifix, particularly as they were executed almost consecutively.

The execution of the titular altar reredos was given to a member of the Fabri family of *scalpellini*, who worked on Zahra’s design. Despite the evident differences in the style of execution between the titular altars and the two side altars, the design of the main altar is very typical of Pietro Paolo Zahra (Plate 37). It consists of flowing scroll-like motifs and garlands of foliage, which are characteristic of the decorative Baroque repertoire. It is immediately evident that the rendering of these two angels is not by Zahra himself, as the figures do not engage with either the work of art which they

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101 *Infra* Discussed in Chapter One.
102 In the notarial deed dating to the 23rd August 1722, Francesco La Rosa and the master builder Domenico Bigeni and the worker Domenico Galdes are commissioned to build a three-storeyed house according to the plans which Zahra designed. NAV, Not. A. Vivieri, R487/7 (1721-230, ff. 501-503 (1721-22). Published in J. Debono, 2010.
103 Records of this particular commission have not been traced, however the church was consecrated in 1731; work on the altars had been terminated before.
104 K. Sciberras 2010, p. 35
105 So far it is unknown which member of the Fabri family executed the work.
flank, or the viewer. More evidently, the typology of the figures is radically different from Zahra’s; the ones executed by the Fabri scalpellino are considerably more rigid and are portrayed in a full frontal pose. These angels are also distinctly smaller in size when compared to Zahra’s angels, and come closer to earlier Baroque reredoses.

In the case of the two side altars which are designed as well as executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra, the involvement of the two angels placed on either side of the painting with the work itself, as well as with the viewers is visually-arresting. The angels seem to be an extension of the painting, as they participate in the scene depicted through their gaze and gestures. Zahra makes use of typical Baroque affetti in order to lead the gaze of the viewer towards the Virgin Mary. Their graceful pose of veneration is typical of the angeli adoranti typology. The dialogue which is present between the sculpted angels and the paintings is a direct one, suggestive of the fact that the sculptor and painter worked closely together on this project. The paintings were executed by Pietro Paolo’s talented painter son, Francesco Zahra, and the influence of the father’s decorative style on the son can be noticed within these altars.

In the altar dedicated to the Annunciation of the Virgin (Figure 8) the angel on the left hand side looks down on to the scene of the Annunciation, with his hands clasped together in prayer, as do the winged putti which are depicted in the upper section of the painting. The angel on the right gestures towards the scene as he looks directly at the viewers in order to guide their gaze. The painted putti and the sculpted ones above the picture frame are of the same general typology. These sculpted putti support the figure of God upon clouds as He oversees the annunciation of the birth of His Son.

The rendering of the drapery, both in the painting as well as in the stone sculpted figures, is very bold, with wide plains and sharp curves and angles. It does not cling to the shape of the figures, rather it swirls dramatically upwards almost engulfing the bodies. The only exception is the rendering of the Virgin’s drapery within the painting, which is very calm and linear in comparison. This interaction between the sculpture and the painting is typical of Baroque works which favour an engagement between the different arts.

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106 For more one Francesco Zahra and his artistic career, see Sciberras 2010
Figure 8: Altar dedicated to the Annunciation

Figure 9: Altar dedicated to the Virgin of the Light

Figure 10: The angeli adoranti within the Oratory of the Crucifix.
The angel on the right hand side of the Altar of the Virgin of the Light (Figure 9) comes very close to the one occupying the same position in the Oratory of the Crucifix (Figure 10). The youthful angel tilts his head towards the scene unfolding in the painting and rests suspended on clouds, with one arm outstretched in a welcoming gesture. The elegant poses of these two angels contributes to the charm of the whole reredos. The position in which the angel on the left is portrayed seems to be an adaptation of the angel which is found on the right hand side in the earlier altar dedicated to Immaculate Conception at the Friar Minor Conventuals Church in Rabat. The pose is mirrored, as both angels are half-kneeling on clouds, with one hand held out in resignation to the Virgin Mary. This angel looks up towards the two winged putti who hold a crown and a banner, which very probably had an inscription written on it.

This commission was terminated during the year that work on the Oratory of the Crucifix commenced, hence similarities in mode of execution, as well as the typologies of figures used, are very evident. Within the Oratory of the Crucifix, the two larger than life angels who are placed on either side of the Crucifix seem to be older than the youths flanking the paintings in the church of St. James. This gives the reredos a more mature and solemn effect than the light-hearted, charming ones in Zurrieq. Both of the angels have a winged putto being supported on the same gathering of clouds upon which they kneel.

For Pietro Paolo Zahra, the commission for the carving of the interior of the new Oratory of the Crucifix was a particularly important one, as he was a member of the same confraternity. Thus for his design he looks back to his more successful typologies and includes adaptations of them within this sculptural scheme. Similarities between his figures have already been noted, and this seems to have been the manner of work of the sculptor who had created a number of typologies inspired by the Roman Baroque tradition, and then adapted them to the different altars. The playful putti which are included in this scheme are all executed in different positions from each other, but they follow the same general appearance of all the other winged putti which he executed before, as well as after, this Oratory.

The angeli adoranti which are located in the upper section, beside the niche which contains the wooden Crucifixion of Christ, are of a more sombre expression than the
majority of Zahra’s angels. They are witnessing the sacrifice of the Son of God and their manner is one which hints at sorrow and their reflection upon this scene. The posture and gestures of the angel found on the left hand side of the Crucifix derives from Pietro Paolo Zahra’s own earlier altar reredos in the Augustinian church in Rabat, dedicated to St. Anthony the Abbot (Plate 38).\textsuperscript{107} This angel comes considerably close to the one found in Rabat, almost a mirror image, as both of the youthful figures have their head bowed down in veneration, with their arms crossed over their chest as they kneel in front of the respective altar pieces. The flowing locks of hair and the general appearance of the drapery folds are also very close to each other, however the angel in the Augustinian church seems to lack the air of gravity which the later angel possesses.

These two angels are a very clearly derived from Ciro Ferri’s reliquary which is currently housed at the Museum of St. John’s Co-Cathedral (Plates 39a- 39d). This monstrance itself was also the outcome of different influences which were merged together into a successful whole. Most importantly, the silver and copper reliquary by Ciro Ferri is inspired by Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s creation for the Cappella del Sacro Sacramento (Plate 40a).\textsuperscript{108}

Bernini’s tabernacle consists of a central structure which is a miniature version of the Renaissance architect Bramante’s Tempietto; which was built to mark the location of St Peter’s martyrdom.\textsuperscript{109} On either side of this round structure in which the Eucharist is housed, are two large angels who kneel in veneration.\textsuperscript{110} The angels possess an introspective quality that can be seen in the sculptures which Gian Lorenzo Bernini executed in his maturity. Ciro Ferri seems to have been very familiar with this work, as the angel who is found on the left hand side of Ferri’s reliquary comes particularly close to both of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s angels.

The general pose of Ferri’s angel is a reinterpretation of the angel by Bernini which occupies the position on the left hand side of the tabernacle, whilst the garments

\textsuperscript{107} Zahra was engaged in the dismantling and rebuilding of the altar and carving the reredos according to his own design; for the cost of 110 scudi. It is specified that he is to be solely responsible for the sculpture, and that the stone must be supplied by Zahra from Casal Zebbug or Casal Lija. See Appendix, Figure A3. On the 1\textsuperscript{st} May 1722, Zahra acknowledged the receipt of the full payment.


\textsuperscript{109} The tabernacle dates to 1676.

\textsuperscript{110} K. Sciberras 2004, p.83
and the manner in which the arms are folded on the chest in a gesture of prayer seem to be derived from the angel on the right hand side. In this instance, the drapery folds of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s angels do not possess an overly dramatic quality which is typically indicative of turbulent or strong emotions. Rather the folds are closely gathered despite being emphatic. Whilst the angel on the left is immersed in prayer, the one on the right acts as a mediator between the viewer and the tabernacle in which the Holy Eucharist is held. This angel looks directly at the viewers and sets an example for imitation.111

Before arriving at the decision to place the angels kneeling on either side of the tabernacle, Gian Lorenzo Bernini explored various different options. From drawings which are housed at the Hermitage and clay bozzetti which form part of the collection of the Fogg Museum, the thorough exploration of the role of the angels in sculpture which Gian Lorenzo Bernini made can be seen.112

The drawing shows an entirely different design to the final one, as in it the tabernacle is being upheld by angels who also hold candlesticks.113 Lavin discusses Bernini’s preliminary ideas and suggests that this composition would have given the illusion that the tabernacle is hovering above the angels, and the flickering light of the candles would have added to the ethereal quality of the work. The device of having the main object of veneration being supported above figures had already been used by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in the Cathedra Sancti Petri, where the throne which houses the relic of St Peter’s chair hovers above the Four Fathers of the Church.114

Bozzetti of the angels in this design give insight into how deeply Gian Lorenzo Bernini considered this option. The angels are half-kneeling on the altar whilst holding the candlestick and supporting the tempietto. The ephemeral nature which this creation was intended to achieve can also be seen in the loose modelling of the clay

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112 Only few bozzetti and drawings remain, it is very probable that Gian Lorenzo Bernini had made more studies for this project.
113 This drawing has been published by R. Wittkower in Bernini: The Sculptor of the Roman Baroque (London, Phaidon) First published in 1955 (Third edition 2010) p.297
drapery in the *bozzetto*, as well as the gestures which seem to be transient.\textsuperscript{115} The miraculous nature of the Eucharist as a revelation is emphasized as this design reflects the spirit of the triumphant nature of the Roman Catholic Church, through the Holy Eucharist, which was at the heart of the Counter Reformation.\textsuperscript{116} The tabernacle becomes a metaphor for Christ’s sepulchre.\textsuperscript{117} However, there is a change in thought for the final idea, for which three different *bozzeotti* still exist\textsuperscript{118}. In the final creation, the angels do not carry candles or gesture dramatically, but rather they epitomize the virtue of reflection in front of the miracle of the Eucharist.\textsuperscript{119}

Instead of being elevated, the tabernacle rests directly on the altar, with angels which kneel on either side as they adore the Eucharist. The two angels pose in different manners; one is consumed by reflection on the nature of the Eucharist, as his head is inclined down towards the altar with his hands clasped in prayer. The other angel looks towards the spectator as he rests his crossed arms on his chest in devotion. These *bozzeotti* of angels emit the same result of balance and permanence which the final creation present in the Vatican does.\textsuperscript{120} The spontaneous markings present on the *bozzeotti* appear as smooth folds of material in the final work, however the freshness of the *bozzeotti* is not lost, as Gian Lorenzo Bernini seems to have developed a method which accurately translates the features of his clay studies on to the final work.\textsuperscript{121}

The process by which Gian Lorenzo Bernini arrived to the final conception shows that there was a crucial shift in what the sculptor wanted to portray through his work. The theme of the triumph of the Eucharist and the Church gives way to the importance of the real presence of the body of Christ within the Eucharist itself.\textsuperscript{122} This work was begun in 1673 and completed around 1674.\textsuperscript{123}

By this time Ciro Ferri was already working on his own tabernacle which he executed before the Maltese work. The tabernacle found in St. Maria in Vallicella in


\textsuperscript{116} Lavin ‘Calculated Spontaneity. Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch.’ 2007, p. 391

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{118} The *bozzetti* are housed at The Fogg, Harvad Art Museums.

\textsuperscript{119} Wittkower 2010, p. 297

\textsuperscript{120} Lavin ‘Calculated Spontaneity. Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch.’ 2007, p. 391


\textsuperscript{122} I. Lavin ‘Calculated Spontaneity. Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch.’ 2007, p.391

\textsuperscript{123} Wittkower 2010, p.297
Rome (Plate 41) is highly original in its conception. Documents about this commission show that it had a complex history. The members of the order of Oratorians who commissioned the tabernacle had refused a number of models prior to agreeing to Ciro Ferri’s design. In 1672, Ferri’s model was made with assistance of a student at the Florentine academy, Carlo Marcellini. Apart from the financial problems which arose with this work, changes were also made to the original design and there seem to have been mistakes made during the casting of the work.

Hence the ciborium which is present in the church can be considered to be a compromise from the original idea. Ferri had originally conceived the design to consist of an altar, above which lay the Lamb of God which was adored by angels. The flying angels were intended to be placed very close to the Eucharistic motif in order to form a tightly knit composition. This invention is essentially very painterly in its conception, using the juxtaposition of the tabernacle with the Lamb of God to act as a metaphor for the sacrificial altar.

It was an entirely innovative idea to have the angels executed to seem as though they were flying. The angels which Gian Lorenzo Bernini had executed for the Gloria which forms the upper part of the Cathedra Sancti Petri do appear to be caught in flight; however they give the overall appearance of a mass of tangled bodies and are not as clearly defined as those which Ciro Ferri executes. Jennifer Montagu suggests that Ferri was probably inspired by the angelic figures in paintings and the macchine erected for the Forty Hour’s Devotion when he was creating this work. These angels do not serve to hold the tabernacle, but they float, seemingly without support besides the Divine Mystery of Christ’s sacrifice.

The silver and copper reliquary which Ciro Ferri executed for the Grand Master of the Order of St John (Plate 40b), Gregorio Carafa, follows the basic structure of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s work; namely a central decorated structure, which in this case was designed to contain the hand of St John the Baptist, with two large angels placed on

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124 For more on the commission for the reliquary see J. Montagu, ‘Ciro Ferri’s Ciborium in Santa Maria in Vallicella’, Source: Notes in the History of Art, viii, 4/1 (1989), 49-57
125 Ibid.
126 Ibid.
127 Ibid.
128 Infra The Gloria and the Cathedra Sancti Petri have been discussed in Chapter Two.
129 Montagu suggests that these angels can be considered as a continuation of the same theme which is present in the altarpiece above the tabernacle by Rubens, despite the difference in scale.
either side of the actual reliquary. Ciro Ferri follows Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s typology very loosely and adapts the motifs and elements in order to create an inspiring work of art. Overall Ciro Ferri’s reliquary is more decorative than Bernini’s which is of a more classicized nature. There is more emphasis on flowing lines and intricate surface decoration. Two playful putti are included under the main central structure, giving the work a lighter, more charming air.

Ciro Ferri opted for a more compact composition than Bernini’s. The kneeling angels are not placed upon separate pedestals besides the central structure, but they kneel on volutes, thus they are placed closer to the reliquary which is suspended on a thick knop and narrow stem. This gives the composition a balanced, pyramidal structure.

The faces of the kneeling angels almost mirror each other; however they hold very different poses. As has already been mentioned, the angel on the left comes very close in posture to Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s angels, whilst the one on the right hand side has his arms down by his side, in a gesture of adoration and awe. These angels do not make direct contact with the viewer; however through their own intensity of expression, they serve as models to be emulated. The drapery folds of Ferri’s angels are rendered in the same fluid manner as Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s; closely knit garment folds fall much closer to the actual figure of the angels. The Maltese reliquary comes very close to his tabernacle for Sta. Maria in Vallicella, particularly in the modelling of the facial features and the rendering of the drapery. It shows Ciro Ferri’s understanding of the theme of the *angeli adoranti* as he reinterprets his own ideas as well as those of Bernini.

As there are no known records of Pietro Paolo Zahra’s travels, it is highly unlikely that he had first-hand knowledge of the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini or of his followers. However he must have been intimately familiar with the works commissioned from Rome on the Maltese Islands, particularly those within St. John’s

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130 The reliquary contained the right hand of St John the Baptist until 1798.
131 K. Sciberras 2004, p. 83
133 K. Sciberras 2004, p. 83
From what has already been discussed, it is very clear that Zahra referred to Ciro Ferri’s reliquary when designing his own angels. The angel which is found on the right hand side of the Crucifixion in the Oratory looks down towards the congregation and acts as a visual aid to direct their gaze to the Crucifixion. The drapery folds of this angel swirl more dramatically than those of its counterpart, as they seem to have been caught by a gust of wind from below. Despite the success of the overall scheme, Pietro Paolo still seems to have had some trouble with the execution of the human form; this is most noticeable in the awkward positioning of the legs of the angel on left.

The typology of *angeli adoranti* is used to its utmost potential in the exuberant transept termination dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory in the Parish church of Zebbug (Plate 3) which was completed by 1747. For this commission, Zahra received the full payment; 635 scudi from the Procurator of the Sodality, as well as an additional 60 scudi for the extra work entailed. The overwhelming effect the reredos achieves is due to the predominant importance which figurative sculpture assumes in the entire decoration. The dynamism and movement it creates is typical of works of the Roman Baroque. The original design for the project was the work of Mro. Antonio Panza in 1737, however Gio Nicola Buhagiar made amendments to it after he was appointed to be in charge of the project by the Bishop in 1742. For this scheme, Zahra had the help of Gerolamo, Francesco and Carlo Fabri. Overall the effect produced by this dynamic reredos is overwhelming; however artistic weakness is evident in the more challenging poses. Pietro Paolo also executed the side altar on this transept dedicated to St. Catherine of Alexandria (Plate 42) in 1742, in the same manner, following his own design.

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134 Pietro Paolo is recorded to have worked for the Knights of the Order of St. John by 1716, specifically within the Chapel of Aragon, Catalonia and Navarre, however it has not yet been determined what his contribution was.
136 ‘.. Don Joanne Maria quo supra nomine stipulante alia scuta sexaginta de tarenis 12: pro scuto praesidentialiter coram nobis Notario, et testibus infrascriptis in moneta aurea, argentea, et aenea de contanti; et sunt dicta scuta 60: pro satisfaction tot laboris secutis in sculptura et ornamentis dici Venerandi Altiris Agonaie ultra illos labors signatos virtute praedictarum binarum obligationom.’
138 S. Caruana 2010, p.33
139 This altar had previously been dedicated to St. Barbara. NAV, Not. A. Pullicino, R 408/26 ff. 237-238. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
Chapter Four:
The Angels
Holding the Passion Symbols;
A Comparative Analysis
Four years after the interior carving and sculptural work within the oratory of the Crucifix was complete, the commission for six angel statues arose. In 1737 the confraternity decided to resume the project of decoration according to the original design. Pietro Paolo Zahra was commissioned to execute the six angel statues for the side walls. These angels were to be placed on the side walls of the oratory and had been part of the original design by Pietro Paolo Zahra (Appendix, Figure A2). In the original contract between Giuseppe Muscat; who was one of the procurators of the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix and Pietro Paolo Zahra, it was stated that Zahra had to execute all the carving work which was present in the original design, excluding the six angel statues on the side-walls. Hence it is clear that they formed part of the original conception for the oratory, but for some reason a decision was taken to have them sculpted at a later date.

On the 24th April 1737 it was agreed with the procurator Filippo Russo, who was representing the Confraternity that the sculptures of angels holding the symbols of the Passion of Christ were to be six and a half palmi in height. These were to be completed within one year for the sum of 150 scudi. Payment for the angels was to be split into three equal parts; 50 scudi was given to Pietro Paolo Zahra before the actual works commenced; another 50 when the first three angels were finished; and the last 50 scudi upon completion of the final three. It was specified that these angels were to be carved in stone quarried from Santa Venera. The sculpted angels hold the symbol of the column, the crucifix, the lance, the superscription, the sudarium and the robe and dice (Figure 11). On the second of May 1738, Pietro Paolo acknowledged the receipt of the final 100 scudi from a procurator of the Confraternity; Padron Tommaso Grimani.

These angels derive from the designs for the ten angels upon the Ponte Sant Angelo which date to 1672, and formed part of Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s project (Figure 12). Bernini’s transformation of the Ponte Sant Angelo was a major project and it is very probable that prints or drawings of the angels upon the bridge were made and disseminated throughout Catholic countries.

140 NAV, Not. V. Marchese, R 343/36, ff. 752-753. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
141 Refer to Appendix, Figure A1.
Figure 11: The six angel sculptures executed by Pietro Paolo Zahra for the Oratory of the Crucifix. The Angel holding the cross is a reconstruction after the original was destroyed in the Second World War.
The Angel holding the Garment and Dice is by Paolo Naldini; the Angel holding the Sudarium by Cosimo Fancelli and the Angel holding the Superscription is the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

Figure 12: Six of the ten angel statues on the Ponte Sant Angelo, which were the source of reference for the ones in the Oratory of the Crucifix.
As will be discussed in further detail within this chapter, the angels within the oratory come very close in their pose and gestures to those on the Ponte, thus it shows Zahra knew Bernini’s work relatively well. However, Zahra’s was a rather superficial adopting of the Roman Baroque manner as his work does not have the depth and spiritual intensity which is at the core of Bernini’s conceptions. Neither does it come close to the ones on the Ponte in terms of quality. The angels also lack the technical refinement in the rendering, particularly of the anatomy beneath the drapery folds.

The Ponte Sant Angelo angel statues were part of a major commission which was entrusted to Bernini by Pope Clement IX, just after his election as Pope in 1667. He initiated work on a project for the restoration and redecoration of the Ponte Sant Angelo which included the widening of the roadway running in front of the Castel Sant Angelo from the Borgo Nuovo (Plate 43). This transformation of the bridge which crosses over the River Tiber was not merely an aesthetic or structural decision; the walkway was transformed from a functional crossing into a processional path which symbolizes the Via Dolorosa. Thus the people who were on their way to the heart of the Roman Catholic Church found themselves on a symbolic ‘Way of the Cross’. A narrative which enacts Christ’s suffering up until His death is created when associating the symbols the angels carry with the events they represent.

The use of angels as Eucharistic symbols can be traced to the fifteenth century, where angels were depicted holding instruments of the passion as reminders of Christ’s sacrifice for the salvation of humanity. In the seventeenth century, angels carrying passion symbols gained deeper significance. These ten statues serve to emphasize the notion that true Eucharistic sacrifice is possible only within the Roman Catholic Church, and also as a reminder that through the Church; salvation can be obtained.

For this project, Bernini engaged talented sculptors with whom he had already worked before, as assistants on this project. It seems that Bernini left them at greater liberty with this project, providing only a few workshop sketches which encompassed

143 See also M. Weil, *The History and Decoration of the Ponte S. Angelo* (Pennsylvania State University Press) 1973
145 See D. R. Marshall 2003 for more on the symbolism of the Ponte Sant Angelo.
146 Ibid.
his initial ideas for the project. It is very evident the sculptors were given only the basic parameters for the angel, as each of the sculptures is very distinctly different from the rest. The sculptors who worked on this project were already quite distinguished within their own right, and had worked on other important commissions with Bernini. As Bernini worked so profusely and held a large workshop of assistants; as well as collaborated with different sculptors on numerous projects, his manner of sculpture spread widely around Italy and did not fade away with his death.

In the oratory, the order of the angels as conceived by Bernini is not adhered to. This might be as within the oratory the importance of the narrative itself is not as significant as it is on the Ponte Sant Angelo. On the Ponte, the faithful are on their way to the heart of the Eternal City, hence the angels serve to aid them on this pilgrimage. As they walk past each of the angels, the pilgrims are encouraged to reflect on the different stages of suffering which were inflicted on the Saviour through these angels on the bridge. Hence the order of the angels themselves acquires new importance as it replicates the familiar story of the Passion of Christ. Within the Oratory, the congregation will be seated, not walking past the angels, thus the six angels form part of the decoration of an enclosed space which is dedicated to the salvation achieved through the Passion of Christ. They serve similar purpose to the ones on the Ponte as they all carry symbols of Christ’s passion which aids the viewer in their contemplation of Christ’s Sacrifice.

Within the oratory, the narrative structure becomes subordinate to the whole effect which culminates in the main enactment of the passion which is found in the apsidal termination. Whilst the representation of the angels in the oratory generally follows those of the angels on the Ponte, there can be little comparison in terms of quality. Zahra’s works do not possess the dynamic quality or the expressive depth which the ten angels on the Ponte are imbued with. Bernini had selected a team of leading sculptors to execute this important task, hence the quality of the works is very high. They do not necessarily reflect Bernini’s initial conception in their execution;

the sculptors interpreted the idea freely whilst achieving the desired effect. The quality of the works in the oratory is considerably inferior; Zahra retains his characteristic mode of executing the drapery and facial typologies. As they come close to the ones on the Ponte in pose and overall representation it is highly probable that he was working through prints.

The first angel on the left hand side of the oratory is the one holding the column. This Angel is portrayed in the same pose as the one located on the Ponte Sant Angelo, and is positioned so as to look at the apsidal termination, thus leading the viewers’ gaze. It also is the first Angel in the narrative of the ten on the Ponte Sant Angelo. The column is one of the symbols of the scourging of Christ, a torture which was inflicted upon Him before the crucifixion. Despite being executed in a thoroughly different manner, the movement of the drapery folds of the angel by Zahra follows the same general diagonal flow as those by Antonio Raggi. The angel on the Ponte is draped in a more refined manner, and a fluttering effect – as though the drapery is caught by a slight breeze is achieved. Jennifer Montagu considers Raggi’s angel to be the finest one after Bernini’s own; the passionate drapery that swirls about the figure like a cry of anguish, billowing up to provide a support for the weight of the column and flowing away in a dying moan, and the soft intensity of the angel’s desolate gaze, show Raggi’s own mannerisms in perfect harmony with the drama of the action.

The folds also follow the body closely in some areas, aiding in the visualization of the anatomy beneath the drapes. On the other hand, the drapery folds in Zahra’s work do not give off a sense of fluidity. Rather, as has been noted in other works, they disguise the actual anatomy beneath their bulk. None of the drama created by Antonio Raggi can be experienced when looking at the angel by Zahra. This angel’s face does not reflect or instil a feeling of the sorrow for the Passion of Christ, rather it seems that his lips are slightly upturned giving off the hint of a smile. A noticeable difference between the angels is the fact that Pietro Paolo Zahra’s angel tilts the column towards him, in order to have the figure acting as a support for the weight, whilst Raggi’s Angel holds it effortlessly outwards. Raggi uses thicker and more dramatic folds

149 On the Ponte Sant Angelo there is also an angel holding the Scourge executed by Lazzaro Morelli.
151 Antonio Raggi’s studies for this angel, as well as sketch by Bernini’s workshop are published in M. Weil, ‘The Angels of the Ponte Sant’ Angelo: A Comparison of Bernini’s Sculpture to the Work of Two Collaborators’, Art Journal, vol. 30, 3, Spring 1971 p.257
beneath the column as a support for the extra weight. Pietro Paolo’s angel is almost a mirror-image of the one found in the drawing by Pietro Paolo Troisi for the project of the Altar of Repose for the Cathedral in Mdina (Figure 13).  

Facing the Angel holding the Column, next to the side door entrance, is the Angel holding the Robe of Christ and Dice. This angel is based on the one by Paolo Naldini, which is imbued with a sense of stoic gravitas as he gazes into the distance, away from the items which he holds out. The furrowed brow and deeply set eyes reveal an expressive face which seems to be immersed in thought, and is permeated by a deep sadness.  

The figure is set in a strong contrapposto, with most of the weight being placed on the left leg. The folds of the angel’s drapery almost merge with those of Christ’s garment, as both fall in a soft, swirling manner. It reflects the way in which the garment is being held, particularly through the creation of a cluster of folds under the angel’s right arm which swirls upwards between the feathers of the wings. The drapery also clings quite closely to the body, giving the impression of a soft, light fabric. This angel stands out in its solid pose and linear execution in comparison to the ecstatic effect of movement which the others achieve.  

Despite the fact that Pietro Paolo Zahra’s angel is executed in the same pose as that by Naldini, it gives off an entirely different aura. Zahra attempts to follow the contrapposto pose; however it is not as successful and a certain rigidity permeates the work. Both angels look into the distance, but the sombreness of Naldini’s angel is absent through the same use of the slight hint of a smile as the fronting Angel with the Column. There is no depth of feeling in the facial expression or in the manner in which the garments are executed. The drapery folds follow Zahra’s typical mode of execution as they fall heavily in wide planes with angular folds. The Robe of Christ acquires certain weightiness due to the angel holding it closely to him.  

\[\text{Infra} \] This project will discussed in further detail.  
\[\text{153} \] Paolo Naldini also executed the copy of the Bernini’s own Angel holding the Crown of Thorns  
\[\text{154} \] Jennifer Montagu suggests that his face was modelled on ancient portraits of Alexander the Great.  
\[\text{155} \] J. Montagu 1985, p. 32
Beside the Angel holding the Robe and Dice is the Angel holding the Sudarium. This angel gazes down at the viewer with a sombre countenance as he holds up the sudarium which has the face of Christ imprinted on it. The angel’s face comes very close in expression and execution to the carved one of Christ, and they echo the same expression of sorrow. The way in which the drapes of the angel fall mimics those of the sudarium. The locks of curls of Pietro Paolo Zahra’s angel also fall relatively freely, particularly when compared to the Angel carrying the Robe and Dice which has been discussed above. Both the posture and gesture of this angel are replicated from that on the Ponte Sant Angelo executed by Cosimo Fancelli. Fancelli’s angel looks directly at the cloth which he is holding up. As the Sudarium is considered to be one of Christ’s relics, the angel is portrayed gazing at it with devotion. In this sculpture, the face of Christ is not shown.

The final angel on the right hand side of the oratory is the one holding the Superscription. The acronym INRI, which is said to have been nailed on to Christ’s cross stands for the Latin phrase: Iēsus Nazarēnus, Rēx Iūdaeōrum/ Jesus the Nazarene, King of the Jews. This angel is based on the one by Gian Lorenzo Bernini himself. Initially, Bernini had intended to execute two angels for this project himself, whilst assigning the remaining eight to talented sculptors, with whom he had already worked on other projects. Accordingly he worked on the Angel holding the Superscription and the Angel with the Crown of Thorns (Plate 44a -b). From bozzetti and sketches which still exist of these angels, it is clear that Bernini conceived them as a pair, acting as counterparts to each other.

Irving Lavin notes that Bernini had established the pose of the angel holding the inscription and did not alter it; changes were made to the expressive drapery and not to the figure. Initially Bernini had conceived the angel holding the crown of thorns as a mirror image. He later developed his pose to complement that of the other angel. Upon seeing the nearly completed angels, Pope Clement IX found them to be too

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156 According to Catholic legend, the sudarium was the cloth used by Veronica to wipe Christ’s face as he was on his way to his crucifixion. The image of Christ’s face was imprinted on her cloth.  
157 R. Wittkower 2010, pp. 289-291  
158 A sketch which is believed to by Bernini is published in M. Weil, ‘The Angels of the Ponte Sant’ Angelo: A Comparison of Bernini’s Sculpture to the Work of Two Collaborators’, Art Journal, vol. 30, 3, Spring 1971, p.254  
160 As can be seen in the photo of the nude study bozzetto published by I. Lavin, ‘Calculated Spontaneity. Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch.’ 2007
beautiful to be placed outside, at the mercy of the elements. Thus Bernini continued working on them in order for these angels to be finished to a more scrupulous level of detail, as they were going to be held within closer inspection distance than the ones on the Ponte.\footnote{161}{The Pope had intended to have these angels housed at his relatives, however they remained in Bernini’s studio until one of Bernini’s heirs gave them to San Andrea della Fratte in 1718. They may now be seen flanking the entrance to the choir.}

Bernini then engaged Paolo Naldini to reproduce the Angel with the Crown of Thorns whilst he worked on the Angel with the Superscription himself.\footnote{162}{R. Wittkower 2010, pp. 289-291} At first glance, the two angels with the Superscription seem to be copies of each other. However, upon closer attention it becomes evident that Bernini conceived this angel as a new creation. This one is not part of a pair, like the first angel was; hence it needs to be considered alone. Rudolph Wittkower emphasizes this fact, as well the approximately two year span from the creation of the first angel and that of the second angel.

Bernini’s Angel holding the Superscription on the Ponte Sant Angelo stands in elegant contrapposto. This angel is an externalization of the sorrow felt for the death of Christ.\footnote{163}{I. Lavin, ‘Calculated Spontaneity. Bernini and the Terracotta Sketch.’ 2007, p. 389-391} Bernini’s angel holds the partially scrolled superscription delicately to his right hand side. He looks away from it, down at the passers-by. The manner in which the garment moves upwards around his body is an embodiment of the turbulent spirit of this angel.\footnote{164}{R. Wittkower 2010, pp. 289-291} Bernini emphasizes the soft swirling movement of the drapery; the locks of hair of this angel as well as the feathers and the clouds on which it stands also echo the same softness based on circular shapes.

The angel within the oratory follows the same typology of Zahra’s other angels. It is set in the same basic pose as the one by Bernini. This angel also looks away from the symbol which he is holding; his gaze is focused on the image of the crucified Christ above the altar. He is wrapped by heavy drapery which falls in thick, angular planes. These folds complement the positioning of the superscription, giving the work a well-balanced appearance. Despite Zahra’s angel being a charming work, it does not emanate the same spirit as that of the master. Apart from being a technically inferior
work, it fails to achieve the level of spirituality which is manifest in the work of Bernini.

The Angel holding the Lance stands directly opposite the one holding the Superscription. Along the Ponte Sant Angelo, this angel is the last one in the order of the narrative, as he holds the symbol of the lance, which pierced Christ’s side in order to confirm his death. This angel was sculpted by Domenico Guidi, and the one in the oratory comes relatively close to this work. Domenico Guidi’s angel holds the lance lightly, in a diagonal manner. His gaze follows the direction in which the lance points at. As the spear is held close to the angel’s body, the composition is made more compact. This sculpture is based mainly on diagonal lines; the angel’s hair is swept back in a manner which reflects the angle of the spear. The drapery also flows around the body, echoing the same angle. The symbol’s long narrow shape is reflected and broken up loosely through the angel’s garments. The folds do not fall heavily downwards; rather there is a certain premeditated spontaneity in their rendering.

Zahra’s angel also holds the spear in a diagonal manner, and follows its movement with his gaze. As this spear is considerably longer, the angel gazes further out into the distance at the apsidal termination. The drapery of this angel falls heavily in a diagonal manner, from one side to the other. The garment achieves the impression that it is made of more than one layer, as layers of folds reveal another one beneath.

Of the six Angels which Pietro Paolo Zahra created, one: the Angel holding the cross was destroyed during the bombings of the Second World War. A later reconstruction now stands in its place. It becomes evident that this angel was not the work of Pietro Paolo, as the proportions of the angel are more slender, and the facial typology is rather more refined when compare to the other five. The angel on the Ponte Sant Angelo which holds this symbol is the work of Ercole Ferrata.\footnote{The angel holding the Cross is discussed in Mark Weil’s paper: ‘The Angels of the Ponte Sant’ Angelo: A Comparison of Bernini’s Sculpture to the Work of Two Collaborators.’ A workshop drawing for this work is also published.}
The angels on the Ponte Sant Angelo had also been the source of inspiration for Pietro Paolo Troisi in 1727, as they form part of his drawing intended as a proposal for an Altar of Repose for the Mdina Cathedral (Figure 13). Canon Gourgion had commissioned Troisi to invent an ephemeral structure appropriate for the Cathedral, in order to replace the existing one. Troisi presented a drawing for the movable chapel which had large angels holding the symbols for the Passion of Christ.

These angels in the drawing are not copies of the ones by Bernini and his team of sculptors, but Troisi’s own interpretation of the idea. Pietro Paolo Troisi was a talented and independent artist and he succeeded in appropriating Bernini’s basic idea whilst transforming it for this project. This gives rise to the possibility that Pietro Paolo Zahra became acquainted with the angels on the Ponte through studies made by Troisi before he created his own variations of the typology.

Unfortunately Troisi’s project was discarded and for around two decades there was no mention of a new ephemeral chapel. In 1747, Canon Alberto Portughes and Giovanni Castelleti were assigned to choose a design for this project by the Cathedral Chapter. It seems that they were not pleased with the proposals submitted, as in 1751 Pietro Paolo Troisi’s design was reconsidered and eventually accepted. As Pietro Paolo Troisi had passed away, the role of executing this Baroque macchina was assigned to the current leading artist on the island; Pietro Paolo Zahra’s son Francesco.

Francesco Zahra seems to have referred to Troisi’s drawing as a guideline for this project; executing the main elements and allowing himself to take creative liberties in some aspects (Plate 45a). The four large angels occupy the same role as the ones in the drawing, however the objects which they hold as well as their poses and the overall execution varies (Plate 45b). Francesco was influenced by his father’s decorative manner, as is evident within this chapel. The angels are almost an elegant and finer reworking of the ones present in the Oratory of the Crucifix. The drapery of these few angels falls in smoother, more structured folds and is more elaborate than those in Troisi’s sketch.

166 J. A. Briffa, p.34
167 J. A. Briffa 2009, p.34
168 Ibid.
Figure 13: Pietro Paolo Troisi’s drawing for the Altar of Repose (c 1727).
Conclusion
The Oratory of the Crucifix in Senglea combines – in a regional Maltese manner – several different elements from the Roman Baroque artistic repertoire, associated with Bernini, in order to create an interior decoration which captures the spirit of theatricality of the age.

The coherent relationship between the sculptural work and the architecture is evidence of the fact that Pietro Paolo Zahra worked closely with the architect Francesco Zerafa when creating his design and executing the project. Within the oratory, architectural elements acquire secondary importance as they serve to articulate the interior space whilst acting as a backdrop for the sculptures and carving work.

This oratory is one of the finest examples of coherent planning, according to established parameters and iconography on the Maltese Islands. However, when compared to works being produced internationally, it is obvious that it is of inferior quality. The decorative interior was influential on the islands, and had an impact on the design of oratories in Malta. The Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament, in Zejtun follows the same general type of interior, however it does not feature the elaborate apsidal termination.

Pietro Paolo Zahra arrived at this variant of Roman Baroque sculpture through his filtered knowledge of sources. It can be assumed that his main influence was Pietro Paolo Troisi and his work, which was solidly embedded in an academic background. It was Troisi who introduced Zahra to the typology of the angeli adoranti, which Zahra continues to use throughout his career. Apart from the experience acquired through working with Troisi, Zahra was also exposed to a growing climate of Baroque-inspired decoration on the Maltese islands. Important Roman works which are present on the islands must have been very well known at the time to the local artists, and these were sources of inspiration for them.

Pietro Paolo Zahra spent most of his career developing different approaches to the theme of the angeli adoranti within altar reredoses, discussed in Chapter Three. Despite not having attended any academic knowledge or professional training as a sculptor, Zahra succeeded in elevating himself from an artisan scalpellino. He sought out new and more effective solutions to the use of angelic figures within his altar reredoses. From having the angels as two symmetrically aligned figures on either side
of the altar painting, Zahra eventually had the angelic figures dominate the altar reredos as the overwhelming number of figures fuses with the architecture and gives the space a dynamic sense of movement and theatricality.

Zahra’s angelic sculptures do not reach high levels of merit, nor are they expressive of an intense spirituality; he seems to have opted for the Roman Baroque idiom predominantly for aesthetic purposes. Zahra’s work is characteristically very decorative, making use of flowing motifs and swirling garlands to complement his angels and cherubs. His style was inherited by his painter son who makes use of the same motifs within his own works.

The main motifs found in the Oratory all hark back to the work of Gian Lorenzo Bernini and his followers. The three main typologies which feature in this oratory can all be traced to Bernini’s conceptions. The Gloria in the apsidal cap, which is discussed in Chapter Two, harks back to the glory of angels introduced by Bernini in the Cathedral Sancti Petri. The angeli adoranti, which are discussed in Chapter Three, are also inspired by Bernini’s creation for the Capella del Santo Sacramento, whilst the six angel figures holding symbols of the passion of Christ are based on the ones on the Ponte Sant Angelo. Chapter Four discussed the Angels holding the Passion Symbols

Thus Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s influence can be admired, as his works had such a widespread impact that they reached the Maltese Islands and dominate the sculptural decoration of this oratory. Knowledge of Bernini’s creation by this local sculptor must have been limited to prints of his works, and Pietro Paolo Troisi’s own creations which were inspired by this new Roman manner. As he had not experienced Bernini’s works personally, he was unable to grasp the full effect of the works and use it to inspire his creations. A more superficial approach, which seeks to create effective visual solutions within church interiors, was adopted by Zahra as well as other Maltese sculptors.

Bernini had created these different elements which became part of the Roman Baroque repertoire in order to fulfil certain aesthetic and spiritual needs in his transformation of Rome. Gradually as they were repeated and adapted by other artists and reached locations further afield than the heart of Rome, some of their main qualities were lost and the aesthetic similarities were retained. This can be seen in the
Oratory of the Crucifix, where Pietro Paolo Zahra seeks to create a visual coherence within his design and makes use of the Roman Baroque to achieve such ends. The intensity of feeling which is idiosyncratic of Bernini’s creations has been diffused.
Plates
Plate 1: The apse of the Oratory of the Crucifix (1733) by Pietro Paolo Zahra, Senglea
Plate 2: The altar dedicated to St Joseph, also known as the altar of the Holy Family (1741-1743), by Pietro Paolo Zahra. St Paul's Church, Rabat.
Plate 3: The north transept of the Zebbug parish church, dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory (1742), by Pietro Paolo Zahra.
Plate 4: The altar dedicated to the Annunciation (c1730), by Pietro Paolo Zahra. St James chapel, Zurrieq.
Plate 5: The altar dedicated to the Virgin of the Light (c.1730), by Pietro Paolo Zahra. St James chapel, Zurrieq.
Plate 7: The altar dedicated to St Anthony, by Pietro Paolo Zahra. Minor Conventual Friars Church, Rabat.
Plate 8: Interior of San Andrea al Quirinale (1670), Gian Lorenzo Bernini
Plate 8a: The upper level of the reredos dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady (1711). Minor Conventual Friars, Rabat.

Plate 9: Interior of the Dominican Oratory of the Blessed Sacrament (c1673). Porto Salvo church, Valletta
Plate 10: Plan of the Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea
Plate 11: One of the three bays within the Oratory of the Crucifix. This division is articulated through the blind arcade which acts as a niche for the full-length sculptures of the angels holding the Passion Symbols.

Plate 12: The segmental pediment with a scallop shell motif found above the doorways which lead to the sacristy
Plate 13: The interior of the Oratory following the bombings of April 1942.
Plate 14: The niche which houses the wooded Crucifix and the relics.
Plate 15: St Longinus (1629-1638), Gian Lorenzo Bernini. St Peter’s Basilica, Rome
Plate 16: Christ’s Fall under the Weight of the Cross by Francesco Zahra.

Plate 107: Ecce Homo by Francesco Zahra.
Plate 18: One of the areas which acts as a division between the bays, featuring the Angel holding the Superscription and flowing, decorative motifs
Plate 19a: A pair of putti holding on to a decorated frame, in the upper level of the oratory.

Plate 19b: A pair of putti holding on to a decorated frame, in the upper level of the oratory.
Plates 20a-f: The pairs of winged putti found above Francesco Zahra’s paintings.
Plate 21a: The winged cherub heads found above the Angels holding the Passion Symbols.

Plate 21b: The winged putti holding a garland of foliage found above the central Angels holding the Passion Symbols.
Plate 22: The niche which houses the venerated eighteenth century statue of the Redeemer.
Plate 23a: The balcony, with the carved relief of a pair of winged putti holding on to a symbol of the Cross.

Plate 23b: The oratory being used today. The members of the congregation give their back to the apsidal termination, as they pray to the venerated statue of the Redeemer.

Plate 25: The Gloria of the Holy Spirit, in the upper part of the aspidal cap the transept dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory, Zebbug Parish Church.
Plate 26a: The sculpted God in glory in the apse of the Oratory of the Crucifix.

Plate 26b: The sculpted God in glory above the altar of the Annunciation.

Plate 26c: The sculpted God in glory above the altar dedicated to the Souls in Purgatory.
Plate 27: The altar dedicated to the Holy Rosary, Zebbug Parish Church. The lower part was reconstructed in the late 20th century.
Plate 28: The altar dedicated to the Holy Rosary, whilst the rerdos was being remodelled by Camilleri Cauchi. (This photo was brought to attention by Joe P. Borg.)
Plate 29: The side altar dedicated to Our Lady of Charity (1736) by Pietro Paolo Zahra, Zebbug Parish Church.
Plate 30a: The upper level of the altar dedicated to the Holy Rosary located within the Zebbug Parish Church.

Plate 30b: The upper level of the altar of St Ignatius Loyola, Andrea Pozzo within the church of Il Gesù, Rome.
Plate 31: The interior of St Peter’s Basilica, with the baldacchino seen framing the Cathedra Sancti Petri.
Plate 32: The interior of the Corsini Chapel, Pier Francesco Silvani (1685). Santa Maria del Carmine, Florence.
Plate 33: God in glory upon clouds, flanked by putti. Corsini Chapel.

Plate 34: The interior of the Conventual Church of St John, Valletta

Plate 35b: Detail of the Gloria by Giovanni Giardini.

Plate 36: The Gloria, Main altar, Melchiorre Cafà and Carlo Rainaldi. Santa Maria in Campitelli, Rome
Plate 37: The titular altar of St James Chapel. Designed by Pietro Paolo Zahra and executed by a member of the Fabri family (c1730).
Plate 38: The altar dedicated to St Anthony Abbot (1720) by Pietro Paolo Zahra, Agostinian Church, Rabat.
Plates 39a-d: From top; Zahra’s angel in the Oratory of the Crucifix; Zahra’s angel in the altar of St Anthony Abbot; Ferri’s angel from his reliquary for the right hand of St John the Baptist; Bernini’s angel in the Cappella del Sacro Sacramento.
Plate 40a: Cappella del Sacro Sacramento Tabernacle (1676), Gian Lorenzo Bernini

Plate 40b: Monstrance, Ciro Ferri. Currently housed at St John’s Cathedral Museum.
Plate 41: Tabernacle (1673-1684), Ciro Ferri, Santa Maria in Vallicella, Rome.
Plate 42: Side altar dedicated to St Catherine of Alexandria (1742) by Pietro Paolo Zahra, found within the transept of the Souls in Purgatory of the Zebbug Parish Church.
Plate 43: A view of the Castel Sant Angelo from the Ponte Sant Angelo.

Plate 44a-b. The Angel holding the Crown of Thorns and the Angel holding the Superscription, Gian Lorenzo Bernini. San Andrea della Fratte, Rome.
Plate 45a: The Altar of Repose (1751), Francesco Zahra following the design by Pietro Paolo Troisi. Mdina Cathedral.

Plate 45b: The four angels which form part of the Altar of Repose.
Appendix A:
The Notarial Documents
On the 16th Feb. 1731, Pietro Paolo Zahra agreed with Giuseppe Muscat, a procurator of the Confraternity dedicated to the Holy Crucifix and Our Lady of Charity to engage in the carving of the newly built oratory and its altar, based on a design drawn up by Zahra himself.

Figure A1: Pietro Paolo Zahra, the interior carving of the Oratory of the Holy Crucifix, Senglea. NAV, Not. F. Alessi, R 14/7, ff.684-685. Published in J. Debono, 2010.

On the 24th April 1737, Pietro Paolo Zahra agrees with Filippo Russo, who is representing the Confraternity dedicated to the Holy Crucifix to carve the six statues of angels holding symbols of the Passion of Christ in stone which was quarried from St Venera.

Figure A2: Pietro Paolo Zahra, commission for the six angel statues for the Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea. NAV, Not. V. Marchese, R 343/36, ff. 752-753. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
di loro loculo con le loro piú distali preghierì e quelle messe di tutto punto fornite nel luogo già destinato nella
Vera Congregazione di detta fratellanza fra il termine d’un anno continuo e compitò da contare di ogni anno innanzi
altresí innanzi spirito del tempo e non saranno
ancor terminato delle sue statue e
effettò quelle terminate non ritornaranno
ben fatta sarà tanto al med. Rulo a me
me pudetato sole fare d’altri magneti di
sindica misterio a lui benigno. Di tutti dan
ni questi al interesse del fatto Zahra non
ne addotto ciondolato

per la mercede di sedici cento e cinquant
ditto 15. quando di questa corrente monete
di rame, a conto della qual somma detto
Maestro Paolo da Vice e con tale d’aver
veduto e ricevuto dal med. Aligio Rulo
pronte e a n. su. Stampato sedici cento
di 15. di sedici ponti innanzi a noi in m
voro e rame il conti Rulo

e quanti sedici cento e compimento di detta
dsedici cento e cinquant. Il med. Rulo a
nome Zahra non ha promesso e promette e
sole. Si obbliga e obbliga dare e pagare
escluso tutto al med. Maestro Paolo nondi
termine in denari conti in questa città
visto in quanti sedici cinquant. termi
nativo posti nel luogo la prima tre volte e salvo i suoi cinquant'anni posto che avendo similmente nel luogo salvo tre statue son
in contro alcuna

fuete le quali così

Cosi hanno giurato: Onore

Fatto in Malà e in questa città Velle in ان

A domandina: Iverina besta Danino e di dom

meia iueme nel fatto di Malta nella detta casa

Alma soprintendi
c

Benigno Bugia

Serafini Bugia

Siero Giovanni Bugia

del fu Angelo della

Bermuda e me nitro condotto poste in

nanzi anoi, po' ha promesso e promette

e sotto se è obbligato e obbligo verso il sig.
On the 15th April 1719 Pietro Paolo Zahra agrees with the Reverand Friars at the Augustinian Church in Rabat to dismantle and reconstruct the altar dedicated to St Anthony. Zahra also agrees to decorate the altar according to his own design. The sculpture is his own responsibility, however he is free to ask the aid of other sculptors. In a marginal entry dating to the 1st May 1722, Zahra acknowledged the receipt of the final payment.

**Figure A3:** Pietro Paolo Zahra, St Anthony altar reredos, Augustinian Church Rabat. NAV, Not. I. Debono, R 210/40, ff.793-795. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
Buon giorno, Signore. Sono giunto per discutere con Sua Eccellenza.

La situazione attuale richiede una soluzione immediata. La città è in preda a una crisi economica che minaccia il suo futuro. Spero che il nostro dialogo possa trovare una via d'uscita.

Desidero inviare un ambasciatore all'estero per negoziare un aiuto finanziario. Sarebbe di grande aiuto per riportare la normalità nella società.

Mi piacerebbe sapere se Sua Eccellenza è d'accordo con me.

Ringrazio Sua Eccellenza per la sua considerazione e attenzione.

Buona giornata.
Vid. xxxi. mens. An. 1519

Salvator Cauchi idem. In parte del tabbato (qui est)

faccia cu cui si ha il viso di Paolo con la pietra.

Non si possa vedere di opere, et confessus esse. Video

essere del suo anno. Balachino il Joseph

de la Trinita abate, ma fisti pero con il suo

costrinse per maniera che Joseph non si possa

vedere. Propria quasi quotidiano solto. Ecco, ecco ieri

è di. Il giorno scalo ma sono ancora, e questo domo.

Sono di: E il compasso, prego nove.

E il Cauchi venendo il Balachino è accettato.

E ha da causare.
On the 17th February 1694, Antonio Zahra agrees with the Augustinian Friars at Rabat to dismantle and rebuild the altar dedicated to St Giovanni Facundo. He also agrees to carve this altar in the same style as the altar dedicated to St Nicholas. Zahra is to select and supply the stone slabs necessary from the quarries at Lija, at his own expense.

Figure A4: Antonio Zahra, altar dedicated to St Giovanni Facundo. Augustinian Church, Rabat. NAV, Not G.D. Pace, R 388/13 (1693-94), ff.451-452. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
117
On the 22\textsuperscript{nd} June 1702, Antonio Zahra agreed with the various procurators of the Altar dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, St Joseph and St Dominic at the old Parish Church of Birkirkara to carve the altar according to his own design. (At this time Pietro Paolo was around eighteen years old, thus it is likely that he also worked on this commission).

\textbf{Figure A5}: Antonio Zahra, Altar dedicated to the Assumption of Our Lady, St Joseph and St Dominic, Birkirkara. NAV, Not. B. Vassallo, R 461/80, ff. 445-446. Published in J. Debono, 2010.
On the 17th January 1706 Antonio Zahra and his son Pietro Paolo agree with Reverend Sebastiano Gabriele and Paolo Borg to execute the carving work of the altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin, in the old Parish Church of Birkirkara, for the sum of 60 scudi which was to be paid at the rate of work carried out. They are to follow the design given to them.

**Figure A6:** Carving of the altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady, in the old Parish Church of Birkirkara
Nave dell'Immacolata Concezione della Beata Maria Vergine Madre nella Congregazione di Brindisi, si vdigne, e il mare si: nel quale, e maggiore al mare già fatto, e conseguente a dir de
vita spirit., e ciò fra il termine di un anno, ad habere in vita decoroso, sin
altra occasione.

Che nato senton un seco in d'ult. 1270
inve, quae = abz in. Don Sebastian, o
lautus rote qui subito scendo don un secre
prima, quare quidem non addirigibil
obliganti se cura tenea de vita spirit.
maxima, nove nove, Dona ultima, ovvero
non detere sinoma lustra opera non sine
aliqua occasione.

Certi che, la prima necessario per l'alta
nne, sine somministrazione 1o de Don
Sebastian, o ab in detta Chiesa et
monstra per pace.

Pien che, detto serata, opus con
venire, in detto disegno, sentono sentoni,
e obliganti secolare la sacra dell'Arci e
se vacanti a caso dell'Arci, graz
e semre nell'ammamento e pace.

Quis omnino?
On the 30th August 1711, Pietro Paolo Zahra agrees with Reverend Domenico Tonna and Baptista Agius, procurators of the Balzan Parish Church to carve the projections of the High Alar dedicated to the Annunciation of the Virgin according to his own design.

A separate folio related to the High Altar of the Balzan Parish Church. The notary Domenico Gerolamo Bonavita declares that according to a deed dated to the 23rd February 1715, Zahra received the sum of 20 scudi 6 tari from Baptista Agius, according to an obligation signed earlier between them at notary Giovanni Maria Felice on the 30th August 1711.

Figure A8: A separate folio related to the commission of the High Alar of the Balzan Parish Church.
Appendix B:

Altar Reredoses
Executed by
Pietro Paolo Zahra
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady and the façade of the arch</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Sebastiano Gabriele and Paolo Borg</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>The Collegiate Church of Birkirkara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1706- to be finished within a year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>stone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>60 scudi payable at the rate of work carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Antonio Zahra and Paolo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Design consigned to them after being approved. Clients have to bear the expenses entailed in the provision of the stone slabs. Following Zahra’s own design.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Frame of the altar dedicated to St Joseph</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Anna Agius, as authorised by her brother Notary Giovanni Agius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Lija Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Intaglio to be completed by the following feast of the Transfiguration of Our Saviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>52 scudi of which 10 are paid in advance. The rest is to be paid according to the rate of work carried out but the final payment, which must not be less than 10 scudi, becomes payable upon completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Design drawn up in the presence of the architect Giovanni Barbara</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Client accepts to cover the expenses for the supply of the necessary stone slabs for this altar frame</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to St. Damian and St Cosmas</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Giuseppe Mamo and Giovanni la Grancia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>The Minor Conventuals’ Church Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>-to be completed by the following 15 September</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>80 scudi which is to be paid in four equal instalments starting from the following June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Carved similarly to that dedicated to St Gregory, the Miracle-Worker in the same church.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Doctor of Medicine Filippo Giacomo Gauci</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Minor Conventual Friars at Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1710-1711 To be completed within 10 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>250 scudi – 90 scudi at a simple request by Zahra, 50 scudi after the completion of two months’ work 50 scudi after another two months and the final payment of 60 scudi on full completion that must be acceptable to Troisi.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Design and model by Pietro Paolo Troisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>As a sign of gratitude for this charitable work the Reverend Friars assign the grave marked number one situated in front of this altar to Gauci and his heirs. This vault can also be extended to underneath the altar and covered with an inscribed tombstone. Permission is given to dismantle the existing altar and rebuild it</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
at the expense of the procurators.
The altar can be enhanced with stone carved ornaments in the columns, the family’s coat-of-arms and a new altarpiece.
Zahra is to supply the stone slabs required in the building of the altar, the statues, reliefs, inscriptions, lavabo and other embellishments as illustrated in an approved design and a model still to be constructed by the architect Pietro Paolo Troisi. Workers hired must be approved by Troisi and directed by Zahra.
Gauci has to fork out the expenses connected with the foundations of the altar. Stone slabs are to be of good quality and obtained from quarries situated at Lija, Zebbug or Siggiewi. To carve and interlock them Zahra must only use the pick axe and the chisel, a precaution to safeguard the structure of the church building. On completion, Zahra has to remove all the excess material from the church.

Documents
7 July 1710. NAV, Not G. Grech, R 303/2, ff. 867-870.
7 July 1710. Ibid., ff.883-885.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to St. Christopher and the picture frame and pedestals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Gratio Busuttil and Pietro Meylac</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Cospicua Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1711</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>100 scudi of which he receives 30 in advance. The rest is to be paid in two equal instalments, one falling due when the stone slabs are in place ready for carving and the other one on full completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Procurators are to provide the necessary stone slabs. Zahra is promised a gift if the work proved to be to their complete satisfaction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar of the Sodality of the Agony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Giovanni Domenico Micallef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>The Old Birkirkara Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be finished within 18 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>60 oncie of which 5 oncie are paid in advance. Extra work to ameliorate the carvings of this altar are undertaken, so the appointed experts, Ignatius Portelli on the behalf of Giovanni Domenico Micallef and Giuseppe Azzopard on behalf of the Zahras estimate them for 105 scudi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Antonio Zahra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>15 mysteries of the Rosary carved similarly to those sculpted on the altar dedicated to the Holy Rosary .Micallef, at his own expense must transport the necessary stone slabs and with the assistance of the artisans build the altar for eventual carving.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>The projections of the High Altar dedicated to the Annunciation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Domenico Tonna and Baptista Agius</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Balzan Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Project to be completed within two and a half years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>350 scudi of which 7 scudi 1 tari 10 grani are paid in advance, while the rest is to be paid according to the rate of work carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Worked with Antonio and probably Giacomo Zahra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Approved design drawn by the artisan himself. The procurators oblige themselves to finish off the masonry work of the altar and to supply the wooden planks for the scaffolding, ropes and whatever else may be necessary for the intended sculptural works.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Rebuilding of the altar dedicated to St. Francis of Paola</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Minor Conventual Friars at Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Minor Conventual Friars at Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed by the following month of April</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>60 + 20 scudi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Provided with the design and model consigned for imitation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Worked a two-stepped gradine or scanello with two puttini found on the sides of the niche of the same altar for another. Also the carving of two coat of arms according to a third design similarly provided and to groove two pilasters</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Maruzzo Magro and Giacomo Xicluna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Zabbar Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed within two years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>180 scudi to be paid in four equal instalments- one at commencement, another when half of the carving work is ready, a third when another quarter is carried out and the final when it is fully undertaken</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Altar in a manner similar to that dedicated to Our Lady of Graces established in the choir part of the same church. Posture and gesticulation of the figures can be varied with the consent of the procurators and of the parish priest. A glory of angels carved under the picture-frame of the altar.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to St Paul the Hermit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Fra Joseph Zammit, Doctor of Medicine and Clara Magro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Balzan Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed within six months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>80 scudi of which 26 8 tari were given in advance, with the balance falling due in two equal instalments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Design by Pietro Paolo Troisi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Troisi has to approve the works undertaken before payment; otherwise another artisan is to be engaged at Zahra’s expense.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>20 June 1714. NAV, Not. G. Callus, R 126/7, ff. 761-762</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<p>| Work | Side chapel dedicated to St Angelo, St Francis of Paola and St Francis Xavier |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to Our Lady of Charity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Doctor Domenico Azzopardi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>St. Lawrence’s Parish Church at Vittoriosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>160 scudi of which 30 are payable in advance. 50 scudi become payable after two years and the balance of 80 scudi, collected from church alms at the rate of work carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Carving work is to start from above the two-stepped gradine or scannello of the altar in order to appear as eminently as that of the altar dedicated to the Immaculate Conception in the same church. Procurator is to supply the stone slabs on which the carving is to take place. The provision of wooden planks for the scaffolding and other safety measures fall also within his sphere of responsibility.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>1 February 1716. NAV, Not. A. Vivieri, R 487/2 (1715-17), ff. 46-49 (1715-16).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to the Holy Crucifix</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Giacomo Bucchier and Reverend Nunciato Bonnici</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Zabbar Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Completed in 1719</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>304 scudi payable in four equal instalments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Altar carving and a coat of arms according to a design drawn by the artisan himself and acceptable to the parish priest. Zahra had to present the parish priest with a clay model of the work involved while the procurators in turn are to provide and transport the necessary quarry stone in the vicinity of the church.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Mausoleum in the Chapel dedicated to the Blessed Sacrament</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Noble Ferdinando Castelletti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>The Matrix and Collegiate church in Gozo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be executed within 5 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>75 scudi of which 25 are paid in advance while the rest are payable in two equal instalment of 25 scudi each</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Mausoleum, 16 palmi in height and 10 palmi in width is to be finished as expressed in a model and a design drawn up by</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Zahra himself. Instead of some minor changes in certain trophies he is to carve other festoons. Zahra is to supply and provide the necessary stone slabs newly dressed on both sides. Most probably at the time there were excavations being carried out for the chapel crypt and so the artisan is impeded from using its hewn rock.

**Documents**
7 November 1716. NAV, Not. I. Debono, R210/37, ff.270-272.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Carvings in the chapel dedicated to the Holy Spirit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>The Reverend Friars of St. Augustine’s Church at Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>St Augustine’s church at Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed by the following Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>60 scudi – receives 20 in advance, the remaining 40 scudi being payable at the rate of work carried out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Carving in some part of the chapel resembling, except for minor details, those dedicated to St Jerome in the same church</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documents**
10 March 1718. NAV, Not. F. G. Tonna, R 455/3, ff. 689-690.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Side chapel and altar dedicated to St Francis of Paola</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Giuseppe Scifo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Church dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel in Vittoriosa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed within 7 months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>50 scudi of which he receives 10 scudi in advance. The rest is to be paid in two equal instalments- 20 when half the work is done and 20 upon completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>The procurator is bound to provide all the necessary stone slabs and pay both for their transportation and for the construction of the altar in which Zahra is to offer his assistance before undertaking the carvings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documents**
1 November 1718. NAV, Not. A. Pace, R 386/2, ff. 89-90.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to St. Anthony</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Friars of the Augustinian church in Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Augustinian church, Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed by the following February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>110 scudi of which 23 scudi 9 tari are paid in advance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>He is free to ask for the help of other artisans; however the sculpture is his personal responsibility. The provision of the stone slabs for this work is to be supplied by Zahra either from the quarries of Casal Zebbug or from Casal Lija. Chapel’s reredos was erected by the friar’s money together with the commission of a new altar painting in 1719.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Documents**
15 April 1719. NAV, Not I. Debono, R 210/40, ff. 793-795.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Reredos of the altar dedicated to the Holy Trinity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Ludovico Fabre and Antonio Cremona</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Senglea Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be finished by the following Easter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>117 scudi 6 tari, of which the procurators are to pay 50 scudi within 15 days, another 50 scudi within 4 months and the rest when the work is completed</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Collaboration?
- Giacomo Zahra

### Other information
- Carvings with adaptable figures and putti as expressed in a design drawn by the artisan himself. Zahra is to provide at his own expense the necessary stone, lime and other workers who may be need for this carving operation.

### Documents
- 25 September 1720. NAV, Not. A. Vivieri, R 487/6, ff.50-52.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Carvings of stone ornaments of the altar dedicated to St. Felice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Doctor of Law and canon of the Cathedral Chapter, Giovanni Francesco Maria Maggioni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>the Minor Conventuals Church at Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>End of following January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>55 scudi, he receives 20 in advance but the final 10 scudi are payable at the end of the commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Carvings conform to that on the altar dedicated to St Stefano opposite to it. Coat of arms of Mangioni in relief on two pedestals. Zahra is to supply the necessary stone slabs and materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>4 October 1721. NAV, Not. I. Debono, R 210/45, ff. 161-162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Carvings on the altar of St. Leonard</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Veronica Busuttil’s will – money given to Reverend Camillo Cumbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Tarxien Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>15 scudi as well as the income derived from rents collected during one year after her demise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>22 January 1715. NAV, Not. P.P. Saliba, R 424/7, ff. 268-269. 26 September 1722. NAV, Not. G. D. Pace, R 388/35 (1721-25), ff. 16-16 (1722-23)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Demolishing and rebuilding of the choir section of the Senglea parish church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Fortunato Vella and Reverend Giovanni Cachia and Pasquale Bianco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Senglea Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>All construction work on the choir with the necessary white-washing is to be completed by the following 8 September. The time is extended for another year in order to carve its reredos to be ready to put into place.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>The whole project cost 1100 scudi payable according to the rate of work carried out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Demolition and construction works assigned to Lorenzo Mieli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Giovanni Maria Gilberti is to supervise the construction with the authority of the procurators to order any alteration as he may think fit. Building material must be quarried from Corradino and from near the Capuchin’s Friary at Floriana but the paving material from Santa Vennera. Zahra is allowed to make use of any implements belonging to the church but has to clear the place from discarded building materials on termination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>The altar to Our Lady of Graces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>---------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Augustinian Friars of Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Augustinian Church Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>It is to be ready within four months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>60 scudi of which he receives 20 scudi in advance, another 20 become payable when half the work is finished and the remaining 20 scudi when it is completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Altar agreed to conform with that dedicated to St. Liborio founded in the same church. He must supply the stone and the workmen needed for their laying ready for carving.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to Our Lady consoling St. Monica</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Pietro Xiortino and Lorenzo Fenech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Attard Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To carve within five months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>Expected to exceed 9 scudi 6 tari - the amount charged for the altar dedicated to St Joseph, as it appears in the acts of the Notary Tommaso Cauchi. Zahra receives 10 scudi in advance and the rest is promised at the rate of work carried out. It is also agreed that if the commission is not completed within the stipulated time then the price will be lowered according to that charged for the imitated altar dedicated to St Joseph.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>To be carved in a manner similar to that dedicated to St Joseph in Lija Parish Church. Zahra is also to work the scannello of the altar as soon as it is built by the procurators at their own expense. for which Regnaud produced the altar painting precisely in the same period.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Salvatore Adriano Cassar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Zejtun Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed by the end of the following January</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>160 scudi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>An angel holding a crown of roses and surrounded by putti supporting small clouds for ornamental purposes are to be carved on the upper section of the reredos. Additional carving works as expressed in the design are to be followed for the niche belonging to the statue dedicated to Our Lady of the Purification and these apart from other coats-of-arms that may be indicated later.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar reredos at the monastery dedicated to St Mary Magdalene</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Nuns of this monastery – after an agreement with Michele Micallef</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>St Mary Magdalene monastery Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be finished by the following December</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Sculpting of the altar dedicated to the Holy Child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Giovanni Antonio Schembri and Doctor of Medicine Michele Fiteni</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Cospicua Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed within six months</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>200 scudi of which Zahra receives 60 in advance, the rest is payable in three instalments according to work carried out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Design approved and subscribed by Bishop Paolo Alpheran. Besides the altar, Zahra is to carve as well a large window with all its ornaments, as expressed in a consigned design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Design for the titular altar of St James Chapel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Details of this commission are not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>St James Church, Zurrieq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>C.1730</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>Details of this commission are not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>The altar reredos was executed by a member of the Fabri family, while Pietro Paolo’s son Francesco Zahra, was responsible for the painting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>The design for the titular altar of the Chapel dedicated to St James.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>Documents for this commission have not been found</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Carving of the walls of the newly built oratory and its altar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Giuseppe Muscat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Carvings in relief</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Senglea parish church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Completed by 1733</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>To be completed within five years for the sum 400 scudi this is to be paid in diverse instalments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>In 1727 the confraternity decided to project an oratory behind</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Commissioned by** Reverend Antonino Grech and Gregorio Abela  
**Location** St. Paul’s Church Valletta  
**Cost and Payment method** 140 scudi, payment to be effected in three equal instalments  
**Collaboration?** To be carved following a design drawn up on two loose sheets of paper  
they decide to commission three artists from Senglea. The oratory project started in 1731 and the overall work including the sculpture was finished two years later, although some minor works were still going on. Due his devotion towards the Holy Crucifix and Our Lady of Charity and as a member of the same confraternity Zahra promises not to charge extra money for their work if the procurators alter parts of the design. However if the changes involve less work, experts are to be appointed to estimate their costs and deduct the relevant amount.

### Documents

16 February 1731. NAV, Not. F. Alessi, R 14/7, ff.684-685

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Carving of the choir section of the façade of the Tarxien Parish Church</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Giuseppe Calleja, acting in the name of his father Giovanni Domenico</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Tarxien Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed by the following December 1736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>350 scudi of which he has already received 100 scudi in advance. The sum of 75 scudi is to be paid when Zahra completes the section found above the moulded frame and the remaining 175 scudi in four instalments at the rate of completed work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>According to a design drawn up by Zahra himself. The artisan is allowed to add more details that can embellish the façade even apart from those expressed in the design</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>21 December 1735. NAV, Not. F. Alessi, R 14/12, ff. 460-461</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar of the Rosary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Details for this commission are not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Parish Church Zebbug</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Was finished in 1736</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Located opposite the altar of the Souls in Purgatory in the north transept of the church. In the beginning of the twentieth century the lower part under the cornice was remodelled in a more purist tradition but during the second half of the 1970s it was once again given a “baroque form” through the insertion of new plaster statues. The decoration in the upper level of the transept remains original and can be stylistically attributed to Pietro Paolo Zahra.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>21 December 1735. NAV, Not. F. Alessi, R 14/12, ff. 460-461</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Carving of the façade of the niche contained in its stone altar (our lady of charity)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Giovanni Battista Sagnani, Petrutio Debono, Salvatore Micalef and Pietro Paolo Grima, procurators of the Confraternity dedicated to Our Lady of Charity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Zebbug Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed by the following titular feast of St Philip</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>150 scudi which it to be paid as follows- 50 scudi at the request of Zahra, another instalment of 50 scudi when half the work is ready and the final payment of 50 scudi on full completion.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Design approved by Nicolo Buhagiar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>The parties agree that if within eight days, with the approval of the artist Nicolo Buhagiar, they alter any parts of the design these are to be executed by Zahra without claiming any dues. However</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work</td>
<td>Six angel statues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Padron Filippo Russo, representing the Confraternity dedicated to the Holy crucifix</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Oratory of the Crucifix, Senglea</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>They are to be completed within one year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>150 scudi of which 50 scudi are to be paid in advance. Half the balance is to be paid after finishing three statues and the rest on completion of the commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Stone quarried from St. Venera</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>27 September 1736. NAV, Not. A. Pullicino, R 408/21, ff. 44-45</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Ornaments and Carved reredos of the Souls in Purgatory transept termination</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Giovanni Maria Psayla, procurator of the Sodality of the Agony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Zebbug Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Works started in August 1736 and finished in May 1747</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>460 and 175 scudi respectively as well as extra 60 scudi for his extra work entailed in these carvings and ornamentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Gerolamo, Carlo and Francesco Fabri also worked on the project. Also Felice Zahra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Obligations signed on 18 May 1737 and 22 December 1739 at the Bishop’s Curia. In 1736, Bishop Alpheran de Bussan visited the village of Haz-Zebbug, and insisted that the altar of the Souls in Purgatory should be decorated similarly to the one opposite of the Rosary. Rev. Gio Maria Psayla from the Confraternity of the Agony was responsible for the administration of the project. Gio Nicola Buhagiar was put in charge of the works and he added to the designs made by the Architect Antonio Panza, apart from other decorations, he added more sculpture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>24 April 1737 NAV, Not. V. Marchese, R 343/36, ff. 752-753.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>The stone altar, scannello, six large candlesticks and four small one, the frontal frame of the altar and three Gloria frames</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Antonio Vassallo, person in charge of the Sodality of St. Francis of Paola founded in the filial church dedicated to St Vincent Ferreri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>St. Lucy’s church in Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be finished within four months, following the construction of the altar and ready for gilding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>125 scudi to be effected by three payments- 40 scudi on the following 10 June, 50 scudi when half the work is done and the last 35 scudi on completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>To be carried out according to an approved design which follows in a similar way the altar dedicated to St. Pasquale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>10 February 1742, NAV, Not. A. Pullicino, R 408/26, ff. 218-219</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar Reredos dedicated to St. Catherine</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Giovanni Bonnici and Giusto Smut, Apostolic Promoter and Lateran’s Vicar in Malta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>2 June 1740. NAV, Not. P. V. Giammalva, R 292/1 (April 1739- August 1740), ff. 345-346 (September 1739-August 1740)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Zebbug Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Work to be completed by the following feast of St. Catherine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>206 scudi of which he receives 25 in advance, a payment forming part of the legacy of 100 scudi bequeathed by Reverend Giovanni Bonnici. Remaining balance to be paid according to rate of work carried out except for the last 25 scudi which come payable on completion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>Design drawn up by the artist himself. Altar was formerly dedicated to the Agony and holy souls in purgatory, established in the left transept of Zebbug Parish church. Following a decree issued by Bishop Alpheran during his last pastoral visit the reverends are changing its dedication to St. Catherine. The reverends have to build the altar table with its two-stepped gradine or scannello, an operation for which Zahra promises his assistance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>17 February 1742. NAV, Not. A. Pullicino, R 408/26 ff. 237-238</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>The Fifteen Mysteries of the Rosary</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Fernando Camisuli, procurator of the Confraternity dedicated to Our Lady of the Rosary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>Old Birkirkara Parish Church</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Work to be completed within one year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>200 scudi which Camisuli is empowered to pay according to a decree issued by the bishop. It falls due as follows: 25 scudi on 7 October, the commencement of work, 100 scudi at the rate the work is carried out and the remaining 50 scudi payable in six months’ time after the termination of the commissioned work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>The figure, puttini, stone picture frames that represent the fifteen Mysteries of the holy Rosary, the frames of the two side-paintings of the altar, the inscription under the titular painting and the two corbels attached to the altar table according to an approved design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>1 October 1742. NAV, Not. G. Grech, R 303/31, ff. 81-81</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Altar dedicated to St. Joseph/Holy Family</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverend Domenico Falzon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>St. Paul’s Rabat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>1741-43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>175 scudi. Amount also comprises the price of the stone slabs required for construction and the execution of four paintings undertaken by Pietro Paolo’s son Francesco.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaboration?</td>
<td>Paintings – the titular painting represents the Holy Family or rather St. Joseph with Jesus on his arms, the Blessed Virgin Mary, St. Isidoro and St. Nicholas; the oval painting represents the Passage of the Glorious St. Joseph; and the other two side paintings represent respectively St. Aloysius and St. Francis Xavier.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Documents</td>
<td>6 March 1743. NAV, Not. I. Debono, R 210/79, ff. 415-417</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Carving and cleaning of the newly built side-chapel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commissioned by</td>
<td>Reverends Santoro Camilleri and Gioacchino Gucciardi-procurators of the Collegiate church dedicated to St. Paul in Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>St. Paul’s Collegiate Church in Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>To be completed within one year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost and Payment method</td>
<td>170 scudi of which he receives 50 in advance, the rest is payable quarterly. The parties agree that in care extra work besides these stipulated above is demanded, then experts are to be appointed to appraise it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other information</td>
<td>He has to start from the interior top part of the lantern and finish up to the floor according to a design drawn up by the artisan himself. Another design prescribes Zahra the ornaments to carve on the door lintels contained in this side-chapel and to insert inscriptions above the arch leading to it. Meanwhile, he has to remove any previous coats of arms contained on the pilasters, which once were suitable to honour the glory of St Egidio, and carve instead others as may be ordered by the procurators.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Work | Altar of the Holy Rosary |
--- | --- |
Commissioned by | Reverend Giorgio Velasco, Reverend carmine Delicata and Notary Giovanni Francesco Farrugia, procurators of Zurrieq Parish church |
Location | Zurrieq Parish Church |
Date | c1745 |
Cost and Payment method | 120 scudi payable in three equal instalments falling due every two months |
Collaboration? | With his son Francesco Zahra |
Other information | Dismantling of altar dedicated to the Holy Rosary and rebuilding and carving of a new one with niches similar to those of the altar dedicated to the Holy Crucifix in the same church. The depiction of a picture representing St Joseph for its sotto quadro was also their responsibility, as well as giving the necessary colour to the statues within six months |
Documents | 5 February 1744. AAF, Atti Civili, Vol. 104, ff. 184-185 |

Work | Altar dedicated to Our Lady of Mount Carmel |
--- | --- |
Commissioned by | Giovanni Gauci |
Location | Collegiate Church of Birkirkara |
Date | Work to be started during the current week and finished within three months |
Cost and Payment method | 60 scudi |
Other information | Carving of altar according to his preferred choice from the two designs presented to him. Zahra is to start working on the altar during the current week. Gauci is to provide stone slabs, chalk and the necessary wooden planks for the scaffolding |
Documents | 15 March 1745. NAV, Not. I. S. Bonavita, R 65/2 (1742-45), ff. 102 (1744-45) |

Work | Reredos of altar dedicated to Our Lady of Porto Salvo |
--- | --- |
Commissioned by | Reverend Doctor in Sacred Theology Francesco Saverio Plitano, provost and procurator of the Oratory dedicated to St. Philip Neri at Senglea |
Location | St Philip Neri Oratory at Senglea |
Date | To be completed within one year |
Cost and Payment method | 225 scudi. Captain Gabriele and his son reverend Francesco Camilleri, as benefactors, due to their devotion towards our Lady of Porto Salvo are ready to pay Zahra 100 scudi within |
three days, promising to pay the rest in two equal instalments during the execution of work. Zahra is not to expect any remuneration for any extra work undertaken other than that show on the designs.

| Other information | This relief representation, according to two designs drawn up by the artisan himself, is to be undertaken on all the projecting stones, the figures, the four pedestals and the entablature with its architraves, friezes and cornices, wherever carving is required. Zahra cannot alter anything from the designs except for the posture of the figures. Transportation charges of the wooden plans for the scaffolding are free of charge |

| Documents       | 12 July 1746. NAV, Not. F. Pisano, R 395/6, ff. 464-467 |

| Work            | Carvings in the church dedicated to Our lady of Porto Salvo |
| Commissioned by | Carlo Domato appearing on behalf of the benefactors, Antonio Agius and his wife Margarita nee Grech from Valletta |
| Location        | Porto Salvo Church in Valletta |
| Date            | Commission is to be completed within seven months starting from the following March |
| Cost and Payment method | 200 scudi payable in four equal instalments of 50 each. Higher price is charged if extraneous work outside the design is demanded. |
| Collaboration?  | With his son, probably Felice |
| Other information | The benefactors are to pay all the charges for this commission including the provision of the stone slabs and chalk. Obligation is very detailed with regard to the decorations which Zahra ought to execute both on the exterior part of the main door and on the reredos of the altar especially around the frontispiece. Carvings and reliefs wherever are required from the lantern of the cupola downwards: sides, frames, doors and arches, are to follow partly the design supplied and partly the sculpture contained in the cupola of St. James; Church. Zahra is also responsible for the embellishments of the lavabo and the two coats of arms on the two fonts of holy water. Paolo is to provide the planks for the scaffolding and assist his son- probably Felice- for at least two days per week, as he is jointly engaged with him in this commission, but remaining personally responsible for a perfect execution. |

| Documents       | 3 February 1747. NAV, Not. F. Alfano, R 15/17 (1746-48), ff. 333-336 (1746-47) |
## List of Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AAF</td>
<td>Archiepiscopal Archives, Floriana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f./ ff.</td>
<td>folio/ folios</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ibid.</td>
<td>Source cited in preceding footnote</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infra</td>
<td>Will be referred to later on in this work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAV</td>
<td>Notarial Archives, Valletta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not.</td>
<td>Notary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p./ pp.</td>
<td>page/ pages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAI</td>
<td>Parish Archives l-Isla</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Primary Documents

Manuscripts

NAV, Not. A. Pace, R 386/2, ff. 89-90.
NAV, Not. A. Pullicino, R 408/26 ff. 237-238
NAV, Not. A. Pullicino, R 408/26, ff. 218-219
NAV, Not. A. Vivieri, R 487/2 (1715-17), ff. 46-49 (1715-16)
NAV, Not. B. Vassallo, R 461/80, ff. 445-446
NAV, Not. B. Vassallo, R 461/84, ff. 382-383
NAV, Not. B. Vassallo, R 461/91, ff. 795-796
NAV, Not. D. G. Bonavita, R 62/3, ff. 270-272
NAV, Not. F. Alessi, R 14/7, ff.684-685
NAV, Not. G. D. Chircop, R 182/8, ff. 936-937
NAV, Not. G. D. Pace, R 388/13 (1693-94), ff.451-452
NAV, Not. G. D. Pace, R 388/24, ff.696-704
NAV, Not. G. Grech, R 303/2, ff. 867-870
NAV, Not. I. Debono, R 210/26, ff. 833-833v
NAV, Not. I. Debono, R 210/40, ff.793-795
NAV, Not. I. Debono, R 210/79, ff. 415-417P
PAI, Liber Baptizatorium, Vol. III(1679-1724), f.78
PAI, Liber Matrimoniorum, Vol. IB (1675-1715), p.1074

Secondary Works

Angelini 2005

Angelini, Alessandro, *La Scultura del Seicento a Roma*, Milano: 5 continents, 2005

Attard 2006

(Attard provides a catalogue of the more important reredoses of the eighteenth century and traces the change in style from the Renaissance to the Baroque reredos.)

**Azzopardi 1986**


**Bonnici 1981-1991**


(Bonnici’s work gives a description of the works in the new oratory, and provides information on the Confraternity of the Holy Crucifix.)

**Bonnici 2002**


**Borg 1988**


**Braun 1946**


(This work is an analysis of buildings which lost and survived the war. Both the Senglea Basilica as well as the oratory suffered losses in the War.)

**Briffa 2009**


(This is a concise publication on Troisi, who was probably Zahra’s major influence.)

(This short publication mainly focuses on the celebrations held during Holy Week in the parish of Senglea, however it was relevant as importance is given to the Oratory due to the statue of the Redeemer.)

**Caruana 2010**


(Caruana compiled the notarial deeds of the Zebbug Parish Church into one collection, which deals with the decoration and works which took place within the church. This was relevant as Pietro Paolo Zahra is documented to have worked on three altar reredoses within Zebbug, and there is the probability that he also worked on a fourth one. Of the latter no documents are known however it is stylistically close to Zahra’s work.)

**Cutajar 1983**

Cutajar, Dominic, *Artists of the Buhagiar and Zahra families*, Times of Malta 30 October 1983

**Debono 2005**

Debono, John, ‘St John’s Conventual Church: Stone Carving, Gilding and Marble Works (1640s-1660s)’ *Art and Artisans in St John’s and Other Churches in the Maltese Islands ca. 1650-1800* stone carving, marble, bells, clocks and organs, 2005

**Debono 2010**

Debono, John, *Documentary Sources on Maltese Artists: Pietro Paolo Zahra (1685-1747) and his son Francesco Vincenzo (1710-1773)* Gudja, Gutenberg Press Ltd, 2010

**Falaschi 1996**

(Falaschi delves into the commission for the tabernacle of the Santimisso Sacramento by Bernini, where he developed the *angeli adoranti* typology which was to become very influential in the Roman Baroque.)

**Ferris 1985**


**Gibson 2012**


**Hughes 2003**


(This publication places Malta in the Baroque context and describes the various architectural works which were being carried out and which were transforming the landscape. These new Baroque buildings required decoration, hence there was a need for stone-carves and artists.)

**Kruft 1970**


(In this work Kruft provides correct authorship for the Ciro Ferri reliquary, through an analysis of the work and the oeuvre of the artist.)

**Lagerlöf 2012**


**Lavin 2007**


(Lavin analyses the baldacchino within St Peter’s as part of an ancient tradition; and the importance of the clay bozzetti, which Bernini created in preparation for his masterpieces. Lavin notes the importance of such works as the thought process of the master can be traced.)

Marshall 2003


Martinelli 1996


(This work is a collection of papers by different scholars which shed new light on Bernini and his oeuvre.)

Martinelli 1979

Martinelli, Valentino, Bernini, Arnoldo Mondadori, 1979

Montagu 1985


(Montagu emphasises the importance of Bernini’s assistants in the execution of particular projects, some of the assistants were established sculptors in their own right, some of whom worked on the project of the Ponte Sant Angelo with Bernini.)

Montagu 1989

Montagu, Jennifer, ‘Ciro Ferri’s Ciborium in Santa Maria in Vallicella’, Source: Notes in the History of Art, viii, 4/1, 1989

(Montagu analyses the commission for the Roman Ciborium, which was one of the sources of inspiration for Ferri’s Maltese work.)

Montagu, Jennifer, Roman Baroque Sculpture: The Industry of Art, Yale University Press, 1989
(This work emphasises the context within which sculptors operated in Rome, around the seventeenth century, focusing on lesser known sculptors who were working during the period.)

Montagu 1996


Navarro 2004


Roberts 2013


Robinich 2008


Sciberras 2010

Sciberras, Keith, *Francesco Zahra 1710-1773: His Life and Art in Mid-18th Century Malta*, Midsea Books, 2010

(Sciberras places the Zahra family within the context of the eighteenth century and discusses Pietro Paolo Zahra’s career as a scalpellino.)

Sciberras 1999

Sciberras, Keith, ‘Ciro Ferri’s Reliquary for the Oratory of S. Giovanni Decollato in Malta’, *The Burlington Magazine*, CXLI, 1156, 1999

(This work is an analysis of Ferri’s reliquary and the sources of inspiration for this work, which influenced Zahra’s sculpted figures.)

Sciberras 2009
Sciberras, Keith, *Baroque Painting in Malta*, Midesa Books, 2009

**Sciberras 2006**


**Sciberras 2004**

Sciberras, Keith, *Roman Baroque Sculpture for the Knights of Malta*, Fondazzjoni Patrimonju Malti, 2004

(This work was critical, as it provides an analysis of the works commissioned from Rome, the context which led to such commissions and a discussion of the actual works themselves. These were works which Maltese artists referred to when creating their own.)

**Thake 1995**


(This publication provides a survey of the numerous churches which were built in Malta during the Baroque. Such an increase in number of churches allowed for artists and sculptors to work extensively during the period.)

**Weil 1971**

Weil, Mark S., ‘The Angels of the Ponte Sant' Angelo: A Comparison of Bernini's Sculpture to the Work of Two Collaborators’, *Art Journal*, vol. 30, 3, Spring 1971

(Weil compares Bernini’s angel for the Ponte Sant Angelo, with two other angels on the Ponte which were made by Ercole Ferrata and Antonio Raggi.)

**Weil 1973**


(This work studies and analysis the extensive project of the Ponte Sant Angelo, which Bernini undertook. This project was decorated with ten statues of angels which became very influential.)

**Wernham 1968**

(This publication provides information on the Counter-Reformation and the Council of Trent, which had deep repercussions on the art being produced.)

**Wittkower 2010**


(Wittkower gives an overview of Bernini’s extensive projects and analyses the patronage and commissions which the sculptor executed. The catalogue in this work was particularly useful as it listed and analysed the works which were the source of inspiration for Zahra.)