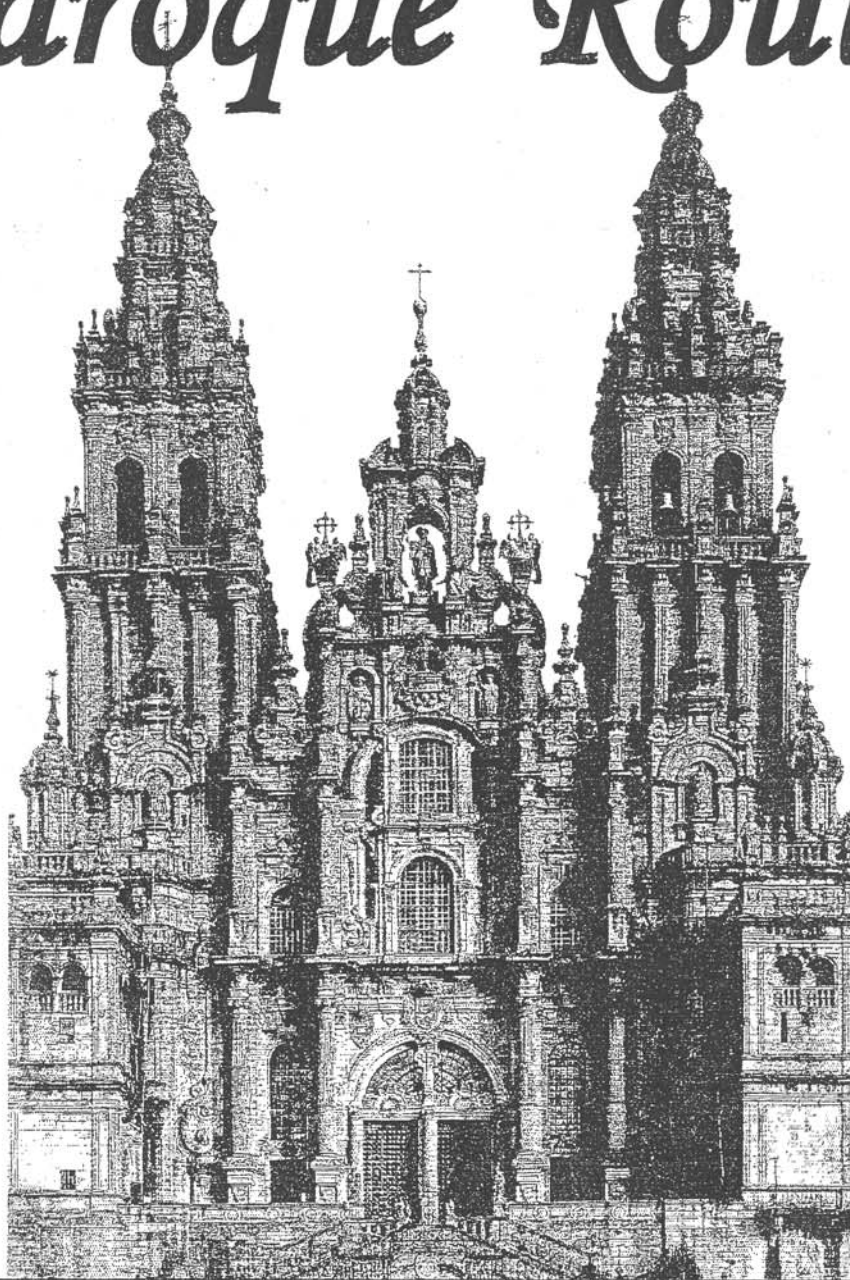


December 2001

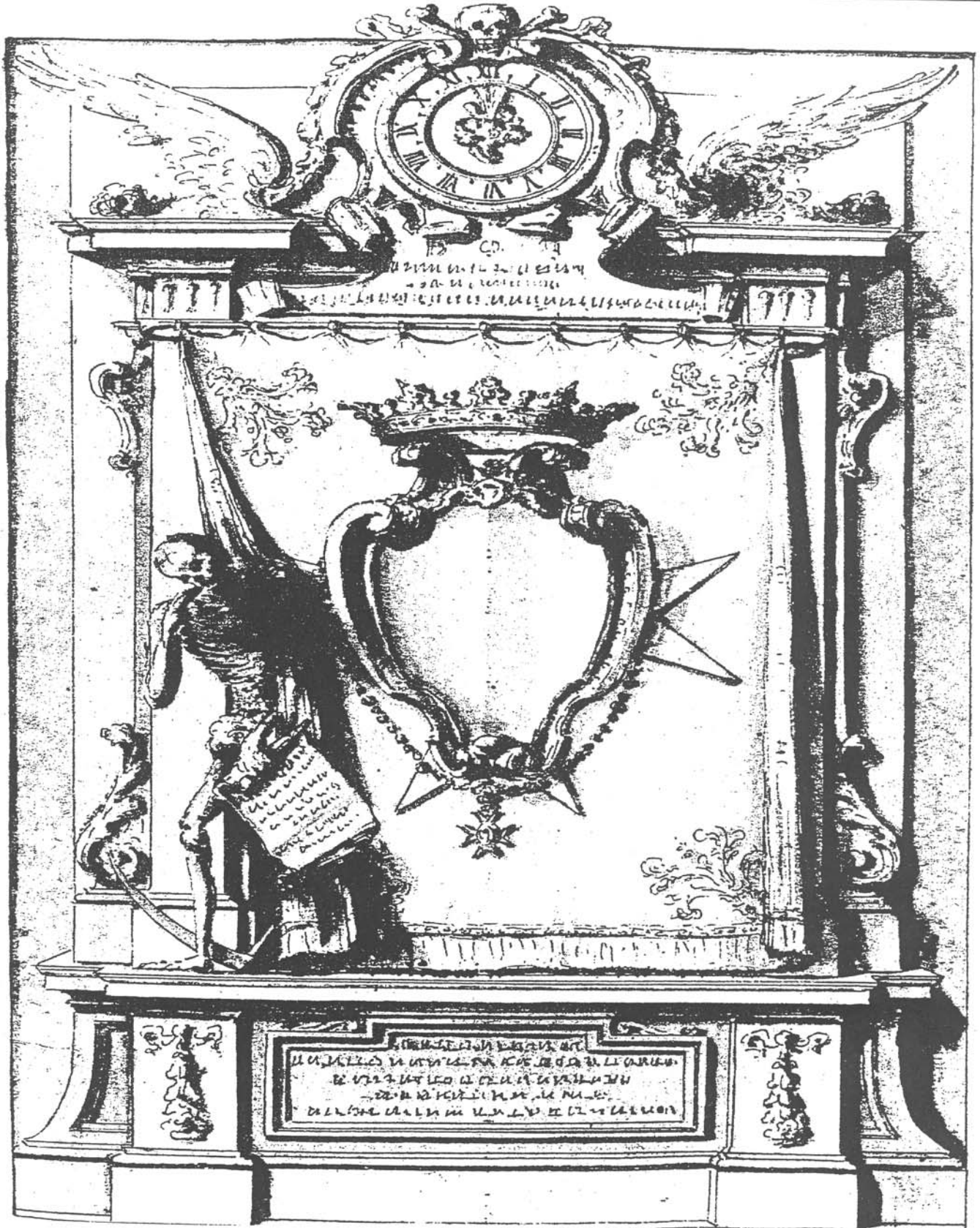
Number Three



Baroque Routes



Newsletter



Baroque Routes Network Newsletter
 Issue No 3 December 2001

Editor: Petra Bianchi
Layout and design: Simon Gatt
 Printed at the University of Malta Press

The IIBS would like to thank the Sunday Times and the Times of Malta for their kind permission to reproduce the authored articles on pages 6 to 10 and 14 to 19.

Front cover: Santiago de Compostela Cathedral, Spain (1738)
Above: Baroque tombstone by Romano Carapecchia

A note from the Director

The third issue of the Baroque Routes Network newsletter focuses on recent activities of the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta, which is at present involved in several initiatives designed to focus attention on Baroque culture in the central Mediterranean region during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The principal interests of the Institute concern research activities and publications, but several events have also been organised including a seminar on the Baroque heritage of Valletta, a seminar on Spanish Baroque architecture, a seminar on Borromini and a conference on the Baroque theatre, the latter held in connection with a splendid Baroque festival of theatrical activities promoted by the Manoel Theatre in Valletta. Details of these events and others planned for 2002-2003 are found in this newsletter together with information on some recent books dealing with various aspects of European Baroque culture.

The present issue of the newsletter is edited by Dr Petra Bianchi, a research assistant at the IIBS who is also co-ordinating the Baroque festival due to be held in Malta in May 2003. Any readers who might be interested in participating in the Baroque festival are advised to contact the Institute.

Among other things, the Baroque festival will include a grand exhibition on the theme 'The Triumph over Death: a Baroque Celebration', which will focus on funerary artefacts and habits found in various parts of the Maltese Islands, among them Romano Carapecchia's famous 'Chapelle Ardente' which is presently being studied by the Institute for this purpose. This splendid and unique contraption, originally designed for the funeral service of Grand Master Antonio Manoel de Vilhena (1722-1736) now lies in a disused and dismantled state in the crypt of the Conventual Church of St John in Valletta – its inclusion in the forthcoming Baroque festival should prove to be one of the major attractions of the event!

Professor Denis De Lucca

Director

International Institute for Baroque Studies

The International Institute of Baroque Studies (IIBS) at the University of Malta was set up to promote the pursuit of interdisciplinary, academic studies on various aspects of Baroque culture. It organises symposiums, public lectures, exhibitions and other activities leading to a greater appreciation of Baroque culture, with particular reference to Malta, and networks with similar centres for Baroque studies overseas. It is currently engaged in research projects concerning Baroque art and architecture of the 17th and 18th centuries. The Institute organises MA courses on Baroque studies and short courses on the Baroque heritage of Malta and its conservation, and is also engaged in giving assistance to various bodies concerned with the restoration of Baroque buildings and artefacts. It also organises a pre-tertiary certificate course in Baroque architecture.

Contact Address:

International Institute for Baroque Studies
University of Malta
Msida MSD 06
Tel: 00356-333919/ 316619
Fax: 00356-333919
Email: mfo1@um.edu.mt

Director: Prof Denis De Lucca
Exec. Officer: Ms Monica Floridia

Board Members:

Rev Prof Peter Serracino Inglott (Chairman)
Prof Denis De Lucca
Dr Mario Buhagiar
Prof Victor Mallia Milanese
Arch. Hermann Bonnici
Arch. Shirley Cefai
Dr Keith Sciberras
Dr Giovanni Mangion
Prof Paolo Varela Gomes
Arch. Dieter Falzon
Arch. Valeriano Schembri

Contents

The Council of Europe: Cultural Routes	4
Events	
Spanish Baroque Architecture	5
Baroque Theatre	6
The Baroque Heritage of Valletta	7
<i>The Manoel Baroque Festival: Opera</i>	8
<i>The Manoel Baroque Festival: An Invitation to the Baroque</i>	8
Manoel Baroque Festival 2001	9
Paolo Portoghesi at the Italian Cultural Institute	10
Features	
A Plea for the Restoration of Baroque and Theatrical Elements in the Liturgy Peter Serracino Inglott	11
The Theatre-City of the Baroque Age Peter Serracino Inglott	14
Books	
Giovanni Battista Vertova: <i>Diplomacy, Warfare and Military Engineering Practice in Early Seventeenth Century Malta</i>	17
Matteo Perez d'Aleccio: <i>Pittore Ufficiale del Grande Assedio a Malta</i>	19
Courses	
M.A. in Baroque Studies	20
Pre-Tertiary Certificate Course in Baroque Architecture	20

The Council of Europe Cultural Routes

The Council of Europe Cultural Routes were created in order to highlight the common cultural heritage of all Europeans. The project was launched in 1987 by the Council for Cultural Cooperation (CDCC), following the Parliamentary Assembly's proposal to revive the famous routes along which innumerable pilgrims travelled in the Middle Ages from all over Europe to Santiago de Compostela. This mass movement gave the pilgrims a feeling of belonging to a family of nations, each distinct from the others, but all sharing the same basic values and linked by a common civilisation.

The Council of Europe and its member states quickly realised that it was an excellent idea to devise routes offering a tangible and visible illustration of both the overall unity and the inherent diversity of European culture.

This corresponded perfectly to the aims and ideals of strengthening European identity while respecting to the full the cultural heritage and beliefs of others, and was also likely to encourage cultural tourism.

The Council of Europe's Cultural Routes programme, of which the Baroque Routes Network forms a part, has become an instrument for understanding European values. It plays its part in European construction by drawing on the wealth of Europe's heritage in every sense.

The Cultural Policy and Action Division, under the supervision of the Culture Committee and the CDC, has therefore selected a number of themes relating to peoples, migrations and the spread of the major European currents of civilisation, such as to generate a range of proposals and initiatives reflecting the complex nature of the cultures and societies that have formed present-day Europe.

Various networks of individuals, institutions, organisations and structures are responsible for developing each theme. These networks operate as intermediaries, setting up long-term cooperation projects and establishing centres for exchange, information and the implementation of new initiatives.

In the last ten years some twenty themes have been selected, covering the whole of Europe and giving rise to initiatives for fruitful cooperation in the fields of research and development, enhancement of the memory, history and European heritage, cultural and educational exchanges of young Europeans, contemporary cultural and artistic practice, as well as cultural tourism

and sustainable cultural development.

The scope of this project has been widened through the adoption of a Committee of Ministers resolution setting criteria for selecting themes and approving networks.

The resolution also entrusts the European Institute of Cultural Routes, set up in Luxembourg in July 1997 on the joint initiative of the Luxembourg authorities and the Council of Europe, with responsibility for co-ordinating the networks and offering them technical assistance, examining proposals for routes and developing the Cultural Routes Resource and Documentation

Centre by publicising the programme's achievements.

The competent bodies of the Council of Europe, assisted by an Advisory Committee comprising representatives of the Culture Committee and the Cultural Heritage Committee, are responsible for assessing the suitability and feasibility of new themes and routes, and awarding certification for routes.

*European Institute of Cultural Routes
Tour Jacob
Plateau du Rham
L-2427 Luxembourg
<http://culture.coe.fr/routes>
institut@culture-routes.lu*



Interior view of Santa Maria della Pace

Spanish Baroque Architecture



Murcia Cathedral, Spain (1742-54)

The three main phases of the development of Baroque architecture in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Spain were the subject of an intensive course of lectures by Professor Mercedes Gomez-Ferrer Lozano to students attending the MA in Baroque Studies course at the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta.

Professor Gomez-Ferrer Lozano is a renowned scholar in architectural history at the department of Art History of the University of Valencia in Spain.

The course, which focused on the so-called 'golden age' (*Siglo de Oro*) of Spain, covered different aspects of the Baroque architectural expression in the Iberian peninsula, placed within the context of the painting activity of Velasquez and Zurbaran and the plays of Lope de Vega and Calderon, all renowned among the finest achievements of the European Baroque heritage.

Professor Gomez-Ferrer also spoke about the export of Spanish Baroque architecture to the Spanish American colonies and

discussed in depth the unique architectural treatise of Juan de Caramuel, known as the *Arquitectura Civil recta y oblicua* which formed the basis of architectural expression in Andalusia in the second half of the seventeenth century.

Other topics discussed were the Jesuit contribution to Spanish Baroque and the superb interventions in the cathedrals of Santiago de Compostela and Toledo.

The Director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies, Professor Denis De Lucca, said that Spanish Baroque was one of the important contributions to the history of European architecture, and that a proper understanding of its 'spirit' and underlying theory is an essential component of the postgraduate course on Baroque studies at the IIBS.

The lectures on Spanish Baroque were concluded with a discussion on the Royal Palace in Madrid and the residence in Aranjuez.

The IIBS plans to hold another course of lectures on Spanish Baroque architecture in January 2002.

Baroque Theatre

A Symposium

As part of the Manoel Baroque Festival (May 4-12 2001), a symposium was held on May 10 by the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the Manoel Theatre's Sala Isouard. The symposium was entitled 'The Baroque Theatre', but the subjects covered were much more far-reaching than the title would suggest.

In his opening address, Professor Denis de Lucca, Head of Architecture and Director of the IIBS at the University of Malta, set the tone for the whole proceedings. He stated that the aim of the symposium was to provoke much needed thinking and discussion about the Baroque theatre, about its history, its design, its contents, and its message to people living in Europe in the 17th and 18th centuries.

He then quoted from Corrado Rizza's description of the Baroque theatre, highlighting how from a Medieval and Renaissance open air show, it developed into an indoor performance. 'Instead of by day, in the sunlight, it was now held at night, illuminated by numerous candles which were reflected by a myriad of crystals'.

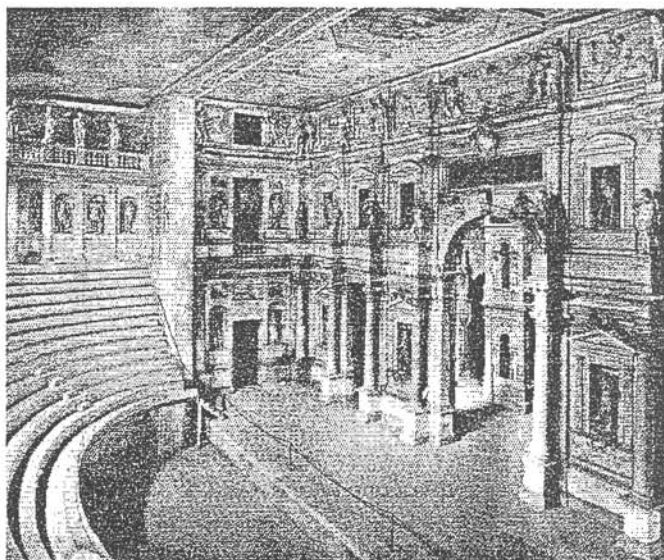
It was then pointed out how the spirit of Baroque Europe was powerfully evoked in the allegorical drama entitled *El Gran Teatro del Mundo*, where Calderon de la Barca reinterpreted the classical idea of life as a play and applied it to his own times. 'This metaphor of the world stage, of the universal theatre of mankind, remains dominant throughout the Baroque age'. A close relationship was established between the theatre and architecture.

Among the highlights that occurred in the development of the Baroque theatre, Denis de Lucca mentioned the following dates and events: 1545, when the publication of Sebastiano Serlio's *Secondo Libro di Architettura* was followed by the establishment of the first group of professional actors in Padua; 1556, when Leone de Sommi's *Quattro dialoghi in material di rappresentazione sceniche* was published; 1585, when Andrea Palladio's celebrated Teatro Olimpico was inaugurated in Venezia; 1598, which saw Angelo Ingegneri's publication of *Pratica di fabricar scene e machine nei teatri*, which was followed by the building of several famous Baroque theatres.

After the destruction inflicted by the earthquake of 1693, Noto in Sicily rose up again as 'a dream city conceived as a vast theatre, full of splendid churches and palaces'.

Towards the end of his wide-ranging introductory talk, Denis de Lucca referred to a matter of special interest for us Maltese. He recorded the extraordinary success registered by Scipione Maffei's *Merope* when it was performed in Rome in 1713. This success later moved the Italian Knights of St John to suggest to Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena that it should be chosen to inaugurate the Manoel Theatre in Valletta when it was completed by Carapaccchia and Mondion in 1731.

The different speakers in the symposium then proceeded to elaborate on the various themes that had been introduced. They also drove home their points by means of illustrations in sight and sound, through slides and cds.



**Interior of the Teatro Olimpico, Vicenza.
Palladio (1580)**

They included Professor Clelia Falletti, who spoke on *Drammaturgia dell'Opera Barocca*; Dr Vicki Ann Cremona, on 'Colour and Transformation on the Baroque Stage'; Professor Elena Tamburini on *Lorenzo Bernini, Carlo Fontana, Romano Carapaccchia: tre artisti del teatro Romano del 600*; Rev. Professor Peter Serracino Inglott on 'Aspects of Liturgy and Theatre'; Annabel Vassallo on 'Liturgy as Ritual – Borrowings from the Theatre'; Mrs John Galea on 'Bizzarrie, Irregularity, Extravagance: Common Denominators in Baroque Music', and Canon John Azzopardi on 'The Musical Capella of the Mdina Cathedral and its Protagonists in the 17th and 18th Centuries'.

Bernini, who designed the huge bronze baldachin over the high-altar within St Peter's Basilica in Rome and the colonnades outside it, was personally also an author and actor of plays. As a stage designer, he devised grandiose sets aimed at '*suscitare meraviglia*', awakening wonder in the audience.

The tradition he created was carried on and further strengthened by his successor as the leading architect in Rome, Carlo Fontana, as well as Fontana's own successor Romano Carapaccchia, who later came to Malta to undertake the building of the Manoel Theatre in Valletta.

To do justice to the elaborate sets that were constructed, often involving three tiers to represent sky, land, and sea, one had to find correspondingly spectacular stories and appropriate personages. Mythological subjects were resorted to, so that gods and goddesses could appear in the sky, dragons come from the sea to seek their victims on land and finally meet the fate they deserved at the hands

continued ➔

Baroque Theatre

⇒ continued

of their human or divine victors. The story of Andromeda was one of the first subjects elaborately staged in Rome. This led to the development of melodrama, where the dramatic was wed to song and dance and every form of art was involved.

The typical Italian theatrical performance became known as 'the opera'. It was felt to be the best medium to hold the spectators spellbound.

At first, in imitation of Greek drama, recitative predominated. Then it was realised that the relationship between music and language could be better exploited to the advantage of both. More opportunities were to be given to choir and soloists to display their talents to the full.

In 1637, an important development took place in Padua, when five persons got together and hired a theatre for the carnival season. This ultimately led to making the opera more accessible to the general public, and freed it from its dependence on rich patrons. The members of the audience were asked to buy a ticket for each performance.

The creators of the Baroque style, such as the great Bernini himself, worked both on churches and theatres. The liturgy itself is not

divorced from spectacle. In a way, it presupposes that participants are actors as well as spectators. There are even more Baroque churches than there are theatres. This is certainly the case in Malta. The liturgical reforms introduced by Vatican II were certainly all well-intentioned and many were long overdue. However, some people who undertook to implement the reforms were mistaken in their interpretation and over-zealous in their application of the reforms, so that much that was of great artistic value was destroyed. The insensitive removal of side altars from a number of Baroque churches was cited as a notorious example.

There is room for different styles in church art, architecture, and liturgical performance. Drama should not be excluded from divine service. Man as searcher and questioner, not only as believer, should feel perfectly at home in church as a participant in the liturgy. It is the function of religion to reveal, rather than to preach. It is not to be forgotten that St Thomas Aquinas described artistic performance as a 'natural sacrament', an outward sign of inward grace. The iconic element of the liturgy should not be underestimated. The Baroque treasures that form a substantial part of the art and architecture of Maltese churches should be better preserved and appreciated by all concerned.

Francis Cachia

The Baroque Heritage of Valletta

A Seminar

On Friday 3 November 2000, a seminar entitled *'The Baroque Heritage of Valletta'* was held at the National Museum of Archaeology in Valletta. This very well attended event was organised by the International Institute for Baroque Studies (IIBS) in conjunction with the Museums Department, and sponsored by the Bank of Valletta. The seminar was the contribution of the IIBS to the *Europe - A Common Heritage* campaign promoted by the Council of Europe.

The seminar was introduced by Professor Denis De Lucca, Director of the IIBS and Head of Architecture at the University of Malta. He began with a general description of Valletta as a fortified city built to provide a well-protected urban nucleus as an alternative to a dangerous life in scattered hamlets.

Protected urban life is the concept underlying an early plan of Valletta drawn up in Brussels in September 1565 by the famous Italian theorist and military architect Francesco de Marchi, and in a later plan drawn up by Daniel Specklin in Strasbourg.

Within a short time, the austere appearance of Valletta was transformed into a splendid European Baroque setting, well-suited to the ceremonial needs of the aristocratic Knights of St. John.

Denis De Lucca described how during the

17th and 18th centuries changes were made to the fortification system and urban texture of Grand Master de Valette's city. After 1650 a more relaxed Italy had already experienced the architectural and artistic revolution created by the great Baroque architects Maderno, Borromini, Bernini, and Pietro da Cortona.

The official opening address to the seminar was delivered by Professor Roger Ellul Micallef, Rector of the University of Malta.

He first expressed his appreciation of the initiative taken by the IIBS to organise the event, and then summarized the operative aims of the Institute, which is now offering an M.A. in Baroque Studies as a postgraduate course, as well as publishing this newsletter on behalf of the Council of Europe's *Baroque Route Network*.

The Institute has also embarked on an ambitious research programme studying hitherto unexplored aspects of the building of Valletta and the design of early Baroque churches in Malta.

Other areas of interest include co-operation with the University of Catania, the Baroque Centre of Syracuse, and other European Institutions concerned with Baroque Studies. Details of the Council of Europe campaign, *Europe - A Common Heritage*, were outlined to the audience by Mr Anthony Pace, Director of Museums, on behalf of the Minister of Education who was indisposed.

The first paper of the day was delivered by Chev. Roger de Giorgio, author of *A City by an Order*, who talked about the historical background leading to the foundation of Valletta and the subsequent Baroque

continued ⇒

The Baroque Heritage of Valletta

⇒ *continued*

transformations of the City after the arrival of the papal military engineer Floriani in 1635.

This was followed with a slide lecture by Annabel Vassallo, research assistant at the IIBS, who demonstrated the changing face of Valletta through a series of architectural features identified by the Institute for this purpose.

Claude Busuttill, a graduate student of the University of Florence, continued with a paper on the rich Baroque interior of the Conventual Church of St John the Baptist in Valletta, which offers a striking contrast to the bland 16th-century façade. Architect Hermann Bonnici, also a research assistant at the IIBS, spoke about various technicalities linked to the conservation of the Baroque heritage of Valletta.

The main speaker at the Seminar was Professor Mauro Bertagnin of the University of Udine, who gave personal insights into the spirit of Baroque Valletta as seen in a video produced in 1998 by the audiovisual centre of the University of Udine in conjunction with the department of Architecture at the University of Malta. Professor Bertagnin also highlighted the theoretical aspects of the gridiron urban armature of Valletta and compared them to projects by famous Italian architectural theorists of the 16th century. It was this same urban armature that provided the setting for the Baroque architectural transformations of 17th and 18th-century Valletta.

Rev. Professor Peter Serracino Inglott, Chairman of the board of the IIBS, delivered the closing address of the seminar. He emphasised the great need to actively conserve the unique Baroque heritage of Valletta, and also explored various relationships between Renzo Piano's proposals for the new city gate and the Baroque concepts discussed during the seminar, adding that the spirit of Baroque Valletta must at all costs be respected in any future interventions in the urban fabric of this fine city. ■

The Baroque Festival Opera

Concluding the recent Baroque festival, the Manoel Theatre, in collaboration with the Istituto Italiano di Cultura, presented Pergolesi's stage masterpiece *La Serva Padrona* at the Manoel to a pretty numerous audience. I had seen this work just once before: it was at the erstwhile Radio City opera house back in the late 1950s.

One's memories, no matter how youthful, perforce fade after more than 40 years but the amazing cheek and freshness of the saucy maid Serpina are not easily forgettable. They were successfully revived as far as I was concerned by Marcello Ancilotti, who also doubled as the bumbling Vespone, a mute part Servant and accomplice of Serpina's and privy to her scheming in bagging/trapping her 'master' Uberto into marrying her.

The Venetian chamber orchestra *L'Offerta Musicale* was conducted by Riccardo Paravicini. Lithe and elegantly stylish they provided continuous support to this delicious romp that does not seem to age. That despite its intrinsic idiosyncracies which at times could seem almost too repetitive, to the extent that one finds the vivacious lengthy recitative passages far more interesting and revealing.

A small cast, a work on a small scale because after all this is only an *intermezzo a due*, often meant to provide lighter contrasts during evenings when jaded tastes and appetites needed some relief from heavier stuff inhabited by classical and mythological heroes up to their incredible tricks. Soprano Giuseppina Brienza's Serpina was excellent, so good that it almost made me resent her extreme bossiness, to the point of exasperation. On the other hand, baritone Davide Paltretti's Uberto was equally convincing that at first one felt sorry for him, for not standing up to his maid's bullying and blandishments.

Such was the characterisation the pair projected. Their technical endowments are considerable, and while like Paltretti's vocal qualities at all times, for his timbre is warm and delivery very smooth, it took me some time to get used to Brienza's sometimes strident top which eventually mellowed into something more agreeable in the second part of the work.

Her '*Serpina penserete*' was most winning and so were the duets with Uberto, especially the last extended one with various sections of the orchestra imitating the prospective couple's beating hearts. For in the end she wins her man, helped in part by Vespone's masquerading as Captain Tempesta. This was one of the funniest scenes of all.

A sparsely effective set and judicious light effects continued to create the right atmosphere, as after all, did the theatre itself, a jewel of the Baroque.

Albert G. Storace ■

An Invitation to the Baroque

It is always good to see different cultural bodies come together voluntarily around a table and pool their ideas and resources into a common project. One new collaborative effort of this kind involves the Manoel Theatre, the International Institute for Baroque Studies (IIBS), and the Kooperativa Kulturali Universitarja (KKU).

These three entities have recently joined up with the aim of developing a biannual international festival of the Baroque arts, the first edition of which took place last May. Apart from the Neolithic temples, the Baroque period constitutes Malta's most

important architectural and cultural national heritage.

The phrase 'cultural tourism' is bandied about frequently in public discourse and

continued ⇒



Manoel Baroque Festival 2001

From 4-11 May 2001, the Manoel Theatre hosted a series of exciting events in connection with the Manoel Baroque Festival, which included a wide range of activities of all things Baroque - two opera concerts, recitals, lectures, and a tour of Mdina.

The setting was perfect - a Baroque theatre in one of the finest Baroque cities, bursting at its seams with Baroque tradition. When Baroque music is making a comeback in Europe, it is so appropriate for this theatre to be poised on the crest of this new wave, luring local and foreign music lovers to the island, and giving a boost to its cultural tourism.

The festival was a collaborative effort between Malta's national theatre, Teatru Manoel, the International Institute for Baroque Studies, and supported by the Istituto Italiano di Cultura.

The events of the festival included an exhibition on Baroque theatre which featured original designs and drawings by Romano Carapecchia. Among the musical events was the Johann Adolf Hasse (1699-1783) Concert by the Affetti Musicali of Budapest on period instruments and a concert of sacred music by Carissimi, Hasse and Scarlatti at the Basilica of St George in Rabat, Gozo.

The two popular operas *Tracollo* and *La Serva Padrona* by Pergolesi were performed by L'Offerta Musicale di Venezia, directed by Riccardo Parravicini. ■

⇒ *continued*

generally accepted to be a valuable idea worth encouraging. But is it being taken seriously? Does it amount to more than sightseeing in the minds of most people?

Cultural tourism does not only involve taking visitors on brief guided tours around key sites.

It includes the much broader aim of attracting groups who travel with the specific intention of experiencing and learning about a particular cultural aspect of a foreign

country, often also attending a festival or event.

Much still needs to be done to sell Malta to this specialised market, and to develop tours and events suited to this kind of tourist.

One of the aims of the Baroque festival is to contribute to this demand, recognising that much of what we consider to be Malta's intrinsic artistic and religious character is linked to the flourishing of the Baroque ideal in this country during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The promoters of the festival would like to invite other people and groups involved in the arts to plan and stage their own performances and events related to the Baroque, to coincide with the next festival in May 2003.

The organising committee is willing to offer advice and assistance to anyone interested in helping the festival grow into a major and regular international event.

Petra Bianchi ■

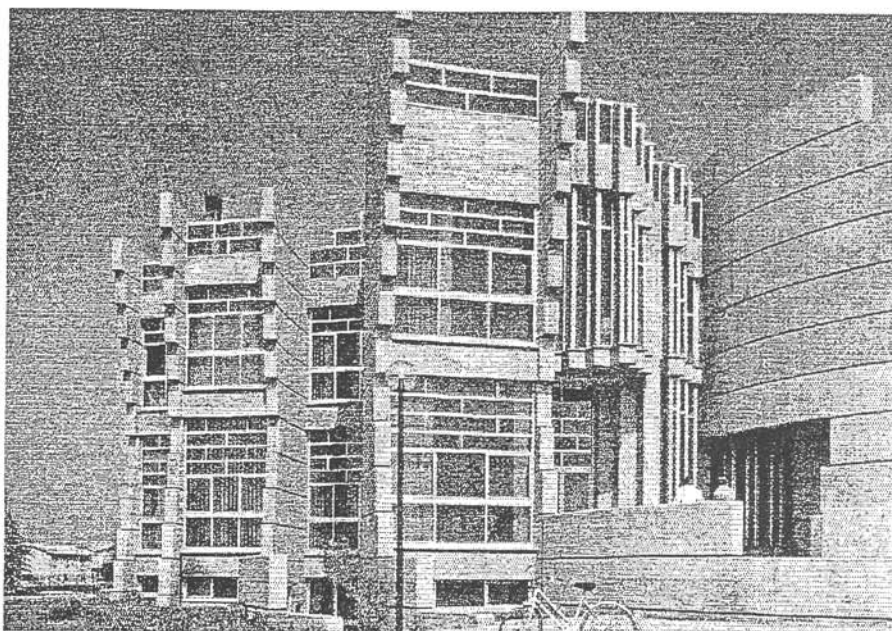
Paolo Portoghesi at the Italian Cultural Institute

The beautifully frescoed Baroque hall of the Italian Cultural Institute in Palace Square, Valletta, was the well-attended venue of Thursday, 31 May 2000, of a lecture delivered by the renowned Italian architect, Paolo Portoghesi.

The lecture was introduced in the presence of the Italian Ambassador Dott. Giancarlo Ricci by Dott.ssa. Rosanna Cravenna, Director of the Institute, who took the praiseworthy initiative of inviting Professor Portoghesi to Malta. In view of the rich Baroque heritage of his country, Portoghesi was particularly interested in linking historical research on Baroque architecture and project activity, this indeed being the theme of his lecture at the Italian Cultural Institute.

Born in Rome in 1931, and having graduated as an architect from Rome University in 1957, Portoghesi was at a very early stage involved in the debates and research activity concerned with Italy's contribution to the international scenario of contemporary architecture. Professor Portoghesi's interest in the history of architecture manifested itself in numerous books and publications about Baroque architecture, focusing in particular on the famous works of Guarino Guarini, Bernardino Vittone, and Francesco Borromini.

Professor Portoghesi's lecture clearly betrayed the great influence that Borromini had on his career as an architect, crystallised not long ago in his Mosque building in Rome. Other buildings created by Portoghesi which reveal the architect's thorough knowledge of the forms and compositional elements of Baroque architecture were the houses for Iacp in Salerno (1981-88), the Banca Popolare del Molise at Campobasso (1984), the Tegel house in Berlin (1984-88), the scenography for the 'Le Divine' spectacle in front of the Pisa Baptistry (1987), the thermal salon at Montecatini (1987-88) and so many other projects, all monuments to an illustrious career which repeatedly



Above: Cultural Centre, Avezzano. Paolo Portoghesi (1970-82)
Below: Project for a piazza at Latino. Paolo Portoghesi (1984)

proved itself to be so very influenced by the architecture of Baroque times.

High quality slides of most of the projects mentioned were shown in Portoghesi's lecture, preceded or overlapped with views of the great Baroque works of Borromini, such as the Galleria Spada, S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane, S. Ivo alla Sapienza, and, of course, the remarkable Convento dei Filippini, all magnificent buildings which in the 17th century converted Rome into a splendid Baroque city.

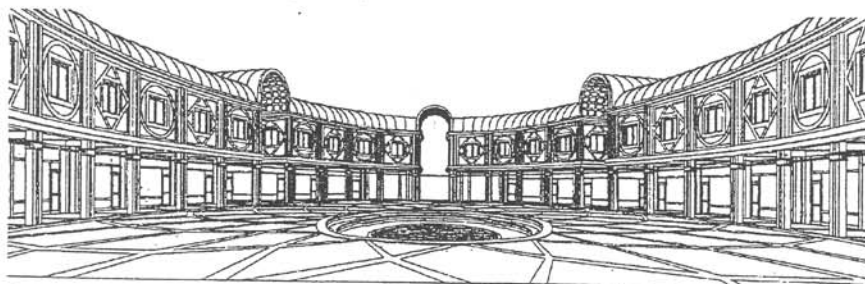
One of Portoghesi's admirers, the architect Mario Pisani whom I had invited to lecture in the Faculty of Architecture and Civil Engineering at the University of Malta several years ago, has published a very interesting book entitled *Dialogo con Paolo Portoghesi per comprendere l'architettura* (Rome, 1989).

This work examines Portoghesi's considerable contribution to the history of

modern architecture in three stages. There is firstly a rare insight into his initial formation as an architect in the immediate post-war period, in very problematic times for Italy. There was then Portoghesi's deep understanding of the successive periods in the remarkable history of Italian architecture starting from ancient Rome and ending in the modern expression, *I maestri del Movimento Moderno*. There was finally the third theme of Portoghesi's somewhat controversial views about the interesting relationship of architecture and politics.

At the end of reading Pisani's book about Portoghesi one feels a sensation of what the Italian's describe as *benessere*. I think this was the general feeling of all those who had the privilege of attending Portoghesi's lecture at the Italian Cultural Institute – a lecture which must have had a special significance for the many architectural and MA in Baroque Studies students who attended Professor Portoghesi's superb presentation of what is essentially a very complex subject, the prime aim of which was to explore possible interactions between Borromini's Baroque architecture and present-day architectural expression in neighbouring Italy.

Denis De Luca



A Plea for the Restoration of Baroque and Theatrical Elements in the Liturgy

Peter Serracino Inglott

Let me begin by making it absolutely clear that I think that the liturgical reform of the Second Vatican Council was overdue and, on the whole, was an excellent achievement. I am in no way in favour of a return to the liturgy of Pope Pius V, although (as a person born, resident, and intending to die in Valletta, the city which is very indebted to him for its coming into existence) I have reason to be grateful to that Pope.

There are, however, some aspects of the liturgy which have been greatly impoverished by Vatican reforms, in consequence, I suspect, of the desire to eliminate from it anything that smacked of the theatrical and the baroque. The positive motivation of this anti-baroque and anti-theatrical purge was the greater involvement and participation of the people. Today, thirty years afterwards, it is clear that the opposite result has come about the certain crucially important instances.

The best illustration of what I mean is provided perhaps by the Easter Vigil. Let me just read to you a description of the central rite as it was and as it became before and after 1970. I quote from Herbert McCabe. Before 1970,

the baptismal font was seen in essentially sexual terms. It was seen as the womb of Mother Church, fertilised by the entry of the Holy Spirit, and this was seen in the phallic form of the lighted candle entering the waters. Christ's fertilisation of the Virgin Mother Church by bringing her the Holy Spirit was compared in this liturgy to the fertilising of the primeval waters, the waters of Chaos, by the breath of the Spirit, in the reading from Genesis 1. So the bringing to new birth of believers in the womb of the Church was united with the bringing to birth of the Universe.

In the rubrics, the priest was instructed to lower the lighted candle into the baptismal water in three stages, penetrating more deeply each time, and each time singing on a higher note: *Descendant in hanc plenitudinem fontis virtus Spiritus Sancti*. It is quite plain that an impression of mounting excitement is meant to be visibly, factually felt. It was a very strange (baroque) and theatrical (primitive) ceremony in the middle of the night.

Finally, when the candle has reached its deepest point, the priest was to blow three times on the surface of the water in the form of the letter Ψ (a reference to the cross, but Ψ is also the initial of the word *psyche*, soul, life). The priest then continued: *totamque huius aquae substantiam regenerandi fecundet effectum*; the Latin brings out the full resonance of 'regenerandi' and 'fecundet'.

As the candle penetrates the water, it was said to be entering *hanc plenitudinem fontis*; this feminine word 'plenitudo' suggests the fullness of mother earth, the coming pregnancy of the womb of Mother Church, and this womb is to be fertilised by the 'virtus' of the Holy Spirit – the word 'virtus' comes, of course, from 'vir', man. The Holy Spirit is the virility through which the fullness of the womb is pregnant with new life, – the liturgy said – 'in order that the whole substance of this water may become fecund for rebirth'.

Now contrast this pre-1970 version with the 1970 one. The English missal says: 'The priest *may* lower the Paschal Candle into the water one or three times' (He does not even have to!). He says: "We ask you, Father, with your Son, send your Holy Spirit on the waters of this font". It's a nice little reference to the Trinity; but all that rich fertility symbolism is gone. The rubrics go on: 'The priest holds the candle in the water and says: "May All who are buried with Christ in the death of baptism rise also with him to newness of life".' This is an unexceptionable bit of theology – but it seems as if the same people who once covered the sexual parts of the figures in Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel have been at work on the text of the central liturgical rite of Christianity.

I have cited this one example at some length and it will have to suffice. Other examples, I am sure, will readily occur to some of you; for instance, such elements as the play with candlelight and darkness, which gave a powerful dramatic meaning to those offices of Holy Week that were once known precisely as *Tenebrae*. Alas, they have now disappeared from the liturgy, without as far as I can see at all enhancing its popularity. I will not analyse the significance of these particular losses. Instead I will discuss briefly the three factors which I suspect are the main motivation for their disappearance.

The first is what might be called puritanism, that is, the objection to anything that seems erotic or sexual in the liturgy. Perhaps the classical manifestation of this prejudice is the often repeated criticism of Bernini's archfamous *Ecstasy of St Theresa*. Bernini is accused of representing the mystical experience of the saint of Avila in too erotic a fashion. There is an abundance of such remarks as: "the Angel has too pretty a foot" – as if sexual overtones were not already very much present both in the saint's own account of her religious experiences *and* in the Biblical model which Theresa used, the *Song of Songs*. I will not dwell any more for the present on this topic.

The other two factors are objections to the elements of theatricality on the one hand, and the baroque as a style, on the other. I have, I fear, at this point to give in briefly to the philosopher's professional temptation of giving a working definition of what I mean by 'theatricality' – I do not think that in this context I need spend time on what I mean by 'baroque'. With regard to the first of these terms, I follow those authorities who distinguish theatre from liturgy in the following way. Liturgy supposes that all participants are actors, in the sense that they are all believers that the

continued ⇒

⇒ *continued*

rite has the power to transcend time and make present the past or mythical event re-enacted in the rite (the creation of the world and its recreation in Christ, in the Easter baptismal liturgy I referred to). There is no audience.

The role of an audience may be quite active, but it is distinct from that of the actors, in that their attitude as auditors and spectators is critical and searching, not believing and immersive. If a performance is being done not because all the participants in it believe in the efficacy of its claims to transcend time and space, but at most for this claim to be presented to the critical attention of an audience, then it is theatre, not liturgy.

There is, moreover, a formal feature, at least in a Christian context, that enables one to distinguish fairly easily between liturgy and theatre – namely impersonation. The liturgy eschews impersonation: at Mass, for instance, the priest does not perform the part of Christ, but narrates the account of the last supper in the third person.

I mention this example because it enables me to point out an important and relevant distinction. A lot of the anti-theatrical polemic of the Vatican II liturgical reformers was justified because their bogey were usually certainly mistaken interpretations of the Mass, as if the priest were performing in it the part of Christ in a passion-play. This is quite certainly not what the priest is supposed to be doing at any time – and it must be said that he does do quite a large variety of things, such as welcoming, saluting, presiding over collective acts, summing up, praising, preaching, washing his hands, narrating the story of the Last Supper, and so on. But, at no stage, I repeat, does he impersonate anybody.

One must, however, sharply distinguish between the erroneous misinterpretation of moments of the liturgy as if they were impersonations, and the performance outside or even within the framework of the Mass of actions involving impersonation. In other words, it is certainly a mistake to interpret or perform the Mass as if it were theatre, but there is nothing either theologically or aesthetically wrong in introducing theatrical elements or parts either in the liturgy itself or outside it, as what is sometimes called paraliturgies.

There is, indeed, a possible objection that comes to mind against the practice of juxtaposing within the celebrative framework performances which are liturgical (without impersonation) and others which are theatrical (with impersonation). The objection is that such juxtaposition may confuse the congregation as to its supposed role.

Are the members of the congregation supposed to be participant and believing actors or critically minded auditors and spectators? The answer to this objection is, in my opinion, that most



Interior of the Conventual Church of St John, Valletta

members in most congregations will find that such an unresolved and quizzical status is precisely the standpoint they wish to assume.

This generalisation probably became true for the first time in the Western world in the baroque age. The liturgists of the time found themselves confronted with a world which was conceived as “all a stage”. Their reaction appears to us to have been that they converted their churches into theatres. At the back of their minds there may well have been an idea that was centuries later well-expressed by none other than Gordon Craig when he was promoting a dramaturgical revolution in the first part of last century.

Gordon Craig was arguing for a form of drama “which *says* less yet *shows* more than all other art forms”. There is a clear resemblance between Craig’s slogan and Wittgenstein’s characterisation of the “mystical” as “that which cannot be said but can be shown”. This probably unintended coincidence of language prepares for Craig’s successive statement, which might otherwise have surprised us. Referring to the new theatrical art form which he was pleading for, Craig added: “a religion will be found contained in it. That religion will preach no more, but it will reveal ... It will unveil thought to our eyes – silently – by movement – in visions”.

It seems to me that Craig’s notion of the mode of communication of the religion of which he anticipated the appearance was not all that different, at least from a formal point of view, from the aims of such artists as the Jesuit Dubrenil, in the baroque age, in his

continued ⇒

⇒ *continued*

designs of church interiors. They are designed to provide at once responses to two needs. The first is an appropriate setting for the technical implementation of a primarily visual theatre.

This is the presentation of the Christian world-view in the sort of non-dogmatic but subtly suggestive language which is most appropriate for the searcher and questioner rather than the full-blooded believer. A different formulation of the objection to juxtaposing liturgy and theatre within the same framework is often provoked by such art-forms. Already in the baroque age itself, there were many critics (several quoted, for instance, in Gino Stefani's book *Musica Barocca* (2), who complained that more people went to Church to enjoy art – music and theatre – than out of piety.

Such critics are, however, in the first place ignoring the consideration, at least in the Thomist tradition of theology, of artistic performance as a natural sacrament. Music, for instance, is the combination of divine gifts (the natural conditions of sound production including by the human voice) and human reordering skills (inventing tunes and musical instruments) which makes it conform to the account of a sacrament as an outward sign of inward grace.

More specifically, account has to be taken of what has been called the 'iconic' quality of Baroque music. The word 'iconic' is being used here with the meaning which Pierce gave it – that is, a sign the meaning of which is determined by a resemblance to the object signified by it. I myself prefer to call this kind of music theatrical rather than iconic.

A typical example would be, say, the *O Sacrum Convivium* by the English composer Thomas Tallis. He sets to music a text which talks of the Eucharist as a pledge of future glory, and the music itself sounds as if it were reaching out to grasp something outside itself. Such music effectively makes the veil between heaven and earth appear thin.

There are, obviously, hundreds of other examples I could have taken. I have chosen this particular one because in its entirety it also illustrates a specifically baroque treatment of a theme – the Eucharist. Another of my suspicions is that the allergy to the baroque elements in the liturgy is also partly due to its favoured treatment of the Eucharist as the true fertility rite – of which pagan practices of a similar nature were imperfect and sometimes corrupt foreshadowings.

That consideration brings me to the hypothesis that the real ground of the objection to having both liturgical and theatrical elements or parts within the same framework is in the last analysis merely a negative aesthetic reaction to the Baroque style. Such reactions often go beyond a mere classical distaste for the "*mirabile composita*" principle enunciated by Bernini. Their roots lie more generally in the belief that there is only one style of art which is liturgical.

In Malta, we have had a most remarkable expression of this belief at the time of the Nazareners. In his hatred of the baroque, Giuseppe Hyzler had reached the point where he succeeded in

getting one chapel of St. John's Co-Cathedral despoiled of the baroque decoration carved in its stone walls. Happily the Nazareners were not allowed to proceed with their work of destruction. But the belief that there is only one style of art which befits the liturgy is still rampant. At one time it was held even by such a luminary as Nicola Zammit that only the Gothic was suited to church architecture. At other times, here in Malta, it was held that only the Baroque was suitable for church art; and this in spite of official pronouncements to the contrary.

The clearest case is that of music. In the baroque age, it is plain that it is not even possible to distinguish sacred from profane music in stylistic terms. The same is equally true today. But there is an odd paradox in the anti-baroque attitude of contemporary fashionable liturgists. While, on the one hand, they insist on the necessity of a specific sacred style, on the other they show a determination to eliminate anything that smacks of the spectacular, the marvellous, the miraculous, the ecstatic or the supernatural. But the result of this elimination is precisely to remove the feature that could most sensibly distinguish the sacred from the secular.

I will conclude my plea for baroque elements or parts in the liturgy with just one other observation. A great merit of the Vatican II reforms is that they put the Mass back at the centre of Catholic devotion. But at present the danger has turned rather in the opposite direction: viz. that the liturgy be deprived of anything else that is not the Mass. On the contrary, it seems to me obvious that with the greater prevalence of doubters over unquestioning faithful, the need is greater than ever for paraliturgies. Paraliturgies are structured – like the typically Baroque-age celebrations – with the catechetical element (always present in the liturgy) being given a rather apologetic turn. Moreover, it seems to me equally clear that the celebration of the Mass itself would benefit from the creative reintroduction of some baroque or theatrical elements of the kind that I have indicated.

The title I gave to the organisers of this symposium was formulated before I had decided what to say exactly. At the time I was profoundly shocked by the recent horrific sacrilege against the national heritage at Mnajdra.

I also felt that another sacrilege was being committed through the neglect of our baroque heritage – not playing the music – not performing the drama. Perhaps the worst instances were mutilating the churches, professedly in the interest of current liturgical fashions or fads. In fact, there is undoubtedly a genuine problem here. Can you suitably perform anything but a baroque liturgy in a baroque church? Is any kind of music, let us say, compatible with the setting in St John's Co-Cathedral?

Those were the kind of questions which I had in mind when I spoke of "aspects of liturgy and theatre" – but in actual fact I decided to reduce the topic to one of less troublesome proportions than that of the dramaturgy of a contemporary liturgical performance in a historical baroque church. ■

This paper was delivered at the symposium on Baroque Theatre during the Manoel Baroque Festival in May 2001 (vide pp8-9)

The Theatre-City of the Baroque Age

Annabel Vassallo

People living in Baroque times had a great love of dramatic representations in all their forms. This love of theatre extended into all areas, including those that are not usually viewed as theatrical. Theatre permeated every aspect of life.

During the period religion was dramatised, Mass was elevated to the form of ritual and processions became elaborate, spectacular events. Theatre became so pervasive that even daily living became an act: costume, gesture, etiquette were all ritualised.

Theatre thus became the showpiece of the age, in that it expressed the Baroque desire for display and exultation, elements that also emerge in architecture and in the city. This Baroque love of theatre can be seen in the great palaces and magnificent churches of the age, particularly in the Baroque notion of space as a living, pulsating element.

In architecture, as in theatre, Baroque space came to be viewed increasingly as an arena for action, where the space represented the action it contained and encouraged, such that in both disciplines there emerges a disposition towards the spectacular and the illusionist. Even military structures such as the fortifications can be interpreted as scenarios for action.

Vauban's fortifications (late 17th-century) can in fact be interpreted as settings for military drills and parades where the soldiers became actors performing to well-rehearsed movements.

The force behind this changing vision of the world was the Counter-Reformation. The Council of Trent brought about a revival of religious feeling and a desire to express the greatness of the Catholic Church.

The decrees of the last session of the Council laid down guidelines for artists encouraging them to fuse the three arts of painting, sculpture and architecture in an attempt to render the Christian message vigorous and alive.

The emphasis was now on feeling, on the spiritual made visual. Architects and artists took the convincing powers of theatre and applied these methods to their own ends in an attempt to render the whole of the religious experience, so that the mood of austerity that had prevailed immediately after the last session of the Council of Trent gave way to the joyous, exuberant Baroque.

Space in the theatre does not only mean the theatre building itself (the location for the theatrical action), but also and especially the representations of space that became part and parcel of the theatrical representations, hence Baroque scenography. The word scenography incorporates not only the painted backdrops that became increasingly elaborate and illusionistic, but also all those effects that contributed to making a spectacle memorable and extraordinary.

Foremost among these were the theatrical machines – one can call them the special effects of Baroque theatre. Together painted scenery and machines populated the world of theatre with fantastic beings and weird creatures. They created a short-lived atmosphere

of wonder and magic, a world that centred wholly on the spectator and was created for him.

One of the most striking aspects of the Baroque theatre, particularly its scenography, was its ephemeral nature. Often spectacles would be put up for one night only and thus a lot of trouble and expense would be taken to produce a wondrous world which lasted only briefly and which, once the spectacle was over, would be gone for ever.

One way to make the illusory world that was the theatre durable was to recreate it in stone – in the city. Hence scenography became a springboard for many ideas, which found their way into the city, such that the magic and illusion of the theatre world could live on in enduring form.

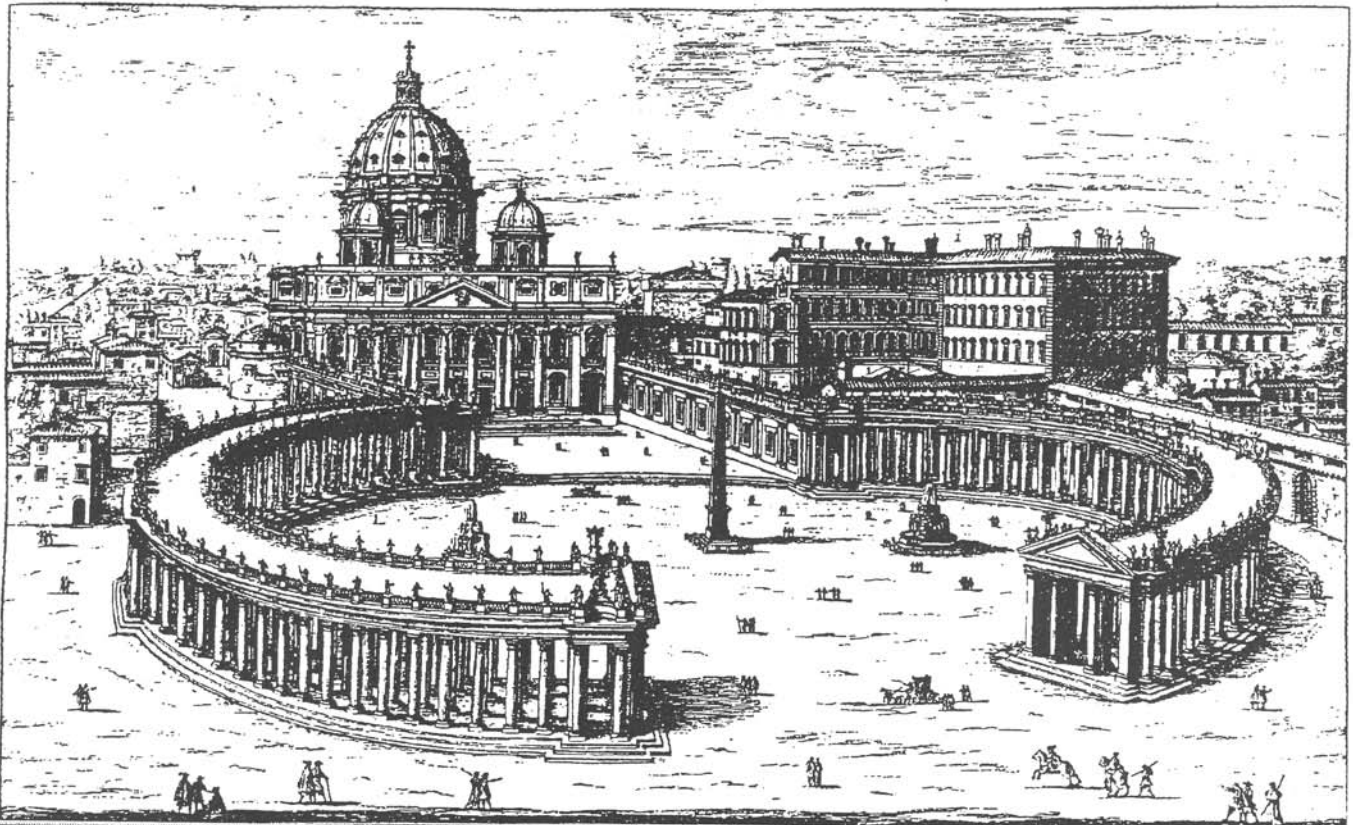
Unlike Renaissance spaces, Baroque city forms were designed in their entirety. Buildings were not simply planned on paper and inserted into the urban fabric. They were designed in relation to all other buildings in a space, they came to epitomise the Baroque love of self-expression and ultimately to reflect the mood of their maker, of the person they were dedicated to, or of the idea they represented.

Rome, where the Baroque originated, is replete with mystical spaces that transfigure the city, spaces that make it a city of wonder and greatness even today. St. Peter's Square, the Vatican, Piazza Navona, the Spanish Steps, are only among the best known of these magnificent spaces.

Malta too has its fair share of scenographic architecture. Mdina and Valletta are the first to spring to mind; yet to these we must add the numerous Baroque churches that fill our islands as well as the palaces and other buildings situated primarily in our village cores. Accentuated cornices, recessed windows, deep doorways, articulated street corners, grandiose yet sober churches, eschutcheons and monuments proclaim everywhere the supremacy of church and state.

Mdina, for long the forgotten stronghold of the Maltese nobility, was reconstructed and transformed from a dark, medieval enclave into a fine Baroque city at the time of Grand Master Manoel de Vilhena following an earthquake, which in 1693 destroyed much of the existing fabric.

Vilhena grabbed the opportunity to transform the old capital into an opulent statement of the sovereignty of the Order. Seen from afar, the citadel stands out above the landscape proclaiming its presence long before one enters it. The main entrance and approach to Mdina is theatrical in itself, a monument to Manoel de Vilhena. His arms occur frequently throughout the city, yet nowhere as emphatically and magnificently as over the main



St Peter's, Rome. The vast piazza and curving portico were designed specifically for their function as containers of the sacred spectacles linked to the mother-church of the Roman Catholic religion that crowns the square

doorway, a proclamation that this is his city and that he is the master. He uses recurring scenographic methods to assert his supremacy over the nobility that had previously been the undisputed masters of the city, a stance of authority that is reinforced by the magnificent Baroque palace that he places directly inside the main gate, an enticing vision of the power of the monarch.

The scenographic practice of engendering expectation in the user of a space, and then presenting him with a completely different reality once this is attained, is employed in the city streets. Walking through medieval and Baroque Mdina is an experience of discovery. Areas present themselves suddenly and unexpectedly, engendering a wish to explore, to find out the hidden recesses which can be guessed at and which one feels must be attained.

The narrow, winding streets draw the walker onwards, hinting at the openings ahead but never preparing the viewer for the dramatic piazza or the monumental cathedral that crowns it.

The cathedral square presents itself abruptly to the walker, a vast open space that sweeps from the opening of a the space downwards along the gentle slope, up the steps of the parvis and then rushing along the sober yet monumental cathedral façade.

To right and left are hints of other spaces, each exerting a gentle pull on the spectator. The tortuous streets, interspersed with minor squares that serve as areas of rest, ill-prepare the viewer for the grand, open view from the bastions, rendering the old citadel dynamic and vibrant.

Thus the city becomes a painted backdrop reproduced in stone. The lines of vision that are the work of perspective in the theatre become vistas in architecture so that one view leads on to another, and that onto another again. There is a perpetual play on natural human curiosity, a continual exploration of terrain, a changes of level. Theatrical notions of movement and changing perspective are incorporated on a city-wide scale.

In this manner streets no longer remained merely avenues leading from A to B. They became efficient, enticing channels for movement, pulling or pushing the citizen, who now also became the spectator, along carefully planned routes. A person walking along a street would be driven forward by tantalising glimpses of open spaces ahead, areas of rest within the city structure. As the walker progressed along the route his perception of it would change, continually engendering fresh ideas and new responses.

The lines along which the city of Valletta is laid are completely different. Mdina, being a much earlier city, had developed organically and somewhat haphazardly, with streets following territorial outlines – an aspect that the old capital never completely lost. Indeed the charm of Mdina lies in its artful mixture of natural development and novel methods of embellishment.

Valletta, on the other hand, was built from scratch, a city built to accommodate the military and hospitaller image of the Order. The city was laid out along intersecting gridlines, which made the development of the city much easier to control and which would have greatly facilitated movement in the event of attack. In other

⇒ continued

words it was the perfect military city for a military order: severe, solemn, and perfectly controlled.

This is evident immediately on entering Valletta. The main street becomes an avenue crossing the entire city. From the main gateway to the glimpse of the sea in the distance, the long vista enables the spectator to make a mental picture of the city. Yet again, along Strada San Giorgio (today better known as Republic Street), are unexpected areas that slow the headlong rush of the route.

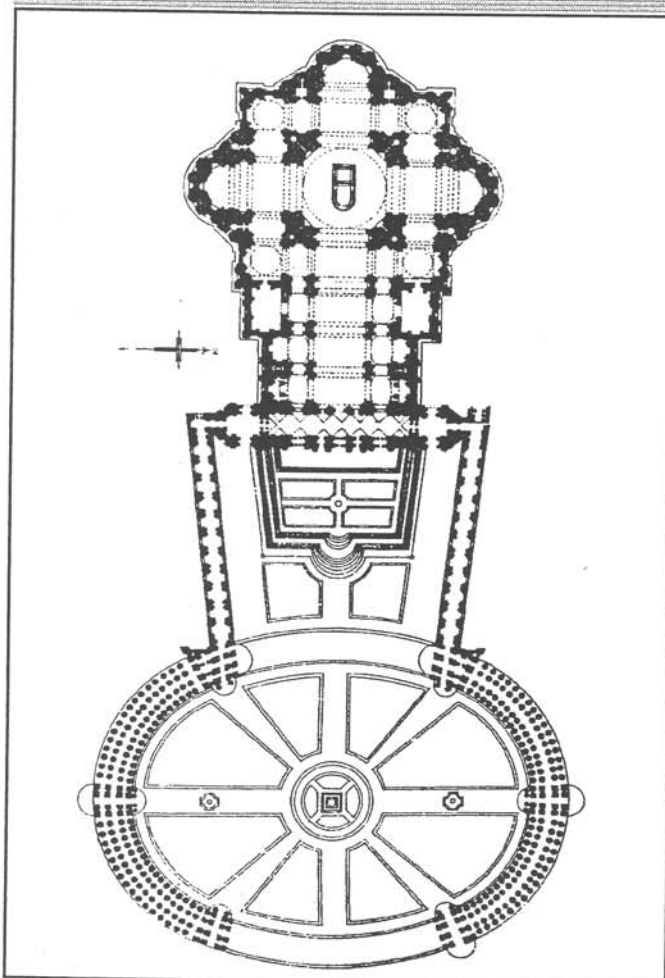
Here too, as in Mdina, we find breathing spaces along the way, albeit vastly different, far more solemn and academic. Whereas in Mdina the architectural details are flamboyant and energetic, triumphant crowning of doorways and window frames, in Valletta the mood is more sober.

This reflects the initial development of Valletta as a fortress city, as well as its role as capital city of the Knights.

While Valletta's buildings are not lacking in richness of architectural detail, particularly evident in the Baroque transformation that occurred after 1650, the whole is subordinated to the overall organising scheme laid out in the 16th century by Laparelli.

Hence the monumental buildings are rigidly in line, continuity and rhythm being provided by the strict alignment of doors, windows

Plan of St Peter's, Rome (as built)



and stringcourses, making the street the spinal column of this perfectly controlled system.

The sobriety of this system reflects the stature of the Order, in keeping with the theatrical notion of appropriateness, where the costume of an actor would immediately make evident his role in the representation. Thus the overall design of Valletta, which could be taken in at a glance, set the mood and revealed the nature of the capital city.

Inside the buildings a similar staging of the function of the space resulted in decorative schemes that reflected the nature of the space and the activities it was used for. Often space and user were both exulted, in the sense that a magnificent space reflects and equally important user.

Main stairways become monumental, making the daily passage from one level to the next a ritual of movement and of form, and celebrating the user at the same time. This taste for *mise-en-scene* was prevalent throughout the Baroque and emerges very strongly in the churches.

These are presented as magnificent arenas for ritual devotion, at the same time generating action and reflecting it.

One obvious case is the Conventual Church of San Giovanni Battista (St. John's Co-Cathedral), which functions as a minor city. The nave leads directly and unequivocally to the main altar, the embodiment of the Christian sacrifice. The altar faces the congregation in much the same way as the church faces the street or square.

On either side of the nave are the richly decorated secondary chapels, semi-private areas of devotion and resting places within the larger fabric of the church.

Along the barrel vault of the ceiling are spread scenes from the life of Saint John the Baptist; a reminder of the heavens that await us, while below the floor is covered with a constant reminder of our human mortality.

The church is a completely Baroque, symbolic representation of the whole of human life, connected to the world outside through this symbolism of plan and also through its layout. And one must remember that for the Baroque age all living was an act.

Thus the worlds of theatre, particularly scenography, and of architecture are strongly interconnected. Besides, having the same users and often the same originators, theatre and architecture had the same preoccupations and methods.

However theatre scenography was typically ephemeral, of passing nature. Once the show was over, the use for scenography was likewise over. What the Baroque architect did was to create the scenography in more durable material, in the city.

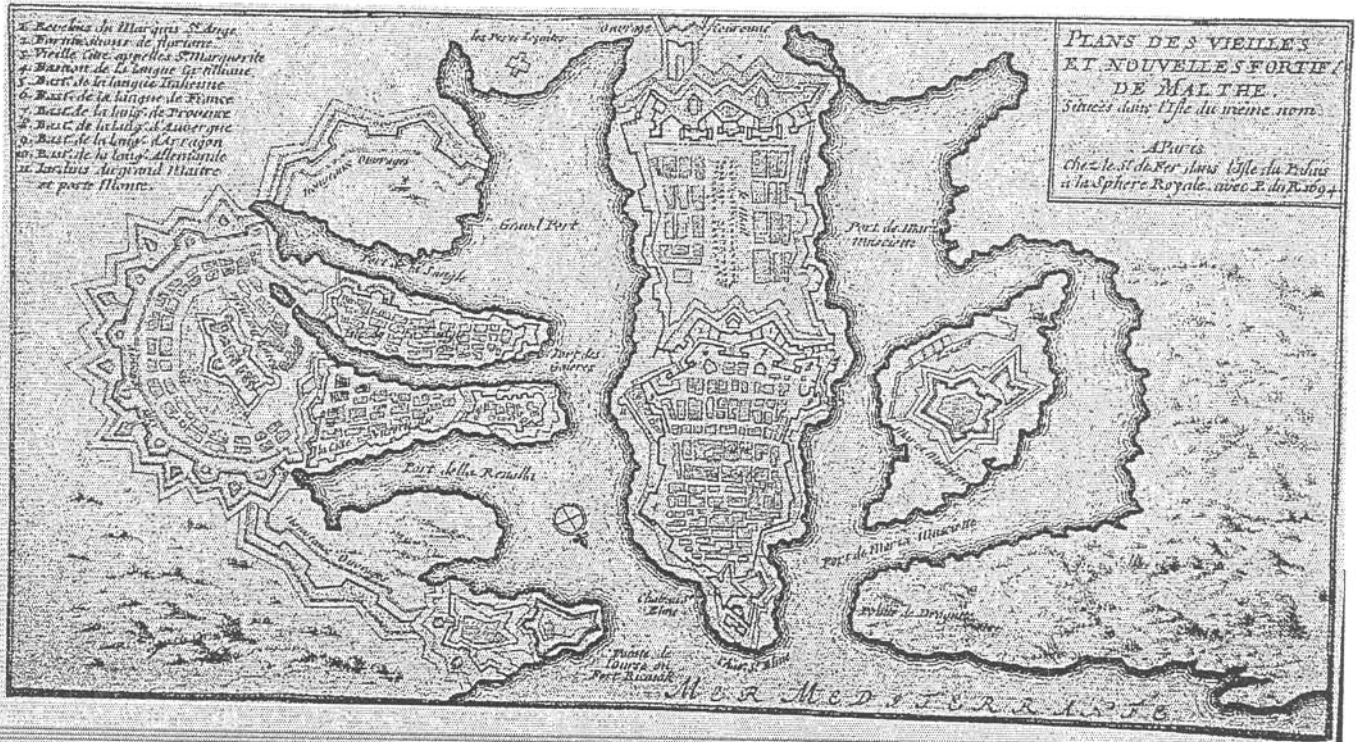
Today little remains of Baroque ephemeral structures. The scenography is gone, but the architecture remains as a living testimony to a different era and a different way of life. ■

Giovanni Battista Vertova: Diplomacy, Warfare and Military Engineering Practice in Early Seventeenth-Century Malta

by Denis De Lucca

Midsea Books 2001. pp 108. ISBN 99909-93-76-9

The book *Giovanni Battista Vertova: Diplomacy, Warfare and Military Engineering Practice in Early Seventeenth-Century Malta* is a fascinating publication that sheds new light on some hitherto nebulous areas in the history of fortress Malta, focusing on Valletta.



Plan of the Grand Harbour fortifications drawn under the supervision of Marshall Vauban (1694)
(Istituto Storico e di Cultura dell'Arma del Genio, Rome)

Authored by Denis De Lucca, head of Architecture and Director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta, this excellently researched and beautifully illustrated book, published by Midsea Books Ltd, covers three main themes, all related to the defence of Malta in the early seventeenth century.

As implied in the title, the main thrust of this new book concerns the life history of a forgotten brilliant military engineer – Count Giovanni Battista Vertova of Bergamo (1592-1647) – who became a Knight of Malta in 1617 and who, through his excellent connexions with other members of his profession in neighbouring Italy, served well the interests of the Order of St John at a crucial point in its history when the Knights were determined to strengthen the fortifications of Valletta and build the outworks of Floriana and Cospicua.

It was Vertova, a brilliant mathematician and a veteran of the Italian wars of Valtellina and Mantova, who made it possible for Grand Master Lascaris not only to considerably stiffen the bastions of Valletta, but also to obtain the best possible advice with regards to what had to be done to protect Baroque Malta from Muslim occupation.

Not only was Vertova honoured to travel to Italy aboard the flagship of Genova as the personal envoy of Grand Master Lascaris, not only did he manage to put Malta on the forefront of contemporary military engineering thinking and experiment in very troubled times, but through his standing and prestige as a military engineer Vertova also introduced Valletta to Catholic Europe as a veritable laboratory of research and progress in this field of study.

Among other things, Professor De Lucca tells us that one important figure in Vertova's meetings in Italy in 1638-39 was the Jesuit military engineer and famous Professor of Mathematics Oratio Grassi. It now emerges that this person was none other than the architect of the church of St Ignatius in Rome and a tremendously influential figure in contemporary military engineering practice in Baroque Europe.

Vertova's discussions with Oratio Grassi and with other leading military engineers in war-torn Italy revealed the existence of many contemporary projects of the Knights, now lost, to fortify Manoel Island and to displace the Cathedral, the Università, and the people of Mdina to the Floriana area.

There also seems to have been at this time

⇒ *continued*

great fears of an imminent Muslim slave uprising which led Vertova to propose the isolation of Fort St Elmo with a wet ditch and its use as a last post and as a storehouse for foodstuffs and munitions, complete with a small berthing place for supply and evacuation purposes. Vertova's scheme to encircle the fort with bastioned walls was later on implemented by the Spanish military engineer Don Carlos De Grunenbergh.

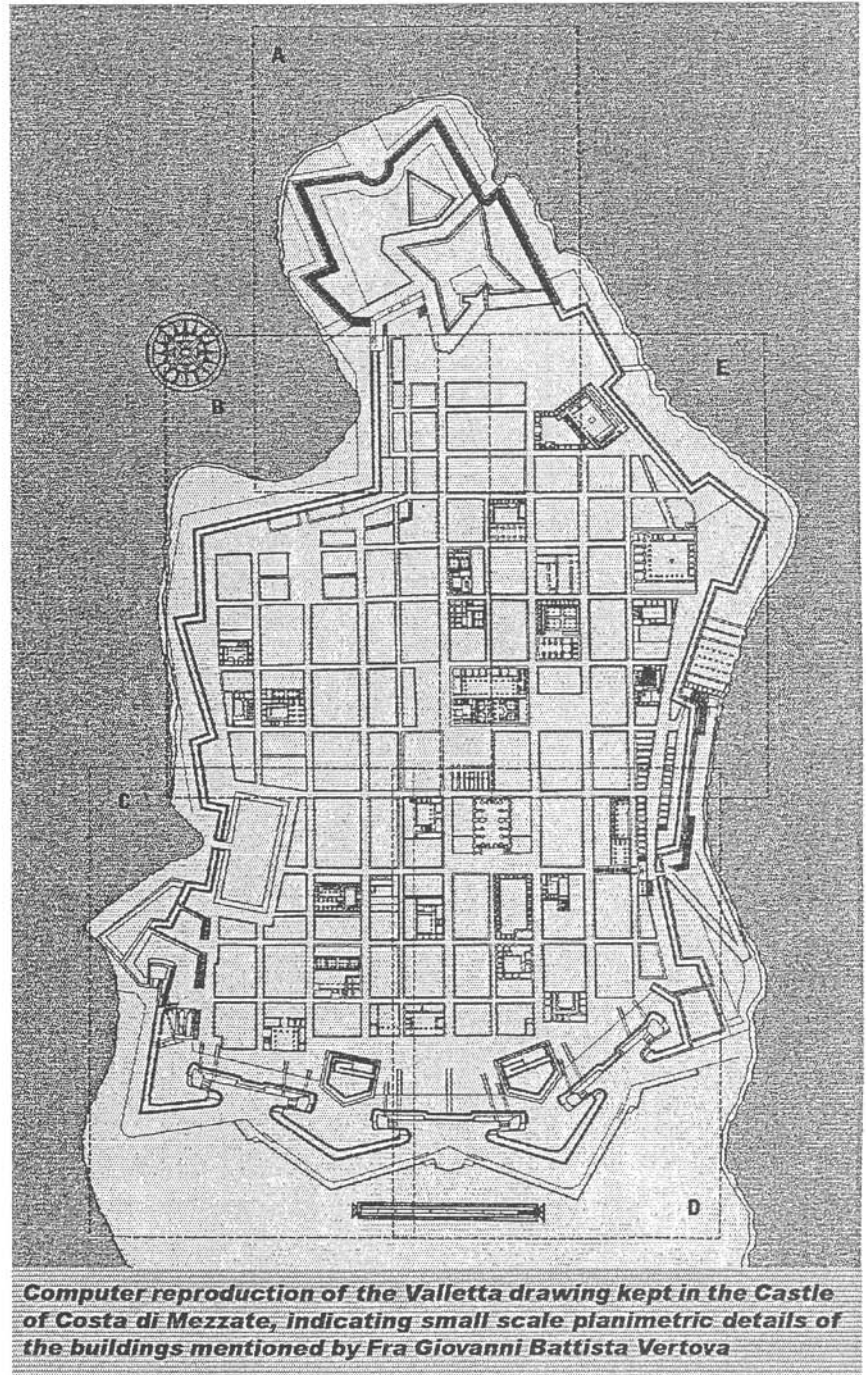
A second purpose of Denis De Lucca's new book about Vertova is to introduce the reader to two plans of the Grand Harbour and Valletta, annotated by the military engineer and discovered by the author some years back in Vertova's family castle at Costa di Mezzate. These plans focus on an unrealised project for the development of the Birgu galley arsenal according to contemporary Italian models and on a very orderly urban experience in Valletta in the early seventeenth century.

Most of the buildings of Vertova's Valletta seem to have been very different from what they are now. There was, for example, a huge prison for slaves facing the lower Barracca approximating the size of the Grand Hospital and the Magisterial Palace.

The church of S. Caterina d'Italia was non-existent, and the church of Our Lady of Victories then faced St James Cavalier. The old Augustinian church faced Old Mint and not Bakery street, and detailed plans shed new light on the original designs of many churches and auberges including those of Italy, France and Castille, which were all restructured in later times.

There is also plenty of graphic information on the old Carmelite monastery and the church of Porto Salvo, and on the layout of the beautifully landscaped courtyards of a very different Magisterial Palace, the Jesuit college, and other buildings, all revealing a hidden Valletta exclusively controlled by the Knights which was not immediately obvious to anyone walking through various streets which then also had very different names.

In the building of Valletta, this book reveals, the Knights made a very conscious attempt to balance the arid conditions of



Computer reproduction of the Valletta drawing kept in the Castle of Costa di Mezzate, indicating small scale planimetric details of the buildings mentioned by Fra Giovanni Battista Vertova

the Maltese Islands to which they had objected in 1530, with luxurious gardens situated right in the centre of their new capital city. The land front fortifications of Valletta were later strengthened by additional outworks including two counterguards designed by Vertova who, we are told, was also responsible for remodelling some bastions.

In the third part of his book, Denis De Lucca provides completely new information about the family history of Vertova's friend, the military engineer, the Marquis of St Angelo who had collaborated with him in Florence to build a model of the new

fortifications of Valletta and who was up to now thought to have been the son of Cosimo I de Medici, the ruler of Florence.

For the first time, reference is also made to the presence in Malta of another friend of Vertova, the then famous Jesuit mathematician and military engineer Giacomo Maso, who not only became the personal adviser of Grand Master Lascaris on fortifications but was also the author of a forgotten treatise about military architecture. This treatise was derived from a collection of very detailed notes on which Fra Maso had based lectures delivered to

continued ⇒

⇒ *continued*

distinguished audiences in Rome and Palermo and to large gatherings of Knights at the Jesuit College in Valletta.

In view of the fact that our present day knowledge on Jesuit military education in Baroque Europe is still very limited, the introductory information about this highly specialised subject in De Lucca's book has already attracted the attention of some Italian universities which will be collaborating with the International Institute for Baroque Studies to intensify research about Jesuit knowledge and teaching on military architecture in early modern Europe.

Meanwhile, Fra Giacomo Maso's 400-page treatise entitled *Trattato dell'Architettura Militare Defensiva et Offensiva* is at present being studied in depth by the Institute in preparation for a publication on this subject as some very revealing correspondence between Vertova and the papal inquisitor concerning the then suppressed works of Galileo Galilei.

Count Vertova, the godfather of Duke Emanuele II and the distant relative of Saint Carlo Borromeo, died in Malta on 14 April 1647, at the relatively young age of 55. Denis De Lucca's book surely does full justice to his forgotten contribution to military engineering knowledge and the development of Valletta during the seventeenth century.

In this respect, one recalls the author's previous book on Carapicchia, described by Francesco Gurrieri and Paolo Portoghesi as having been of great importance to the history of Baroque architecture in Europe. This book was also dedicated to the memory of another great builder of Baroque Malta, the architect Romano Carapicchia.

Considered from this angle, the efforts of the International Institute of Baroque Studies to focus attention on the achievements of these forgotten architects and military engineers who were responsible for shaping our rich architectural heritage is indeed praiseworthy, certainly a welcome contribution to our knowledge of Baroque Malta and its European connexions.

Joe Mercieca

Matteo Perez d'Aleccio *Pittore Ufficiale del Grande Assedio a Malta*

by Lucio Maiorano

Lupo Edizioni, Lecce, 2000. pp 105. ISBN 8887557-07-1

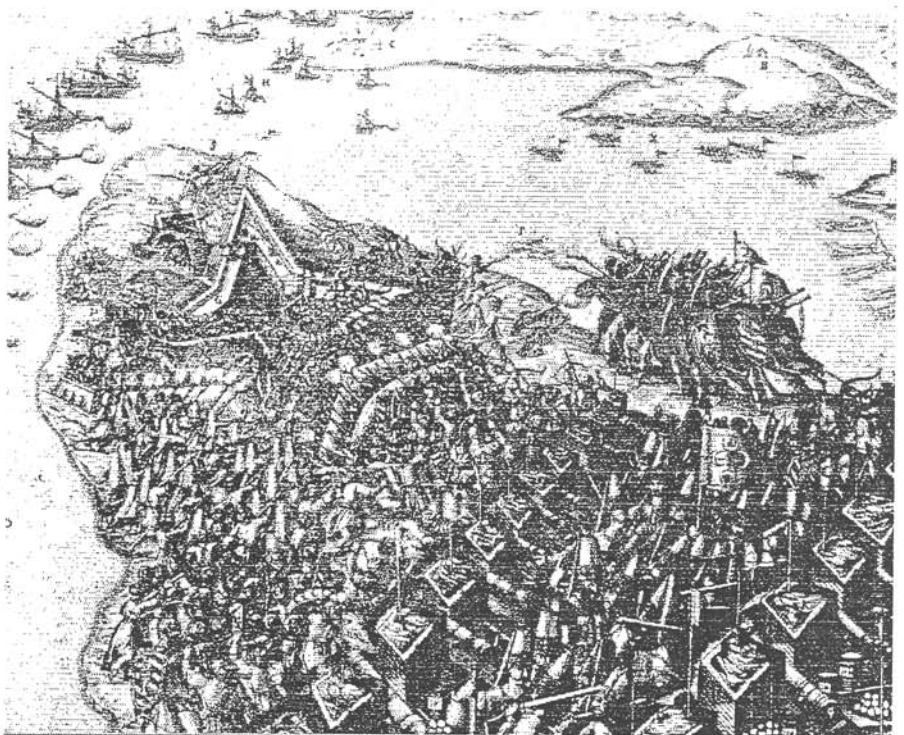
An interesting publication about the 16th-century artist Matteo Perez d'Aleccio focusing on his life history and on his superb frescoes at the Palace in Valletta, has just been published by the commune of Alezio in Italy with the co-operation of the International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta.

Authored by Lucio Maiorano, the book contains valuable information about the artist's birth in Alezio in 1547, about his activity in Rome (1566-76) and Malta (1576-81) and, finally, about his demise in far-off Lima in Peru.

Matteo Perez d'Aleccio's finest achievement was undoubtedly the impressive frescoes of the Great Siege in the former Magisterial Palace of the Grand Masters in Valletta, but Grand Master Jean de la Cassiere's reference to Matteo as '*eccellente nella sua professione*' was also proved in other less publicised works produced by the artist during his stay in Malta. Among these one can mention the *Baptism of Christ* and the *Shipwreck of St Paul*, both remarkable for their dramatic composition and the attention to detail that they reflect.

Maiorano's book contains an introduction by the Director of the International Institute for Baroque Studies, Denis De Lucca, according to whom the artist arrived in Malta at a critical time when the Hospitaller Knights of St John the Baptist, having finally found security and a sense of belonging within the strong fortifications of Valletta, could afford to introduce a new Baroque lifestyle by commissioning, among other things, high quality paintings full of memories of their mission to protect Catholic Europe from being overrun by Turkish armies.

Considered from this viewpoint, Perez d'Aleccio's artistic activity in Malta provides us with a unique record of the heroic achievements of the Knights, which are well-explained and beautifully reproduced in the text and various illustrations of this new volume.



Detail of fresco by Matteo Perez d'Aleccio in the Grand Master's Palace, Valletta

M.A. in Baroque Studies

The International Institute for Baroque Studies at the University of Malta has finalised preparations for the commencement of a 15-month postgraduate course leading to the award of an M.A. in Baroque Studies. This course, due to begin in October 2000, is presented in a newly-prepared course brochure outlining (a) the aims of the Institute (b) the Institute Programme 2000-2003 (c) the course regulations governing the M.A. in Baroque Studies programme (d) the course syllabus (e) an explanatory essay on European Baroque.

Institute Director Professor Denis De Lucca emphasised the multi-disciplinary nature of the new course syllabus which is to be based on nine study units and a dissertation. The study units consist of

An Introduction to Baroque Europe: Political, Religious, Intellectual and Scientific Scenarios (BST 401);

The Baroque Route 1: Fortification Building, City Planning and Landscape Design (BST 402);

The Baroque Route 2: Architecture (BST 403);

The Baroque Route 3: Sculpture (BST 404);

The Baroque Route 4: Painting (BST 405);

Baroque Theatre and Music (BST 406);

Baroque Literature (BST 407);

The Conservation of the Baroque Heritage 1: Conservation Philosophy (BST 408);

The Conservation of the Baroque Heritage 2: Conservation and Recording Techniques (BST 409).

The Conservation part of the course will be supplemented by a number of practical sessions dealing with the conservation of Baroque architecture in Malta and Sicily, and will include a study tour to the Baroque centres of Catania and Noto in S.E. Sicily.

A number of guest lecturers from Italian universities specialising in Baroque will be invited to participate in the teaching sessions of the M.A. in Baroque Studies course.



Pre-Tertiary Certificate Course in Baroque Architecture

The International Institute for Baroque Studies (IIBS) at the University of Malta, in conjunction with the Works Division, Ministry for the Environment, is organising a one-year part-time Pre-Tertiary Certificate Course in Baroque Architecture starting in October 2001.

The course is intended to provide a broad but thorough grounding of Baroque Architecture by reconciling the theoretical aspects with practical site work, allowing the participants to pursue their own specialisation or field of interest in greater depth through project and hands on experience.

As explained by the Director of the General Works Division, Architect Vince Cassar, the idea behind this course is to create an awareness of our built environment by helping participants to develop the necessary skills to understand Baroque architecture and distinguish between different architectural styles.

Course participants are expected to develop a clear understanding of how Baroque buildings are constructed, and how different materials within a building interact, with the aim of improving their manual skills.

The course is spread over two semesters, with the objective of the first semester being to provide the participants with a complete theoretical background where various historical issues, building construction practices, and structural principles will be discussed.

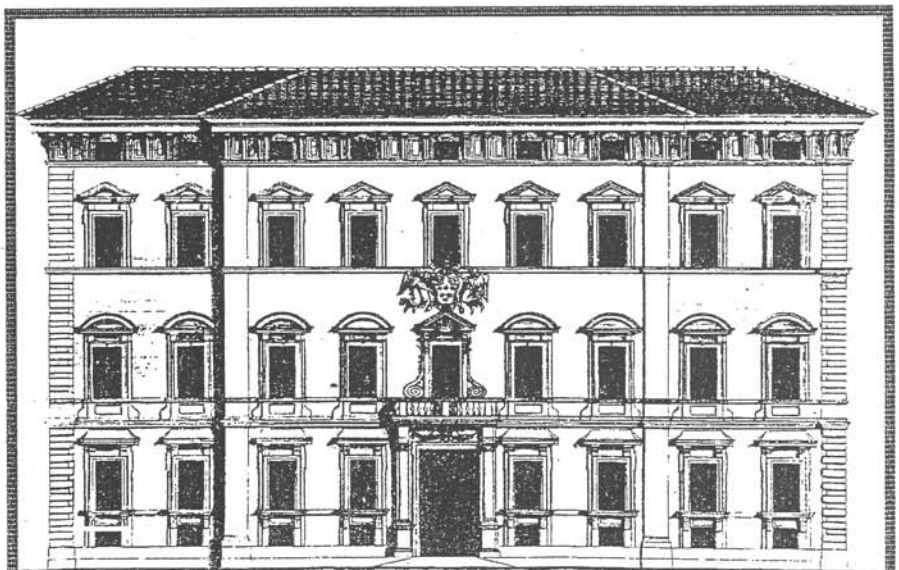
The teaching sessions of the second semester will aim at applying the theoretical aspects discussed during the first semester into practice.

Participants will become aware of the complexity of building structures and their nature as a whole rather than as a collection of individual elements.

The IIBS is taking various initiatives in the field of primary source research and the conservation of the Baroque heritage.

The Pre-Tertiary Certificate Course in Baroque Architecture, which has the approval of the Senate of the University of Malta, will be co-ordinated by Architect Hermann Bonnici, who is also a research assistant at the IIBS.

A number of foreign lecturers have been invited to participate in the teaching of the various study areas of the course.



The Baroque facade of Palazzo Altieri, Rome